

***“I think about leaving every day. Doesn’t everyone?”:
Reasons for non-completion and dissatisfaction
amongst apprentices and trainees***

Final Report of the
Gippsland Apprenticeship Research Project



Darryn Snell and Alison Hart
Research Unit for Work and Communications Futures
Monash University Gippsland



December 2007

***“I think about leaving every day.
Doesn’t everyone?”:
Reasons for non-completion and dissatisfaction
amongst apprentices and trainees***

**Final Report of the
Gippsland Apprenticeship Research Project**

**Darryn Snell and Alison Hart
Research Unit for Work and Communications Futures
Monash University Gippsland**

December 2007

Published 2007 by
The Research Unit for Work and Communications Futures
Monash University Gippsland
Northways Rd. Churchill, Victoria, 3842.

Copyright ©2007 The Research Unit for Work and Communications Futures,
Monash University

This work has been produced with funding assistance from Regional Development Victoria (RDV), The Gippsland Local Government Network (GLGN), Monash University Gippsland and The Baw Baw Latrobe Local Learning and Employment network (BBL LLEN).

DISCLAIMER

Any representation, statement, opinion or advice, expressed or implied in this publication is made in good faith but on the basis that the Research Unit for Work and Communications Futures, its agents and employees are not liable (whether by reason of negligence, lack of care or otherwise) to any person for any damage or loss whatsoever which has occurred or may occur in relation to that person taking or not taking (as the case may be) action in respect of any representation, statement, or advice referred to above.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the overall guidance and advice provided by members of the Gippsland Apprenticeship Research Project Advisory Board. We thank John Parker, (Secretary of the Gippsland Trades and Labour Council) and Mick Murphy (Executive of Baw Baw/Latrobe Local Learning and Employment Network) for their help in initiating and bringing this project to fruition. We are indebted to all the apprentices, trainees and VET stakeholders who provided valuable input and without whom this project could not have been completed. We would also like to acknowledge the assistance of the Victorian Office of Tertiary Training and Education for providing data not available from any public source.

For their provision of financial support for this project, we gratefully thank Regional Development Victoria, the Gippsland Local Government Network, the Research Unit for Work and Communications Futures, Monash University and the Gippsland Local Learning and Employment Networks.

In addition we would like to acknowledge the input and enthusiasm of Professor Al Rainnie in the early stages of this project.

Our work ... hired a lot of retail trainees and it was very clear within management that they were only there because they were cheap, the company got government subsidies ... and they were there for 12 months and then they would be gone ... a lot of the trainees knew they were very dispensable — just cheap labour, they were given the impression by management that they should be grateful to have a job and there is plenty more where they came from. (female, retail trainee, non-completer, 22 year old)

I haven't learnt, I haven't been able, I am not qualified ... the guy that was teaching me [on the job] left ... and I got sent out by myself and had to teach myself as well as another apprentice at the same time. I was an apprentice trying to learn myself while trying to teach someone else ... then your boss is hounding you because you are not as fast as a qualified tradie, when you haven't been trained. (male, construction apprentice, non-completer, 20 year old)

They never helped with anything. They were really poor in communicating and following up phone calls and I remember having to travel to see them ... The support that was supposed to be there just wasn't (female, retail traineeship, non-completer, aged 39)

Traineeships fundamentally are to get youth into work and yet they seem to have been hijacked by ... the privatised training market, and various providers perhaps allegedly colluding with employers are just putting ... 200 people onto traineeships — you know even the truck driver might have been doing a certificate II in IT — so ... the way that traineeships are valued and looked at was devalued a lot by what has been going on, ... there has certainly been some dodgy things going on ... but so long as those organisations can tick the right boxes that they have got all the processes in place it unfortunately gets through — we know that (employer, Baw Baw/Latrobe)

Executive Summary

Background

The Gippsland Apprenticeship Research Project grew out of current debates around skills shortages and the concerns raised by a range of interested stake holders including local and state government representatives, Vocational Education and Training (VET) teachers, trainers, trade unions, youth workers and educationalists about seemingly high attrition rates among apprentices and trainees.

Over the last 20 years the Australian VET system has undergone extensive and continuous change and unprecedented expansion. This expansion has been accompanied by a significant growth in government funding and the number of stakeholders involved in the system, alongside increased research into various aspects of the system. In a climate of increasing skills shortages what seem to be high (and growing) attrition rates have attracted some attention over the last ten years.

This project set out to establish what the regional attrition rate was amongst apprentices and trainees, how it compared to the state average, whether stakeholders and those in training had similar views of the factors which contributed to this non-completion, and what those factors are.

Research was mainly focused on the four industry sectors of construction, engineering, hospitality and retail. These were chosen as representative of both apprentice experiences (construction and engineering) and trainee experiences (hospitality and retail) and all four industries are well represented in training figures for the region.

The region has more than 6,200 apprentices and trainees currently in-training (ABS, 2007). The majority of these are concentrated in traineeships, particularly in retail and to a lesser extent, hospitality. The region has a vibrant apprenticeship and traineeship system that includes a number of TAFE, group training organisations and private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). Overall attrition rates in Gippsland are better than the State average, although there is considerable variation between industries and training types, with some industries such as construction and engineering performing much better than the state average — while others like hospitality, are performing poorly, with completion rates below 50%.

Methodologically, the project was divided into three stages which comprised:

1. The analysis of existing literature and statistical data
2. Forums, meetings and in-depth interviews with local stakeholders
3. Interviews with apprentices and trainees, both in training and non-completers.

Research findings

One of the initial aims of this study in interviewing both VET stakeholders and apprentices and trainees was to determine if their perceptions about the system and reasons for non-completions coincided; in the most part they did, differing only in regard to transportation and work ethics and values. Both were seen as significant issues by stakeholders, but regarded with much less importance by apprentices and trainees, with most who expressed a genuine desire to do an apprenticeship/traineeship being fully committed to completing the training and unafraid of 'hard work'.

Most issues raised by both stakeholders and apprentices and trainees fell into one of the following categories:

- incidental factors
- transportation
- inadequate wages and labour market factors
- age
- work ethic and values
- prior knowledge
- mismatch
- motivation of both employers and apprentices/trainees for undertaking training
- perceptions of being treated as cheap labour
- expectations
- lack of support
- unpleasant working environment
- abuse by employers
- the quality of training.

The quality of training, both on and off the job, was widely commented on by both groups.

A surprising finding of this research was that the factors which stakeholders, apprentices and trainees identified as factors contributing to non-completion are also of significant concern to both those currently in training and those who have completed their training. In a time of acute skills shortages when it is vital to encourage (especially) young people to enter the VET system it is paramount that such shortfalls within the system be redressed.

The main issues expressed by apprentices and trainees as contributing to their non-completion or dissatisfaction with their apprenticeship/traineeship were:

- Being treated as cheap labour
- Lack of appropriate supervision in the workplace
- Problems with poor or inappropriate training
- Bullying and abuse in the workplace
- Low wages

There were found to be significant differences across industries, with retail and hospitality trainees and hospitality apprentices the least satisfied with their experiences, although there were significant issues about workplace practices and being treated as 'cheap labour amongst construction apprentices.

Overall there was consensus amongst VET stakeholders, which was backed up by apprentices and trainees, that the decision by apprentices and trainees to leave training is often the result of multiple connected issues, and although one particular reason may 'tip the balance' often it is the accumulation over time of a range of difficulties which results in withdrawal.

Those that described the most positive experiences tended to be:

- those employed by large companies, who received their training from TAFE.
- those employed by group training companies, doing their training at TAFE and who had been successfully placed with a range of good host employers.

It was found that existing statistical data is inconsistent and inadequate, making the calculation and comparative analysis of completion and non-completion rates a problematic exercise. The researchers relied on a specialised data set of Gippsland apprentices and trainees to obtain a profile of training in the region and to calculate completion rates that could be compared with State figures. It was found:

- In 1995, apprentices accounted for 57.5% of the 823 who commenced training, by 2006 apprentices only accounted for 32.2% of the total 3,372 commencing training.
- While traineeship commencements have fallen off in the most recent years there has been a slow but steady increase in apprenticeship commencements.
- There are currently 6,204 Australian Apprentices in-training in Gippsland, 49% of these are apprentices and 51% trainees. Of the 3 regions only East Gippsland/Wellington has more apprentices than trainees.
- Nearly 90% of current apprentices are male, while 47.6 % of trainees are male. Of the total currently in-training 68.2% are under 25, compared with 59.2% of those in-training in Victoria.
- Notable is the miniscule number (especially of apprentices at .8%) being trained in the public sector; this is in sharp contrast to the large numbers of apprentices previously trained in the region by the SECV prior to the early 1990s privatisation.

Applying the Victorian Office of Training and Tertiary Education's (OTTE) recently developed method of calculating completion rates to the Gippsland dataset it was found:

- The average completion rate for apprentice cohorts commencing 1995-2000 was 73.1%, which is considerably higher than the State average of 65.1%.
- The average completion rate for trainee cohorts commencing 1995-2002 was 57.6%, which is slightly better than the State average of 54.1%.
- Apprentices aged 12-19 had the highest average completion rate –75.4%—among apprentices.
- Average completion rates for trainees were found to be the highest among the youngest (12-19 years old) and oldest (45+) commencing trainees.

Selected Recommendations

Findings from this research are similar to those of other research into factors contributing to non-completion. The recommendations arising from this research are thus not regionally specific. In addition they are based on the view that no single actor is responsible for either the problems within the VET system or the solutions. The recommendations cover a range of areas such as; ways to better address skills shortages, ways to improve completion rates and apprentice/trainee experiences and strategies to acquire more reliable data to inform future policy. The 30 recommendations can be grouped into the following key themes:

1. Financial incentives to employers should be restructured so that commencement and completion bonuses more adequately reflect the differences in time and commitment between traineeships and apprenticeships.
2. There needs to be standardisation of the data system (definitions and methodology) Australia wide to enable better monitoring of completion rates.
3. Traineeships should have the same level of contractual and employment protection as apprenticeships — this would enhance the value of a traineeship, improve recruitment practices and strengthen employers' and trainees' commitment to training.
4. The number of traineeships and apprenticeships which are solely on-the-job should be minimised.
5. Wages for apprentices and trainees must be increased if any significant reduction in non-completion rates is to be achieved and if new people are to be attracted into the system.
6. There needs to be closer monitoring of employment conditions and training quality (as per the Apprenticeship Code of Practice — see Appendix XII) to ensure that RTOs and employers are meeting their obligations.
7. There needs to be better support for apprentices and trainees, especially in the early stages of their contracts.

8. There needs to be a better clarification of the role of Australian Apprenticeship Centres. Their support role would be enhanced by becoming independent government bodies rather than attached/affiliated with RTOs or private interests.
9. Given the failure of the present system to address skills shortages over the past decade, further research into possibilities for a restructure of the system is highly recommended.

Contents

<i>Executive Summary.....</i>	i
<i>Chapter One: Outline of Project.....</i>	1
<i>Chapter Two: Literature Review.....</i>	5
<i>Chapter Three: Statistical Profile of Training in the Gippsland Region.....</i>	11
<i>Chapter Four: Perceptions of the problem: the views of local stakeholders.....</i>	35
<i>Chapter Five: The Experiences of Apprentices and Trainees.....</i>	51
<i>Chapter Six: Findings and Recommendations.....</i>	87
<i>Bibliography.....</i>	101
<i>Appendices.....</i>	105

List of figures, charts and tables

Figures		
1.1	Map of Victoria and Gippsland.....	1
1.2	Map of Gippsland Local Government Areas.....	2
Charts		
3.1	Apprentice and trainee commencements in Gippsland 1995-2006.....	13
3.2	Apprentices and trainees in-training in Gippsland 2000-2007.....	13
3.3	Apprentices and trainees in-training in Victoria 2000-2007.....	14
Tables		
3.1	Apprentices and trainees in-training 2007 by Local Government Area, Gippsland.....	14
3.2	Apprentices and trainees in-training 2007 by gender, Gippsland.....	15
3.3	Apprentices and trainees in-training 2007 by age at commencement, Gippsland.....	15
3.4	Apprentices and trainees in-training 2007 by occupational group.....	16
3.5	Apprentices and trainees in-training 2007 by educational background, Gippsland.....	17
3.6	Apprentices and trainees in-training 2007 by certificate level, Gippsland.....	17
3.7	Apprentices and trainees in-training 2007 by certificate level, Gippsland.....	18
3.8	Apprentices and trainees in-training 2007 by training provider, Gippsland.....	18
3.9	Apprentices and trainees in-training 2007 by training scheme	18
3.10	Apprentice Completion Rates for Cohorts Commencing 1995-2000 (%).....	25
3.11	Trainee Completion Rates for Cohorts Commencing 1995-2002 (%).....	25
3.12	Apprentice Completion Rates by Occupation for Cohorts Commencing 1995-2000 (%).....	26
3.13	Trainee Completion Rates by Occupational Group for Cohorts Commencing 1995-2002 (%).....	27
3.14	Apprentice Completion Rates by Employer Type for Cohorts Commencing 1995-2000 (%).....	27
3.15	Trainee Completion Rates by Employer Type for Cohorts Commencing 1995-2002 (%).....	28
3.16	Apprentices Completion Rates by Training Provider for Cohorts Commencing 1995-2000 (%).....	28
3.17	Trainee Completion Rates by Employer Type for Cohorts Commencing 1995-2002 (%).....	29
3.18	Apprentice Completion Rates by Age Groups for Cohorts Commencing 1995-2000 (%).....	30

3.19	: Trainee Completion Rates by Age Group for Cohorts Commencing 1995-2002 (%).....	30
5.1	Characteristics of participants.....	52
5.2	Contract status of participants.....	53
5.3	Reasons for non-completion of apprenticeships and traineeships	53
5.4	Reasons for potential non-completion amongst those currently in-training but at-risk.....	54
5.5	Reasons for dissatisfaction with apprenticeship/traineeship amongst those currently in-training but likely to complete.....	55

Chapter One: Outline of Project

Background

The Gippsland Apprenticeship Research Project grew out of current debates around skills shortages and the concerns raised by a range of interested stake holders including local and state government representatives, trade unions, trainers, youth workers and educationalists about seemingly high attrition rates among apprentices and trainees. These concerns motivated the current research in a bid to ascertain the real level of attrition in the region and to look more closely at the factors contributing to this attrition. While a significant amount of research had previously been completed on the factors contributing to successful completions (Harris, Simons, Symons et al. 2001; Ball, 2005; Ball & John, 2005; Bender 2003; Harris & Simons 2005; Group Training Association of Victoria, 2005; Karmel & Virk, 2006) in Australia, far less applied research, other than statistical analysis, had been conducted on the factors contributing to non-completions.

The objectives of the project were to identify the factors which impact on apprentice/trainee decisions to withdraw from courses before they have gained their qualification; to compare the reasons for non-completion given by the apprentices and trainees with the perceptions of other stakeholders; to compare the different experiences of non-completers with those still in-training and to compare the experiences of apprentices and trainees. Most importantly the Project aimed to provide recommendations for best practice to address the issues identified by the research, both for the local region and with a view to broader application.

Gippsland Region

Figure 1.1



Source: Gippsland Research and Information Service (2007).

Gippsland is a large, geographically and socially diverse regional area with a mixed economy. Almost a third of the region's population live in Latrobe City where open-cut coal mining, electricity generation and other manufacturing industries are concentrated¹⁷. In East Gippsland and South Gippsland, where the population is relatively sparse and concentrated in small country towns along the main highways, agriculture, forestry and tourism serve as the

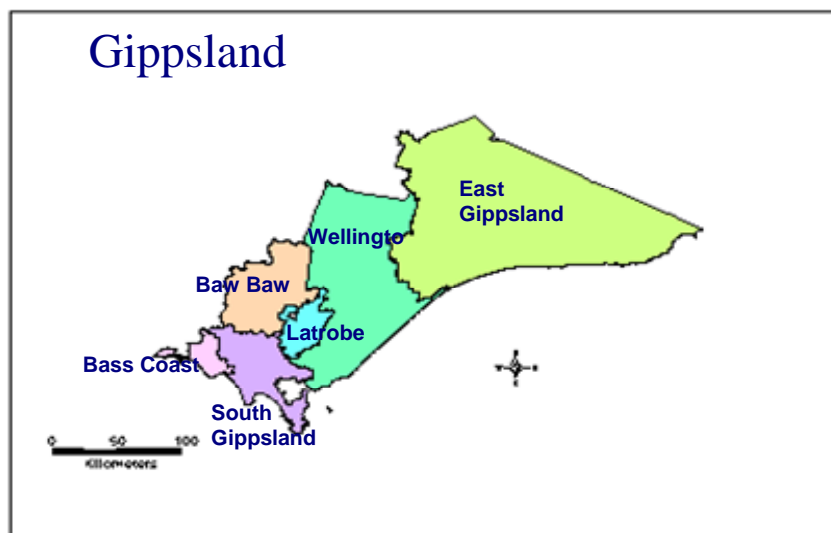
¹⁷ Until the 1990s, the region was economically vibrant. In the late 1980s privatisation of State owned energy industries led to the substantial decline of jobs in areas of traditional employment.

primary industries (Crinall and Collis, 2000). The region as a whole struggles with high unemployment, with all shires regularly reporting unemployment rates above the State average. Opportunities for young people post education are fairly limited with many opting to leave the region upon completing their secondary education. Additionally year 12 retention rates are amongst the lowest in the State, as is the take-up of university places — 31% of year 12 completers, as compared to 47% for Victoria. The take-up of apprenticeships/traineeships for Gippsland year 12 completers however, is nearly double the state average — 15% as compared to 8%¹⁸ (DEEDC 2007). Despite this higher than average uptake of training places, the ageing workforce is a serious concern in many industries.

Out of a total population of 252,691 the region has more than 6,200 apprentices and trainees currently in-training (ABS, 2007). The majority of these are concentrated in traineeships, particularly in retail and to a lesser extent, hospitality. The region has a vibrant apprenticeship and traineeship system that includes a number of TAFE, group training organizations and private RTOs. Overall attrition rates in Gippsland are better than the State average, although there is considerable variation between industries and training types, with some industries such as construction and engineering performing much better than the state average — while others like hospitality, are performing poorly, with completion rates below 50%.

Project Methodology

Figure 1.2



Source: Gippsland Research and Information Service (2007)

For the purpose of this study the Gippsland region was divided into three sub-regions: Central Gippsland (comprised of Baw Baw Shire and Latrobe City), South Gippsland (comprised of South Gippsland and Bass Coast Shires) and Gippsland East (comprised of Wellington and East Gippsland Shires). These 3 sub-regions coincide with the areas covered by the three Gippsland Local Learning and Education Networks (LLENs).¹⁹ Regional bases for the project were established in Wonthaggi, Warragul, Morwell and Bairnsdale.

¹⁸ In addition, for those who leave without completing year 12, Gippsland has 15% more males going into apprenticeships and traineeships than the state average, while for females the percentage is virtually the same (DEEDC, 2007).

¹⁹ LLENs are incorporated and independent from government. They each have a committee composed of twenty participants with at least one from each of the following eleven categories: schools (government, private and catholic), TAFE, ACE, trade unions, employer groups, other government agencies (ie Centrelink), community organisations, Koori organisations, local government, a community person and other training organisations.

Research was mainly focused on the four industry sectors of construction, engineering, hospitality and retail. These were chosen as representative of both apprentice experiences (construction and engineering) and trainee experiences (hospitality and retail) and all four industries are well represented in training figures for the region.

Methodologically, the project was divided into three stages which comprised:

1. The analysis of existing literature and statistical data
2. Forums, meetings and in-depth interviews with local stakeholders
3. Interviews with apprentices and trainees, both in training and non-completers

Part One: Statistics and Previous Research

An extensive literature search produced useful background information and in addition recent statistics were obtained from both the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) and the Victorian Office of Training and Tertiary Education (OTTE). Initially, the research team requested a series of regionally specific tables to be produced by NCVER statisticians who are specialists in this area and work on a fee-for-service basis. After further discussion with NCVER about the methodology they used, data sets they were working with and the information required for our analysis, it emerged that NCVER were unable to provide the detailed level of regional data the project required. OTTE were then approached to provide the research team with a de-identified regional data set for conducting our own analysis which would enable comparisons with State data (which OTTE were currently working on). This data set enabled the research team to conduct very detailed analysis of all apprentice/trainee enrolments between 1995 and 2007 specific to the three Gippsland LLENs areas.

Part Two: Regional Forums and Meetings with Local Stakeholders

This involved consultation with educationalists, training bodies, employers, trade unions and community groups in each of the three sub-regions (see Appendix I). The focus was on gathering and understanding the views of these groups and individuals about why they thought many apprentices and trainees do not complete.

Through the good auspices of the three Gippsland LLENs, regional forums were constituted in Trafalgar (9th October 2006), Leongatha (24th October 2006) and Bairnsdale (6th November 2006). There were more than 50 attendees at these three forums. Each forum was characterized by lively discussion from all attendees and each lasted for between ninety minutes and two hours. Attendees included representatives from local employers, RTOs, TAFEs, schools, trades unions, LLENs, Shires, employment agencies and local community organisations. All the forums were recorded with the permission of attendees (see Appendix II and for greater detail of focus group methodology see Chapter Four).

The regional forums identified many of the issues which are problematic, both systemically and specifically to regional areas, and produced multiple suggestions for practical solutions. All local organisations understood that in this time of increasing skills shortages and population flows from regional areas, it is vitally important to identify all factors which can contribute to an improved retention rate amongst apprentices and trainees who enter the system. Local and other organisations were very enthusiastic to participate and assist in any way — especially with the challenging process of participant recruitment for the final stage of the project.

In addition to these three regional forums a number of one on one interviews and meetings were conducted with interested parties who were either unable to attend the forums, expressed a wish to be further involved, or who the researchers felt could provide valuable input to the project.

Part Three: Apprentice and Trainee Interviews

Arguably the most important part of the project involved a brief questionnaire followed by in depth interviews both individual and in small groups with over 100 participants — both those who did not complete their training and current apprentices and trainees — to understand those issues which impacted on their ability to complete their training. These participants were a relatively representative mix of the four target industries, the three regional areas and the varying ages of those undertaking training in the Gippsland region.

Before any work could begin the researchers were required to undergo a rigorous ethics application process. This ensured the rights and anonymity of all participants were protected and produced a range of consent forms and explanatory statements covering the various methods used to recruit participants (for greater detail see chapter Five).

Funding

Funding bodies for the project comprised Regional Development Victoria (RDV), Baw Baw Latrobe Local Learning and Education Network (BBLLEN), constituent organisations of the Gippsland Local Government Network (GLGN), the Pro Vice Chancellor's (PVC) Office of Monash University's Gippsland Campus and the Research Unit for Work and Communications Futures (RUWCF), Monash University. An Advisory Board comprising one member from each funding body was constituted to oversee the project with regular meetings at which the interim reports were tabled.

Outcomes

The project commenced in August 2006 with a launch by the then Minister for State and Regional Development Victoria, Mr. John Brumby, and was completed in December 2007. Working papers (interim reports 1, 2 and 3) were presented at the end of each stage of the project (November 2006, May 2007 and October 2007) and the final report, including recommendations, was tabled at the December 2007 Advisory Board meeting. In addition presentations of the Project findings will be made to local LLENS and interested parties in each project area.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Over the last 20 years the Australian Vocational Education and Training (VET) system has undergone extensive and continuous change and unprecedented expansion: from 128,600 in training in 1985 (NCVER, 2000: 3) to an estimated 409,900 in March 2006 (NCVER, 2007a: 3). This expansion represents a commensurate increase in government funding and the number of stakeholders now involved in the system, alongside increased research into various aspects of the system. This has raised questions about what appear to be consistently high and (most agree) growing attrition rates in apprenticeships and traineeships. While there is little agreement on what these figures are (rates from 24% to over 60% have been published — see Smith, 1998; Grey et. al., 1999; Lamb et. al., 1998; Ray et. al., 2000; NCVER, 2000; Victorian TAFE Association Inc., 2000; John, 2003; Ball & John, 2005, Bowman et. al., 2005), even the most conservative research puts the figure at around 40% overall.

In spite of numerous reviews and sweeping policy developments in the system since traineeships were originally introduced to address high youth unemployment in the mid 1980s, these high rates have continued, and appear to be rising (Ray, 2001b: 36; Harris, Simons, Symons et al., 2001: 10; John, 2003: 16; Ball and John, 2005:5; Karmel & Virk, 2006: 19).

Historical overview of the Australian VET system

The Australian VET system is complex and multi-layered, reflecting both its origins within individual State and Territory jurisdictions, and the results of labour market reforms, which have had a substantial impact on the system, particularly in the last decade.

From before Federation in 1901 until the 1970s the apprenticeship system of each state and territory was administered and developed independently under individual State Training Authorities (NCVER 2000:3). Training was mostly in the traditional trades associated with construction and engineering — hairdressing being the exception to the male oriented focus. In response to rising unemployment rates, in 1973 the Commonwealth Government introduced the National Apprenticeship Assistance Scheme (NAAS), providing subsidies to encourage employers to sign up more apprentices. This “marked the beginning of what was to prove to be continuous Commonwealth funding for apprenticeships and put apprenticeships firmly on the policy agenda of ... Governments” (Ray, 2001a: 26).

Further Commonwealth government support came in 1974 when funding for Institutes of Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE) was provided for the first time (Ray, 2001b: 19). The TAFE system, up to this point supported by State and Territory governments, was considered badly run-down by the Commonwealth, but increasingly vital to meeting the country’s training needs.

In a new policy direction which would eventually have enormous impact on the VET system, the 1985 Kirby Report proposed that “a system of traineeships combining work and formal education and training should be developed, initially for young people” (Committee of Inquiry, 1985: Recommendation 18). Separate to apprenticeships, these shorter duration traineeships were specifically designed to address the high youth unemployment rate by providing a broad range of general skills to 16 and 17 year olds who had left school early without completing year 12 or doing further training. They were to provide entry level training mostly in the low skilled occupations of retail, hospitality and clerical work. An extensive expansion in traineeship occupations in 1995, coupled with the dropping of the mandatory off-the-job training requirement (Ray, 2001a: 35), and the expansion from just certificates at level I/II to include certificates III/IV, saw unprecedented growth in traineeships; with the numbers of those in-training rising from 8,000 in 1994 to 126,000 in

1999 (NCVER, 2000). In this same period when the focus was on traineeships, traditional apprentice numbers rose by a modest 7,000 and it would be 2004 before they caught up to the levels attained in the early nineties (NCVER, 2005).

The new Commonwealth Government came to power in 1996 with a more pronounced agenda of privatisation and deregulation. This agenda was applied with fervour to the VET sector with the introduction of New Apprenticeships combining apprenticeships and traineeships under the one umbrella and introducing a raft of changes — increased and expanded subsidies for employers (Cully, 2006:6); User Choice legislation, which also provided subsidies for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and expanded the training system to include private RTOs and Group Training Organisations (GTOs); and New Apprenticeship Centres to act as sign-up and support agencies. Subsidised training was opened up for the first time to existing employees and mature age employees, and part-time and school-based apprenticeships and traineeships were introduced along with Training Packages. In the ensuing decade this has no doubt contributed to a doubling of numbers in training (from 197,120 to 404,200: NCVER, 2007a) and changed the profile of the average apprentice/trainee considerably.

The result of these historical factors has been the development of a “vast institutional apparatus of industry bodies, training packages and resource developers, New Apprenticeship Centres and accreditation authorities ... to support the functioning of the system” (Cully, 2006:12). The Commonwealth Government (through the Department of Education Science and Training — DEST) and the eight State and Territory Training Authorities, with input from industry and educational bodies, oversee by way of legislation, administration and a substantial funding commitment (over \$705 million was spent on administering the system in 2004/05: Cully, 2006:12) this vast multiplayer system. The system is comprised of Registered Training Organisations — including both for and not for profit Group Training Organisations, individual for and not for profit private training organisations, State and Commonwealth funded TAFEs and schools; Australian (formerly “New”) Apprenticeship Centres (AACs), brokers, industry bodies, employers and the apprentices/trainees. Other interested parties include unions and State Education Departments. Cully (2006:12) describes “a quasi-market for the delivery of training services ... which [is] ... primarily geared towards meeting employer needs”.

One of the features of this new apprenticeship system was the funding of AACs, private organisations designed to be ‘one-stop shops’ funded by the Commonwealth Government to provide a range of apprenticeship services. These include providing “information, administration services and support to employers and Australian Apprentices and assisting with the signing of training contracts ... [and administration] of employer incentives, scholarships, and income support payments” (Commonwealth of Australia 2007; see Appendix XI). Considered problematic by some critics of the system is the fact that multiple roles can be owned and controlled by the same company. ACCs, for example, may be managed by RTOs or group training organisations, and private employment services may set up as RTOs. Employers may form their own RTOs, develop their own training packages and conduct their own training. In some cases effectively a single company may serve as all three — AAC, RTO and employer.

Adding to the complexity of the system, the division of responsibilities between the State and Commonwealth Governments is not always clear-cut, as both provide funding indirectly to the system — through such mechanisms as wage subsidies, commencement and completion and other bonuses, user choice funding to training organisations — as well as more directly through funding of TAFEs, policy interventions and administration. Specific areas of State and Territory responsibility include: quality of training and training products; registration of training agreements; registration and auditing of RTOs and GTOs; workcover exemption;

payment of completion bonuses (this can be up to \$3,500 per apprentice); and monitoring of User Choice funding (OTTE, 2006:7).

In the late 1990s, there arose a growing interest among academics, training providers, employers, trade unions and State and Commonwealth government leaders about the impact of these various changes on meeting skill requirements. Throughout most of the 1990s, Australia's economy resisted the international trend towards recession and recorded substantial growth figures. One of the implications of this steady growth was a growing concern about skills shortages and by 2000-2001 this had emerged as a major political issue. With this development concerns about the new VET system have begun to focus on high rates of attrition and non-completions among apprentices and trainees.

Attrition: review of past research

There have emerged within the literature two broad methodologies pertaining to research into completion/non-completion amongst Australian apprentices and trainees. The majority of studies concentrate on characteristics — such as age, gender, schooling, industry, location — of non-completers and completers through analysis of administrative data (Ball & John 2005; Ball, 2005; Bender, 2003; Ray et al. 2000). There have, however been a number of qualitative studies using surveys, interviews and focus groups, most often giving reasons for leaving such as “being treated as cheap labour” and quality of training issues (Callan, 2005; Cully & Curtain 2001;). A number of studies and reports (Harris & Simons, 2005; ANTA 2002; Callan 2000; Grey et al. 1999) utilise a combination of these two approaches. As both Lamb (2005: 14) and Ray et al. (2000: 11) contend, while the use of databases and administrative data can provide characteristics of apprentices and trainees who are less likely to complete, to ascertain the full reasons for non-completion “requires surveys of the non-completers themselves ... which attempt to establish factors behind decisions to abandon study” (Lamb 2005: 14).

Working purely from statistical data Ball and John's (2005: 6-7) findings are representative of the majority of administrative studies. They found that those groups less likely to complete an apprenticeship or traineeship were under 25, had left school before they completed year 12, were indigenous or had undertaken training at AQF level II or below. Trainees were less likely to complete than apprentices and there were marked differences between industries, with those in the food trade half as likely to achieve a successful completion as those in mechanical and fabrication engineering. Analysis of NCVER data has shown that in general trades related apprentices and trainees were twice as likely to complete as those in non-trades areas, and over 50% of the “non-trades non-completers were in the *Clerical, sales and service workers ... occupation group*” (ANTA 2002:4). Ball and John (2005: 14-16) found those in metropolitan and remote regions were less likely to complete than those in rural areas, as were part timers (comprising 27% of those who commenced in 2003) who were 9.2% less likely to complete than full timers. They also found a marked drop in completion rates over time: traditional apprentices who commenced in 1999 were 10% less likely to complete than those who commenced in 1995 — a trend which seems to have continued (Ball & John 2005: 7). Bender's 2003 study reported similar findings, in addition noting that “apprenticeships and traineeships undertaken in the government sector are about 12 percentage points more likely to result in a successful outcome than those in the private sector” (Bender 2003:6). Although it has since been disputed by ANTA (2002: 9), DETYA research (Ray et al. 2000) also found that apprentices employed through group training companies were less likely to complete their training.

In Cully and Curtain's (2001) detailed national study of 797 non-completing ‘new apprentices’ and their employers (examining those who began training between 1994 and 1999) a major contributing factor — given by close to 50% — for leaving their training was being “treated as cheap labour”. Aligning with this Grey et al. (1999: 31) found low wages to be the main reason trainees left before completion. Another highly rated ‘contributing factor

for leaving' — cited by over 30% of trainees (and 23% of apprentices) was that they were not learning anything (Cully & Curtain 2001: 24). This could indicate poor quality, or lack of, training and would seem to be supported by the finding that only 60% of the non-completers reported having "taken part in training of the kind that is supposed to be the bedrock of new apprenticeships" (Cully & Curtain 2001: 20) and more alarmingly 19% reported taking part in no training at all (viii). Callan (2000: 24-25) in his analysis of Queensland non-completers found that lack of training or poor training on the job was cited by nearly 50% of trainees and nearly 60% of apprentices as a reason for not completing. In addition the departmental staff (Queensland Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations) surveyed thought this was a major reason for non-completions and were "critical of the performance of RTOs, and the bosses of some small businesses who they believed used the schemes as a source of cheap labour rather than as a training vehicle" (Callan 2000: 13). In support Grey et al. (1999:31) reported that insufficient training was cited by 45% of non-completers as being one of the top three important factors in their decision to leave.²⁰

However Cully and Curtain (2001), Grey et al. (1999) and Ray et al. (2000) concur "that it is aspects of the employment relationship, rather than the training relationship, which have the greatest impact on completion" (ANTA 2002: 6). Dissatisfaction with the workplace and 'the boss' were both reported by 40% of those surveyed by Cully and Curtain as contributing factors to their leaving. This study also found that while the decision to leave was more likely taken by the New Apprentice rather than the employer, many apprentices and trainees felt the decision to leave was forced on them (Cully & Curtain 2001: 25). Research shows the breakdown of the employer-trainee relationship may have its origins in how and why apprentices and trainees are recruited. Trainees especially are most often motivated by the desire to get work, and if training is a requisite part of the job they will sign onto it with little personal motivation to obtain the qualification. According to Cully and Curtain more than half of the many who reported feeling 'obliged' to undertake training were existing employees (ANTA 2002: 7). This may raise questions about the employers' motives for signing on apprentices and trainees in a climate where there may be significant financial incentive (through subsidies and grants) for signing up their existing workers, or for employing new workers as trainees rather than on full adult wages.

In their qualitative study on factors contributing to retention Harris, Simons, Symons et al. (2001: 223) looked at literature from the fields of adult education and human resources management, and identified a number of factors affecting training retention. They categorise these as either "person oriented factors"; such as motivation, persistence, gender, interpersonal relationship with employer, age, highest level of previous education and past life experience; or "context-oriented factors" which include type and quality of social networks, mandatory nature of the training, work opportunities gained by training, on the job/ off the job training, type of industry, quality of training, employment conditions, nature of employer and whether they are doing a traineeship or apprenticeship. In their own research they found ten factors contributing to retention (the absence of which indicates risk of non-completion). These factors were: "readiness to cope with the demands of work and learning" — identified as a strong sense of personal agency; a good support network; a good 'fit' between employer and trainee; previous good work experience related to the industry; supportive workplace supervisors; supportive workplace culture; structured training; reliable transport; availability of alternative employers to continue training; and value placed on the qualification (Harris, Simons, Symons et al. 2001: 227-231). They recognised these factors are "both interrelated and cumulative ... [and that] often the weight of multiple negative factors ... ultimately led to an apprentice or trainee failing to complete" (ANTA 2002: 6).

²⁰ The other two most important reasons were low wages — cited by 53% and not getting on with their employer — cited by 44%.

In conjunction with the examination of factors contributing to both non-completion and successful completion, there has been extensive and ongoing debate for more than a decade about how to measure completions and/or non-completions in VET training (see for example: Ray et al 2000; Senate 2000; Bender 2001; John 2003; Ball & John 2005; Karmel & Virk 2006). Recent research and the development of new methodologies by the Victorian State Training Authority (Kozdra & Davenport 2007), designed to more accurately reflect the realities of the system and overcome some of the deficiencies in data created by a complex and inconsistent system, has sought to clarify some of the issues around measuring completion rates. These statistical issues will be elaborated on in the following chapter.

Chapter Three: Statistical Profile of Training in the Gippsland Region

Introduction

One of the common complaints heard among stakeholders associated with the training system in Gippsland concerns the lack of available and/or reliable data on apprentice and trainee training in the region. While National and State-wide data on training is more accessible, data for smaller regional areas such as Gippsland is difficult and costly to obtain, particularly when factoring in the amount of specialist analysis required. This chapter provides a comprehensive and up-to-date profile of apprentice and trainee training in the Gippsland region, providing the region's stakeholders with a better sense of the nature of training in the region. It examines the historical trends in commencements in the Gippsland region, the characteristics of current apprentices and trainees in-training in the region and provides completion rates for apprentices and trainees across a range of variables. The methodology utilised for this analysis is consistent with the statistical work being carried out by the Victorian State Training Authority — The Office of Tertiary Training and Education (OTTE) — so that meaningful comparative analysis can be carried out between the State and local level.

In recent years there has developed considerable debate over the most appropriate method to analyse the outcomes of VET training in Australia. Much of this debate has revolved around whether it is best to track the individual or the training contract²¹. The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER)—the primary source of information on training in Australia—relies on administrative data collected by the State Training Authorities and provided to them for research purposes. NCVER's research approach, based on tracking contracts, does not accurately reflect individual outcomes because there will always be more contracts than there are individuals (due to the way in which 'events' such as changes in employer are reported, and the fact that individuals can have multiple contracts of training). Like NCVER, this report relies on administrative data for its analysis. However, because this project seeks to gain a greater insight into individual apprentice and trainee behaviour and outcomes, some modifications to the administrative data was carried out prior to analysis to enable the research team to be more sensitive to individuals and their progression through and out of the training system. Information about the dataset and procedures taken to modify this data are presented in the following section.

Gippsland dataset

As the research team discovered, acquiring reliable data from traditional sources such as NCVER is fraught with difficulties. While NCVER is able to provide regionally specific datasets, their system of collecting data and their procedures for 'cleaning' the data so they can carry out National analysis from the diverse range of administrative data they receive from the States and Territories, has the effect of removing some of the important details required for this project; such as the unique student identification numbers that are vital to tracking individual cohorts of students. This report therefore, relies on data provided to the research team by OTTE which created a special dataset containing all contracts for the Gippsland region (as defined by the research team) for the years January 1995-January 2007. This dataset was drawn from the administrative data contained in the OTTE Delta database.

Prior to releasing the dataset all personal identifying information about the apprentices/trainees (name, address, phone number, etc.) and identifying information about the training provider and employer were removed by OTTE to protect the privacy of

²¹ Ray et al (2000: 14) however, argued there was only a marginal difference in the calculated attrition rates between the two methods.

individuals and companies. The dataset contains comprehensive information about the student's age, gender, background schooling, the status of their contract, the occupational group in which training was taking place, the level of training, the type of training scheme, the type of training provider and the employer. One of the limitations of the dataset received from OTTE was that withdrawals — where termination occurs during the first 3 month probationary period — had been removed. The reasons for this removal will be explained in the following discussion on OTTE's approach to calculating completion rates. As a result, no information can be reported on withdrawals among apprentices/trainees in the Gippsland region. As noted below this has an effect on the calculation of completion rates, but while these differences affect the commencement and completion data they do not affect the in-training data (used below to outline the characteristics of current apprentices and trainees), as it is essentially a snapshot in time.²²

While personal information about students was removed, unique student identification numbers were provided to enable the research team to track individual cohorts of students and conduct analysis more sensitive to individual student behaviour and training outcomes. In meeting these aims a process was undertaken to 'clean' the data prior to analysis.

Prior to analysing the Gippsland dataset a process was undertaken to remove cases of a particular type of multiple contract, involving situations where students remain within the same occupational group and same scheme but may have more than one contract before they exit training (see 'Completion rates' below). This procedure enabled the research team to carry out their analysis in a way which is more sensitive to individual outcomes and in a manner consistent with OTTE's method of calculating completion rates, as will be discussed.

Prior to removal of these multiple cases, the data file contained 36,784 contracts covering the period from January 1995-January 2007. After the removal of multiple contract cases 34,212 contracts remained. These contracts represented 29,805 different individuals. While the overwhelming majority of individuals (86.9%) who were in-training over this period had only been involved in one training contract, 11.6% undertook two contracts, 1.4% undertook three contracts, 0.1% entered into four contracts and four people had five different contracts.²³

Of the 34,212 training contracts used to conduct research for this report 25,337 (74.1%) were traineeship contracts and 8,875 (25.9%) were apprenticeship contracts. Of the 34,212 training contracts, 15,686 were completions (45.8%), 6,204 were still active (18.2%), 9,640 had been cancelled (28.2%), 2,649 had expired (7.7%) and 33 were suspended contracts (0.1%).

Regional Commencements 1995-2006

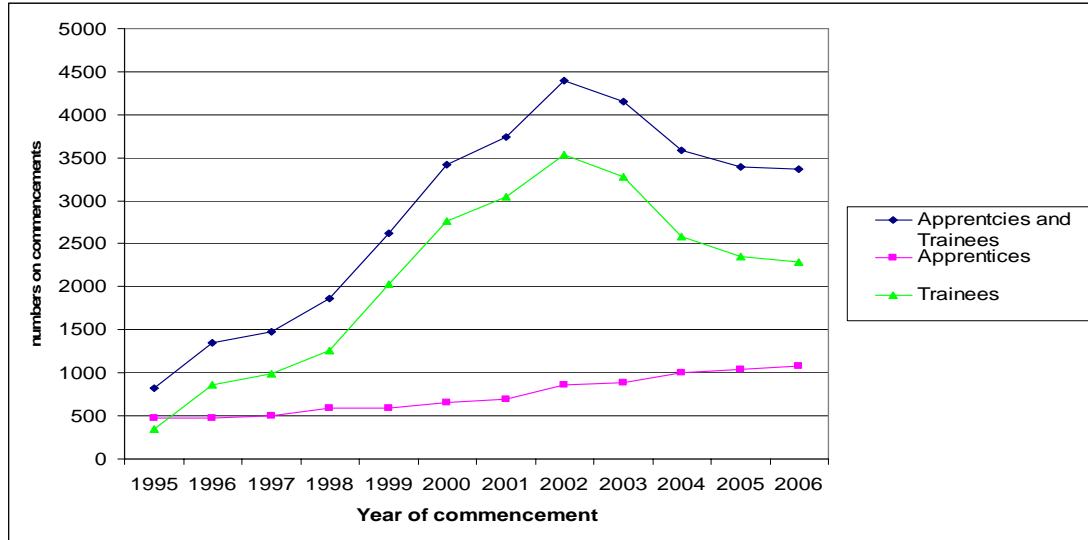
As can be seen from Chart 3.1 below, more apprentices commenced training than trainees in 1995, accounting for 57.5% of the 823 who commenced training in that year. By 2006, however, apprentices only accounted for 32.2% of the total 3,372 commencing. This change reflects the dramatic increase in the number of people taking up traineeships, especially from 1999-2003. Traineeship commencements peaked in 2002 when apprentices represented only 19.6% of the total of 4,396 commencing training. At this 2002 peak traineeship commencements were 10 times higher than they had been in 1995, in the same period apprenticeship commencements had less than doubled. There has, however, occurred a slow

²² OTTE do not normally provide detailed analysis at State level of the characteristics of apprentices and trainees, though NCVET do publish this information periodically at the national level. OTTE have currently commissioned a study to investigate the characteristics of completers/non-completers, however the results have not been finalised in time for this report.

²³ Often individuals with multiple contracts would have completed or attempted certificates in different occupations, changed employer or changed from a traineeship to an apprenticeship in the same occupation.

but steady increase in the number of apprentices each year from 1995-2006. In 2006 the 1,086 apprentice commencements were 2.3 times the number in 1995, while traineeship commencements (2,286) were 6.5 times higher (see Appendix IV for a more detailed table). In 2006 apprentices accounted for 32.3% of all commencements in the region, while State-wide they represented only 22.6% of all training commencements (NCVER 2007c)²⁴.

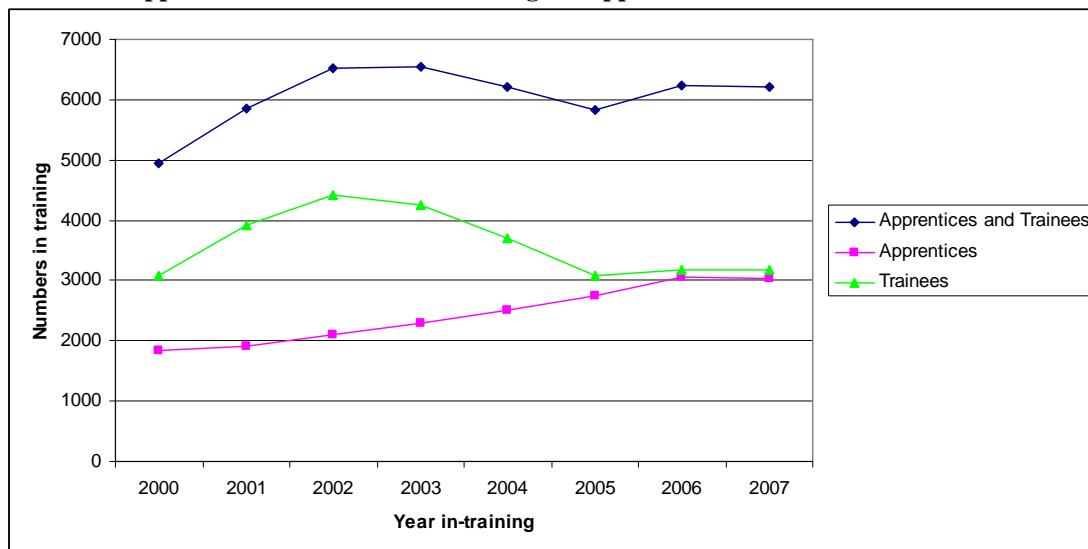
Chart 3.1: Apprentice and trainee commencements in Gippsland 1995-2006



Characteristics of Gippsland Apprentices and Trainees In-training in January 2007

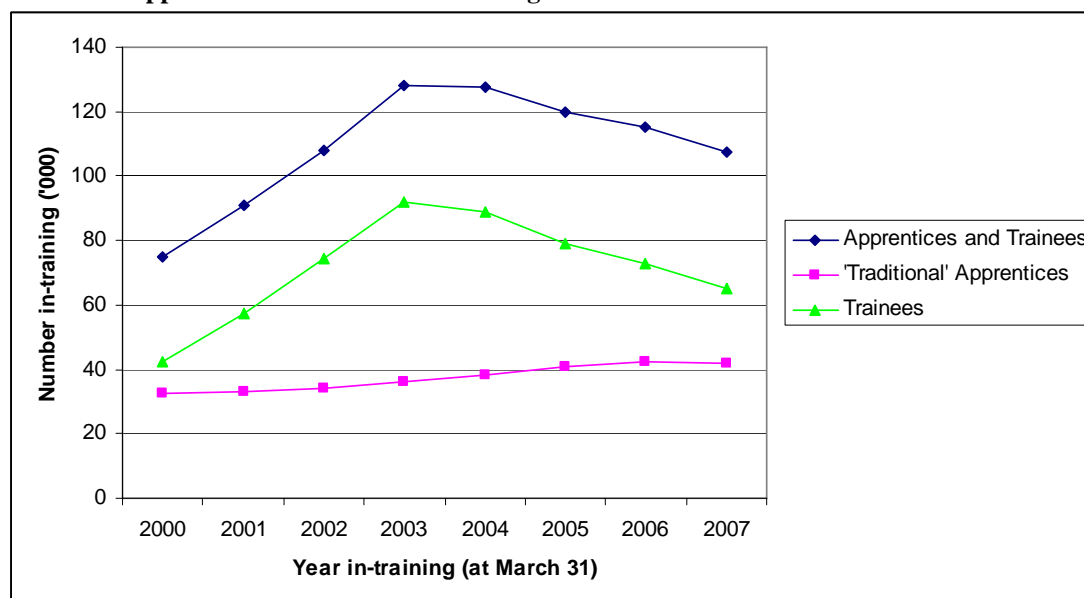
Using the information from the OTTE data a profile of the 6,204 Gippsland apprentices and trainees in-training in January 2007 has been developed. Chart 3.2 presents information about in-training for 2000-2007 for apprentices and trainees combined, and for each separately. Chart 3 provides this information for Victoria for comparative purposes.

Chart 3.2: Apprentices and trainees in-training in Gippsland 2000-2007



*Note in-training numbers for 2007 are from the March quarter while those from previous years are as of December 31 for each year in the series.

²⁴ NCVER define a traditional apprentice as: “those contracts in the trades or related workers occupational group at AQF level III qualification or above with more than two years expected duration for fulltime contracts and more than eight years ... for part time or school based contracts”

Chart 3.3: Apprentices and trainees in-training in Victoria 2000-2007

Source: NCVER 2007c.

In Victoria over the seven years from 2000-2007 there has been a 28.4% increase in the number of apprentices in training, while in Gippsland over the same period this increase has been more than 65%.²⁵ However amongst trainees a different picture emerges. In Gippsland there was only 3.9% growth in trainee numbers from 2000-2007, whereas in Victoria as a whole the growth rate of trainees over this period was 54.7%. Chart 2 shows a clear convergence in recent years in the numbers of apprentices and trainees in-training, while this is also evident in the state as a whole (Chart 3.3), it is not so marked. As with Victoria the total number (and pattern) of those in training is driven more by changes in trainee numbers than apprentice numbers. When looking at the in-training numbers it needs to be kept in mind that apprentices in-training stay in the system much longer than trainees and so while their commencement numbers are significantly lower than trainee commencement numbers, the current in-training figure is only marginally different. Of those in-training in January 2007, 49% were apprentices and 51% were trainees, while at this time State-wide 39.2% of those in training were apprentices and 60.8% were trainees (NCVER 2007c).

Distribution of apprentices/trainees across the region

Table 3.1: Apprentices and trainees in-training 2007 by Local Government Area, Gippsland

Local Government Area	Apprentices		Trainees	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Bass Coast/South Gippsland	629	20.7	711	22.5
Baw Baw/Latrobe City	1,415	46.6	1,570	49.6
Wellington/East Gippsland	993	32.7	886	27.9
Total	3,037	100.0	3,167	100.0

Among Apprentices, 20.7% lived in Bass Coast/South Gippsland, 46.6% in Baw Baw/Latrobe and 32.7% in Wellington/East Gippsland. Among trainees, 22.5% were in Bass Coast/South Gippsland, 49.65% were in Baw Baw/Latrobe and 27.9% were in Wellington/East Gippsland. Only Wellington/East Gippsland had a higher proportion of apprenticeships to traineeships.

Among apprentices only 23 of the 3,037 apprentices in-training identified themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (less than 1%). Among trainees in-training the percentage was higher (2.6%) with 82 of the 3,167 trainees identifying themselves as Aboriginal or

²⁵ It should be noted that Gippsland apprentices were coming from a very low base line (under 2,000).

Torres Strait Islander. According to the 2006 Census, 1.3% of the Gippsland population identified themselves as indigenous (ABS, 2006).

Gender

Table 3.2: Apprentices and trainees in-training in 2007 by gender, Gippsland

Gender	Apprentices		Trainees	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Male	2,708	89.2	1,507	47.6
Female	329	10.8	1,660	52.4
Total	3,037	100.0	3,167	100.0

With the exception of hairdressing and cookery, males have traditionally dominated in apprenticeships. This trend continues with nearly 90% of the apprentices in-training being male. Traineeships, on the other hand, are more balanced between males and females with 52.4% of those in-training being female trainees. This is a reflection of the more feminised industries where traineeships predominate — retail and hospitality in particular. In total 68% of apprentices and trainees in the region are male and 32% female. This is in line with whole of Victoria figures which show 65.6% are male and 34.3% female (NCVER 2007c).

Age at commencement

Table 3.3: Apprentices and trainees in-training in 2007 by age at commencement, Gippsland

Age at Commencement	Apprentices		Trainees	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Under 19	2,134	70.3	931	29.4
20-24	572	18.8	594	18.8
25-34	282	9.3	1,090	34.4
35-44	36	1.2	415	13.1
45+	13	0.4	137	4.3
Total	3,037	100.0	3,167	100.0

The age profile of those in-training in 2007 is notably different between apprentices and trainees. Eighty-nine percent of the apprentices in-training were under 24 years of age. Among trainees less than half (48.2%) were under 24 years of age. This brings into question the common perception that it is largely young teenagers who are involved in traineeships and reflects the reality that many taking up traineeships are existing workers (see page 18).

The youngest person to take up training over the 12 year period from 1995-2007 was twelve years old. The oldest person was 71. Both of these individuals were doing traineeships.

Looking at all those in training in Gippsland 68.2% were under 25, compared with 59.2% of those in training in Victoria (NCVER 2007c). The latest available NCVER data shows that nationally 57% of all new apprentices and trainees are under 25 and “13% of people commencing apprenticeships and traineeships are aged 45 years or over” (NCVER 2007b). This indicates a generally younger profile of apprentices and trainees in the region than in both the State as whole and nationally.

Occupational Group

Table 3.4: Apprentices and trainees in-training (2007) by occupational group

Occupational Group	Apprentices		Trainees	
	Number	% of Apprentices	Number	% of Trainees
Auto Repair Service and Retail	462	15.2	24	.8
Civil Operations	59	1.9	46	1.5
General Construction	770	25.4	7	0
Plumbing Services	245	8.1	1	0
Business Administration	0	0	226	7.1
Finance	0	0	54	1.7
Children's Services	0	0	91	2.9
Community support	0	0	97	3.1
Health Services and Acute Care	1	0	104	3.3
Residential and Home Care	0	0	126	4.0
Recreation	0	0	59	1.8
Electrical and Electronics	327	10.8	1	0
Baking	75	2.5	2	0
General Food	0	0	84	2.6
Meat	52	1.7	110	3.5
Petroleum, Rubber and Cables	0	0	58	1.7
Furnishings	134	4.4	3	0
Engineering	416	13.7	23	.7
Agriculture	2	0	170	5.4
Amenity horticulture	50	1.6	66	2.1
Cookery	221	7.3	11	.4
Hospitality	0	0	228	7.2
Storage and Distribution	0	0	151	4.6
Road	0	0	159	5.0
Hairdressing	159	5.2	0	0
Retail	0	0	719	22.8
Other	64	2.2	547	17.4
Total	3037	100	3167	100

Apprentices in the occupational groups of construction, automotive, engineering and electrical account for over 65% of current apprentices, with construction at 25.4% clearly the most popular. In traineeships the distribution is more even across occupational groups with only retail (22%) having over 10%, and retail, hospitality and business administration accounting for 37% of those currently in training.

Education level

Table 3.5: Apprentices and trainees in-training in 2007 by educational background, Gippsland

Level of Education	Apprentices		Trainees	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Did not go to school	0	0.0	4	0.1
Year 8	44	1.4	98	3.1
Year 9	236	7.8	366	11.6
Year 10	861	28.4	863	27.2
Year 11	899	29.6	719	22.7
Year 12	996	32.8	1,111	35.1
Not Stated	1	0.0	6	0.2
Total	3,037	100.0	3,167	100.0

The percentage of those completing year 11 or above was slightly higher among apprentices than trainees. Among apprentices, 62.4% had completed year 11 or above while the percentage of trainees who had completed year 11 or above was 57.8%. Among apprentices in-training, 28.4% had completed up to year 10, a further 29.6% had completed year 11 and 32.85 had completed year 12. A marginally lower percentage (22.7%) of trainees completed year 11, however a slightly higher percentage (35.1%) had completed year 12.

Nationally of the 15 to 19-year-olds commencing an apprenticeship or traineeship, 37% had completed Year 12 (NCVER 2006).

Certificate level

Table 3.6: Apprentices and trainees in-training 2007 by certificate level, Gippsland

AQF Certificate Level	Apprentices		Trainees	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Certificate II	0	0.0	474	15.0
Certificate III	2,990	98.5	2,238	70.7
Certificate IV	46	1.5	424	13.4
Certificate V	1	0.0	24	0.7
Certificate VI	0	0.0	7	0.2
Total	3,037	100.0	3,167	100.0

The overwhelming majority (98.5%) of apprentices in-training in January 2007 were doing their training at Certificate III level. Those doing an apprenticeship at Certificate IV represented only 1.5% of apprentices in-training and only one person was doing their apprenticeships at Certificate V level.

Among trainees in-training in January 2007 the level of dispersion among the various certificate levels was far greater. Of the 3,167 trainees in-training in 2007, 474 (15%) were doing their training at Certificate II level, 2,238 (70.7%) were doing their training at Certificate III level, 424 (13.4%) were doing their training at Certificate IV level, 24 (.75%) were doing their training at Certificate V level and 7 (.22%) were doing their training at Certificate VI level. As with apprentices, the largest majority (70.7%) of trainees were training at Certificate III level. Victorian data reflects a similar distribution, with 82.8% of apprentices and trainees doing AQF level III and less than 10% doing level IV and above (NCVER 2007b).

Employer type and training provider

A variety of employment and training schemes are available for those wanting to do an apprenticeships or traineeship. These range from full-time to part-time training and school based apprenticeships, employment with a private or public enterprise or a group training company and training delivered by either TAFE or a private provider. The following

considers this range of options for those in-training in January 2007. In doing so it also considers the differences between those doing apprenticeships and those doing traineeships.

Table 3.7: Apprentices and trainees in-training (2007) by employer type, Gippsland

Employer Type	Apprentices		Trainees	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Private	2,184	71.9	2,726	86.1
Group Training	828	27.3	143	4.5
Government	25	.8	298	9.4
Total	3,037	100.0	3,167	100.0

Among those apprentices in-training in January 2007, 71.9% were employed by a private enterprise, 27.3% were employed by a Group Training Company and .8% were employed in the public sector. Among trainees in-training in 2007, 86.1% were employed by a private enterprise, 4.5% by a group training company and 9.4% were employed in the public sector. Notable in these figures is the miniscule number (especially of apprentices) being trained in the public sector; this is in sharp contrast to the large numbers — up to 460 engineering apprentices commenced each year — (Buchanan et al; 2002: 195) who were trained in the region by the State Electricity Commission prior to privatisation. As Toner (2003: 16) noted “a major contributor to the reduction in apprentice numbers over the 1990s has been the large scale withdrawal of all levels of government from apprentice training ... largely due to the ... privatisation of State and Commonwealth government activities” he goes on to say that “there was no compensatory increase in private sector apprentice employment ... [as] a singular focus on improving the direct rate of return on the private or public funds invested has seen these entities reduce their responsibility to train for ‘their’ industry”.

Table 3.8: Apprentices and trainees in-training (2007) by training provider, Gippsland

Training Provider	Apprentices		Trainees	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
TAFE	2,289	75.4	1,141	36.0
Private	684	22.5	1,983	62.6
Unknown	64	2.1	43	1.4
Total	3,037	100.0	3,167	100.0

Among apprentices in-training in January 2007, 75.4% were doing their training at TAFE, 22.5% with a private provider and for 2.1% it was not known where they were doing their training. Among the 3,167 trainees in-training, the majority (62.6%) were doing their training with a private provider with just over a third (36%) doing their training at TAFE, and for 1.4% this was unknown.

Training scheme

Table 3.9: Apprentices and trainees in-training (2007) by training scheme

Training Scheme	Apprentices	Trainees	Total
Full-time training	2,869	1,284	4,153
Full-time existing employee	113	552	665
Funded full-time existing employee	0	1	1
Part-time training	33	762	795
Part-time existing employee	7	269	276
Integrated school based (part-time)	0	16	16
School based (part-time)	11	207	218
Part-time attending school	4	76	80
Total	3,037	3,167	6,204

Over three-quarters of apprentices and trainees in-training in 2007 were doing their training full-time. This was marginally higher than in Victoria generally, where 72.9% were full-time

(NCVER 2007c). Nationally this growing trend to part time is also evident: “Apprentices and trainees employed part-time comprised only 2% of all commencing apprentices and trainees in 1995. By 1999 this group comprised 18% of all apprentices and trainees. ... and now accounts for around 27% of apprentices and trainees” (Ball & John 2005: 8-9). Nationally, the proportion of full-time to part-time training found among apprentices compared to trainees, however, is notably different. The percentage of apprentices doing full-time training in 2007 was 98.2%. The percentage of trainees undertaking full-time training was considerably lower. Among trainees, only 58% were undertaking full-time training.

In Gippsland, the overwhelming majority of apprentices in-training in January 2007 were doing so full-time. Of the 3,037 apprentices in-training in January 2007, 2,869 (94.5%) were doing it as a full-time new employee and 113 (3.7%) were doing it full-time but had been an employee of the company before taking up the apprenticeship. There were only 11 apprentices who were doing school-based apprenticeships.

The situation among those doing traineeships in January 2007 was quite different. While the majority of the 3,167 trainees were doing full-time training (57.9%), this proportion was considerably less than that found among apprentices. Seventeen percent of those doing full-time training had also been employees of the company before taking up the traineeship — a figure considerably higher than that found among apprentices. The percentage of trainees who were signed up to traineeships by the employer they had already been working for represents more than a quarter of all those trainees in-training when full-time and part-time trainees are taken into account. The number of school based traineeships is also higher than that found among apprenticeships. In 2007, there were 207 trainees doing school based traineeships.

Looking at both trainees and apprentices in the region, 15% were existing employees before they started training, in contrast “nationally more than one quarter of all new apprentices and trainees are already working for the employer they undertake their apprenticeship or traineeship with” (NCVER 2007b).

Completions and Non-completions

While ascertaining commencement numbers (at least of contracts) in apprenticeships and traineeships may seem a relatively uncomplicated process, as Ray et al (2000: 13) point out “[d]eriving an accurate estimate of the apprenticeship attrition rate, while fairly straight forward in theory, is extremely difficult [if not impossible] in practice”. Concurring, the comprehensive 2000 Senate Inquiry into training quality found that “[d]etermining apprenticeship and traineeship attrition rates has proved to be a difficult and complex task, largely confounded by the lack of reliable data. The NCVER, for example, only recently began publishing national data on non-completion” (Senate, 2000: ¶ 5.3). Bender (2001: 1) agrees that “one of the most challenging tasks [of] ... VET research” is the measurement of success — and this is before considering issues of definition including how ‘success’ itself should be defined.

Factors which complicate measurement of attrition from training are multiple and include different definitions and data collection systems in each State and Territory, data issues, different methodologies, issues around how to account for multiple and expired contracts, in addition to time lags — both those in reporting ‘events’²⁶ and those associated with the time taken to complete contracts²⁷ (Ball & John 2005:11). The latter is compounded by the

²⁶ When any change to contract status, such as a completion, cancellation, recommencement etc. is recorded on the State (or Territory) Training Authority database, it is termed an ‘event’.

growing flexibility of the system, evidenced by the fact that currently almost 42% of traineeship contracts in the Gippsland region are part time. As Ball and John (2005: 11) note, clearly these same difficulties surround the determination of accurate completion figures.

Despite these continuing issues there has been a long history of research into completion and non-completion rates in the VET sector through from the 1970s to the present (Harris & Simons 2005: 353). The range in attrition figures reported in research over the last 10 years – from as low as 24% to over 60% (see Smith, 1998; Grey et. al., 1999; Lamb et. al., 1998; Ray et. al., 2000; NCVER, 2000; Victorian TAFE Association Inc., 2000; John, 2003; Ball & John, 2005, Bowman et. al., 2005) — reflects the difficulties involved in both choice of methodology and accurate measurement.

Definitional problems

There are few definitions which are uncontested when it comes to measuring completions and non-completions in apprenticeships and traineeships. The following outlines some of these.

Apprentice/trainee

Since the bringing together of apprenticeships and traineeships under the 'New Apprenticeship' scheme in 1996 the once clear division between the two types of training has become blurred. As the definitions of apprentices and trainees differ from state to state, NCVER since 1996 have developed a "proxy for traditional apprenticeships". A traditional apprentice for their purposes is defined as: "those contracts in the trades or related workers occupational group at AQF level III qualification or above with more than two years expected duration for fulltime contracts and more than eight years ... for part time or school based contracts" (NCVER 2004). OTTE however use a 'Set One' and 'Set Two' definition which relates more to the apprentice/trainee's conditions of employment than to their time of study²⁸. However there is a reasonable correlation in that contracts of training under Set 1 conditions will generally be longer duration and mostly in the occupations considered as covered by traditional apprenticeships; such as construction, electrical, plumbing, cookery and hairdressing.

Commencement

While the term 'commencement' may seem to be fairly unambiguous, in Victoria (as in some other Australian states) when an apprentice or trainee changes employer, they are recorded on the data base as a cancellation or withdrawal and then as a new commencement when they sign a contract with their new employer. In the past this has often been cited as reason why many studies into VET attrition indicate inaccurately low levels of completion. (Karmel & Virk 2005; NCVER 2002). In addition any change in contract (such as moving from full-time

²⁷ Note a part time apprenticeship could take longer than 8 years to complete and in addition "[i]t can take up to 9 months — 1 year for completions and commencements to be reported and up to 2 years for cancellations/withdrawals (by employers)" (Ball 2005: 2).

²⁸ **Set One** conditions specify that:

- a) Apprentice and employer must both agree to cancel or change the contract of training.
- b) If they are unable to agree OTTE's permission is required to suspend or cancel the contract.
- c) If the apprentice wants to leave or is unfairly dismissed OTTE may hold a hearing to resolve disputes and then decide on resolution.
- d) If the business is sold the apprentice **must** be continued by the new employer

Set Two conditions specify:

- a) The apprentice/trainee or employer can cancel the contract by giving appropriate notice.
- b) If there is a lack of business the employer can suspend or cancel the contract.
- c) OTTE cannot hold a hearing to resolve disputes.
- d) If the business is sold the new owner does not have to take on the trainee. (OTTE 2006: 12)

to part-time) may also result in a cancellation and new commencement being recorded on the data base.

Completion

In order to officially complete an apprenticeship or traineeship three conditions must be met:

- The completion of formal training requirements of the apprenticeship or traineeship as per the qualification specified in the contract;
- completion of the indenture period of the contract of training and meeting the on-the-job requirements as endorsed by the employer;
- having met these requirements, evidence of this must be provided to the appropriate state/territory training authority (Ball & John 2005: 8).

It is the failure to complete the third step which can result in expired contracts which in actual fact may be either unreported completions or cancellations. There is also often a time-lag involved in this reporting, sometimes up to two years (Ball 2005:2). While there can only be one completion for any apprenticeship or traineeship, due to the way in which changes in employer and contract type are recorded there can be multiple commencement and cancellation events (see 'Multiple contracts' below).

Attrition or non-completion

An apprentice or trainee is officially recorded as a non-completion when the trainee either withdraws from (in the first 3 months) or cancels (after the 3 month probationary period) their contract of employment and/or their training contract. "The most common form of non-completion is where the contract of employment is terminated, which by default also terminates the contract of training" (Cully & Curtain 2001:14). Ray et al (2000: 14) used the following definition for attrition: "when an apprentice leaves an apprenticeship prior to completion and does not recommence within a two year period". They assume if an apprentice has not recommenced in two years they are unlikely to do so.

The OTTE methodology which has been used to derive the Gippsland figures has no time limit on '(re)commencement', thus apprentices and trainees can be out of the system for an indefinite number of years and so long as they (re)commence in the same occupational grouping their training is considered to be ongoing and their 'cancellation' (and new 'commencement') has been removed from the database. It should be noted that when attrition is considered in relation to commencements (as it usually is in more recent studies), the removal of 'change in employer' events (i.e. both the 'cancellation' and the new 'commencement' are removed from the figures) does not affect attrition figures in the same way as it does completion figures²⁹.

Data issues

There are a range of concerns which are highlighted in the literature about the quality and accuracy of available data. Some of these issues have already been discussed. Bender (2001: 2) notes some additional concerns with existing databases which limit their utility:

the national apprentice and trainee data collection is not a longitudinal database. Every quarter all unit records get updated, no matter whether a training event (such as a contract commencement, cancellation or completion) has taken place recently ... This practice leads to modifications of original unit-record information over time (such as contract identifiers, effective dates, etc.) and makes it difficult ... to find, at

²⁹ This is because for each superfluous non-completion, there is a linked (re)commencement. Note that (re)commencement as used here should be distinguished from 'active-recommencement' status in the DELTA database which refers to when someone starts a new training contract in the exact same qualification as their previous one.

the unit-record level, accurate matches between records describing training uptake ('commencements' and 'recommencements') and those describing outcomes ('completions', 'withdrawals', 'cancellations' 'expiries') (Bender 2001: 2)

Multiple contracts

'Multiple contracts' occur when an apprentice or trainee changes their employer during the course of their training, or changes their training type — i.e. they may change from school based or part-time to full-time training, or from one training package to another in essentially the same occupation. Most state databases will record this as a cancellation and then a new commencement. In keeping with the OTTE methodology, before the Gippsland data was analysed for this report, all multiple events such as these for the same apprentice or trainee were removed from the database (see 'OTTE methodology' below for details).

Expired contracts

Expired contracts are those that go beyond the expected completion date with no report of a final outcome. How these cases should be treated when carrying out analysis has become a point of some discussion and research. In 2000 and 2002 NCVER undertook surveys of expired contracts to try and determine their eventual outcome and concluded that about a third were actually unreported completions, another third cancellations and the rest were either 'partial completions' or could not be determined (Ball & John 2005: 12). The 2000 survey indicated that "as many as 20% of New Apprentice commencements 'expire'" with no reported outcome (NCVER 2002: 4)³⁰. The distribution of those contracts that could not be determined was calculated to be the same as those that could be, and thus a distribution of 45% completions and 55% non-completions for expired contracts was decided on (Ball & John 2005: 12). OTTE methodology, which found only 7% of contracts in Victoria to be expired, also adopted this distribution of expired contracts, though some other studies³¹ have questioned its accuracy.

Withdrawals

Withdrawals are a common category found within administrative data sources. Like in the cases of multiple contracts and expired contracts there is not universal agreement on how these cases should be treated. NCVER does report withdrawals in their various reports and includes them in their calculation of completion rates. OTTE, however, takes a different approach. The OTTE methodology removes those contracts from which apprentices and trainees have withdrawn in the probationary period (i.e. left within the first three months of signing up). The reasoning behind this is that trainees and apprentices who withdraw in the "probationary period are by definition not committed to training" (Kozdra & Davenport 2007) but are 'trying out' various career paths. While we have adopted this approach it should also be noted that withdrawals in the first three months still represents a significant waste of time and resources, both for the trainee and the system, and better recruitment or pre apprenticeship advice could feasibly reduce the rate of this early attrition.

As some state databases do not distinguish between withdrawals and cancellations NCVER and most other researchers include these and tables show that from 1995-2002 between 8.8-11.4% of all commencing apprentices and trainees withdrew in the first three months of their training (Ball 2005:3; Ball & John 2005: 10).³² John (2003: 4) in an analysis of Queensland

³⁰ The two surveys found there was a decline of about 3% in underreporting of completions, and cancellations plus withdrawals from 1999-2001 (Ball & John 2005: 12).

³¹ David John (2003: 7) states the NCVER studies into expired contracts "found only one third of expired contracts to be completions nationally".

³² Ball and John (2005: 10) note that despite many changes in the system and the makeup of apprentices and trainees this pattern of attrition has remained relatively constant from the mid-1980s.

data, found that if those who withdraw in the first 3 months are excluded from the data “the rates of completion increase 7-9 percentage points for trainees, and 3-4 percentage points for apprentices ... [and] the rates of non-completion decrease 8-10 percentage points for trainees, and 2-4 percentage points for apprentices”. OTTE, however, found using their methodology of removing withdrawals that the increase in completion rates in Victoria was 2.4% for apprentices and 4.5% (Kozdra & Davenport 2007).

Deriving Completion Rates: Methodological Problems

The variation in attrition and completion figures in the research can often be accounted for by differences in the methodology undertaken. One of the simplest ways to measure completion rates is by comparing the number of completions to the number of commencements in a given year. Typically, this is expressed as a ratio or percentage rate of completions to commencements. This approach is extremely crude and does not consider the fluctuations that occur from year to year in uptake and completion of apprentices and trainees. For this reason traditionally administrative data was used to derive proxy rates by deriving completions/non-completions as a percentage of commencements. As completions/ non-completions in any one year relate to commencements from previous years, “studies generally used the ratio of completions [and non-completions] to commencements four years earlier ... for apprenticeship ... rates and ... from the previous year for traineeships” (NCVER 2001: 119). Bender (2003:1) however notes the problematic nature of this as “contract withdrawals or cancellations, on average, occur much earlier with respect to the date of contract commencement than completions”. Cully and Curtain (2001: 14) also advocate caution, noting that not only is “information ... not held consistently across the country by the training authorities, but ... the number and composition of new apprenticeships has altered so much in recent years, this proxy measure is inherently unreliable”. In addition, as described above, problems arose when non-completions were calculated using only commencement and completion data, not taking into account ‘(re)commencements’.

The most accurate methodology would be one which utilised longitudinal studies of commencing cohorts (Ball and John 2005:11;NCVER 2002: 3; Lamb 2005), however this type of study which follows each apprentice and trainee requires a significant investment of both time and resources and makes the tracking of past cohorts difficult. Despite the issues of multiple contracts and thus the fact there are always more commencement events than there are actual apprentices, Ray et al (2000:14) in pondering the difference between tracking “individual apprentices or commencement events”, came to the conclusion “empirically the effect on the attrition rate is marginal—less than 1% overall”. However it also became clear (John 2003) over time (and was acknowledged by NCVER in 2002) that there were some serious flaws in the methodology employed by various studies. While NCVER (2002) believed that state based studies such as Callan (2000, Schofield 1999a; 1999b; 2000; Smith 1998) underestimated completion rates because of how they treated expired contracts and recommencements, they also found, in agreement with others (John 2003, Ball & John 2005), that Ray et al, had actually overestimated completions rates as “No allowance was made for expired contracts and in effect, the methodology assumed all such contracts to be completions” (John, 2005: 7). John (2005: 7) believed that in fact the frequently cited national attrition figures for 1994-1996 (Grey et al 1999; Ray et al 2000) of 42-43.5% for trainees and 23-30% for apprentices were much more likely to be 42-50% and 35-40% respectively.

OTTE Methodology

We have chosen to use the OTTE methodology, as the OTTE database enabled us to obtain raw data for the whole of Gippsland region for the last 12 years. This methodology is explained in detail in the following section.

OTTE has sought to track cohorts on a population level looking at the whole of Victoria from 1995-2006. OTTE's approach is to track commencing cohorts of apprentices and trainees through the DELTA database which contains all records of commencing, completing, cancelling and withdrawing apprentices/trainees in the State of Victoria. In adopting this methodology they track apprentice and trainee cohorts separately from one another. They track cohorts of apprentices for 6 years and cohorts of trainees for 4 years. According to their estimates, 97% of commencements finish training within these durations (Kozdra & Davenport 2007).

The OTTE model also seeks to address the problems associated with multiple contracts. According to OTTE, among the contracts entered into the DELTA database from 1995-2006 there were 755,000 different contracts. These contracts were represented by 600,233 individuals. The overwhelming majority (80%) of these 600,230 individuals had single contracts. In these cases an apprentice/trainee would have commenced and completed their training with the same employer and training organization. Of the other 20% of individuals, 15.5% had at least two contracts and 4.5% had three or more contracts (Kozdra & Davenport 2007). The OTTE methodology seeks to remove certain cases of multiple contracts as a way to more accurately measure completion rates. In particular, the OTTE methodology seeks to remove those cases whereby an apprentice/trainee may have multiple employers, and therefore multiple contracts, throughout their training period. In these situations only the first commencing contract and the final contract (be it a completion, cancellations or expired contract) are included in the analysis. This tracking of individuals is made possible through the individual's unique student identification number used in the database, and examination of the multiple contract cases. OTTE has taken the position that in cases where an apprentice/trainee has multiple contracts "in the same occupational group and scheme termination of prior contract is not counted as a non completion" (Kozdra & Davenport 2007). This approach pays much closer attention to individual cases and what is occurring among those who have had multiple contracts.

In a national study looking at the cohort who began their training in 1999, Ball and John (2005: 29) calculated an 8% increase in completion rates for traditional apprentices and a 1% increase for trainees when both changes in employer and changes in training contract were taken into account. Taking these changes into account, the OTTE methodology this project uses found an increase in completion rates of 6% for both apprentices and trainees (Kozdra & Davenport 2007).

The OTTE approach to measuring completion rates also considers issues surrounding expired contracts, withdrawals and cases where individuals are still in-training beyond the training period. Drawing on NCVER research (Ball & John 2005, 12) on expired contracts which found that 45% of expired contracts were calculated to be unreported completions, OTTE methodology distributes the expired contracts according to the principle that 45% are completions and 55% are non-completions (Kozdra & Davenport 2007).

As outlined above (see 'Withdrawals' section) OTTE methodology removes the records of all those who withdraw from training in the first three months. Those in-training beyond the training period are distributed according to historical pattern. The allocation for those 'in-training' at the end of the tracking period is derived by looking at the pattern of completion over the last part of the tracking period - 18 months for apprentices and 12 months for trainees. That is, in the last 18 months of the 6 year tracking period for apprentices, 77% completed and in the last 12 months of the 4 year tracking period for trainees, 60% completed.

In summary OTTE methodology differs from NCVER calculations of completions in the following ways:

- Multiple contracts where someone has changed employer or contract status but continued their training in the same occupational group are removed
- Withdrawals in the three month probationary period are removed
- Expired contracts are distributed 45% completions/55% non-completions
- Contracts which remain in-training beyond the tracking period are considered 77% completions for apprentices and 60% completions for trainees.

These adjustments have the combined effect of raising the apprentice completion rate by 23.8% to 65.1% and the trainee completion rate by 10.9% to 53.7% (see Appendix V).

The next section provides the completion rates for Gippsland apprentice and trainee cohorts from 1995-2006 calculated using this methodology.

Completion Rates Among Gippsland Apprentices and Trainees 2001-2006

Table 3.10: Apprentice Completion Rates for Cohorts Commencing 1995-2000 (%)

Year of Commencement	Number of commencements	Completion rate (%)
1995	473	72.9
1996	480	75.1
1997	496	71.3
1998	594	77.5
1999	594	72.1
2000	659	69.6
Total = 3296		
Average completion rate		73.1

Table 3.10: presents the completion rates for Gippsland apprentices commencing in the years 1995-2000. While completion rates for the various cohorts vary over this period there is no indication of a trend whereby completion rates improved or worsened. The average completion rate for apprentice cohorts commencing 1995-2000 was 73.1% which is considerably higher than the State average of 65.1%. It is difficult to establish why the Gippsland average completion rate is higher than the State average. This difference may reflect a more positive experience that apprentices receive in the Gippsland region; a more vocationally oriented and motivated group of apprentices that may not be uncommon for a regional area like Gippsland; or it may be a reflection of fewer opportunities than those found in other areas (particularly large metropolitan areas like Melbourne) which means apprentices in Gippsland are not as tempted to pursue other avenues once they commence their training.

Table 3.11: Trainee Completion Rates for Cohorts Commencing 1995-2002 (%)

Year of Commencement	Number of Commencements	Completion rate (%) (n=14832)
1995	350	57.4
1996	866	56.1
1997	985	56.3
1998	1266	58.3
1999	2027	59.7
2000	2760	56.4
2001	3048	58.1
2002	3530	58.5
Total= 14832		
Average completion rate		57.6

In common with State and National trends, completion rates among Gippsland trainees are much lower than those found among Gippsland apprentices. Table 3.11 presents the

completion rates for Gippsland trainees commencing in the years 1995-2002. A slight improvement in completion rates among Gippsland trainees has occurred among the respective cohorts over this period. The average completion rate for trainee cohorts commencing 1995-2002 was 57.6 which is slightly better than the State average of 54.1%. The potential reasons provided for higher than State average completion rates among Gippsland apprentices apply for higher than State average completion rates among Gippsland trainees as well.

The sharp difference in completion rates among apprentices and trainees is widely recognised and generally accepted. Various explanations can be provided for this. Partially this difference reflects the different types of employment conditions in the industries where apprenticeships and traineeships are found. Apprenticeships tend to be found within industries providing better wages and employment conditions than those where traineeships predominate. Traineeships tend to be found in industries where wages and salaries are low and rely much more extensively on part-time and casual work. Workers in these industries do not tend to view traineeships as a career path towards working in these industries as is often the case with those choosing to do an apprenticeship. The motivational influences for commencing and completing training are thus often very different among apprentices and trainees depending upon the industries where they are working. The differences in conditions of employment between apprenticeship and traineeships as stipulated in Set1 and Set 2 conditions (see above) also means it is much easier for employers (and trainees) to cancel a trainee contract than an apprentice contract. There are, however, notable differences in completion rates among the different occupational groups where apprenticeships and traineeships are found.

Table 3.12: Apprentice Completion Rates by Occupation for Cohorts Commencing 1995-2000 (%)

Year of Commencement	Occupational Group Completion Rate (%)					
	Engineering (n=551)	Construction (n=651)	Electrical and Electronics (n=79)	Auto repair service and retail (n=583)	Meat* (n=67)	Cookery (n=231)
1995	86.4	73.2	77.0	73.6	63.0	53.0
1996	81.2	81.2	82.8	82.6	74.0	52.1
1997	84.5	80.3	87.0	75.6	52.5	26.8
1998	92.7	78.7	82.3	79.8	62.1	52.9
1999	78.1	76.6	80.4	72.7	49.5	51.2
2000	83.0	77.3	78.2	78.5	53.8	51.0
Average completion rate	84.3	77.9	81.3	77.1	59.2	47.8

*Small numbers of apprentices in this occupation may influence completion rate outcomes.

Table 3.12 presents the completion rates for Gippsland apprentices commencing in the years 1995-2000 by occupational group. Completion rates among engineering and construction, the two traditional trades that serve as the focus of this study, are much higher than the Gippsland average completion rate for apprentices. The average completion rate for engineering apprentice cohorts commencing 1995-2000 was 84.3% and 77.9% for construction apprentices. The average completion rates among apprentices in the electrical trades (81.3%) and auto repair and retail (77.1%) were also higher than the Gippsland average completion rate for apprentices. Average completion rates among apprentices in cookery and the meat occupations, however, were well below the Gippsland completion rate average for cohorts commencing 1995-2000. The average completion rates in these occupational groups more closely resembled those found among traineeships. Recently commissioned but yet to be released OTTE research that looked at completion rates among different occupations at the State level also found that apprentices in food occupations have a distinctly lower probability of completing than those found in other occupations (OTTE 2007). While these occupations

are outside the scope of this research project it is our recommendation that further research be carried out on the factors contributing to low completion rates in these occupations.

Table 3.13: Trainee Completion Rates by Occupational Group for Cohorts Commencing 1995-2002 (%)

Year of Commencement	Occupational Group Completion Rate (%)				
	Retail (n=2779)	Hospitality (n=980)	Business Administration (n=1514)	Agriculture (n=624)	Meat (n=757)
1995	59.6	*20.0	*65.5	*75.0	*20.0
1996	78.8	*36.4	80.4	53.9	*40.2
1997	50.6	*37.8	71.4	46.5	58.5
1998	57.5	45.7	68.9	59.5	51.4
1999	59.8	60.3	77.6	47.1	47.3
2000	59.7	57.1	81.4	57.9	35.9
2001	51.2	65.0	78.4	57.0	28.3
2002	53.0	66.2	74.0	43.2	26.8
Average completion rate	58.9	48.6	74.7	55.0	38.6

*Small numbers of trainees in this category may influence completion rate outcomes.

Differences in completion rates among trainees in different occupational groups were also found. As presented in Table 3.13, the average completion rate among Gippsland trainees commencing in the years 1995-2002 in the business administration occupational group (74.7%) was significantly higher than the Gippsland average completion rate for trainees. The average completion rate for retail trainees was 58.9% and was considerably better than Hospitality where the average trainee completion rate was less than half. However, when considering the individual completion rates for cohorts commencing in 1999-2002 hospitality trainees have a better completion rate than retail trainees in all years with exception of the 2000 cohort. The average completion rate among trainees in the agricultural occupations was 55%—just under the average completion rate for trainees in Gippsland. The meat occupations demonstrated to have the lowest completion rates of the six occupational groups examined. On average only 38.6% of trainees in the meat occupations that commenced their training in the years 1995-2002 completed their training.

Recently commissioned OTTE research carried out at the State level, found similar differences in completion rates among trainees in these occupational groups (OTTE 2007). In this research it was reported that trainees in the business services had a high probability of completing, retail an intermediate probability of completing and hospitality and food processing occupations a low probability of completing.

Table 3.14: Apprentice Completion Rates by Employer Type for Cohorts Commencing 1995-2000 (%)

Year of Commencement	Employer Type Completion Rate (%)					
	Private		Group Training		Government*	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
1995	316	69.0	157	81.1	0	0.0
1996	348	71.8	130	84.8	2	50.0
1997	314	66.0	182	82.0	0	0.0
1998	383	71.7	209	89.0	2	45.0
1999	407	67.1	186	82.9	1	100.0
2000	450	65.1	201	81.9	8	18.0
Total	2218		1065		13	
Average completion rate		68.5		83.6		53.3

*Small numbers of apprentices in the government sector may influence completion rate outcomes.

Table 3.14 compares the completion rates for Gippsland apprentices commencing in the years 1995-2000 by employer type. The average completion rate for apprentices employed by group training companies over this period was 83.6%—significantly higher than the average completion rate found among apprentices employed by private enterprises (68.5%) or the government (53.3%). One of the reasons for this may be due to the capacity of group training companies to place apprentices with different host employers if problems emerge. It is also worth noting that this finding is counter to recent OTTE research which found an apprentice doing an apprenticeship with a group training company was less likely to complete than those employed by a private or government employer (OTTE 2007).

Table 3.15: Trainee Completion Rates by Employer Type for Cohorts Commencing 1995-2002 (%)

Year of Commencement	Employer Type Completion Rate (%)					
	Private		Group Training		Government	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
1995	231	54.0	114	62.3	5	*100.0
1996	678	54.2	162	63.2	26	*58.5
1997	791	54.3	184	65.0	10	*49.0
1998	1029	57.4	178	62.5	59	62.0
1999	1737	58.0	226	69.7	64	71.3
2000	2269	52.4	220	75.6	271	74.2
2001	2617	55.1	227	79.8	204	73.0
2002	2984	57.0	249	65.7	297	71.6
Total	12336		1560		936	
Average completion rate		55.3		68.0		70.0

*Small numbers of trainees in this category may influence completion rate outcomes.

Among trainees, the highest average completion rate for Gippsland trainees commencing 1995-2002 was found among those employed by government (70%). Trainees employed by group training companies had a slightly lower average completion rate for these years (68%) than those employed by government. The average completion rate for trainees employed by private enterprises was 55.3%—a considerably lower completion rate than that found among trainees employed by the government or group training companies. This finding is similar to recent OTTE research which found a trainee employed by a private enterprise had a lower probability of completing than those with a government or group training employer (OTTE 2007).

Table 3.16: Apprentices Completion Rates by Training Provider for Cohorts Commencing 1995-2000 (%)

Year of Commencement	Training Provider Completion Rate (%)					
	TAFE		Private		Unknown	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
1995	252	80.1	5	*80.0	216	63.7
1996	345	82.1	19	*94.7	116	51.4
1997	348	78.3	23	*95.7	125	49.8
1998	467	78.5	90	91.6	37	*32.3
1999	464	73.3	98	78.9	32	*34.1
2000	472	70.0	152	77.2	35	*30.3
Total	2348		387		561	
Average completion rate		77.1		86.4		43.6

*Small numbers of apprentices in this category may influence completion rate outcomes.

As presented in Table 3.16, the average completion rate among Gippsland apprentices commencing in the years 1995-2000 who were being trained by a private provider was higher

than those being trained by TAFE. This finding is different from recent OTTE research which found apprentices receiving training from TAFE had a higher probability of completing their training than those receiving training from a private provider (OTTE 2007). The average completion rate for apprentices receiving their training from a private provider was 86.4%. However, when considering the completion rates for individual cohorts of students training with a private provider completion rates have declined from 1995-2000. Completion rates among apprentices training at TAFE also declined from 1995-2000. The average completion rate for cohorts commencing 1995-2000 for apprentices training at TAFE was 77.1% which, like the average complete rate among apprentices training with a private provider, is above the Gippsland average completion rate for apprentices. This can be explained by the fact that the average completion rate for apprentices where the training provider is not known is very low—43.6%. This category is likely to include cases where apprentices are receiving training from TAFE as well as cases involving private providers. It is feasible that there is a higher proportion of private providers found in this category due to the fact that TAFE reporting mechanisms and familiarity with completing the administrative forms required is likely to be more advanced than that found among some private providers. If this speculation could be established as accurate, the differences in completion rates between private providers and TAFE would become less obvious. This is an area for further research.

Table 3.17: Trainee Completion Rates by Employer Type for Cohorts Commencing 1995-2002 (%)

Year of Commencement	Training Provider Completion Rate (%)					
	TAFE		Private		Unknown	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
1995	89	62.1	77	56.3	184	55.2
1996	263	41.1	156	68.4	447	60.6
1997	231	51.4	308	60.4	446	56.0
1998	580	63.4	454	60.0	232	42.8
1999	675	62.8	1193	62.2	159	28.5
2000	655	60.5	1920	58.5	185	20.7
2001	1070	59.1	1851	60.3	127	18.6
2002	859	60.7	2568	59.7	103	21.2
Total	4422		8527		1883	
Average completion rate		57.6		60.7		38.0

*Small numbers of trainees in this category may influence completion rate outcomes.

Similar findings emerge among trainees who commenced their training in 1995-2002. As Table 3.17 presents, the average completion rate among Gippsland trainees commencing in the years 1995-2000 who were being trained by a private provider was higher than those being trained by TAFE. This difference, however, may not be as great if the cases found in the Unknown category (as discussed above) where completion rates are very low, are taken into account.

Recent OTTE research found trainees receiving training from TAFE had a higher probability of completing their training than those receiving training from a private provider (OTTE 2007).

Table 3.18: Apprentice Completion Rates by Age Groups for Cohorts Commencing 1995-2000 (%)

Year of Commencement	Age Group Completion Rate (%)			
	12-19 (n=2439)	20-24 (n=597)	25-44 (n=215)	45+ (n=45)
1995	74.9	63.0	*77.9	*100.0
1996	77.5	68.5	*64.3	*00.0
1997	73.4	71.1	*49.1	*81.7
1998	78.5	76.8	*56.1	*50.0
1999	76.2	67.5	54.4	*46.4
2000	71.8	72.5	60.2	*41.8
Average completion rate	75.4	70.0	60.3	64.0

*Small numbers of apprentices in this category may influence completion rate outcomes.

Table 3.18 presents the completion rates for Gippsland apprentices commencing in the years 1995-2000 by age group. The evidence suggests that age of commencement does have an effect on apprentice completion rates. Average completion rates for apprentices commencing in the years 1995-2000 declined as the age of commencing apprentices became older. Apprentices aged 12-19, with an average completion rate of 75.4%, had the highest average completion rate among apprentices commencing in the years 1995-2000. They represented the only group to be above the average completion rate for Gippsland apprentices for these years. Commencing apprentices in the 25-44 and 45+ age categories were well below the average completion rate for Gippsland apprentices.

Recent OTTE (2007) research also found that apprentices among the intermediate age groups had a lower probability of completing.

Table 3.19: Trainee Completion Rates by Age Group for Cohorts Commencing 1995-2002 (%)

Year of Commencement	Age Group Completion Rate (%)			
	12-19 (n=4013)	20-24 (n=3244)	25-44 (n=5297)	45+ (n=2278)
1995	60.6	52.7	56.7	*61.3
1996	61.1	54.7	51.9	51.4
1997	58.9	53.6	54.6	63.3
1998	59.8	55.0	57.2	65.1
1999	64.5	54.4	58.1	62.8
2000	61.4	54.7	51.8	60.8
2001	60.8	59.2	54.7	60.7
2002	60.6	57.9	57.9	59.1
Average completion rate	61.0	55.3	55.4	60.6

*Small numbers of trainees in this category may influence completion rate outcomes.

Table 3.19 presents the completion rates for Gippsland trainees commencing in the years 1995-2002 by age group. Again the evidence suggests that age of commencement has an effect on completion rates. These effects are slightly different than those found among apprentices. Average completion rates for trainees were found to be the highest among the youngest (12-19 years old) and oldest (45+) commencing trainees. The average completion rate among these two age groups was completion rate for Gippsland trainees.

The average completion rates for trainees in 20-24 and 25-44 age groups, on the other hand, were both found to be 55%. OTTE (2007) research also found that trainees among the intermediate age groups had a lower probability of completing but not to the same degree as apprentices.

Conclusion

The Gippsland region has witnessed a strong increase in the number of apprentices and trainees commencing training from 1995 to 2006. While commencement numbers are not as high as they were in 2002 when 4,396 apprentices and trainees commenced training they are four times what they were in 1995. The overwhelming growth in commencements has occurred among trainees, who in 2006 accounted for nearly 68% of all commencements. As with Victoria the total number (and pattern) of those in-training is driven more by changes in trainee numbers than apprentice numbers. While the growth in apprentice numbers has been steady, without stronger growth in the years ahead the region will struggle even more than it does now to meet skill demand, particularly when considering the aging workforce found among many of the region's trades.

Generally, the profile of Gippsland's apprentices and trainees is similar to that found at the State level. Apprenticeships continue to be overwhelmingly dominated by male apprentices while traineeships tend to be more balanced between males and females. The overwhelming majority of Gippsland apprentices and trainees in-training in January 2007 were doing AQF Level III as is the case in Victoria. In line with State-wide trends, over three-quarters of apprentices and trainees were doing their training full-time. There are, however, some notable differences. Gippsland's apprentices and trainees are generally younger than the State or National average. Looking at all those in-training in Gippsland 68.2% were under 25, compared with 59.2% of those in training in Victoria (NCVER 2007c). In contrast to national developments, where more than one quarter of all new apprentices and trainees are already working for the employer they undertake their apprenticeship or traineeship within Gippsland only 15% of apprentices and trainees were existing employees (NCVER 2007b).

The most significant differences between Gippsland and Victoria as a whole were found among completion rates. The average completion rate for apprentice cohorts commencing 1995-2000 was 73.1%, which is considerably higher than the State average of 65.1%. It is difficult to establish why this is the case. It may reflect internal dynamics of the training system in Gippsland (e.g. better recruitment and support, better quality training, etc.), the quality and motivation of Gippsland apprentices and trainees, or it may reflect external realities where training and job prospects are not as plentiful as they are in other parts of the State, which means there are not the same opportunities to pursue other avenues once an apprentice or trainee commences their training.

Completion rates among engineering and construction apprentices, the two traditional trades that serve as the focus for this study, were found to be quite high compared to other occupational groups. The average completion rate for engineering apprentice cohorts commencing 1995-2000 was 84.3% and 77.9% for construction apprentices. Apprentice completion rates in meat and cookery occupations were found to be dramatically low. Further research is required to better understand the factors contributing to low completion rates in these occupations.

While Gippsland's trainee completion rates was also found to be above the State average it is still below 60% — considerably lower than completion rates for apprentices. Explaining this difference is not as easy as one might first think. Certainly it partially reflects the nature of the industries where traineeships are found, motivational differences between apprentices and trainees and the differences between Set 1 and Set 2 conditions. Ray et al (2000: 16), however, make the important point that it is difficult to compare trainee and apprentice completion or attrition rates. This is due (in the case of apprentices) to “the existence of a legally binding indenture on the employing firm”. An employer cannot simply cancel apprenticeships when the business is sold and when a firm cannot keep an apprentice on. State Training Authorities also expend considerable effort to get apprentices a new placement when they face the loss of an employer. As Ray et al (2000: 16-17) note “this obviously lessened

the attrition rate, though the extent is unknown". The assumption has often been made that it is the trainee or apprentice themselves who are most likely to drive the non-completion, however even when trainees and apprentices 'leave' their training apparently voluntarily there are enough studies to show (including this one) that circumstances in the work place often 'force' them to leave.

The sharp difference in completion rates between apprentices and trainees, however, should not be seen as 'natural' or unable to be addressed. Impersonal labour market forces and "labour market mobility" are commonly used to explain the differences in completion rates between trainees and apprentices (Ball & John 2005: 7; see also Grey et al 1999). Low trainee completion rates, it is argued, simply reflect the high turnover of the occupations where traineeships are found. Ray et al (2000) discount such explanations. They point out this argument often includes casual jobs and turnover among casual jobs and is thus a "relatively poor comparison" (Ray et al 2000: 16). The 2000 Senate Inquiry also questioned the use of this comparison given that "It could be expected that where a contract of training is involved, with elaborate quality assurance measures in place, and the progress and welfare of trainees supposedly monitored by New Apprenticeship Centres and state training authorities, that the rate of separation would be significantly lower" (¶ 5:11).

As found among apprentices, trainee completion rates varied widely between occupational groups. The average completion rate for retail trainees was 58.9%, which was considerably better than hospitality where the average trainee completion rate was less than half. Completion rates among business administration traineeships on the other hand, were nearly 75%. Trainees in the meat occupations demonstrated to have the lowest completion rates. With a trainee completion rate of less than 39% this is an additional area needing further investigation, particularly given the meat industry's struggle to address skill shortages and growing reliance on imported labour.

The statistics found in this report tell only part of the story. While scheme, age, occupational group, employer and training provider have been found to influence one's likelihood to complete these findings tell us little about a person's decision to leave or stay in training. The last stage of this research project seeks to provide us answers to these questions. In addition, like so many statistical findings, the statistics found in this report are open to, and should be subject to, scrutiny. Throughout the report we have highlighted areas where further research is needed before drawing definitive conclusions about what may be occurring in the region. Many of the stakeholders associated with the training system in Gippsland, including those affiliated with government departments, training organisations and private companies, have lost faith in the reliability of official statistics they receive about training in the region. For many stakeholders, available statistics do not reflect what they perceive to be accurate about the nature of training in the region. Their trust in these figures has to be restored through better data collection, analysis and distribution of information.

While we support the OTTE methodology over other methods of calculating completion rates the OTTE methodology is not without faults. The decision to remove withdrawals from the calculation of completion rates effectively means the method under-represents the actual loss of people from the training system; a point that OTTE has recognised (Kozdra & Davenport 2007). It is our view withdrawals should be included in the calculation of completion rates. While we accept the fact the first three months are a probationary period, the commitment to training by both apprentice/trainee and employer begins at the point of signing the training contract. Second, their decision to include 45% of expired contracts as completions also has the potential to under-represent the actual loss of people from the training system. This decision is based on NCVER research which is not supported by everyone. It also does not take into account differences that may exist between apprenticeships and traineeships when it comes to the level of completions among expired contracts. This is an area where more definitive research needs to be undertaken to enable a better understanding of cases involving

expired contracts and to better substantiate the OTTE methodology and its assumptions. Third, the decision to include a percentage of the students who remain in-training beyond the tracking period among those who complete, may also contribute to inaccuracies in the completion figures. Given that the number of contracts that remain active beyond the tracking period is relatively small a more appropriate decision may be to remove these cases from the analysis.

Having provided some statistical data for those in training and a breakdown of completion rates in the region, the following chapter will outline the perceptions of local stakeholders in regard to why apprentices and trainees in the region fail to complete their training.

Chapter Four: Perceptions of the problem: the views of local stakeholders

As part of this research focus groups and one-on-one in-depth interviews were conducted in each of the three sub-regions with a range of stakeholders including employers, trade unions, the TAFE sector, RTOs, field officers, employment agencies, trainers, educators, youth workers and local, State and Commonwealth government officials. In all there were 98 participants from across the region (see Appendix VI) involved in this stage of the research.

The focus groups were one to two hours in duration and were organised by the three regional LLENs, who advertised widely both in the local media and through their email network lists for participants. The focus group organised by the Baw Baw Latrobe LLEN was held in Trafalgar at the LLEN offices, the South Gippsland Bass Coast at the Leongatha TAFE and Gippsland East (which covers Wellington Shire also) at Adult and Community Education (ACES) in Sale. In addition numerous individual interviews were conducted with focus group participants who indicated they would like to contribute more to the project, interested parties who were unable to attend the focus groups but wished to participate and others involved in the training industry who became aware of the project through the media campaign and wanted to contribute. Additionally the researchers sought out individual interviews with some major players in the regional training sector.

As the focus of this project is to better understand the reasons for attrition amongst local apprentices and trainees, focus group participants were asked to respond to open-ended questions about why they thought trainees and apprentices do not complete their training (see Appendix VII). A number of themes emerged from these focus groups and interviews including issues about apprentice and trainee wages, transportation difficulties, unreasonable expectations among both employers and apprentices/trainees, and labour market conditions which contributed to apprentices and trainees withdrawing from their training. In addition issues relating to the type and quality of training, especially in fully-on-the-job training situations, emerged as both an area of some concern amongst many focus group participants, and as a contributing factor in attrition for some apprentices and trainees.

Research findings

In interviews and focus groups held with employers, RTOs, GTOs, educationalists, field officers, trade unionists, youth workers, local, state and Commonwealth government leaders and interested community members, a wide range of issues were discussed which reflected people's perceptions or personal experiences working within the VET system or being affected by it in some way. While participants' views were wide reaching, the diversity of perspectives can be categorised under twelve factors which they saw as contributing to non-completion. These twelve factors were: incidental factors, transportation, apprentice/trainee wages and labour market factors, age, work ethic and values, prior knowledge, 'mismatch', motivation, expectations, lack of support, unpleasant working environment and training quality. Some of these factors are overlapping and/or interrelated. Each of the factors, however, raised distinct issues which participants felt were influencing completion rates and/or apprentice/trainee decisions to cancel or withdraw from training.

The following discussion of these factors is intentionally presented in random order. While the participants largely agreed that these factors played a role in shaping completion rates they were not always in agreement on which factors were the most significant. On this basis, no attempt has been made to rank these factors. Where significant differences in participants' views about a particular factor did occur, these have been identified.

Participants' identity has been protected and reference is only made to their respective position or occupation and the region they work in. These details have been provided to demonstrate the breadth of participants interviewed and identify the different concerns of the different actors. Views and perceptions among the different participants were for the most part similar across the region, with issues raised about transportation one of the notable exceptions.

Incidental Factors

In line with other studies (Harris, Simons, Symons et. al. 2001) participants highlighted a range of incidental factors that they perceived to be contributing to non-completions among apprentices and trainees. Some of these incidental factors related to behaviours or personal problems among the apprentices/trainees which led to their dismissal or the cancelling of their contract. Drug use, drunken behaviour and failing to show up to work were some of the reasons identified by participants for employers and/or RTOs terminating someone's apprenticeship/traineeship. As one TAFE representative stated:

We have had a number in hospitality over the years - hospitality has proved difficult, we have had people who have not completed hospitality because of misdemeanours and indiscretions by trainees where people you know they had no choice but to be a non completer (TAFE representative, South Gippsland).

The death of an apprentice/trainee was also identified as a reason for a contract being cancelled or an apprentice/trainee not completing.

According to participants, the cancelling of contracts by employers was not always about apprentice/trainee performance or behaviour issues. Some incidental factors also impacted upon employers, leaving them little option but to cancel an apprentice/trainee contract. A downturn in the employer's business resulting in the company not having enough work for the apprentice/trainee to do and/or sufficient revenue to honour the contract with the apprentice/trainee were some of the incidental factors identified. Seasonal industries, such as agriculture, tourism and hospitality, were identified as those most likely to suffer from this situation.

Transportation

Transportation, or more precisely the perceived lack of it, was a theme which came up across the region albeit of greater concern in South Gippsland/Bass Coast and East Gippsland/Wellington. As one South Gippsland participant stated "*Transportation is a massive issue around here*". There was a general perception that a large number of apprentices had to travel some distance for work and/or training. Public transportation was seen to be either unreliable or 'non-existent' requiring the apprentices/trainees to rely on other means. One of the participants described the challenges in these terms:

In the first instance you might think oh yeah I am going to be able to hitch a lift from Orbost to Bairnsdale every day - I can manage this, but you only have to pick a really bad stretch of rainy days where no one picks you up and you really start thinking about whether you really wanted to do that (local government representative, East Gippsland).

... if you think about some of them doing an apprenticeship in Orbost or Cann River or beyond and they have got to go to trade school or suddenly the group training company says well this person doesn't want you anymore, you are going to have to move to another mill somewhere else or you are doing a retail traineeship and the company falls in a hole, whatever it is that you are doing in Cann River there ain't a lot of choice and you either have to commute or stop what you are doing (local government representative, East Gippsland).

Stories of apprentices having to travel to Melbourne for training purposes were not uncommon.

If you are living on the Island [Phillip], I mean if you are a fibrous plasterer living on the Island then you have got to go to Holmesglen if you are an apprentice (local government representative, Bass Coast).

I spoke to a young bloke who is a diesel mechanic about two weeks ago and one of his major beefs is that he has got to go from here all the way into the City to go to trade school, you know and that is a real strain for him as a young bloke (manager, South Gippsland).

It was recognised that some employers do provide assistance to their apprentices/trainees when it came to transportation. In many cases, however, it was felt that this was not always sufficient.

Expecting a kid to drive from Mirboo North to Phillip Island [200 km round trip] like my 20 year old son is doing on \$300 a week ... they give him \$60 a week for petrol but how far does that get you? (school careers co-ordinator, South Gippsland).

Apprenticeship/Traineeship Wages and Labour Market Influences

Apprenticeship/Trainee wage rates were one of the most common reasons provided by participants for why many apprentices/trainees do not complete their training. Two major problems were identified with the current apprentice/trainee wage rates. First, they were seen as insufficient for apprentices/trainees needing to pay for the upkeep of a car, cover their training fees (which can be over \$800 per year), purchase food and pay for housing if they were out of home. Employers who paid the minimum training award rate were seen as particularly vulnerable to high drop out rates. As one participant argued,

The traineeship award wage and the apprenticeship award wage is just ludicrous to live off, we have something like 22 traineeships at Council and we certainly don't go by the national traineeship minimum wage and we believe that works to keep our retention rate quite high (local government representative).

Other forms of financial support, such as living away from home allowances and tool subsidies, were seen as important but largely insufficient to prevent apprentices/trainees from withdrawing for financial reasons. As one secondary teacher stated, "*The living away from home allowance for apprentices that has made a difference ... If that was increased it would be fantastic*" (East Gippsland). First year apprentices, where the apprenticeship wage is at its lowest, were seen as the most vulnerable.

'Doing it hard', however, was only one element of the problem. A second problem identified by a number of participants with low wage rates was that there were many opportunities, particularly in the current favourable economic climate, for unskilled and unqualified workers to earn substantially higher wages outside the training system and this was seen as a strong contributing factor in apprentices/trainees withdrawing from training. As one East Gippsland employer stated "*the ones that we find leave usually are moving away or they go to another job with more money*". According to several participants, the temptation of money became particularly great when apprentices/trainees witnessed friends who were not in training earning substantially higher wages.

I am in manufacturing and it is about the wages. They come in and they see guys walking off the street at the age of 18 years old and if they are lucky they have got a 12 hour shift for six months and they are making 70 grand a year, they are making more than their bosses and they didn't have to do anything, they didn't even have to finish year 12, so for these guys who are making ... really base wages and certainly year 1 [and] year 2 are the hardest for them to get through ... it is the number one reason they don't complete (manager, South Gippsland).

One employer expressed his frustration with the situation.

A couple of weeks ago one of our apprentices said 'well I am leaving on the 27th I am going to work in Melbourne with \$800 a week and just cancel my apprenticeship'. There is no thanks, no nothing, and the bit that makes it very hard is trying to work out when we signed the contract that was a contract for 4 years. They just seem to want to just jump out of it whenever they want to (employer, East Gippsland.)

One participant perceived that the temptation to withdraw from an apprenticeship becomes greater as they gain more experience and skills.

From my experience, by the time they get to second year maybe going into third, a lot of them have enough skills where they might think, oh I could actually make twice as much or three times as much by jumping in the car and going to WA with the skills that I have (TAFE representative, Baw Baw/Latrobe).

Some participants viewed the problem as far more serious in metropolitan areas, such as Melbourne, where there were much greater opportunities to earn money above apprenticeship/traineeship wage rates. As one group training participant stated,

the opportunities down there are greater and not just in apprenticeships but in terms of employment in general.

Age

The age at which apprentices and trainees were beginning their training was seen as a significant background factor in the likelihood of completion. Unlike previous generations where apprentices started their training at the age of 15-16, the profile of today's apprentice is one who is more likely to have finished year 11 or 12 and is approaching, or already, 18 years of age. Different expectations among this older age group, particularly when it came to wages, were seen as an important issue. There was however some disagreement as to whether the younger or older apprentices/trainees were more prepared to 'stick it out' on apprentice/trainee wages. While most felt apprentice/trainee wages were less of a problem for younger apprentices/trainees — particularly if they were still living at home, this view was not universal. As one dissenting participant argued:

I found the mature ages do tend to stick it out more because they already know what their aptitudes are they are bit more aware and ... they can see the bigger picture better than the younger kid can, so ... [they] can actually step back and go oh that is gonna hurt for a couple of years but boy look at those salaries they make once they are done (manager, South Gippsland).

For others it was the 18-21 year olds who were most at risk of non-completion. According to many participants holding this view, the interests and priorities of this age group, summarised by one participant as "cars, girls and alcohol" (secondary teacher, East Gippsland), were what set them apart from the younger apprentices/trainees and put them at higher risk of not completing. One East Gippsland employer, drawing upon personal experiences in employing different aged apprentices, stated:

18 is just too old for an apprentice, I have said now we will not be taking an apprentice over 17 we will take them at 16 or 17 and that is it, 16 preferably, at least they have two years with Mum & Dad the wages they get keeps them settled enough and then by the time they are in a car or have their licence they have got some money behind them and at least while [they're]... with Mum & Dad they have still got a bit of an attitude to you know [follow instructions] or a bit of discipline (employer, East Gippsland).

These views were also expressed by those less directly involved in working with apprentices/trainees. In the words of one Commonwealth Government representatives:

If you imagine being on the low rate and trying to run a car with today's fuel cost, and let's face it you have got to have a car because of the transport issues, and then have a social life outside of work, it's almost impossible, I don't know how young people get by, whereas when they were 16 and they were still being cooked for and clothed and marched about by Mum & Dad it was much, much simpler.

An East Gippsland local government representative expressed similar sentiments.

We hear from a lot of employers that they would much rather have younger apprentices and trainees that they can mould and train and that haven't hit that need for big money because if they start on first year apprenticeship wages at 16 to them at that age it is a lot of money but to an 18 year old it is not, and I think that that is a whole different ball game and I think that probably one of the barriers is money and we know that young people can earn much, much more at a lot of industries now than they have ever been able to in the past. So when they start comparing with friends who are doing other non apprenticeship type jobs and realise what people are earning, they would have to ask the questions.

Work Ethic and Values

Participants throughout the region identified a change in values and attitudes among young people as a contributing factor to attrition from training. One participant described today's youth as the 'Y Generation' who held fundamentally different values from earlier generations.

Young people nowadays are more in a hurry — they have got higher expectations, they don't hold the same values that perhaps we were used to years ago, when you gave somebody a four year apprenticeship to them it was valuable and they hung on to it, those same values don't exist and there isn't the same qualms nowadays about people saying well this isn't really what I want to do, I am going to move on and try something different and I think we are facing a significant element of that (group training representative, Baw Baw/Latrobe).

A secondary teacher expressed similar views:

It is just their morals are different to what they use to be I think, and their expectations (Secondary teacher, East Gippsland).

Some of the participants felt that the general failure of the apprenticeship system to respond to these new values sufficiently contributed to the problem. The time required to complete an apprenticeships for example, was identified as one of the major problems for today's youth. As one educator argued,

Four years is a very long time in a young person's life ... if you are 16 can you imagine four years? (Baw Baw/Latrobe).

Others saw today's youth as impatient and conditioned to expect instant gratification, but they were also identified as somewhat inflexible and unwilling to work hard.

I had an employer tell me he was sick of these kids just watching the clock, won't do anything extra you know and he is a builder and he said that you stay back until things are tidy you don't just leave when the big hand is on the twelve (secondary teacher, East Gippsland)

The general view was that the younger the apprentice/trainee the poorer their work ethic. One trainer described her experience working with young school based apprentices this way:

They were just doing it to get out of school and getting free money basically because they weren't working for it that's for sure, so you know those sort of kids just wreck it for everyone else (trainer, South Gippsland/Bass Coast).

Some attributed this perceived change in values among today's youth to the welfare system. An employer from East Gippsland argued:

I think that it comes from this age that we have got now the amount of families that have lived off welfare and the amount of couch potatoes that are about that they won't get out of their way for anyone at the best of times ... One of our sons is a third year apprentice with us and if I could have ten like him it would be terrific.

It was not uncommon for despairing comments about today's youth to be followed up with exceptions to the rule as found in the previous statement. Nor was it uncommon for participants to raise questions about how dramatically different were the values of today's generation from previous generations. As one participant commented:

I am not sure that I buy the thing about the heap of kids who won't do anything for less than \$60,000. I am not sure that young people are any different to the way they were when I was their age, I do think they are exposed to a different world and a different set of expectations and I do think that there is probably more pressure on them to meet higher aspirations more rapidly, I mean we were sort of content to have a lower level of stuff, you wanted to have a car but it didn't have to be a new car, but I can see that there is a cohort of young people that are operating at that level, I don't think it is all of them (Commonwealth government representative).

Changes in values were not just seen in terms of personal values or values of the younger generation. For some the problem resided with the broader values of society, which were seen as devaluing the traditional trades. It was commonly viewed that the societal emphasis on the importance of completing year 12 and going onto university had placed the traditional trades on the defensive. For some, growing attrition rates simply reflected society's devaluation of the trades.

If we started to see a change in the rhetoric and to see the value of going into a trade and that it is something that is recognised as being good, then we should start to see a shift and we might even start to see a lower attrition rate (local government representative, East Gippsland).

Prior Knowledge

For many participants, the prior knowledge of apprentices and trainees was seen as an important factor when it came to understanding completion rates. For some, one of the most significant background factors was the level of knowledge and understanding the respective apprentices/trainees had about the trade or occupation they were going into and what was actually involved in the training for that trade or occupation. A representative of a group training company explained it this way.

The preparedness of people coming into the trade and understanding what it is about, that is something we have specifically identified and we work harder now to ensure that people quite clearly understand what it is they are coming into and there aren't as many surprises when they get out on the job.

Exposure to the trade they are seeking to go into and prior work experience were identified as key factors. A background in VET in school programs or Pre-Apprenticeship programs were stressed as contributors to an individual's likelihood to complete. One employer from East Gippsland stressed "We found it very valuable with the kids having pre-apprenticeship courses."

It was pointed out by one of the participants however, that while VET in schools may be an important background factor influencing an apprentices/trainees likelihood to complete, recent research suggests that VET in schools is not necessarily a pathway into a trade.

One of the participants suggested that a good way for employers to 'test run' kids was through work experience or work placement programs. This provided the apprentices and trainees the opportunities to see if they were interested in an industry or trade and would want to take up

an apprenticeship in the future. Employers would also have a feel for the work ethic and commitment of those young people before putting them on as an apprentice or trainee—described by one participant as a ‘try before you buy’ strategy (local government representative, East Gippsland).

‘Mismatch’

The importance of an appropriate match between the background and skills of the apprentice/trainee with the needs and demands of the organisation and job was also stressed. For some participants this problem emerged out of the recruitment process and criteria used to select apprentices/trainees. A union representative describes this problem when it comes to selecting applicants for a traditional trade apprenticeship.

If you just select the blue eyed blonde haired ... kid that can articulate everything and they are — for the want of a better word — they’re more comfortable in a bank job, and after getting knocked around on six bucks an hour they just walk out of the apprenticeship.

For many participants the problem extended beyond the recruitment process. The mismatch between apprentices/trainees and the training and jobs they are involved in, was seen as a potential problem throughout their training and was seen as a significant factor in shaping an apprentice’s likelihood to complete when in their final years.

they might have been signed up by an employer and left in a qualification that doesn’t actually match what they do and they find the whole thing a bit difficult (TAFE representative, Baw Baw/ Latrobe).

One of the failures that we are getting with our third and fourth years is that group training organisations send us somebody that clearly wasn’t the right mix for that organisation and that department ... if somebody has just shoved a kid in there without really saying look I think this kid is gonna fit in your group and your team and your organisation, well of course they are not going to work, so that ... coordination is going to be the key to any success (manager, South Gippsland).

A participant from a group training company recognised the importance of matching apprentices/trainees with appropriate employers when it came to achieving successful outcomes. From their standpoint, it was often a mismatch in personalities between apprentices/trainees and their workplace managers that contributed to difficulties. One of the privileges of group training companies, she argued, was being able to move apprentices/trainees around when these sorts of problems emerge. She argued:

Sometimes it is just getting a balance because you can have two apprentices with two employers and swap them over and they are completely different people because it is a personality mix, sometimes it is never going to work, it doesn’t matter how much support you give them as an employer or an employee. Sometimes it is just not the right match and they need to go somewhere else and that is as simple and logical as it is — hang on this isn’t working for you, that person isn’t working for you lets get you out of there and get you somewhere else — I have had classic examples of that you know, this person is never going to make a tradesman, take him somewhere else and he wins apprentice of the year (Baw Baw/ Latrobe).

Motivation for Undertaking Training

The motivational factors influencing the trainee’s reasons or purposes for taking up training (or the employer’s in taking them on), were seen by participants as important issues to consider. It was felt that some sign up for an apprenticeship/traineeship for the ‘wrong reasons’ which contributes to many of them withdrawing or cancelling soon after.

Often they have chosen it or it has been selected for them as a way of them leaving school—they are not achieving at school and the option is an out so why not do an apprenticeship (manager, Baw Baw/Latrobe).

A distinction was often drawn between apprentices and trainees when it came to their motivation for taking up training. Some perceived that apprentices typically viewed their training as part of clear career path into a trade while trainees often saw it as simply a condition of employment. Partially this reflects the nature of the industries, such as hospitality and retail, which rely on a high proportion of casual and part-time staff and partially this reflects the type of employees found in these industries, who often see themselves only working in the industry for a relatively short time while they finish a university degree or pay off a debt.

One union representative felt this attitude among trainees might be different in urban settings where there were more career options.

In Melbourne it is different. You know stick it out for a year and you can go and work in the Hilton or you know some silver service place or something like that whereas down here it's well you know the Bowls Club or the Golf Club and that sort of thing.

It was expressed by some participants that for many young people doing a traineeship, the qualification may be secondary to other factors driving them. This was seen to significantly impact on their likelihood of completion.

I find that a lot of kids they don't particularly want that traineeship they just wanted a job at Macca's or Donut King or something like that, either way they are not motivated they are just going along with it because they have to do it to keep the job and they have no intentions of ever finishing it (secondary school teacher, East Gippsland).

Participants also spoke about employers who encouraged their existing employees to sign onto traineeships or apprenticeships despite these workers being fully competent in their jobs. In these situations, it was felt there was unlikely to be much motivation among these apprentices/trainees to complete their training.

These cases raised real questions about the motivations of some employers in signing up apprentices and trainees. Participants in our focus groups had some strong views on these matters. For many the answer was clear—it was about acquiring cheap labour.

You know some employers will just put them on for three months as cheap labour and no one will do the right thing by the student so that would have to account for some of the percentage of the drop out rate (secondary teacher, East Gippsland)

Others focused on the financial incentives provided to employers to sign up trainees and apprentices. Some of the participants felt that the introduction and proliferation of incentive schemes had at times led to hasty and ill-informed decisions. “*In the haste to take on an apprentice or trainee*”, a group training representative states “*there was an element of taking on people who probably weren't suited to it and they fell over*”.

For some participants, it was not just haste that was the problem it was a clear and intentional ‘rorting of the system’. There were many stories told by participants about the abuse of the system and the industries most involved. Many of these stories were similar to the one told by one of the TAFE representatives. He stated:

[A local fast food chain]... takes on 50 school based trainees, they put them on the certificate 3 level because they are going to get a far greater bonus from that from the Commonwealth financial incentives, earning four grand, that qualification has a coordinating and supervisory role component in it which clearly most of them don't get. They are trained sometimes by a private RTO that delivers all the training in the

workplace ... it is very easy for that RTO to gather evidence to support the issuing of a qualification, so you will see this 15, 16 year old supervisor/coordinating person go through a certificate three traineeship in eight or nine months and perhaps come out the other end with a qualification ... without having done the training. Now I can tell you this happens and it happens big time. I mean if you think about the annual funding that this establishment draws from the Commonwealth and State coffers ... \$200,000 bucks-plus a year, some of these joints get for cycling school kids through traineeships.

Financial incentives provided to employers have become a focal point of several recent research papers. According to Cully, “the combination of the training wage and incentive payment can represent a substantial implicit wage subsidy to the employer e.g. for a full-time adult trainee undertaking a Certificate III in Retail Operations, the annual wage cost to the employer is \$18,220 (made up of \$22,620 minus the \$4,400 incentive payment) compared with \$28,260 for an employee not undertaking a traineeship” (Cully, 2006:8). Schofield (2001) believed one of the problems to emerge out of this situation is that the motivation of some employers to sign up apprentices/trainees and provide quality training was secondary to other motivational factors. According to Schofield, some companies compete on the basis of ‘low skill/low-wage strategies’ which are supported by strong Commonwealth and State incentives and bonuses provided to employers who sign up apprentices and trainees (Schofield, 2001: 252). Views expressed by some participants interviewed for this study reflect these concerns.

Expectations

Inappropriate or unreal expectations was a common theme to emerge from interviews with participants. For some participants it was the expectations held by apprentices/trainees going into training and the training process’s failure to meet those expectations that had contributed to many of them not completing their training. For some of the participants, these unfulfilled expectations were often very personal matters for the individual apprentices/trainees and could not be reduced to any one particular problem. Often it was the case that an apprentice/trainee had certain expectations about the type of trade or occupation, they had chosen to pursue and, for whatever reason, they had a change of heart and decide to explore other avenues. One group training representative described their experience with some of these cases when conducting exit interviews with some of their apprentices:

He said to me ‘I don’t want to be a plumber I have been doing it for 18 months now, I have tried, it is not what I want to do’ and he was really good, we talked to the host employer and he was a great kid there was no issue with his performance and he left. Another guy, who was in the Army Reserve, decided he wanted to do Nursing and medical type stuff and he just ... left — complete change of direction.

Other participants highlighted an ‘expectation gap’ between employers and apprentices/trainees as a source of the problem. Participants identified unreasonable expectations among employers towards their apprentices/trainees as a contributing factor to non-completions:

They are expecting them to arrive with an unrealistic level of skill and aptitude, I can understand wanting them to have the right attitude, that is fine, but when it comes to the actual industry skills, day one. I think this is a completely unrealistic expectation (local government representative, East Gippsland).

These unreasonable expectations contribute to a breakdown in the relationship between employer and apprentice/trainee and in some cases result in the employer either wanting to terminate their contract or perceiving the apprentice/trainee as someone not worthy of investing much time and energy into training.

Participants also felt many apprentices/trainees had unreasonable expectations about their training and what employers would provide for them or allow them to do. The failure of the apprentice/trainee to fully understand what was involved in an apprenticeship or traineeship was a common theme.

A lot of kids will start saying “but I didn’t come here to just sweep the floors ... I am bored shitless and I don’t want to do anything”, but they are also not ready to go out and do their first job on their own, so there is this fine line that employers do have to be constantly straddling — how much responsibility do we give this person and at what pace? (Commonwealth government representative).

Others stressed that apprentices/trainees had certain expectations about the nature of the training which were not always met. It was stressed by several participants that apprentices/trainees were often disappointed when they discovered that they would be expected to read training materials and complete training workbooks.

Kids who want hands on stuff get theory books thrown at them quite often and that is a problem (VET teacher, South Gippsland).

Quite often when we review somebody who is leaving an apprenticeship part of the fact is that they left school because they didn’t want to go to school and then they take on an apprenticeship and they still feel like “I am still at school, I am still attending classes, I still have to write reports” (group training representative, Baw Baw Latrobe).

According to one participant, part of this unreasonable expectation has been generated by employers and training organisations who have often worked very hard to attract apprentices/trainees by ‘glorifying the training’ and have often neglected to fully explain what is involved to the potential recruits.

To me it could almost be a catch 22 because we spend a lot of time trying to really sell kids into a great career ... Sometimes I think we oversell the idea of this career so much that they walk into it thinking they are going to be this fantastic person instantaneously, but look at the end of the day you do have to crawl with them for a few months (manager, South Gippsland).

Lack of Support

Several participants identified lack of support by employers and training organisations as a significant factor in the decision to withdraw from training. As one workplace trainer argued:

I go out to these places you know to visit trainees and quite often the feedback I get is — I have to do all my training in my own time, the boss doesn’t support me, he doesn’t want to know about it just so long as I get it done, he wants the qualified worker at the end of it, but he is not prepared to help me do it (Baw Baw).

It was expressed that this lack of support occurred at a range of levels and that throughout the training period different sorts of problems emerge which were not being fully addressed by employers or training organisations.

For some participants the lack of support for training occurs as a consequence of employers not providing sufficient time to carry out the tasks that are required for them to complete their training. Employers in the retail and hospitality industries were seen as particularly guilty of this practice:

We have had some people dropping out because they have found their work was too demanding and they couldn’t complete their training work ... so they pulled out of the traineeship and kept the job (RTO, Baw Baw/Latrobe).

One of the participants identified some of the problems that some apprentices were confronting in their final year of training.

I have heard similar stories of group training companies taking their last year apprentice to Melbourne with no support for accommodation nor travel — just you start there on that day — so you can understand why they don't complete (secondary teacher, East Gippsland).

Some believed the of the lack of support stemmed from employers' lack of understanding about their responsibilities:

I think often employers go into it without fully understanding their commitment to supporting the staff (Group Training representative, Baw Baw Latrobe).

For other participants employers' failure to adequately support their apprentices/trainees was seen as symptomatic of a much broader change in employer behaviours and attitudes in recent years:

One of the problems that I see since the 80s is that society sees no moral obligation to the next generation, never mind about the kids' attitude, the attitude of employers at the workplace tends to be 'I don't know why they send me this kid — it's too much bother teaching him' (trade union representative, Baw Baw Latrobe).

One of the reasons identified for the lack of support was the complexity of the training system. While support may be available, it was felt by some participants, apprentices and trainees are not always sure who they should be turning to for help and advice.

It is too many choices all the way through the line and I think the apprentices are losing out big time because we have made it so complex (local government representative, East Gippsland).

Some felt the lack of support stemmed from the fact that many apprentices and trainees were doing their training in small organisations which did not have the economies of scale to draw upon when it came to meeting trainees' needs. On different occasions comparisons were made to the days when large government owned companies provided extensive apprenticeship training programs to large numbers of apprentices:

... when there were apprentices going through the SEC in huge numbers and Vicroads ... they did all their training in groups, now it is a thousand different employers. It is very fragmented and individuals are very much on their own. Whereas if you went in an environment like SEC or VicRoads I mean you got a lot of support through that (employer, East Gippsland)

For some, proper support and guidance enabled apprentices/trainees to overcome some of the other challenges they confront:

If there is supervision and an incentive given to the kids every time they are at the workface, give them responsibility, talk to them while holding the broom, show them what to do, give them the opportunity to make mistakes and not be laughed at, not be abused, all those sorts of things would have allowed these kids to keep sticking it out and money is only money, over a period of time if they can see what the dollars are going to be in three years or two years, they will stick it out (TAFE representative, South Gippsland).

The lack of support, however, was seen by some as more than simply a lack of supervision or support structures but was also a consequence of the divide that often occurred between what apprentices/trainees learned off-the-job with what they were told in the workplace. As one TAFE representative from Baw Baw/ Latrobe explained problems emerge when:

The boss isn't supporting them or [else is] telling them the opposite of what they are learning at TAFE and it is maybe not the right fit there between their training and what they experience when they go back to work.

Unpleasant Working Environment

Some participants identified poor conditions within the working environment as a significant reason for non-completion. Workplace bullying, harassment and unprofessional behaviour towards apprentices/trainees by some employers were some of the major problems identified.

Workplace bullying is rife in hospitality ... it's worse than sexual harassment. I get young people or not necessarily young people, people who have just entered the industry, quite often ring me up extremely distressed (union representative).

In interviews and focus groups held across the region, participants stressed the need to “train the trainers” (VET teacher, South Gippsland) and employers about their appropriate demeanour and behaviour towards apprentices/trainees. As one participant stressed, employers need to “understand you can't scream at a 17 year old, you can't yell abuse at people” (TAFE representative, South Gippsland). A representative from an employment agency put it this way:

Quite often we say it is the apprentice that needs to be re-educated on what to expect in a workplace. A lot of the time, however, it is the host or the employers who need to be educated on how to treat people with respect (employment agency, Baw Baw/Latrobe).

Quality Factors

A large number of participants raised issues about the relationship between the quality of training and non-completions among apprentices/trainees. Although participants were not necessarily in agreement about what constituted quality training, most agreed the quality of training played a significant role in an apprentice's or trainee's decision to withdraw from training:

Kids do drop out because they have not had proper training; I have had people tell me they are just leaving because they weren't getting proper training (union representative).

Nearly everyone agreed that problems did exist when it came to the quality of training and improvements needed to be made if attrition rates were to be reduced. Concerns about the quality of training centred predominately around four issues—the quality of the trainers, a perceived shift away from a combination of on and off-the-job training towards fully on-the-job training, the narrowing of skills and the loss of transferable skills, and a general lack of training taking place.

The quality of the trainers

One of the problems identified with the quality of training concerned the skills of the trainers themselves and their capacity to engage with and motivate apprentices/trainees. It was felt by some participants that tradespersons did not always make the best trainers and this contributed to quality in training problems. One TAFE representative from South Gippsland stated:

One of our expectations is that a really good tradesperson would also be a really good trainer and the two don't necessarily go together and quite often they are very poor communicators and they are very poor.

Others expressed a view that the quality of trainers had declined among some RTOs because they were relying upon part-time and casual trainers for much of their training delivery. It was felt this had enabled these RTOs to compete on a cost basis to employers which had become quite attractive for many employers, and under ‘user choice’ policy some employers were choosing not the best training organisations, but the least expensive. Schofield's research has drawn attention to similar concerns:

a provider strategy that competes on price alone and which revolves around delivering low-cost, self-paced training supported by a large cohort of inadequately

trained, inexperienced, mobile and casual trainers is unlikely to lead to the development of high-level skills within enterprises (2001: 256).

While it was expressed that tradesmen may not always be the best teachers, it was also considered that trainers needed to have recent experience in the industry. A soon to retire TAFE teacher raised what he saw as a looming crisis in the training industry — a lack of competent up and coming trainers:

... hell even teachers go to Perth driving heavy articulated trucks earning \$100,000 a year so ... why would you be a trade teacher ... I am going to be earning maybe 50 – 60,000 dollars a year and a third year apprentice on a good site could be earning as much as that on overtime, so the next generation of trainers, lecturers, trade teachers if you will - I don't know where they will come from because that length of [time it takes] ... to make a ... tradesperson ... suitable [to teach] ... where are they coming from? We have got a fifteen-year blank space.

On-the-job training

It was generally expressed by participants that the best apprenticeships and traineeships involve a combination of off-the-job and on-the-job training whereby practical skills and underpinning knowledge about these skills are developed. This view is supported by recent research on the topic (Smith, 1999; Schofield, 1999a, 1999b, 2000; Strickland et. al., 2001; Harris et. al. 2003: 84-85). It has also been demonstrated that apprentices and trainees prefer, and often expect, a mix of on and off-the-job training whereby they will be learning a diversity of skills and will receive some level of support throughout their training (NCVER 2001: 79). Apprentices and trainees are more likely to remain motivated and are less likely to withdraw from training when training meets these conditions. Maintaining a good balance of on-the-job and off-the-job training, however, is one of the major challenges for employers and training organisations. As the following two statements indicate, too much of either presents problems:

I find sometimes the kids are disappointed that they are getting the training in house that they would rather go to a TAFE college (secondary school VET teacher)

Lets face it a lot of vocational training is as boring as the proverbial ... and the kids often vote with their feet (employer).

While not all participants were of the view that fully on-the-job training should be abolished it was generally recognised that fully on-the-job training presented significant challenges. One of the concerns raised by participants was that fully on-the-job training might be leaving too much discretion in the hands of individual employers who were often not fully aware of their responsibilities.

I think the on-the-job training is so dependant on the commitment from the employer ... but sometimes that really puts some trainees at a huge disadvantage because if you have got a good employer that is fantastic they will spend time with them, work with them, they will give you tasks related to the workbook etc, but if you go to an employer who doesn't understand any of that [it's a problem] and I think that there has been this sort of understanding that every employer knows the training system, well that's not true at all (employer, East Gippsland).

The narrowing of skills and the loss of transferable skills

Another issue arising from fully on-the-job training highlighted by Schofield (2000: 82; 1999b: 6) and supported by research participants is the lack of general and transferable skills (see also Cooney, 2003; Victorian TAFE Association Inc, 2000: 15). It was expressed that trainees often only learn things specific to that particular work place and lack the “underpinning knowledge” to apply skills in a different environment.

I am hearing from the training organisations that there is a heck of a lot of hospitality stuff being offered, particularly at certificate II level — every second kid leaving school has a certificate II in hospitality — but it is not making them employable...they are not necessarily being told upfront that this won't get you in the door of a willing employer (Commonwealth government representative).

Although the problem may be more prevalent among traineeships in certain industries, as the previous participant has pointed out, the problem is not exclusive to these areas. Trade unions involved in the traditional trades also raised serious concerns about the narrowing of skills among apprentices. As one trade unionist commented:

I think one of the things that we are facing is the dumbing down of the trades with the shortening of the apprenticeship, you have got to be careful about how that is done because now they have introduced where you have a carpenter that works for a framer, and a carpenter which is a fixer, so needless to say the first time that carpenter puts a frame up and hasn't got any more framing to do they are going to hang doors because they say oh well I am a carpenter, and they are going to go out and start hanging doors and they don't know how to do it, so narrowing workplace training is going to limit the scope of apprentices.

One of the factors contributing to a narrowing of skill development, according to some participants, is that the on-the-job component is very much dependent upon what the employer is prepared to allow an apprentice/trainee to do. It was felt that employers are not always able to see a reason for apprentices/trainees to learn skills beyond what is required for their particular job. This situation contributes to tensions between RTOs who see the need to provide trainees and apprentices broad based and transferable skills and employers who are more interested in developing the skills of their workers to do specific tasks. As a representative of a RTO describes, this problem makes it difficult for them to do their job as a training organisation and for trainees and apprentices to acquire those broad based skills.

we have core competencies that have to be addressed and we had this example with cash handling ... where some of the trainees in big department stores wouldn't be even near a cash register [but] had to complete a competency in cash handling, and also in retail in the operations stream there was a unit that involved a bit of supervisory skills, now often they wouldn't be anywhere near that level to complete that satisfactorily so it did create a bit of a worry for us in how to address it and unless the companies were supportive it was always a problem (RTO representative).

The result of this situation is that training companies may be forced to 'tick off' on certain competencies despite the apprentice or trainee not having any practical on-the-job training in this particular task. In this scenario, the narrowing of skills has come about with a sheer lack of training.

Lack of training

According to many participants the lack of training, commonly referred to as 'tick and flick' training, was a major factor in the undermining of training quality. A VET teacher described his son's experience:

... my 16 year old was offered a school based new apprenticeship at (a large retailer) in Wonthaggi. He went there and couldn't believe what he was shown. It was wrong. A crowd from Queensland was the RTO and came down to do the delivery. He said "I can't do this it's a waste of time Dad". ... He then got a letter sent to him saying that he had done 360 hours face to face training. The kid has had two sessions!

A local government representative commented on a similar situation in her workplace:

... there are too many existing workers where they were just signed off as competent. I have had the same thing where I worked. Where a person has been signed off and

we are all sitting there and saying how did this person pass? Who said they are competent to do this?

A few of the participants were of the view that the worst offenders of ‘tick and flick’ training were big companies who had established their own registered training companies and developed specialised training packages for their trainees.

A few employers expressed a loss of confidence in the training system as a consequence of the way assessment procedures were being carried out and qualifications awarded. One employer commented:

they come out with that certificate II or III but they are useless to the next employer ... they say oh I have got certificate whatever, well big deal what can you do and what sort of equipment have you used, so they are thinking they are selling you something and they have got nothing (East Gippsland).

and another:

Traineeships fundamentally are to get youth into work and yet they seem to have been hijacked by ... the privatised training market, and various providers perhaps allegedly colluding with employers are just putting ... 200 people onto traineeships – you know even the truck driver might have been doing a certificate II in IT — so the whole statistics and the way that traineeships are valued and looked at, it was devalued a lot by what has been going on, ... there has certainly been some dodgy things going on and I suppose my background has actually been in hospitality and teaching students in sort of full dining settings, I mean you hear about it in takeaway places, people are getting the same qualification and they have never set a table or there is no chefs there and people go to a counter and order takeaway and they are getting a full hospitality qualification ... but so long as those organisations can tick the right boxes that they have got all the processes in place it unfortunately gets through — we know that (Baw Baw/Latrobe)

According to some participants this lack of appropriate quality training can become frustrating and demoralising for some apprentices and trainees, to the point where they decide to move on.

Conclusion

Findings from interviews and focus groups held with stakeholders in Gippsland’s apprenticeship system generally reflect those from previous studies into factors affecting apprentices’ and trainees’ failure to complete their training. While focus group participants viewed some factors as more important than others — low apprentice and trainee wages especially stood out — no definitive conclusions can be drawn out of the focus groups and interviews with participants about the single most important factor contributing to non-completions. Overall, participants would likely agree with Harris, Simons, Bridge et al. (2001) that the decision by apprentices and trainees to leave training is often the result of multiple connected issues, and although one particular reason may ‘tip the balance’ often it is the accumulation over time of a range of difficulties which results in withdrawal (see also McInnes & Hartley, et al. 2000).

Some of the factors identified by participants which were seen as contributing to non-completions among apprentices/trainees were associated with and attributed to the values, expectations and motivations of apprentices/trainees themselves, both in terms of taking up training and seeing it to its successful completion. Other factors identified by participants focused upon perceived problems which resided within the VET system and the particular role played by its respective actors (e.g. employers, RTOs, GTOs, TAFE, etc.). Taken as a whole the participants’ views reflected the notion that “retention is a process that is the

collective responsibility of all key stakeholders within VET” (Harris, Simmons, Symons et al. 2001: 236) and no single actor was responsible for either the problems or the solutions.

Not all the factors identified by the participants, however, were under the control and direct influence of VET stakeholders. The lack of reliable public transport in the region, and the current availability of fairly well paid, unskilled jobs in the buoyant labour market, which were perceived to be contributing to apprentices/trainees decisions to not complete their training, are two examples. These issues are not easily resolved by the action of VET actors or policy makers.

In identifying the factors contributing to non-completion among apprentices and trainees participants also spoke of a range of issues they were deeply concerned about. It was perceived that many apprentices/trainees are struggling with financial hardship, lack of support from trainers and employers and in some cases inferior training and an abusive working environment. Some participants drew upon the personal experiences of their children or someone they knew doing an apprenticeship/traineeship to support some of these claims, as well as other anecdotal evidence.

The information collected through these focus groups and individual interviews was invaluable in informing the next stage of the project, conducting in-depth interviews with current and non-completing apprentices and trainees, in an attempt to ascertain whether their views of the issues align with those of the other stakeholders in the system. Information collected from the VET stakeholders and reported in this chapter, in combination with data gathered from apprentices/trainees, was used to identify where changes need to occur within the VET system and among the VET actors, and where policy changes need to occur if completion rates and the apprenticeship/traineeship experience are to be improved.

Chapter Five: The Experiences of Apprentices and Trainees

Introduction

While many investigations into attrition amongst apprentices and trainees rely on analysis of administrative data or surveys, the core of this research project was the conduct of in-depth interviews with apprentices and trainees, both those currently still in-training and those who had cancelled or withdrawn from their training before they had completed.

The particular cohort being targeted, that is those who had disengaged from their training and so had often moved on to other unconnected career paths, made recruitment a challenging process. Hospitality and retail trainees were particularly difficult to access, as is common in these industries many had moved on, and the nature of the certificates is that they are often undertaken simply as a requirement of their job rather than as a focused career option. Participants from these industries regularly had to cancel interviews as, given the casual nature of this type of work, they were frequently called into work with little notice. This resulted in some who had initially agreed to be interviewed dropping out of the process. Responses to the initial mail-out included a number from parents of trainees and apprentices who had moved interstate, taken up other careers, been involved in accidents or had died. In addition a number (of both parents and trainees) did not believe they had ever been involved in any training despite the fact they had been officially registered as having signed up to traineeships.

Thus a recruitment process was required which was multi-pronged and lengthy, relying on a range of methods. Firstly two separate mail-outs were conducted enclosing a brief questionnaire and inviting recipients to be interviewed for the project (see Appendix VIII). The mail-out targeted a total of 1,000 past cancelled and withdrawn, and some current apprentices and trainees in the four target industries registered within the region. Personnel from OTTE compiled a list from their DELTA database³³ and forwarded this to a mailing service (in order to protect the anonymity of recipients) using criteria provided by the researchers. In addition there was extensive advertising in local papers throughout the six local government areas, and the distribution of flyers and posters to a wide range of local services such as employment services, youth services, schools, TAFEs, LLENs, unions, private providers, group training organizations, shopping centres and businesses (see Appendix IX). Researchers met with local businesses and services and made presentations to a number of regional youth networks, careers teachers' networks and local government groups to garner support for recruitment. In addition a number of interviewees were recruited through word-of-mouth. Through these processes over 100 interviewees, spread across the region and the four target industries, made contact with the research team. After some initial cancelled interviews, 105 apprentices and trainees were eventually interviewed for the project.

Interviews of approximately 20-40 minutes duration covering a range of both specific and semi structured questions were conducted either face to face or by telephone, individually or in small groups. The initial specific questions were designed to outline the general characteristics of the interviewees such as age, gender, training type, education level and employer type. A series of semi-structured questions then established motivations and pathways into training, reasons for leaving training and future plans, as well as exploring interviewees' in-training experiences and perceptions of available support mechanisms (see Appendix X).

³³ This is a database of information for past and current VET students.

The following section outlines the characteristics of the interviewees and then examines apprentice and trainee experiences in the region, providing a comparison with the themes raised by the stakeholders' focus groups.

Research Findings

Characteristics of participants

There were 105 apprentices and trainees interviewed for this aspect of the research. 71 or 67.6% were apprentices and 34 or 33.3% were trainees. Table 5.1 provides a breakdown of the characteristics of the participants.

Table 5.1: Characteristics of participants

	Apprentices <i>n=71</i> %	Trainees <i>n=34</i> %	Apprentices and Trainees <i>n=105</i> %
Region:			
BBL	56	53	55.2
GE	24	23.5	23.8
SGBC	20	23.5	21
Industry:			
Construction	26.8	11.8	21.9
Engineering	47.8	2.9	33.3
Hospitality	25.4	26.5	25.7
Retail	0	58.8	19.1
Age:			
15-19	48	47	47.6
20-24	36.6	26.5	33.3
25-34	9.8	11.8	10.5
35-44	2.8	8.8	4.8
45+	2.8	5.9	3.8
Gender:			
Male	81.7	32.4	65.7
Female	18.3	67.6	34.3
Education Level			
<10	5.6	5.9	5.7
10	11.3	26.5	16.2
11	21.1	20.6	20.9
12	60.6	47	56.2
unknown	1.4	0	1
AQF level:			
II	0	46	15.8
III	100	40.5	79.6
IV	0	13.5	4.6
Training Provider:			
TAFE	76	29.4	61
Private	24	70.6	39.9
Employer Type:			
Group Training	28	11.8	22.9
Private	72	88.2	77.1
Total	67.6	33.3	100

In many respects the participants who agreed to be interviewed for this project displayed a profile representative of that of Gippsland apprentices and trainees in general (see Chapter Three). Participants' region of residence, industry (occupational group), AQF level, training provider and employer type categories all showed a similar breakdown to that of current Gippsland apprentices and trainees. The main differences appear in the categories of age,

gender and education level. The higher proportion of females interviewed than appear in regional statistics (see Table 3.2) could be due to their often greater willingness to volunteer to discuss their experiences than males. In addition interviewees were also more likely to have finished a higher level of schooling than is average for the region (see table 3.5), again it could be speculated that those with higher educational achievements are more likely to agree to participate in a study of this nature. While both regional and interviewee data places over 80% of apprentices under 25, the third noticeable difference is in the age breakdown of trainees. Of trainees who were interviewed a high proportion (over 73%) were under 25, while only 47% in the region as a whole are under 25 (see Table 3.3). Whether this was due to recruitment strategies (i.e. the use of LLENs and local Youth Networks) or was a factor of the limitation of this study to four particular occupational groups, only two of which — hospitality and retail — have significant numbers of trainees, remains open to speculation.

As can be seen from Table 5.2, among those interviewed, 39 were non-completers, 26 were still in-training but voiced some significant issues and were identified as at-risk of withdrawing — indeed the researchers are aware of a number who have withdrawn since being interviewed. A further 32 were also in-training but likely to complete, though within this group there was also quite a degree of dissatisfaction, and eight had recently completed their training.

Table 5.2: Contract status of participants

Status of interviewee	<i>n</i>	%
Non completers	39	37.1
At risk of not completing	26	24.8
Likely to complete - satisfied	22	21
- dissatisfied	10	9.5
Completed	8	7.6
Total	105	100

Issues identified by participants

For those participants who did not complete their training, a range of factors were identified for their non-completion. While some cited only one reason for leaving — such as being laid off, for many there were multiple contributing factors. Researchers identified up to three main reasons for each interviewee, and Table 5.3 below presents these factors.

Non-completers

Table 5.3: Reasons for non-completion of apprenticeships and traineeships

Most important factors in apprentice/trainee non-completion	%
Problems with the workplace	46.4
Problems with the training	17.4
Low wages	11.6
Laid off	7.3
Issues with travel	5.8
Fired	4.3
Incidental/personal reasons	4.3
It was only ever a temporary job	2.9

As other studies show (e.g. Grey et al 1999; Ray et al 2000; Cully & Curtain, 2001;2001b) the major reason for not completing, cited by 46.4%, was because of issues with their workplace. Out of these a third were not happy about being ‘treated as cheap labour’ — Cully & Curtain (2001b: 212) found that 47 percent felt this way — while a quarter left because of bullying and/or abuse in the workplace — Cully & Curtain similarly put this figure at 23% (2001b: 212). A further fifth were concerned about poor, unsafe or dangerous workplace practices and the rest had various problems with their employers ranging from ‘falling out with the boss’, to employer inability to deal with poor work conditions, hours being cut/too long, and lack of

appropriate on-the-job supervision. Again these were found to be contributing factors of similar importance in Cully & Curtain's 2001 study. While the decision to leave is most often reported as being instigated by the apprentice/trainee (see NCVET 2002), they often felt they were pressured or manipulated into leaving by their employer — *"I was dropped right back to a one hour shift ... they had a policy, the way they got rid of people was to roster them out of hours"* (female, retail trainee, non-completer, aged 40). In addition a further 7.3% of those interviewed were laid off by their employers, usually due to lack of work. A significant 17.4% had problems with their training, identifying it as poor, boring, or non-existent (this was especially prevalent amongst trainees). For nearly 6%, travel was a factor contributing to their decision to leave, though this was frequently linked by them to low wages, i.e. *"You've got to travel every day ... pay petrol and... by the end of the week my bank account would be like empty"* (male, engineering apprentice, in-training, aged 22). As a contributing factor to their not staying in the system (rather than a direct factor in their decision to leave), a number also spoke about a lack of support — sometimes this was directed at employers and group training field officers, but more often involved various institutional aspects of the system which they thought should be there to help them, such as AACs, Centrelink or other government authorities.

At risk of not completing

Among those interviewed who were in-training at the time of the interview there were two distinct groups that could be identified. The first group represented those who were in-training but considered at risk of not completing (it is known that some of those in this category have subsequently withdrawn). Table 5.4 briefly highlights some of the factors identified by this group which they perceive to threaten their training.

Table 5.4: Reasons for potential non-completion amongst those currently in-training but at-risk

Potential reasons likely to contribute to withdrawal from training	%
Problems with the workplace	34
Low wages	32
Problems with the training	17
Lack of support	10.6
It is a requirement of what is probably a temporary job	4.3
Wrong career choice	2.1

Of the 34% who expressed significant problems with their workplace three quarters were mostly concerned about employment conditions such as too many (often unpaid) or too few hours — this was especially an issue with those in hospitality. A smaller percentage had employers who did not pay wages regularly, or felt they were being treated as cheap labour or were having trouble getting a placement. As would be expected, dissatisfaction with low apprentice/trainee wages — which had flow-on effects involving getting to trade school or job sites, and keeping up with their rent — were an issue for nearly a third of those identified as 'at-risk'. Concerns over training, voiced by 17%, were about poor quality training or an inability of training organisations (especially in the private sector) to employ, or keep on suitable trainers. Again expressions of lack of support were around similar issues to those experienced by non-completers. At least two of those interviewed did not expect to continue their traineeship/apprenticeship beyond the month.

Likely to complete

The second identifiable group found among those in-training were those who were likely to complete. In some cases, the apprentice/trainees found among this group were extremely satisfied with their training and experience as an apprentice/trainee — this was most likely if they were employed on a large industrial site where there was peer support and optimum work and pay conditions often underpinned by union agreements. In other cases they were not particularly satisfied with certain aspects of their apprenticeship/traineeship, but this

dissatisfaction was unlikely to contribute to them leaving. There were often other motivating factors which kept them from withdrawing — sometimes it was a case of better support and/or better than average pay, the desire to remain employed, or a desire to obtain a certificate which they believed would help them to secure future employment. Table 5.5 highlights some of the issues raised by those in-training apprentices/trainees who were perceived to be most likely to complete.

Table 5.5: Reasons for dissatisfaction with apprenticeship/traineeship amongst those currently in-training but likely to complete

Issues for concern raised by those in-training but likely to complete	%
Problems with the workplace	50
Problems with the training	18.8
Lack of support	18.8
Low wages	12.4

Among those who were likely to complete but still had issues with their training experience, 50% had problems in the workplace. Half of the workplace problems participants identified related to bullying and abuse, usually by the employer but sometimes by other workers, a quarter felt they were treated as cheap labour and another quarter were concerned with a lack of supervision in the workplace. Nearly 19% had concerns with their training, principally because of what they saw as boring or lack of proper on-the-job training. A further 18.8% expressed similar issues with lack of support to the other groups interviewed, while 12.4% cited low wages as a cause for serious concern.

Completers

The third group interviewed constituted those who had recently completed their training. They represented the smallest percentage of those interviewed (7.6%). Like participants who were in-training, those who had completed their training represented two types — those who reported a positive experience of the apprenticeship/traineeship (25%) and those who expressed some dissatisfaction (all trainees) with their apprenticeship/traineeship (75%). Of these, two thirds had completed the training as a condition of their job and had issues with their pay and working conditions; such as lack of supervision, call-in at short notices, pressure to work extra shifts or not enough staff rostered on. The remaining third complained of ‘boring and useless’ training and poor work conditions.

Thematic discussion

As the previous tables indicate similar issues are raised regardless of the contract status of the apprentices/trainees interviewed. In the interviews, participants who had dropped out of training were asked about their reasons for not completing and for those still in training or who had recently completed — if they had ever thought about dropping out. This comment from a first year chef apprentice: *‘I think about leaving every day. Doesn’t everyone?’* (male, chef apprentice, aged 19) was fairly typical of the response from many of those currently still in-training.

Because similar thematic experiences and concerns emerged among these different groups — non-completers, those in-training and those who had completed their training — the following analysis is based on these themes rather than on the different contract status of the participants. Interviewees, however, have been identified as either in-training or as completing or not completing their training and when clear differences have emerged between these groups over a particular issue or experience it is discussed. In addition this thematic organization allows the researchers to identify those areas where apprentice/trainee reasons for not completing their training correspond to the perceptions of VET stakeholders (as discussed in the previous chapter) and so for consistency and ease of reference these themes are discussed in the same random order as in the previous chapter. As no clear regional

differences in apprentice and trainee experience could be identified for participant privacy and protection of identity, the regional location of interviewees has not been specified.

Incidental factors

In focus group discussions and interviews with VET stakeholders, a range of incidental factors were identified that were perceived to be contributing to non-completions among apprentices and trainees. Drug use, drunken behaviour and failing to show up to work were some of the reasons identified for employers and/or RTOs terminating someone's apprenticeship/traineeship. While none of the apprentices/trainees interviewed indicated that these sorts of problems had contributed to difficulties for them, two of those interviewed said they were aware of apprentices they had worked with who had been dismissed for drug or alcohol abuse.

In the process of recruiting participants for this research it was also found that one of the apprentices had died before completing their apprenticeship. The researchers were also presented with a situation in which an apprentice, who had agreed to participate, was involved in a serious motorcycle accident just days ahead of the scheduled interview. The severity of the accident placed the future of his apprenticeship in serious doubt.

In addition several of the participants interviewed indicated that they did not complete their training because the employer they were with either went out of business or confronted financial difficulties which resulted in them being laid off from the job and their training. One of the interviewees, for example, described how her mother allowed her to leave school after year 9 under the condition that she found a job. Although it was not a job she particularly wanted to be doing, she succeeded in securing a retail job. As a condition of the employment she was asked by the employer to take up a retail traineeship. It was not long after, however, that the company came into financial trouble and she was laid off along with several other part-time staff.

One other incidental factor which contributed to an apprentice withdrawing from training, involved an apprentice who was unable to complete their spray painting apprenticeship because they were colour blind and could not complete part of the mandatory assessment for the training.

Transportation

The lack of public transport and the requirement for many Gippsland apprentices to travel some distance for work and training was perceived by many VET stakeholders interviewed for this study as being a factor contributing to non-completion of training. In three of the interviews conducted with apprentices/trainees problems surrounding transport were provided as the leading factor in their inability to complete their training.

A carpentry apprentice employed by a group training company described how the loss of his driving license and his inability to travel between work sites meant he was unable to fulfil the requirements the apprenticeship. He stated:

I lost my license and I couldn't get to the job site or anything ... I couldn't get there. I had to rely on other people and it just didn't work out (male, carpentry apprentice, non-completer, aged 25).

In the case of the other two apprentices who identified transport as their primary reason for not completing their training it was because they were being required to travel outside the region for training or work.

For a bakery apprentice it was the expectation that he would travel to Melbourne for training:

I quit after six months ... I would have had to have travelled down to Vermont [Melbourne] or somewhere to do the training or in that general area in the morning ... and not get paid a penny (male, bakery apprentice, non-completer, aged 59).

In the case of a mature aged engineering apprentice it was the employer's expectation he travel to Queensland. The company he worked with had offices in East Gippsland and in Queensland and when the Gippsland operation was closed he was told by the owner he would have to travel to Queensland if he wanted to complete the apprenticeship. In the end, the travel became too much and he decided to withdraw from training:

It was just too hard because I was going up there for 3 months at a time and I've got a young son as well (male, engineering apprentice, non-completer, aged 29).

For one of the trainees interviewed who did not complete their training it was not solely transportation that was the problem but transportation in combination with a difficult work schedule:

see I was driving 45 minutes on split shifts (female, hospitality trainee, non-completer, aged 22).

For another interviewee it was travel, accommodation costs and low apprentice wages combined which contributed to their decision to withdraw from training.

I would love to get my papers but I can't afford it and I can't afford to go to Melbourne ... paying rent here and having to go to Melbourne ... there is no way known in the world I could afford it (male, construction apprentice, non-completer, aged 20).

Several of those interviewed who were in-training identified transportation as a major challenge for them as well. Often it was because they were being expected to travel considerable distance for their training — several had to travel to Melbourne. A mechanical apprentice describes the challenges of getting to Melbourne for schooling:

the biggest problem was living in Phillip Island and having to go to Melbourne to do some of my course. I had to go at night after work so I had to knock off work early, drive to Melbourne to be there by 5, do the course until 9 and then drive all the way home again because there was nowhere else closer to do it, that was pretty hideous (male, mechanical apprentice, in training, aged 33).

More often it was the cost of travel on an apprentice/trainee wages that interviewees identified as the major challenge. An engineering apprentice living in Morwell but having to travel to Warragul for training stated:

I was having to drive to Warragul when I first started. I didn't have a license either because I was only 17 then, but luckily I had a mate to help me because we had to go to Warragul for 8 weeks straight. It was a bit much for them to expect apprentices that they are paying \$250 a week to spend half their wage on petrol getting up there (male, engineering apprentice, in-training, aged 19).

A construction apprentice voiced it this way:

On a first year apprentices wage it's really hard to drive from where I live in Wonthaggi to Morwell (male, construction apprentice, in-training, aged 20).

Some of those interviewed spoke about the strategies they had developed to deal with the challenges of transport and the costs associated with it. One apprentice living in Yinnar describes how he relied on his mum and friends to get him to work and to TAFE for training.

Mum worked in Traralgon so she would drop me off some mornings. There was another fella from Boolarra who use to go too so I would get dropped off at the end of the road,... I just got a lift with him and there was a few blokes around to give me a

lift so it didn't end up too bad (male, fitter and turner apprentice, in-training, aged 20).

Apprentices/trainees living in the more remote areas of Gippsland or places such as Yinnar with poor public transport access, who do not have their license and cannot always rely on friends and family to transport them from home to work or to training, are those that find transport one of the biggest challenges to completing their training. For many young people who find themselves in these circumstances the possibility of being able to undertake an apprenticeship or traineeship in the first place is extremely remote.

Apprenticeship/traineeship wages and labour market factors

Many VET stakeholders identified the low wages received by most apprentices and trainees as a major contributing factor in why apprentices/trainees do not complete their training. A recent study commissioned by Group Training Australia, which represents more than 150 training organisations throughout Australia, has supported these views. The study found that most apprentices live below the poverty line and that such conditions contributed to many deciding to withdraw from training (Bittman et al., 2007). Similar research findings were uncovered in this study, particularly in relation to those working in the construction and hospitality industries.

For several of those who did not complete their training it was solely the poor wages that prevented them from completing. A single mum who always wanted to be a carpenter:

I could not survive on the apprenticeship wage, I couldn't, and that is what stopped me. I would be gung ho, I would be there tomorrow if they could give me the wage that I am on now (female, construction apprentice, non-completer, aged 38).

A chef apprentice told a similar story:

The dishwasher at my work gets paid more than me and I work longer hours as well, they take home the same amount of money as I do and they start three and a half hours later, so I resigned (male, chef apprentice, non-completer, age 20).

Another interviewee said he withdrew because his employer was not paying him enough to cover all the expenses that were required to complete the training.

I had to pay for all [my books] myself and in the end I couldn't afford to go to trade school and my boss wasn't going to pay for it and I wasn't earning enough to go to trade school so I dropped out ... There is only one spot in Victoria to do trade school [in the City]. I couldn't afford the travel, I couldn't afford the fees, I couldn't afford accommodation. (male, construction apprentice, non-completer, aged 20).

Several expressed the view that the introduction of AWAs had worsened the situation. In the case of a mature aged baker apprentice, the AWA and the associated reduction in pay he received, played a major role in his decision to withdraw:

... now all this employer does is use the apprentices for a cheap wage. We were working over Christmas and Easter up to 12 hours a day on the basic rate of pay that included Saturdays, Sundays, public holidays the whole lot. I had to sign an AWA at \$7.50 an hour, no overtime, no holiday pay, no extras, no nothing (male, bakery apprentice, non-completer, aged 59).

For the interviewees who were still in-training, low wages were often spoken of as one of the reasons they were considering withdrawing from training. A first year chef apprentice, for example:

I am not earning enough so I am leaving soon (male, chef apprentice, in-training, aged 22).

Another chef apprentice who was at-risk of dropping out stated:

At the end of the week you are going oh will I buy milk and bread or will I put petrol in my car? (female, chef apprentice, in-training, aged 19).

Among the apprentices interviewed who were in-training, there was universal agreement that the first year of training was the most difficult. A second year construction apprentice stated:

you haven't got much hope and you haven't got much money to spend on other things and you have got your mates saying oh you know look I work as a labourer and I am earning \$1000 a week. That is 4 weeks work for me! (male, construction apprentice, in-training, aged 21).

Another construction apprentice simply stated:

First year was pretty bung, it was like \$240 or \$250 a week. It was a struggle to live off that (male, construction apprentice, in-training, aged 25).

A third year engineering apprentice recalls the difficulties of living on the first year apprenticeship wage:

you have to travel every day and you know you have to pay petrol and all that sort of stuff... I was earning \$220 a week, had to pay \$90 a week rent and I had to buy food, electricity, petrol ... by the end of the week ... my bank account would be empty (male, engineering apprentice, in-training, aged 22)

One of the findings of the Bitmann et al. (2007) study was that because apprentice/trainee wages were so low many apprentices/trainees were forced to rely on alternative sources of income to make ends meet. Data collected from the interviews for this research support these findings. In some cases, apprentices/ trainees had to rely on their parents and family members for income support.

A young 17 year old apprentice living at home with his parents, for example:

If I was living out of home and trying to run a car it would probably be a bit hectic, but its enough for me to go and have some fun on weekends with my friends and stuff like that (male, plasterer apprentice, in-training, aged 17).

A young chef apprentice stated similar feelings:

I think for chef apprenticeships the pay needs upgrading. It doesn't really give you any choice to move out of home. You basically live in poverty. You don't have any money or anything and to run a car on your apprenticeship wages to get to work and back, that pretty much takes the last of your money (male, chef apprentice, aged 19).

Other apprentices/trainees looked to part-time work as an alternative source of income. In the case of one of those interviewed the additional work contributed to a breakdown in their health:

wages were so bad I worked a part time job my first and second year, I actually ended up getting physically ill from working two jobs because I wasn't sleeping enough and was a bit stressed out with it all and ended up having to resign from that job. ... first^t and second year were both pretty tough on the wages and then the third year living away from home allowance is \$11 a week and with rent being, you know, \$100 plus — I mean renting in Melbourne is pretty expensive (male, construction apprentice, in-training, aged 21).

Many of those interviewed who were working in the hospitality industry relied on over-time pay to supplement their income. In one of these cases, a chef apprentice said they resigned because of their employer's attempt to reduce their wages and entitlements following the introduction of Work Choices industrial relations reforms:

I signed a contract last year but it wasn't an AWA and then the AWAs came in and she wanted me to sign that 8 months later and I wouldn't. I stayed there for 12

months and that is why I went to the other place because they wanted me to sign up for minimum wages and I didn't get any paid overtime — they guaranteed me 50 hours but then I ended up still working 64 every week (male, chef apprentice, non-completer, aged 19).

The low wages, long hours and often poor working conditions appear to have created a culture where chef apprentices frequently leave one place and move to another one in the hopes of securing a better employment situation:

I'm looking for somewhere else. I am hoping to go back to where I was before because I left that place for this one because I thought you know it might be a bit better, bit different, time for a change — and I went there with a few promises made by the chef that never happened, so now I hate it pretty much (male, chef apprentice, in-training, aged 18).

Another chef apprentice put it in more broad terms when she said:

It doesn't matter because in the end everyone ends up working at everyone else's old place (female, chef apprentice, in-training, aged 22).

The VET stakeholders discussed the role of allowances and government grants in addressing some of the financial hardship that apprentices have to deal with. They typically thought these allowances were important but that they did not go far enough. This view was also expressed by the apprentices interviewed. While they were grateful to have the assistance, it was often stated that the financial support did was not enough, especially during the first year when the wages were at their lowest:

They give you the \$500 grant but by the time you have got to pay the school fees you have already spent it anyway (male, chef apprentice, in-training, aged 19).

It is worth noting that not all of those interviewed complained about the wages they were receiving. The level of satisfaction among apprentices and trainees receiving a higher than average training wage was notable. Apprentices working for larger companies with union representation and collective agreements rarely complained about their pay or conditions. Typical comments found among this group of apprentices were:

We get looked after pretty well — our schooling gets paid for and our books get paid for and all that (male, engineering apprentice, in-training, aged 19).

The apprentices working in these environments and under these conditions widely recognized that they were in a privileged position compared to many other apprentices and had little or no intention of leaving training.

Age

Age was perceived by VET stakeholders in Gippsland as a factor in ones' likelihood to complete their training. It was perceived by many that if apprentices/trainees were younger they would be more likely to complete their training. This view is supported by the Gippsland completion rates for apprentices and trainees presented in chapter two where it was found that those in the under 19 age group had a higher completion rate than any other age group.

In interviews with apprentices and trainees a few working in the construction industry expressed the view that employers found younger apprentices to be more attractive for a range of reasons. One construction apprentice explained:

... to the employer the younger person tries a lot harder because they dropped out of school to do it, they have two years to get it into their brain before they start going out and [drinking] with their mates once they turn 18 and rock up to work absolutely you know (male, construction apprentice, in-training, aged 20).

Another drew parallels between the apprentice-employer relationship and the father-son relationship to explain why he thought employers found younger apprentices more attractive to employ:

to the 16 year olds their boss is like a father figure, like they tell them what this is and how it is done (male, construction apprentice, in-training, aged 21).

In a similar vein another apprentice argued:

the boss has that, you know, stand over sort of thing and then they will listen to him more, so then they can sort of shape him to more of the tradesmen that the boss wants him to be (male, construction apprentice, in-training, aged 19).

These views, however, were not universally expressed. A number of apprentices and trainees were of the view that employers were not interested in anyone under 18 who did not have a driver's license. This view was particularly expressed among engineering apprentices. Others argued that many employers and group training companies would not hire an apprentice unless they could demonstrate that they had completed a pre-apprenticeship. This requirement effectively worked to increase, not lessen, the age of first year apprentices, unless they had been an early school leaver — not uncommon in the construction industry.

However, some apprentices and trainees expressed problems arising from leaving school early to pursue training. For example an apprentice employed by a group training company told how he was stood down because they couldn't find a placement for him:

Basically they said to me that my hand tool skills weren't up to scratch for me to be placed with an employer and said that they couldn't afford to keep me ... because I was 17 at the time and I couldn't drive to Melbourne they just said that they had to let me go (male, construction apprentice, non-completer, aged 20).

Like a number of other trainees and apprentices interviewed, this one had left school before completing year 12 to take up the apprenticeship and now confronted with a situation where they were not able to complete the apprenticeship or return to school:

I had left year 12 to do it so that kind of sucked and I couldn't just you know start year 12 a quarter of the way into the year and so it was pretty bad (male, construction apprentice, non-completer, aged 20).

This and other cases like it raise important questions about that crucial decision to leave school early and about the age in which one decides to do an apprenticeship or traineeship. While issues have been raised by stakeholders about the need to get apprentices and trainees into training while they are young this can create difficulties for young people if, for whatever reason, they are not able to complete their training. Interviews highlighted how some of these early leavers have struggled to find meaningful work without a qualification. The construction apprentice stated:

I did some voluntary work with a mechanic for about 3 months and then I started a panel beating job ... I got through contacts I made in the voluntary job and I got sick during that job because of the dust from the sanding back ... and so they let me go. Then I worked for Silcar as a trade assistant for a bit and just like odd jobs, abattoirs and things, I am actually casually working for a window factory in Hallam right now (male, construction apprentice, non-completer, aged 20).

Work ethic and values

A view expressed among VET stakeholders concerned the different values and less than ideal work ethic of today's youth which was seen by some as contributing to high attrition rates. The perceived inability for many young people to stick something out was seen as a major reason for why many apprentices/trainees did not complete their training. Very little evidence collected from interviews with apprentices/trainees could be found to support this view. This

may reflect the fact that the sample for this research was based upon voluntary participation and self-selection — disengaged and less motivated apprentices/trainees may have had less propensity to participate in the study. On the basis of those who were interviewed for this study who had chosen to do an apprenticeship/traineeship (as opposed to those who were told they would have to do the traineeship as a condition of employment) most expressed a genuine desire to do an apprenticeship/traineeship and were fully committed to completing the training. Even among those who did not complete their training many still desired an opportunity to complete it. As one apprentice stated:

I would bend over backwards to get my apprenticeship done because it is the one thing I do want to do in life, and I am not going to sit in a nursing home when I am older and say I'm not happy with my life because I should have done this or I should have done that. If I finish my apprenticeship and that is the only one thing I ever accomplish in life I can sit in a nursing home or sit on my death bed and go I am so happy that I achieved my apprenticeship (female, engineering apprentice, non-completer, aged 23).

A retail trainee who also failed to complete their training had similar feelings of regret for not completing their training:

there is not much around here you know and if you can tell me if there is a way I could finish that traineeship somewhere else I would (male, retail traineeship, non-completer, aged 28).

An engineering apprentice who lost their placement when the company they were working for went out of business expressed similar sentiments:

I would just like to finish it. I have done a year and a half and it would be a shame to waste it (male, engineering apprentice, non-completer, aged 29).

Unlike what is typically perceived about young people, most of the apprentices and trainees interviewed had no issue about working hard. In fact, for some, it was the lack of work which was contributing to their frustration:

... really it's just the amount of work that you get given out there, it's a real problem because there is so many people and there is so little work, you just get sick of going there every day if you are not doing anything (male, fitter and turner apprentice, in-training, aged 20).

One of the chef apprentices interviewed indicated he would be withdrawing from training soon because he was not getting enough hours with his employer:

I am struggling to get 38 hours. I am dead set that is why I am leaving. I am going crazy (male, chef apprentice, in-training, aged 22).

Several made the point that completing an apprenticeship/traineeship required hard work and dedication. A plumber apprentice stated you have to:

... toughen out the 4 years to get the trade and then it's all what you do with it from there ... the apprenticeship is only the start. ... it's your attitude towards your job to start with, how you go about it is up to you (male, plumber apprentice, in-training, aged 20).

A female hospitality trainee who did not complete their training expressed similar sentiments:

I think it is just dedication. I think if you know what you want ... being older and not having anything to do with it before I had to prove myself a little bit more (female, hospitality trainee, non-completer, aged 22).

Prior knowledge

VET stakeholders in Gippsland considered prior knowledge of apprentices and trainees as an important factor when it came to understanding completion rates. Some felt one of the most significant background factors was the level of knowledge and understanding the respective apprentices/trainees had about the trade or occupation they were going into. In interviews with apprentices it was not uncommon to hear from them that their initial knowledge of a trade came from their family background. An electrical apprentice, for example:

I'm 17, I finished year 11 but my Dad was an electrician and I did work experience at the Power Station so I kind of just knew what I wanted to do. I was still good at school and all that but I just wanted to be an electrician (male, electrical apprentice, in-training, aged 17).

More often apprentices would describe growing up in a 'tradie' household but choosing to do a different trade from their family members. An electrical apprentice describes his experience this way:

My old man was a plumber and I had been out with him and did a bit of work experience, that sort of stuff, but I kind of more liked what I saw about the electricians so I did a pre apprenticeship for six months at TAFE and kept applying for apprenticeships till I got this (male, electrical apprentice, in-training, aged 21).

Having done a pre-apprenticeship course or VET in schools did not appear to be a significant indicator of completion or non-completion. Some who had done VET in schools or a pre-apprenticeship had not completed and others who had not done these courses appeared most likely to complete. Few saw VET in schools as a major factor for them choosing to pursue the particular training that they had, however, many did see a role for work experience and/or VET in school.

A floristry trainee describes how she came to be involved in training:

I went to do work experience at a florist and I didn't know whether it would be for me. I just thought it would be fun you know and its not like hairdressing where you can't do certain things until you have gotten to a certain stage in your apprenticeship. You actually get to be hands on, ... you are hands on all the time (female, retail trainee, in-training, aged 17).

For others, work experience played a slightly different role. A female engineering apprentice, for example stated, work experience '*helped me decide what I didn't want to do*' (female, engineering apprentice, in-training, aged 23).

A male fitter and turner apprentice tells a similar story:

I was into computers and stuff and went and did work experience and I was in an office for that and I thought nah I couldn't handle it, so I thought I would start looking at other things (male, fitter and turner apprentice, in-training, aged 20).

In some situations, interviewees identified work experience as being the most informative way of gathering knowledge about the trade they were considering entering:

I did work experience with a plumber and I talked to them about it and they sort of told me the right direction to go, I didn't really get much information from the careers teacher at all (male, plumbing apprentice, non-completer, aged 16).

Background knowledge about the training system and what is required of employers, training providers and apprentices/trainees throughout their training was another area identified by stakeholders as being an important factor in whether an apprentice/trainee is likely to complete their training. The role of the AAC in helping to inform all three parties of their obligations was seen as critically important. In the interviews conducted we heard both

positive and negative experiences of this initial signup process. One positive case involved an engineering apprentice:

the people that were there was myself, my employer and the lady from the AAC and yeah they were quite helpful with giving me brochures and telling me that I can't be bullied and all that sort of normal stuff (male, engineering apprentice, in-training, aged 33).

A construction apprentice described a similarly informative day provided to him by the AAC when he initially signed up:

I went to the AAC and spent eight or nine hours one day sitting there watching little videos and getting all the paper work and stuff like that and they talked me through the whole lot (male, plastering apprentice, in-training, aged 17).

Others described a very different experience. A cookery apprentice who had no prior knowledge of the trade she was entering:

I was very naïve about it ... No one [the ACC] explained anything. That [the sign up] was all taken care of by the employer (Female, cookery apprentice, non-completer, aged 18).

The supportive role of the AAC is discussed in the following section on Support.

Mismatch

In the focus groups the VET stakeholders stressed the importance of an appropriate match between the background and skills of the apprentice/trainee with the needs and demands of the organisation and job. Some thought that often the recruitment process was to blame for a 'mismatch' between the apprentice/trainee skills and the demands of the employer. The take-up of 'inappropriate' training could at times be due to the apprentice/trainee requirement for immediate employment, as opposed to searching out a long term career they feel suited to, or the employers' desire for labour (see the following 'Motivation' sections).

For example a retail trainee and supervisor discussed some of the problems of not properly recruiting trainees and speculates why such 'mismatches' may occur.

They [management] were really pushing it ... People were being sent there more as a requirement to their Centrelink payments. It was more compulsory for them and none of them were particularly interested and not really suited to that environment either ... there was a really high drop out rate - only about 20% stuck with it and I would say the rest have probably just gone back into the system and onto some other course that they have been forced to do (female, retail trainee, in-training, aged 24).

This contrasts markedly with the process for large industrial employers whose apprentices go through a rigorous series of application, interview and induction, and very rarely opt out of their contracts.

Motivation for undertaking training

The motivational factors influencing the apprentice's/trainee's reasons or purposes for taking up training were seen by VET stakeholders as important issues to consider when seeking to understand attrition. It was felt that some sign up for the 'wrong reasons' which contributes to many of them withdrawing or cancelling soon after.

VET stakeholders often drew a distinction between apprentices and trainees when it came to their motivation for taking up training. Some perceived that apprentices typically viewed their training as part of a clear career path into a trade while many trainees saw it as simply a condition of employment. Interviewing non-completers in 1999, Cully and Curtain (2001b: 212) found that "[a]mong trainees commencing in 1996, three in four were motivated by a desire

to obtain employment” and considerable support for these views can be found in the interviews with apprentices/trainees.

Nearly every apprentice interviewed had decided to do their apprenticeship because it was something they desired to do and most had sought out the apprenticeship as a clear pathway into the trade they wanted to pursue. The one trade where this did not tend to be the case was among baking apprentices working for baking chains whose experiences were more similar to those of trainees. One baking apprentice, for example, stated:

Basically I was looking for a job, there is very little down [here] ... and that was the main thing just to give myself some work ... Look I wasn't expecting anything great to be honest, the main thing was I needed a job (male, bakery apprentice, non-completer, aged 59).

This scenario, however, was far more common among traineeships. Very often the only reason someone was doing a traineeship in retail and hospitality was because it was a requirement to gain the job, which was their first priority. One retail trainee describes their experience:

I wasn't sure what a traineeship involved. I just wanted a job for a year and then I was going to study the next year (female, retail trainee, non-completer, aged 20).

Also a retail trainee who completed the traineeship:

[I was] just going around anywhere trying to get a job, so the traineeship ... was just part of it ... in your actual application they asked are you prepared to undertake some kind of traineeship and I was like well if I say no it could jeopardise my chances of getting that job (male, retail trainee, completed, aged 25).

For others their motivation for undertaking a traineeship was the desire to move from part-time or casual employment to secure full-time employment. One retail trainee stated:

I approached them to ask for full time work because I wanted to leave school and then they presented me with a retail traineeship — it was the only way they'd put me on full-time. They said that it was a 12 month traineeship and at the end of the 12 months it was their choice whether they kept me on or not (female, retail trainee, non-completer, aged 16).

Another retail trainee told a similar story:

I applied for a full time position at the shop and they basically said “yes we'll put you on if you do a traineeship”. It was a condition (male, retail trainee, non-completer, aged 22).

In other cases, existing employees would be encouraged to do a traineeship because it was often a requirement for moving into a management or more senior position. A hospitality trainee stated:

If you wanted to become a manager at [a fast food outlet] you had to do this ... they offered me a position as a manager and that was part of it ... he signed us all up because all the stores kind of did it at the same time ... during training they come down and they have you run a shift and stuff. Now that I have done that, I am allowed to manage the store even though I haven't finished my traineeship. (Female, hospitality trainee, in-training, aged 19).

Other trainees were motivated by financial incentives on offer by their employers. Some of the trainees working in the fast-food industry, for example, said they were enticed by their employer's offer to increase their hourly wage if they did a traineeship. A retail trainee told how his company offered financial incentives to any of their existing employees if they would sign up for a traineeship. According to the interviewee, few of his co-workers were interested

in doing the traineeship, nor could they understand why they were being asked to do a traineeship given how long they had been working for the company. He stated:

... it was just an absolute waste of money that should have been spent training other people. The [other trainees] agreed with me but did it anyway because they had the financial incentive to (male, retail trainee, non-completer, aged 50)

The motivation for training among existing employees who had been signed onto a traineeship was particularly found to be wanting among those interviewed. They typically found the training as unchallenging and unrewarding. A retail and management operations trainee who had been working as an existing employee for several years prior to being encouraged to do the traineeship by her manager, didn't feel like she was learning anything new from the traineeship:

Everything I was asked to do, I already knew. Everything I did I was just repeating (female, retail and management operations trainee, in-training, aged 24).

Another retail trainee described not feeling challenged enough by the training:

... it lost a lot of motivation for me because a lot of it was things that I already knew.... another thing was it seemed to just to be so slow and dragging along, ... even things I didn't know, a lot of the work could be completed in quarter the time we were given to do it. ... it seemed to be a lot of hand holding ... none of us needed it to be so mind numbingly slow. (female, retail trainee, non-completer, aged 16).

When training is secondary to other motivating factors there becomes a heightened risk of trainees withdrawing. This is demonstrated by the fact that many of those we interviewed who were motivated by other factors were non-completers. Often they only stayed on until something better came along. One of the interviewees, for example, admitted that the only reason they had started a retail operations traineeship was because it was expected of them for the job in the fast food restaurant and they had accepted to earn a bit of money until something better came along. Once they received an offer to do an apprenticeship in a trade they were interested in they left:

The only reason I cancelled out of that was because I got the apprenticeship as a plumber (male, retail trainee, non-completer, aged 18).

These issues did not just emerge among trainees in the retail and hospitality industries. A trainee in the construction industry described how he happened to take up a civil construction traineeship solely to acquire a job. In the end he found the job of little interest and decided to withdraw from the job and the traineeship:

It was pretty boring and I didn't really see it going anywhere where it would be any more interesting. It was just standing there all day holding up road signs because that was the job (male, construction traineeship, non-completer, aged 22).

Motivation for putting on an apprentice/trainee

One of the themes to emerge from the interviews and focus group discussions with VET stakeholders was the perception of some that employers' motivations in taking on apprentices and trainees were not always altruistic and that other factors came into play. In interviews with trainees it was common to hear similar views. For many trainees, especially retail and hospitality industries, the issue was clear — their employers were interested in attracting financial incentives rather than training their workers.

The traineeship was more for their benefit ... they got subsidised for it, the workcover and all that sort of stuff (female, hospitality trainee, aged 23, non-completer).

A retail trainee, who had completed their training but did not feel like his employer took training seriously, stated:

The boss was purely in it for fiscal gain, the kick backs that he could get for employing people on traineeships was the sole reason that he actually allowed it to happen within his shop (male, retail trainee, completed, aged 22).

And another retail trainee, who had also completed their training:

it wasn't seen as real training and other trainees knew what the whole scheme was for and that the employer would benefit financially from them doing it. ... yeah we might be getting paid but how much are they getting paid just for us to fill out some sheets (male, retail trainee, completed, aged 25).

It was not uncommon for apprentices and trainees to tell stories about how their employers spoke openly about the government subsidies and the reasons for wanting to put them on as a trainee:

He was open about it. [The incentive] is something like \$5000. ... you know for me ... I have been in retail for something like 25 years so there is not necessarily any gain for me ... the way it was sort of presented to me was you don't have to worry about it, you know you might just have to do a bit of book work and you know a bit of this and that and you know it will take you 12 months, but don't worry about that and at the end of it I [the employer] get the financial bit and you get a bit of paper (female, retail trainee, in-training, aged 46).

A few trainees interviewed felt employers would do anything to ensure that they received their subsidies. For some it was a case of employers paying greater attention to the paperwork required to get the subsidies than to the training itself. For others it was a case of never reporting any problems if and when problems emerged, because it might put trainee subsidies at risk:

they get \$3000 for each long term unemployed they sign up [through Centrelink] ... we said to the manager one day they aren't attending the training, why don't you ring Centrelink and report them, ... and [management] said, in an off the record manner, if we rang Centrelink and said they weren't coming, then they would take the \$3000 for each student off them (female, retail trainee, non-completer, aged 20).

Another felt that her employer was trying to speed up the training process in order for them to attract the completion bonuses:

I know for a fact that they really tried to get us to try and complete as many modules as possible because they would obviously get their funding a lot quicker and sooner (male, retail trainee, completed, aged 25).

A hospitality trainee who had completed a Certificate III felt that employers were solely motivated by the government subsidies and that once you had completed a Certificate III and could no longer attract government funding, employers were no longer interested in offering you other traineeships:

they hired someone else that didn't know the industry and it came down to the fact they put her on, even though she really didn't like the industry, because they couldn't get any bonuses for me... in hospitality if you [already have] a cert 3 in hospitality you won't get a traineeship because they can't get any funding for it (Female, hospitality trainee, completed, aged 19).

(Female, hospitality trainee, completed, aged 19).

Often their personal experiences led them to become very cynical about not only their employer's commitment to training but the whole training system:

he [the employer] has got no time for them [the trainers] they have rung up to see me and he has forgotten to give me the messages ... and I think the last time I had to sign some form and he had to sign some too ... and he is going yeah, yeah, yeah

whatever I am very busy you know sign and get on with it. You know he is not interested in it whatsoever. ... the training is not at all important for him you know which is probably 90% of everyone that is doing these things — the important part is the cash at the end of it (Female, retail trainee, in-training, aged 46).

While the father of a young apprentice who had withdrawn was even more direct:

I wouldn't send a dog there to train no way, I wouldn't, its got so many flaws in it it's a joke, looking at it and seeing how the whole mechanics of it works, it's a joke, all it is, is a washing machine for them guys to get funds off the government, that is all it is (father of male plumbing apprentice, non-completer, aged 16).

The danger is that if apprentices and trainees are of the view that their employers are not serious about training then they will most likely not take it seriously either. Although difficult to measure, this situation may contribute to many not only withdrawing from training, but may have the more lasting effect of discouraging them from considering other apprenticeships or traineeships in the future.

Cheap labour

According to the views expressed by some VET stakeholders the desire to acquire a cheap labour force is another motivational factor for many employers putting on apprentices/trainees. This view was also strongly expressed by apprentices and trainees, particularly amongst first year construction apprentices:

my first year experience I went into a machine workshop and basically all they used me for was labour — cheap labour, because I am cheap to hire they just put me on an automated lathe or whatever, just having me pressing buttons for 8 months straight (male, construction apprentice, in-training, aged 18).

Another construction apprentice told of a similar experience:

when you first start off you end up doing the crap jobs and if you have got a bad employer that is just the luck of the draw. But everything is crap in the first year, your pay is crap, so you end up stressed out, oh I can't deal with this. The first year is the hardest (Male, construction apprentice, in-training, aged 19).

For other construction apprentices it did not depend so much on where you were in your training but it had more to do with the attitude of the employer and those training you:

they just treat you as a sort of cheap labour and those types of things and won't take the time or the financial investment to make a good tradesman out of you (male, construction apprentice, in-training, aged 23).

The perception that employers were more interested in acquiring a cheap labour force rather than providing training was also particularly strong among trainees in the retail and hospitality industries:

it was just cheap labour. Really, really nice bloke just not a really good employer... I was often left by myself to open and close and manage etc. which I had only just started to get paid entitlements for, even though I had been doing that for two years at least (female, retail apprentice, non-completer, aged 21).

Some felt that their employers considered them as a cheap disposable workforce that was thought of and treated fundamentally different from the company's other employees. One retail trainee said this was reflected in the recruitment practices of the company they worked for:

when they were hiring [non-trainees] they would look at your appearance and the way you presented yourself and things like that. It didn't really matter with the retail traineeships, they were just there to do ... a job that anybody could do and ... it was

very clear to those ... that weren't on the traineeship that they would be gone in a year (female, retail trainee, non-completer, aged 22).

In highlighting the fact that she thought her employer was more interested in securing a cheap labour force rather than training, she went on:

a lot of them weren't going to [their training] and there wasn't a lot of communication between [the trainers and employer] as to whether they were going or not and it looked like the management ... didn't really care whether they were going to the schooling or not because they weren't paid to go to the schooling, they were only paying a low wage — a lot lower than anybody else would get, so they would rather not upset the apple cart, they would rather just have the cheap labour (female, retail trainee, non-completer, aged 22).

A couple of the trainees interviewed spoke about being an existing employee before being asked by their employer about doing a traineeship. They viewed this as an attempt by their employer to lower their wages. Others told about the experiences of friends or siblings who were pressured to do training because their employer had told them they would have to do a traineeship if they wanted to remain with the company. A non-completer retail trainee from East Gippsland, for example, had this to say about her sister's experience at a fast food outlet:

their boss decided they wanted to put them all on retail traineeships ... the wages were lower and ...they bullied a lot of the younger girls into doing it and my sister stood up and said, but hang on that is going to be less money and so in a very subtle way [she] went from 44 and 45 hours a week to 10 because she wasn't interested in doing [the traineeship] so they dropped her hours so she had to leave to find a job elsewhere (female, retail trainee, non-completer, aged 22).

Expectations

Inappropriate or unrealistic expectations was a common theme to emerge from interviews and focus group discussions with VET stakeholders. It was viewed that these unreasonable expectations occurred at two levels. For some VET stakeholders it was the expectations held by some apprentices/trainees going into training and the training process's failure to meet those expectations that was seen as contributing to some not completing their training. For other VET stakeholders the problems resided with unreasonable expectations among employers towards their apprentices/trainees. In interviews with apprentices/trainees support for both of these views could be found.

Expectations of apprentices/trainees

Among those interviewed apprentices in particular where the ones to mention that their training experience was not living up to their expectations. A young male school based apprentice, for example, complained of not being able to do the sorts of jobs that he thought he would be doing and was considering withdrawing from training:

I thought it would be different. They said you work within the metal industry and I thought it would have more of the engineering side but it wasn't. All we do when we go to [the workplace] is just work with the fitters or boiler makers. I reckon that is crap (Male, engineering apprentice, in-training, aged 17).

While in this particular situation this 'expectation gap' may have come about due to their own personal misconception and/or misunderstanding of what training involved, in other cases it appears to have been generated by statements made by employers that were not delivered on. In the case of those employed by group training companies, a number of apprentices complained that the companies were not living up to certain aspects of the training experience that had been presented to them prior to signing the training and employment contract.

These complaints typically centred around placements with host employers. Two different sorts of concerns were raised about the placement process and the perceived promises made by group training companies about placements. The first major concern raised by the interviewees had to do with the time required to receive a placement. Many complained that they would be without a placement with a host employer for an extended period of time. Some of those interviewed had considered withdrawing from training because they were not receiving a placement or were being told they would have to travel considerable distances if they wanted to be placed with a host employer:

I was getting close to dropping out at one stage mainly because they took so many of us on they found it very hard for us to get placements ...we weren't placed and so they were starting to basically tell us that you have to go to Melbourne you don't have a choice ... because we just can't get you work down here. We were starting to just do work at the shop because we didn't have any work outside, everyone basically said "bugger you we are not going because we can't afford to live on \$270 down in Melbourne it is not going to happen" ... at that stage I was getting close to leaving and I ended up getting my own placement with my cousin just to keep me out of Melbourne (female, engineering apprentice, in-training, aged 20).

An electrical apprentice stated:

you know it seems like there are quite a few people that are unplaced at any one time I think you know if they cut back their numbers a little bit then it would be more happy sailing and they would have you know every one out on a placement at one time and the classes would be more easily managed. ... there are still some apprentices who haven't been placed for two or three months or even longer (male, electrical apprentice, in-training, aged 22).

It was quite common for apprentices to attribute the problem to the group training companies taking on too many apprentices at once:

It was ridiculous the amount of apprentices that they put on and then the apprentices were all just sitting around for months (male, engineering apprentice, in-training, aged 19).

Another stated:

I think the worst thing they do is take on 30 apprentices every year and 25 will sit for six months doing nothing (male, construction apprentice, non-completer, aged 18).

These complaints extended to the parents of young apprentices. In a few interviews conducted with young apprentices a parent was present who would periodically also make comment. In two of these interviews parents complained about the failure of group training companies to find placements for their child. One particularly angry parent stated:

I said listen you know this bullshit you are giving us about things are tough you can't get kids placements, you have taken on twenty more young people, ... its like hey there is ten kids still ... not placed and twenty more coming in for front end training in the next couple of weeks (father of male, plumbing apprentice, non-completer, aged 16).

A second major complaint about placements among group training apprentices interviewed was about the different types of placements they received. Some felt that the group training companies had promised to move them around with different host employers throughout their training period so they could learn different aspects of their trade, but had in fact not done so. As a result they felt as they were not getting the breadth of training they were expecting. For example:

They are meant to rotate you around different employers to learn different things.... That is what they are meant to do, That is how they said it to you in the interview

... that is the whole point so that way you have diversity and you are not just stuck in only one part (male, construction apprentice, in-training, aged 19).

And another commented:

I wanted to be able to be shifted around to get the experience in the different areas. That is why I chose to [go with group training] ...so far I have been in a machine shop and the thing is they want to keep me there in the machine shop because they like me there, but they don't want to train me if I am not going to stay there. They have said to me "oh if you are not going to stay here we are not going to bother teaching you anything" and I want to learn but I don't want to stay there. (male, engineering apprentice, in- training, aged 19).

Another group training apprentice, who had experienced different placements with host employers, felt there was still room for improvement:

I have been with my current employer for close to 2 years ... the fact that they moved me about to find a good employer was good but the fact that the rotation hasn't been sort of done in the last two years is a problem (male plumbing apprentice, in-training aged 20).

High expectations of employers

Several interviewees indicated that they felt their employer had unreasonably high expectations of them particularly in terms of their skills and the number of tasks they were expected to perform. A construction apprentice told how he found it all a bit overwhelming:

I got chucked in a house in my first year and I just got a set of plans. "Here you go plumb that house" he said, "you have to learn how to do it yourself" ... Sometimes bosses have to understand that you are just a first year — that you have to learn this stuff (male, construction apprentice, in-training, aged 22).

A chef apprentice expressed similar experiences and feelings of being overwhelmed:

For the chef, nothing I did was right and I got to the stage that I said well I am a first year apprentice I have no other skills I haven't worked in any other job like this what do you expect of me? (female, chef apprentice, in-training, aged 19).

One retail trainee described how her manager gave her a hard time for not being able to perform certain tasks despite only being on-the-job for a few weeks. In the end her employer's high expectations contributed to her decision to withdraw from training:

My first day was okay but towards like the second and third weeks it was getting awful. They told me that my cash handling skills weren't good enough and they told me that I had to work it out in my head which is okay, but when they hand you a \$50 or a \$100 note I didn't feel comfortable, so I was using the sub total button and they didn't like it, but someone else was using it and they didn't get in trouble, but I did (female, retail trainee, non-completer, aged 20).

Interviewees statements about their employer's high expectations extended beyond issues surrounding their capacities to perform certain tasks. A fairly common complaint among young trainees working in the fast-food industry was about the unreasonable hours they were expected to work. For those still in school it often became difficult to balance their school and work commitments. As one 16 year old stated:

even if you have got school work and everything they will make you work until 11 o'clock at night and they ring you during school hours and ask you to skip school to work (female, retail operations trainee, in-training, aged 16).

And another 16 year old male trainee working in the fast-food industry stated:

I have worked until 1 o'clock in the morning on a school night (male, retail operations trainee, in-training, aged 16).

Nearly all expressed the view that if they didn't show up to work when they were called on short notice, or did not work the hours they were told to work they would be fired. In one case, a young male trainee working in a fast-food restaurant was dismissed after failing to show up to work:

I didn't finish the traineeship because I had to go to Melbourne for my Mum's birthday and I got someone to cover my shifts but he didn't show up for work and so I got fired for it (male, retail operations trainee, non-completer, aged 17).

A chef apprentice stated his reason for not completing his training with one employer was because of the unreasonable hours they were expected to work:

The place that I was before here as much as they drove me nuts they looked after you pretty well. Money wise, I was raking in the cash. It was just I was working a more than 60 hours a week, that is why I left (male, chef apprentice, non-completer, aged 22).

Lack of support

Several VET stakeholders identified lack of support by employers and training organisations as a significant factor in apprentices/trainees decision to withdraw from training. In interviews with apprentices and trainees the researchers asked specific questions about the support they had received or were receiving. As with VET stakeholders, apprentices/trainees often described a lack of support at a range of different levels.

An issue remarked upon by a number was the lack of information and support from schools for anyone who did not have university as their primary ambition. They often felt that their schools sought to discourage them from doing an apprenticeship by downgrading them:

... they [schools] are pushing that you have to go and do a Uni course. Now Uni doesn't obviously suit everybody and a lot of the schools are pushing for Uni courses and not pushing for people that are hands on and saying okay these are apprenticeship options (Male, electrical apprentice, non-completer, aged 19).

An engineering apprentice described his experience this way:

I went to a private school and I got laughed at because I didn't want to go to Uni and I virtually got told don't bother doing past year 10. I did year 12 and come out here and probably earn more than the teachers there now anyway as a fourth year apprentice (male, engineering apprentice, in-training, aged 22).

Another stated:

I was in a public school and there was no real interest in anyone who didn't want to go to Uni. I did my VCE in year 11 but by year 12 they wanted to know what my preferences were for Uni and I told them I am not going and they just didn't understand it at all. There was just no, no interest and a couple of the teachers sort of seemed to lose interest in you (male, electrical apprentice, in-training, aged 20).

This lack of support from schools regarding apprenticeships was also discussed by Misko et al (2007), who mention that “[s]tudents in focus groups (especially Year 12 students) ... reported that teachers rarely spoke to them about apprenticeships and were most concerned with students' university preparation ... 25.3% reported that teachers had said that *it was not a good idea* [to do an apprenticeship]”.

Other interviewees spoke about the level of support they received from their AAC. A few talked of positive experiences; A young floristry trainee stated:

They have come to see me when I am at work. They have often rang as well but I haven't been there because I am at school. They have been good and they asked me 'Are you coping okay? Are you enjoying it still?' (female, floristry trainee, in-training, aged 17).

Another interviewee had this to say about his engagement with his AAC:

they [the ACC] came down and gave me just a quick talk and handed me brochures (male, bakers apprentice, non-completer, aged 59).

At the other end of the spectrum, a number of both non-completers and those in-training felt they had received little or no assistance from their AAC following the initial signup. A third year retail nurseryman apprentice stated:

The AAC have not been helpful whatsoever. I found them since I was first hired to be absolutely useless. They are supposed to keep in contact with you, but I never heard anything from them until I rang them (female, retail nurseryman apprentice, non-completer, aged 21).

A third year chef apprentice stated:

I got a phone call on the day that I finished my first year asking me if everything was okay. That is all I got. I might start calling them to remind them that I exist (female, chef apprentice, in-training, aged 20).

A 22 year old retail trainee commented on the lack of follow up from the ACC:

not until I actually signed up for the next one did I ever see them again (female, retail trainee, in-training, aged 22).

The AAC was often a place where apprentices/trainees turned to for advice and support when they began to experience difficulties either personally or with their employers or training providers. It was commonly expressed by interviewees in this situation, that the AAC had not delivered the support they were expecting to receive. In many cases, however, it was also clear that most apprentices/trainees interviewed did not have a clear understanding of what the AACs role was beyond the sign-up stage, as indeed was also the case with both AACs and Government authorities contacted during the course of this project, many of whom gave contradictory information about the extent of the AAC support role (see Appendix XI for AACs role and code of conduct). In one case, a trainee who felt her employer had terminated her employment and subsequently her traineeship without just cause and due process sought the support and advice of the AAC in addressing the matter. She claims that she received no support:

They never helped with anything. They were really poor in communicating and following up phone calls and I remember having to travel to see them ... The support that was supposed to be there just wasn't (female, retail traineeship, non-completer, aged 39).

A chef apprentice who sought advice from the AAC when they were experiencing difficulties with their employer had a similar story to tell. Her story also highlighted some of the reasons that apprentices/trainees were confused as to the role of the AAC:

At the Apprenticeship Centre they told me that once they sign people up they have nothing to do with the apprentice. I asked who is supposed to be there for help and support and he said "It's all changed. The government pays us to sign an apprentice up and that's it". I found him to be really rude, not knowledgeable at all, so much so that I put in a complaint about him and then I had him ring me up and say "you know my job is on the line" (female, chef apprentice, non-completer, aged 19).

Another chef apprentice who sought advice about financial difficulties they were confronting in paying their school fees and other costs associated with their apprenticeship stated:

I tried ringing [the ACC] but I didn't get any help about it they just said oh that's a shame kind of thing they didn't have any answers for me or how I could fund it (Female, chef apprentice, non-completer, aged 49).

Apprentices employed by group training companies often looked to their group training field officers as their first port of call when seeking assistance and advice. Some of those interviewed spoke positively about the assistance they had received from their field officers. In some cases, group training field officers were identified as playing a pro-active role in getting them alternative placements with host employers when they were unhappy with their current employer. One expressed a preference for the way their group training field officer could resolve problems, rather than approaching their OTTE field officers:

if you rang your [OTTE] field officer they would call your boss and then you would have to spend all day with this person and its not going to be very pleasant ... I prefer Group Training because if I have got an issue I can take it up with them and it doesn't effect like the next day at work (male, plumber apprentice, in-training, aged 25).

Others apprentices felt that their group training field officers had not been providing the level of assistance they had expected. Many complained that hadn't seen their field officer for a considerable length of time. A construction apprentice stated:

I hadn't seen anyone in a year and a half, I wasn't looked after, no one came to see me and so I was just sort of dropped off the book (male, construction apprentices, non-completer, aged 20).

Another construction apprentice stated:

Supposedly if you have any problems you are meant to be able to ring your field officer and he turns up but I haven't seen him in about 18 months. I don't even know who it is any more (male, construction apprentice, in-training, aged 24).

An electrical apprentice told a similar story. He stated:

He is very poor with his communication. He doesn't reply to my messages very often ... I have called him a couple of times and left a message but he hasn't gotten back to me ... I find they don't really care that much because they have so many [apprentices] anyway they don't mind if people drop out here and there (male, electrical apprentice, in-training, aged 22).

A couple of interviewees speculated as to why it appeared to them field officers were not fulfilling the role that they thought was needed. One engineering apprentice stated:

I reckon that it is not all the field officers fault ... they are getting stressed out with looking after so many apprentices and getting to a point where they see you in the street and they think ... better say a word to this bloke and get another one marked off you know. It is not like they are actually asking you anything it is like they are just knocking you off the list (male, engineering apprentice, in-training, aged 22).

This perception of being 'ticked off the list' could well be accurate in the case of AAC field officers (or field consultants) as under Commonwealth funding regulations the AACs are obligated to 'make contact' with apprentices and trainees at various stages of their training.

Another apprentice was much more sympathetic to the difficult position that he perceived field officers to be in. He stated:

I don't know if it is like the field officers' problem or if they have to work with the resources — they would like to help you but they can't ... like one field officer to 800 apprentices and ... they are over committed ... like field officers ... you just never hear of them so like they all say give us a ring if you are not happy with this and that

you know, but I feel like I am on my own (male, construction apprentice, in-training, aged 19).

Feelings of being left 'on their own' and not sure where they should go to seek advice and assistance was a serious matter for many of the apprentices and trainees interviewed. In the case of those that had withdrawn from training it is possible that had better support and assistance been available to them they may have been prevented from dropping out. For those still in-training, their feeling of being left on their own is placing them at considerable risk of dropping out if and when an event arises, such as a problem with an employer or training organisation, and they know of no one to help them work through it.

It was not solely to official channels (e.g. the AAC, field officers, OTTE etc.) that apprentices/trainees looked for support. Some interviewees mentioned the important supportive role unions had performed for them while others spoke of various mentors, family members, peers and friends in training who had helped them throughout their training. Often this support occurred in very subtle ways. One of the apprentices interviewed, for example, spoke about the positive aspects of peer support they received by going off-site on a regular basis to do their training:

I actually enjoy going back [to TAFE] and seeing everyone and catching up ... we usually always like turn around and go "so how has it been going and so what have you been up to" and like we always usually talk about what has been going on in different work places and what they have been doing, how they are being treated, different skills they are learning (female, engineering apprentice, in-training, aged 20).

There were a few cases where apprentices/trainees expressed that they had a lot of respect for their employers because they did provide support for apprentices and trainees when it was needed. In one case (a large unionised industrial workplace), an apprentice describes how their employer helped out an apprentice with an emerging drug problem:

Some of the bosses out there will do anything to help you and there was one case a while ago an apprentice was on drugs pretty bad and he wasn't showing up at work and they paid for his rehabilitation and kept the job open for him ... just because he admitted to the problem, there was another one about two months ago ... but he wouldn't admit to it so the company couldn't do anything to help him ... they had to let him go ... they tried to help him out a lot but he wouldn't take the help (male, fitter and turner, in-training, aged 20).

Unpleasant working environment

In interviews and focus groups, VET stakeholders identified unpleasant working conditions as a significant reason for some apprentices/trainees not completing their training. Workplace bullying, harassment and unprofessional behaviour towards apprentices/trainees by some employers were some of the major problems identified. Some VET stakeholders stressed the need to 'train the trainers' and employers about their appropriate demeanour and behaviour towards apprentices/trainees.

In interviews with apprentices/trainees who had not completed their training, workplace problems was the single most common reason provided for their decision to withdraw from training. Among those interviewed who were still in-training, workplace problems were also expressed as real issues for many of them and for some these problems were contributing to a situation where they were considering withdrawing from training. There were a range of problems spoken about. For some it was a case of boredom and feeling like they were wasting their time. In some cases, this occurred on-the-job and in others it occurred at the site of where they were receiving their training. One of the practices of a group training company in the region is to rather than stand workers down when placements with host employers are not available they are brought back to their facility for additional training or supervised work on

their premises. Some of the interviewees who had spent time back at the group training facility waiting for a placement reported feelings of boredom and wasting their time. Some common complaints were:

I was in the workshop for about 8, 9 weeks and it was just like pulling my hair out. No way. Every day it just feels like it just never ends at the workshop, oh it is bad (male, carpenter apprentice, in-training, aged 25).

When I was out there we were mowing the lawns most of the time as a mechanic (male, mechanical apprentice, in-training, aged 20).

Cleaning the gutters, that's all we used to do out there (male, construction apprentice, non-completer, aged 19).

For a couple of the interviewees it was a concern for their personal safety that was contributing to an unpleasant working environment. An electrical apprentice described working for a company that placed him in a shed that leaked when it rained and having to stand in water while working with ungrounded electrical equipment. After the owner failed to fix the problems he decided to leave. A young hospitality trainee, who also decided to withdraw from training due to safety concerns, had this to say:

There is no security guard there at all. There have been fights break out, there have been windows smashed, there have been people sitting up on the counter and trying to get photo's taken with the staff, there was a guy who walked in the back door (female, hospitality trainee, non-completer, aged 17).

For others the unpleasant working environment had more to do with their perception that they were thought of and treated as an inferior group of workers. This was commonly expressed among apprentices in the construction industry:

I reckon a lot of people in the trade end up giving it up after the first six months it is just because of this old bloody respect thing that you have got to go through ... they think they are going to sort of beat it into you in a way like give you all the dodgy jobs and I know it is all part of it, but sometimes it turns them off (male, construction apprentice, in-training, aged 23).

Another construction apprentice put it this way:

I know plenty of apprentices who had fall outs with their bosses and a few ... heated things have come along and I just knew that that is how it was and I just had to keep my head down and try my best (male, construction apprentice, in-training, aged 21).

Others complained about the way their manager treated them and how they felt there were not sufficient grievance processes to have problems addressed. A trainee working in the fast-food industry describes his reasons for not completing the traineeship:

I had a run in with one of the managers and I made a complaint about him and I just didn't feel like I was taken seriously and just felt belittled (male, retail trainee, non-completer, aged 28).

It was often the case that apprentices/trainees saw the only way to overcome the problems they were experiencing in the workplace was to leave. This was particularly true among the younger apprentices/trainees. A young trainee working in a different fast-food restaurant commented 'the manager is a pig...I'm trying to find another job' (female, retail operations, in-training, aged 17).

A mature aged chef apprentice commented on the way younger trainees were treated in her workplace:

the girls that were ... doing front of house training just left. You know they would be crying — they'd come out of the office crying because they were getting abused and

they couldn't take it. ... They say they leave on their own terms so ... no one can come back on them [as] they are the ones that left, but you know they certainly made them go (female, chef apprentice, non-completer, aged 49)

Bullying was a common theme for those apprentice/trainees who raised issues about an unpleasant working environment. Bullying occurred at two levels. For some interviewees, the bullying was coming from their employer or immediate supervisor. According to one retail trainee, for example, the bullying came from the owners of the company who she claimed frequently complained about her performance and her appearance. Ultimately, this situation led her to quit:

I sort of made my decision that I would leave because I would come home crying every night and it just wasn't a nice situation to be around. They were bullies that is all they were (female, retail trainee, non-completer, aged 20).

A young chef apprentice described how out-of-hand and unpleasant the situation had become in her workplace:

That was the chef, just nothing was done right ... and I found out [from someone else who] had worked there he bullied her so much she ended up throwing a pot of soup at him, so I wasn't the only one he had gone through (female, hospitality trainee, in-training, aged 19).

Bullying from peers was the other level at which interviewees spoke about the problem. One female apprentice working in a male dominated industry describes how she confronted continual sexual harassment from one of the fourth year male apprentices:

The apprentice threatened to kill me and also sexually harassed me in those last six months of my first year, just saying things like "you need a beeper on your arse, you know that you should be at home barefoot and pregnant, chained to the kitchen sink", the usual sort of rubbish ... in one incident he was standing with the workshop foreman and a few of the other qualified mechanics and he yells out "You would be used to laying in the back of a panel van wouldn't you", across the yard so that anyone that was out in the yard could hear and not even the workshop foreman said anything, not even any of the other mechanics, nothing, not even the service manager and he was just in the office behind (female, engineering apprentice, aged 23).

When her employer failed to address the problem she took the matter up with the OTTE field officer who investigated the case. Shortly after, however, she was fired from the job and was unable to finish her training. She subsequently pursued the matter through the Victorian Civil Administration Tribunal.

A young plumbing apprentice subjected to bullying from his peers, who decided to leave training because of it, commented on how he got little support from training staff:

especially with the instructor because he wasn't a very good instructor and he liked to, I don't know, bully some of the guys. He was a real bully himself (male, plumbing apprentice, non-completer, aged 16).

His father, who was present during the interview, spoke in detail about the bullying his son confronted from other apprentices while attending off-the-job training:

we had issues there with the bullying ... the normal monkey business, I have been through all that business you know, that's fine but when it gets really targeted and centred at him by the whole group I said hey somebody needs to step in and say, back off you know. ... it got to the point where he was pushed while using a rotating tool and pushed down into a pit and then had faeces pushed into his face ... there was little discipline and often no supervision... the staff didn't seem to care and certainly

weren't addressing it at all (father of male, plumbing apprentice, non-completer, aged 16).

Abuse by Employers

For some of the interviewees it was not just a case of bullying or of the working environment being unpleasant, they perceived that their employer was actually deceiving them and/or abusing them in some way.. A fairly common complaint from interviewees was about not being properly paid by their employer. One apprentice describes being misled by her employer and losing wages and credit towards her training.

I started my apprenticeship in October and I started receiving apprenticeship wages but they didn't sign my papers until January fifth the following year and they didn't back track and put those three months trial period onto my apprenticeship (female, engineering apprentice, in-training, aged 23).

A construction apprentice also complained of being put on apprenticeship wages before completing the training contract.

I started being paid apprenticeship wages and that was before I even signed any papers ... I found out later that I wasn't the first guy. There had been about three other guys my age who I went to school with who all started that job and who all quit for the same reason, because they were being just stuffed around and used for cheap labouring basically (male, construction apprentice, non-completer, aged 19).

A construction apprentice, who was strongly considering leaving training when interviewed, told how he never knew when he would be paid for work performed:

he says we get paid every second Friday but then it would be like a month and a half down the track that we are getting paid. So we are working for a full month and a half and no pay (male, construction apprentice, in-training, aged 24).

One apprentice attributes the failure of her employer to pay her in accordance with award rates and legal requirements as the main reason for her not completing her chef apprenticeship:

My reasons for not completing? I had big issues with my boss; she wouldn't give me a day off like I was meant to. I was entitled to at least two days off a week but I was made to work on my days off and not paid penalty rates. She wouldn't pay me for my overtime, I specifically asked to have one day off which was my birthday and I was told apprentices don't get days off — she doesn't get a day off so I don't get a day off. I approached her and asked if I could be given pay slips a couple of times and the whole time that I was employed there I didn't get a single pay slip (female, chef apprentice, non-completer, aged 17).

These first experiences can often have a lasting impact on young people's lives and their future career ambitions. When this young apprentice was asked if she would consider taking up another apprenticeship she responded:

I am not sure. I am still wary about it. It's a big decision to decide whether I am going to go back and do an apprenticeship again or not and what worries me is I think I am going to get treated like that again (female, chef apprentice, non-completer, aged 17).

Others complained about having to work long hours without breaks. Most of these complaints came from apprentices/trainees working in the hospitality industry. A mature aged chef apprentice stated:

they would expect you to start at ten in the morning and finish at 10 at night. You could probably go to the toilet or something like that and grab a drink and eat something while you are standing up, but if we were busy that was it. They never hired any more staff to help you (female, chef apprentice, non-completer, aged 49).

A hospitality trainee complained that her health suffered because of the long hours and consecutive days of working she was expected to perform.

we used to work sometimes eleven days in a row without a break. There weren't any lunch breaks, so I really wasn't surprised I got run down.... I wouldn't ever bother finishing it (female, hospitality trainee, non-completer, aged 18).

One of the female apprentices interviewed told of being discriminated against by her host employer because she was a woman working in a traditionally male trade.

My first placement I actually got that because I was a girl ... because [the employer] had girls down there before and [the group training company] thought I might fit in a bit better. But it didn't end up working out that way ... they sent me back saying that I didn't have the machining skills. But I found out later ... they said the reason why I was sent back was because I was a girl and the boss had a problem with it. He basically said it is not a girl's job ... because she is a female send her back it is not a female's job (Female, engineering apprentice, in-training, aged 20).

Others complained that they felt like they were being used by employers simply to get government bonuses. Some complained about group training companies taking on more apprentices than they could find placements for with host employers and some attributed this to the group training companies seeking to attract government subsidies. One apprentice tells a story of one of his friends confronting the manager of a group training company about why they took on so many apprentices if they could not place them:

One of my mates from trade school had to give another guy a lift so he was in the class with them waiting for them to finish and the big boss is in there talking to them and they were getting right up in his face saying 'well look we are still waiting, what are you going to do about it? Why did you take on so many apprentices if you knew you can't get a placement for us?' and he pretty much just said to them 'well look we did it so we would get the government grant' and that's about it (male, engineering apprentice, in-training, aged 19).

Quality of training

In interviews and focus group discussions VET stakeholders raised concerns about the quality of training for apprentices and trainees, with some speculating that this might be a contributing factor to their non-completion. In interviews with apprentices/trainees who did not complete, problems they experienced with the training was the second most common explanation as to why they decided to withdraw from training. A hospitality trainee, for example, when asked about her training experience said *"there were no words to describe it because no training ever happened. ... I found it incredibly boring and so I ended up quitting"* (female, hospitality trainee, non-completer, aged 19).

A number of those in-training who were interviewed also had a considerable amount to say about the quality of the training they were receiving. Several complained of training quality problems and for some of them these problems were serious enough for them to consider withdrawing. As emerged out of the interviews and focus groups with VET stakeholders, concerns about the quality of training centred around three major issues: the quality of the trainers, the lack of training and getting the balance right between on and off-the-job training.

The quality of trainers

Apprentices and trainees spoke about the quality of both on and off-the-job trainers. A common complaint about on-the-job training was about the lack of qualified staff to provide training for them. These complaints were largely restricted to those doing their apprenticeship/traineeship in small workplaces. It was not uncommon to hear of second or third year apprentices being the ones responsible to provide training to first year apprentices. An engineering apprentice, who decided to leave his apprenticeship due to the lack of qualified on-the-job trainers, told of his experience:

There was no foreman, there was no tradies either, there was two contractors and basically 4 apprentices — so called apprentices. ... personally I just thought it was just a, you know, cheap labour hire ... There was no tradesmen there, ... the fourth year [apprentice] said that there hasn't been a fully qualified tradesmen in the time he has been there (male, engineering apprentice, non-completer, aged 18).

A construction apprentice, who also withdrew from training, told of a very similar experience:

the guy that was teaching me [on the job] left ... and I got sent out by myself and had to teach myself as well as another apprentice at the same time ... I was an apprentice trying to learn myself while trying to teach someone else ... then your boss is hounding you because you are not as fast or as qualified when you haven't been trained (male, construction apprentice, non-completer, aged 20).

Comments about the lack of qualified on-the-job trainers, however, were expressed most frequently among those working in the hospitality industry. In one incident a young first year chef apprentice describes how she was the most qualified staff member in the restaurant where she was employed:

There was no chef for about a month because the chef actually quit because of the way he was treated and I was actually running the kitchen for a month by myself (female, chef apprentice, non-completer, aged 17).

Another chef apprentice working in a different restaurant told of a very similar experience:

we were just left there, when my understanding was that I would have thought that since I wasn't qualified that I should have a qualified person with me — that never happened ... I trained people you know in my first, second year (female, chef apprentice, non-completer, aged 19).

For both of the above, the lack of available on-the-job trainers was a strong contributing factor in their decisions to withdraw from training.

Some apprentices are aware of the problems that can emerge in smaller workplaces and make it a priority to search out opportunities at larger sized companies. As one apprentice describes:

Yeah it's a big place, yeah you get a very big range and good training and everything out there that is one of the pluses and that is what made me decide to go for it (male, fitter and turner apprentice, in-training, aged 20).

When it came to interviewees' perceptions and experiences with the quality of trainers off-the-job there were notably different views expressed between those doing their training at TAFE and those doing their training with a private provider. When interviewees raised comment about TAFE trainers they rarely raised issues about the skills, knowledge or capacities of the trainers. Most expressed receiving positive experiences. A plumbing apprentice, for example, commented:

The plumbing instructor [at TAFE] is actually qualified to teach and he actually ... gets the module and he reads it with us ... and then when it comes to the practical exercise he will actually say this is how you do it and blah blah and then he will let us go and do it, so he actually teaches us something (male, plumbing apprentice, in-training, aged 19).

As with the VET stakeholders, some raised concern about a perceived skill shortage in the TAFE sector with claims made that many qualified TAFE teachers were leaving the teaching profession to go back into the trade to earn more money. An electrical apprentice, for example, told how he was affected:

A specific problem we have is that the instro teacher at TAFE left to go back on the tools and that have left them with basically no instro teacher and so they were

bringing in people and trying to sort of cover it but it just didn't happen (male, electrical apprentice, in-training, aged 21).

When it came to comments made by apprentices/trainees receiving their training from a private provider the views were much more scathing about the quality of the teaching staff:

They were going through teachers flat out and yeah they would just say 'here do this' and wander off and talk on the phone for an hour and that was for the front end training (male engineering apprentice, in-training, aged 19).

An electrical apprentice stated:

It is the way it is being run ... two years I have been there so far and it has just been farcical and the main instructor that we did have was so busy with administrative tasks he never had time to actually instruct and then everyone they have had since him has just been a joke... they are poor teachers ... They are not really qualified to be a teacher. They are not really concerned about whether the kids do anything ... One teacher that they did have that was really good they stopped hiring — because he cost too much was their excuse — and now we get substandard teachers for a cheaper fee. I don't know it just seems a waste of time to me.(male, construction apprentice, in-training, aged 22).

A retail trainee receiving their training from a private provider stated:

The people who are going around purporting to be trainers don't know anything about the thing they are doing, ... they didn't seem to know anything about the business.... absolutely nothing (male, retail trainee, non-completer, aged 50).

Among those doing their training with private providers it was commonly perceived that a high turnover of teaching staff was contributing to a decline in training quality:

We have had ... ten or twelve different teachers ... they just can't seem to hold down the teachers so there is no teacher that has been there a long time and really knows the system (male, electrical apprentice, in-training, aged 22).

Lack of training

For some apprentices/trainees the problem went much deeper than the quality of the teaching staff. Some felt they did not or were not receiving any substantive training. Their stories corresponded with what VET stakeholders called 'tick and flick' training. These comments were made exclusively by those receiving their training from private providers:

We could write down any answer in the [training] books. They would mark off anything as correct. The schooling was shocking (male, electrical apprentice, in-training, aged 23).

The largest number of complaints about 'tick and flick' training came from those doing retail traineeships involving fully on-the-job training. It was expressed by both young and mature aged retail trainees:

They gave them these books and they would come around maybe once every three months and tick, tick, tick, pass that, here is the next module, tick, tick, tick, pass that with no scrutiny at all (male, retail trainee, non-completer, aged 50).

Retail trainees complained of not being provided the time during working hours to do their workbooks. In some cases, this was seen as part and parcel of their employer's indifference towards training, for example:

we had a book that we had to fill out, ... you weren't to do it while you were working, I had to do it after I finished work ... Yes, but they didn't really care what you wrote they didn't read it, they would just sign it ... They didn't hold the schooling in any high regard at all (female, retail trainee, non-completer, aged 16).

Another retail trainee, who did complete her training, told how her trainer's failure to take training seriously impacted upon her own attitude and the attitude of other trainees in her workplace towards the whole training process:

A lot of them were just ... I am just going to answer whatever I want and tick whatever boxes I need to tick and then I get my certificate from them, so there was no kind of passion to really commit themselves to this traineeship. All the trainers cared [about] was just the fact that they were filled out (female, retail trainee, completer, aged 25).

Another retail trainee described how she felt her trainer was more concerned with ensuring the paperwork was filled in correctly than if she could actually perform a task:

all he kept saying was that you have got to make sure you fill out this and I think the specific one was a record of the number of hours I actually get staff training you know ... and he was really explicit about make sure that you fill that out because you need to have a certain number of hours that you can prove you have had staff training and he said and if you don't do that we get audited, we get into trouble... all your worried about is whether I have ticked all the right boxes for your audit, ... I thought this was all about me and how you were going to nurture me and help me through this, well its not, not the way you are talking. ... well certainly in my situation the so called apprentice is really the last one of significance or important. (female, retail trainee, in-training, aged 46).

The balance of on and off-the-job training

In interviews with apprentices and trainees who were receiving both on and off-the-job training, reference was often made to their overall training program and how they viewed the relationship between on and off-the-job training. For those doing their training at TAFE a preference was generally expressed for the off-the job component of their training:

The training at TAFE was exceptional, it was the on the job training that I had issues with (female, engineering apprentice, non-completer, aged 23).

A construction trainee also perceived the training at TAFE to be far more rewarding and useful than what he were learning on-the-job:

The TAFE course was a lot more interesting because the theory was more varied and the information that they were teaching us was very broad and included more aspects of the construction industry whereas on the practical side of things it was very, very limiting and very restrictive (male, construction trainee, in-training, aged 22).

A preference for doing their training at TAFE rather than through a private provider was also commonly expressed by apprentices and trainees who had either experienced both types of training or knew of friends or family members who had received training from a TAFE or private provider. The reason provided for preferring TAFE training over other forms of off-the-job training typically had to do with the more structured aspect of the TAFE program. An engineering apprentice, employed by a group training company but receiving their training from TAFE, stated his preference for TAFE by stating:

I would rather be at TAFE because I reckon I am getting a better education there and even if it is easier [here] because it is a bludge ... because they are all unorganised and all that I would rather be in a proper class that was working ... (male, engineering apprentice, in-training, aged 23).

A construction apprentice who was doing their training with a private provider expressed a desire to be doing their training at TAFE:

they don't teach in line with the TAFE organisations so we don't have a set curriculum as in terms and semesters they sort of teach us in their own kind of way — or we teach ourselves. (male, construction, in-training aged 19).

It was generally expressed that a good balance of on and off-the-job training was necessary to become a competent trade person. A young electrical apprentice, who eventually withdrew due to the quality of training they were receiving on-the-job, described feeling like he was being disadvantaged by the fact that he was not learning enough in the workplace. He stated:

I didn't feel like I was learning ... in the industrial environment, they didn't sort of seem to want to teach you, whereas we went to TAFE against the domestic guys [and] ... they seemed to know a lot more about the trade ... and so I felt like sort of I was getting further and further behind because we weren't actually learning anything and then you would go to TAFE and they were further and further ahead (male, electrical apprentice, non-completer, aged 19).

For others, securing an appropriate balance between on and off-the-job training meant a good integration between what they learned at trade school and what they were doing in the workplace. For some this integration did not work particularly well because they felt like what they learned at TAFE was not well reflected in what they were doing on-the-job. As one interviewee stated:

It wasn't linked back really and that made it harder doing the stuff at TAFE (male, fitter and turner apprentice, in-training, aged 20).

Getting a good balance between on and off-the-job training was also discussed in relationship to the times at which they received certain training. For those doing their training with a group training company 'up front training' was often spoken about as important in helping them to secure their first placement with a host employer. For others the fact that off and on-the-job training tended to occur in different isolated stages with little or no integration between the two was not all that desirable. Some apprentices described receiving all of their off-the-job training early in their apprenticeship prior to being placed with a host employer and then never returning to it:

I completed all my schooling for my apprenticeship in sixteen weeks (male, carpenter apprentice, in-training, aged 25).

Those that described the most positive experiences tended to be found among two types of apprentices. The first were those employed by large companies and receiving their training from TAFE. They felt that the large workplace provided them the opportunity to learn a range of skills and put into practice much of what they were learning at TAFE. The second group of apprentices which expressed satisfaction with their training program were those employed by group training companies, doing their training at TAFE and who had been successfully placed with a range of good host employers. In their view, the opportunity to be placed with different host employers enabled them to apply the diversity of skills they were acquiring through the TAFE experience. A young plastering apprentice, for example, described being placed with several different host employers which enabled him to apply the diversity of skills he had learned at TAFE:

I am getting all the fancy stuff and then I am getting all the normal stuff as what the usual houses are as well, so I am really getting a good range, its good (male, plasterer apprentice, in-training, aged 17).

Among trainees in the hospitality and retail industries their experience with training was fundamentally different. In the case of retail traineeships their training was fully on-the-job. In the case of hospitality traineeships, trainees might do some safe food handling training off-the-job in a classroom setting, but otherwise it was fully on-the job training as well. For retail and hospitality trainees it was the balance between having time to do their workbooks as required to complete the traineeship and fulfilling the work requirements of the job which was frequently raised. A few trainees described taking part in a fairly structured training program. A fast-food trainee, for example:

Everyone who was doing the traineeship all sat down in the restaurant and we went through the books and wrote out everything. Then they collected up the books, signed it and made sure it was all done properly (male, retail operations trainee, in-training, aged 17).

A hospitality trainee described their training in a similar way:

We had work books. We would go over what we did, whether we understood it, how it was relevant in our industry and our workplace and then he would lump us with more books for the next time (female, hospitality trainee, in-training, aged 33).

These experiences, however, tended to be the exception rather than the norm. It was more frequently expressed by trainees that their training took a back seat to the work they were expected to perform and that training or filling out workbooks was used to fill voids in their day. Some perceived the unstructured nature of the training program to be the consequence of their employer and the private training provider having different priorities and being unable to agree on the structure of the training program:

It was a bit haphazard. It wasn't actually structured very well. She [the trainer] would just come down out of the blue and like our ... foreman on the ground they would have to go oh yeah well alright just be quick with him ... so it wasn't structured extremely well (male, retail trainee, completer, aged 25).

A trainee working in the fast-food industry described his experience as fundamentally different from what he had been told about the training program before he had signed up:

you were told you were going to be completely prepared before you were left on your own and then you were left on your own before you had finished learning and I don't know, maybe I should have been able to do everything by then or whatever but I ... felt like the training process was a lot of talking and not much afterwards, like there you go you're in the deep end, on you go (male, retail traineeship, non-completer, aged 28).

Had a more structured training program been provided for this trainee he might not have felt so frustrated and overwhelmed to the point that he decided to leave the training and the job.

Conclusion

In interviews and focus groups with VET stakeholders a range of factors were perceived to be contributing to the high incident of withdrawals and cancellations among the region's apprentices and trainees. Some of the contributing factors for apprentices/trainees withdrawing from training were identified as:

- Incidental factors
- transport difficulties
- low wages and labour market influences
- age, maturity and generational values
- prior knowledge
- mismatch between the background and skills of the apprentice and needs and demands of the organisation and job
- different motivational influences on the part of apprentices/trainees and employers
- different expectations among apprentices/trainees and employers
- lack of support
- unpleasant working conditions including abuse by employers
- poor quality of training

In interviews with apprentices/trainees many of these factors were also spoken about as reasons for them deciding to withdraw from training. While some cited only one reason for leaving — such as being laid off — for many there were multiple contributing factors for not

completing their training. Problems within the workplace, poor quality training and low wages, however, were the most common explanations for not completing their training. These findings are generally consistent with other research into non-completion among apprentices/trainees (e.g. Grey et al 1999; Ray et al 2000; Cully and Curtain 2001; 2001b).

It was generally expected that those participants interviewed who were in-training would tell of a very different experience than those who had decided to leave their training. This, however, was not the case. Those in-training also expressed similar experiences and concerns as did those who had not completed their training. Unpleasant working conditions, low wages, poor quality training and a lack of support were common complaints among those in-training — for some the magnitude of these problems placed them at risk of not-completing. Thus, while completion rates for Gippsland apprentices/trainees are higher than the State averages this does not suggest that the situation is necessarily better in the region or that Gippsland's apprentices/trainees are more satisfied with their training experience. The slightly higher than average completion rates may reflect a better training system and a more positive training experience or it may reflect the fact that there are fewer opportunities and thus apprentices/trainees are more likely to remain in-training for fear of being unemployed or unable to find other training opportunities. While some apprentices might think about leaving every day not all of them do leave training despite experiencing significant difficulties and/or dissatisfaction. The fact that completion rates were found to be higher among those employed by group training companies while complaints about the quality of training were highest among those receiving their training from group training companies is testament to the difficulties in drawing positive correlations between completion rates and the experiences of apprentices/trainees.

If apprentices/trainees are thinking about leaving, and the findings of this research suggest many of them are, strong support is needed to prevent them from withdrawing. Interviewees expressed great disappointment in not having greater support at a range of levels. They spoke of not receiving support from their teachers and schools when they decided they would not be applying for university but would be pursuing an apprenticeship/traineeship. They told of receiving little follow-up support from their AAC and how they often felt let down by the various support structures when they were experiencing personal difficulties or difficulties with their employer. Some interviewees also expressed feeling confused about who was responsible for providing support and frustrated with not being able to access assistance. Some of this confusion and frustration appears to have come from those whose role is to provide advice and support to apprentices/trainees. Had support been there when these problems emerged some of them might have remained in training.

Making ends meet on apprentices/trainee wages was a major challenge for those interviewed. Many of those who had withdrawn from training complained that they could not afford student fees, costs associated with transportation, accommodation and living expenses. Some had to rely on alternative sources of income, such as an additional part-time job or financial support from their parents, to meet their financial obligations. Some of those working in the retail and hospitality industry felt that the AWAs they were expected to sign had worsened their financial situation. Low wages (cited by 16% overall), however, were not the only or indeed the most common reason provided by apprentices/trainees for deciding to leave their training or feeling dissatisfied. Working in an unpleasant working environment and receiving poor quality training were more frequently expressed as greater problems for apprentices/trainees.

Unfavourable conditions in the workplace (cited by 44% overall) and poor quality training (cited by 20% overall) were the most commonly expressed reasons for not completing training or feeling dissatisfied. Employers having unreasonably high expectations, having to work long hours and being called into work on short notice, unsafe working environments, not being paid according to award rates and legal requirements, bullying and unprofessional

behaviour towards apprentices/trainees were some of the problems that interviewees identified with their workplaces that led them to leave their training before completing. Unqualified training staff both on and off-the-job, poorly structured training, and complaints about not receiving any training were some of the other reasons that interviewees commonly provided for either leaving training or feeling disappointed by their training experience. Apprentices and trainees seemed less concerned about the level of pay they were receiving if they felt like their training was of value and taken seriously by both their employer and training organisation. It was when the quality of training was sub-standard that apprentices/trainees expressed feeling as if they were being used by employers for cheap labour, or to attract government incentives. Unlike what some VET stakeholders perceived about today's apprentices and trainees nearly all of those interviewed across all four industries, ages and genders wanted to be challenged by their training and were prepared to work for it. Where this was found to not be the case was among trainees in the hospitality and retail industries where traineeships were a condition of employment and employment was their primary motivation for doing the traineeship. Existing employees who had been encouraged to do a traineeship appeared particularly disinterested and saw little reason to take the training seriously.

Often the personal experiences of the apprentices/trainees interviewed led them to become very cynical about their employer's commitment to training and the whole training system. This cynicism was also expressed among a range of VET stakeholders during interviews and focus group discussions. This cynicism no doubt contributes to some apprentices/trainees not taking training seriously but it may also have the more lasting effect of discouraging them and others known to them from commencing other apprentices/traineeship in the future. If the training system wants to attract quality applicants and truly address skill shortages it will need to tackle some of the core issues which are contributing to non-completion, unsatisfactory experiences and the level of cynicism that currently plague the system. The following chapter proposes some ways to bring about these changes.

Chapter Six: Findings and Recommendations

This project set out to better understand the factors contributing to non-completion among Gippsland apprentices and trainees working in the construction, engineering, retail and hospitality industries. In doing so it drew upon administrative statistical data and qualitative data collected from both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with a range of VET stakeholders and interviews with apprentices and trainee who were either in-training or had been in-training but had not completed. What sets the findings of this research apart from much that has gone before it is that many of the issues interviewees reported as contributing to non-completion are also of significant concern to both those currently in training and those who have completed their training. Cully and Curtain state that “[w]hile we have no evidence to say that completers have a better time of it at work, it seems reasonable to infer that an unsatisfactory relationship is inimical to completion”. This study has shown that many completers and those in-training do not appear to be “have[ing] a better time of it at work” and while it was found that Gippsland’s completion rates for apprentices and trainees are higher than State averages there should be no complacency in addressing the concerns raised.

For the most part, however, the findings of this research on apprentices and trainees in the Gippsland region are similar to other research conducted on the factors contributing to non-completion among apprentices/trainees, which have been carried out in other parts of the country. What the researchers find especially troubling is that these negative experiences among apprentices and trainees found throughout Australia do not appear to have been addressed over the last eight years, despite the publishing of numerous reports on reasons for non-completion. In a time of acute skills shortages when it is vital to encourage (especially) young people to enter the VET system it is paramount that such shortfalls within the system be redressed. While there will always be incidental reasons for non-completion (such as accidents, workplace closures and other more personal issues) and people with the best information can realise they have made the wrong decisions and choices about their future, there are a number of areas where changes to both policy and practice within the VET system could have profound effects on the experiences of apprentices and trainees. The following sections provide an overview of some of the major findings of this Gippsland research project and the recommendations for tackling some of the issues identified as contributing to non-completion and dissatisfaction among apprentices/trainees. Given that the findings have been similar to those found elsewhere, most of these recommendations are not specific to the region. If the training experiences and outcomes for Gippsland’s apprentices/trainees are to be improved, changes need to occur not just locally but within the larger Australian apprenticeship system.

Project Findings

Findings from this research into non-completions can be grouped into three major categories: statistical findings about apprenticeships and traineeships in the Gippsland region; the factors identified as contributing to non-completion and dissatisfaction among apprentices and trainees in the Gippsland region; and the identification of areas where changes are needed if completion rates and training experience among apprentices/trainees is to be improved. These three broad areas and the issues and recommendations merging from them are discussed below.

Statistical findings

The Gippsland region demonstrated a strong and steady growth in apprenticeships and traineeships. The number of apprentices/trainees commencing training in 2006 was four times that in 1995. The overwhelming growth in commencements has occurred among trainees who in 2006 accounted for nearly 68% of all commencements. By and large these are not the areas where skill shortages are most acute. While the growth in apprentice numbers has been

steady, without stronger growth in the years ahead the region will struggle even more than it does now to meet skill demand as the aging workforce begins to retire. The dramatically higher growth in traineeships as opposed to apprenticeships is not unique to the Gippsland region but is found throughout Australia. One of the explanations provided for this is that traineeships have been far more financially attractive for employers. Under the current Apprenticeship program the same payments are paid to both apprentices and trainees, despite the fact that some traineeships can be completed in one year compared to a four year term for the more highly skilled traditional trade apprenticeship. This policy, in other words, offers the same monetary incentives at commencement and completion for taking on a one-year trainee as a four-year apprentice. This point has been highlighted by Phillip Toner (2003):

The payments do not recognise the much greater investment of time and effort on the part of the apprentice employer. In theory, an employer could get four cycles of commencement and completion payments for trainees in the same time it takes an employer of an apprentice to get one cycle (Toner, 2003: 14).

Apprenticeships in Gippsland, as found throughout Australia, continue to be overwhelmingly dominated by male apprentices while traineeships are more equally represented by males and females. This project has highlighted both the failure to integrate women into the traditional trades and the continual barriers that exist that discourage women from doing so. Interviews conducted with female apprentices working in traditionally male trades suggest that women are interested in these trades but confront significant barriers, including sexual harassment, when pursuing these career options. Improved access and improved support for these female apprentices is an area needing some attention. Another notable, albeit not all that surprising or unique, finding was the small number of apprentices/trainees employed by the public sector in the Gippsland region. Of those in-training in January 2007, less than 1 percent of apprentices and less than 10 percent of trainees were employed by the public sector. In the past, the public sector has played a major training role in the region, at one time employing more than 50% of all apprentices in the Latrobe Valley (GRIB). This is no longer the case and more needs to be done to restore the public sector's training role. Of note is the Western Australian government's 2006 policy implementation that tied apprentice quotas to public projects for the state's building industry as a way to address skills shortages in the building trade (ABC, 2006). There seems no reason why the Victorian government cannot pursue a similar course.

The most significant difference between Gippsland and Victoria as a whole was found in apprentice completion rates. The average completion rate for apprentice cohorts commencing 1995-2000 was 73.1%, which was considerably higher than the State average of 65.1%. The average completion rate for trainee cohorts commencing 1995-2002 was 57.6% which was slightly better than the State average of 54.1%. This finding, however, is similar to other research which has found completion rates to be higher in regional areas (Ball & John 2006: 14). While it is possible that the better completion rates in the Gippsland region reflect the internal dynamic of the Gippsland training system (e.g. better recruitment and support, better quality training, etc.), it is more likely that external realities are at play. Unlike urban areas where training and job prospects are more readily available, regional areas do not provide the same level of opportunities and thus apprentices and trainees are less likely to leave their training. Additionally, while Gippsland's apprentice and trainee completion rates are better than the State average, the rate of attrition is still such that it should be of concern to all VET stakeholders: over 20% of construction apprentices and more than half of hospitality trainees do not complete their training.

For informed policies to be designed to improve completion rates one of the first step to be made is to understand the level of the problem and where the problems reside. As discussed in chapter two, completion rate data, as it currently exists, is highly problematic due in part to the different way data is collected and treated by each State and Territory. There is no

common agreement on how completion rates should be calculated, or about the basic concepts used to refer to events occurring among apprentices and trainees (e.g. a cancellation versus a withdrawal) or even what defines an apprentice from a trainee. This study has relied on concepts and methods used by OTTE in order to make comparisons with State developments. As far as the researchers are aware this methodology is only used in Victoria to calculate completion rates, and other States and Territories have adopted their own particular approaches. While the researchers support the OTTE methodology over other approaches for calculating completion rates, this methodology is not without fault. Amongst other concerns, the decision to remove withdrawals from the calculation of completion rates effectively means the method under-represents the actual loss of people from the training system. VET stakeholders, regardless of region, State or Territory, are losing trust in the completion figures that are currently available and efforts must be made to tackle this problem. As Cully and Curtain (2001: 38) argue “all the major stakeholders will not see completion as a major objective unless it is regularly measured and reported on at levels that are likely to influence behaviour of the key stakeholders”. This requires State Training Authorities to collect data consistently across all States and Territories and agree to standardised concepts and measurements. NCVET can play a facilitating role in opening up discussions with State Training Authorities on how best this might occur.

Recommendations

1. The State and Commonwealth governments should commit to directly employing more apprentices and trainees and government tenders (especially for large infrastructure projects) should require contractors to create additional structured training places.
2. A more concerted effort must be taken to get a higher proportion of women into apprenticeships. Matched with this effort must be mechanisms to provide better support to female apprentices once they enter training.
3. The payment system should be restructured so that commencement and completion bonuses more adequately reflect the differences in time and commitment between traineeships and apprenticeships.
4. There needs to be standardisation of the data system (definitions and methodology) Australia wide, including:
 - a. An agreed definition at State and Commonwealth level of what is an apprentice and what is a trainee and the adoption of two new categories of contract status to be adopted by all states: transferred (to new employer), recommencement (using the current OTTE criteria).
 - b. An agreed definition and measurement methodology of non-completion so that meaningful and reliable regional, state and national comparisons can be made and completion data can be disaggregated at National, State or Territory, regional and industry level.
5. Regular reporting and collection of nationally consistent data on completion rates for apprentices and trainees is needed.
6. Exit surveys should be conducted for ALL apprentices and trainees who cancel, withdraw, pass expiry date, or complete their training, with the purpose of collecting information about their training experience, covering:
 - a. training both on and off the job,
 - b. employment experience and
 - c. level of support, including AAC and OTTE experiences
7. A dedicated OTTE officer would be best suited for conducting and collecting exit survey data, which could then be entered into the DELTA database. Unless AACs can

be entirely independent of RTOs and employers, it would not be appropriate for them to administer these surveys.

8. Periodic analysis of exit survey data should be conducted by the State Training Authorities to help indicate where training/employment/support problems and other types of problems appear to be occurring.
9. Data from exit surveys should be made available to the AACs to better understand the reasons for non-completion, measure apprentice/trainee experiences and to use as a performance measure to identify those employers who should be endorsed as 'Good Apprentice/Trainee Employers'

Factors contributing to non-completion and dissatisfaction among Apprentices and Trainees

One of the initial aims of this study in interviewing both VET stakeholders and apprentices and trainees was to determine if their perceptions about the system and reasons for non-completions coincided; in the most part they did. Probably the most notable difference regarded transport, where stakeholders thought it was a much bigger problem than apprentices and trainees reported it to be. It should be noted though that quite a few relied on parents or friends to drive them and problems with high travel expenses were often put down to low wages. The argument could also be made that those living in remote areas not well serviced by public transport are less likely to be able to take on training in the first place.

Most issues raised by both stakeholders and apprentices and trainees interviewed fell into one of the following categories:

- incidental factors
- transportation
- inadequate wages and labour market factors
- age
- work ethic and values
- prior knowledge
- mismatch
- motivation of both employers and apprentices/trainees for undertaking training
- perceptions of being treated as cheap labour
- expectations
- lack of support
- unpleasant working environment
- abuse by employers
- the quality of training.

Like other studies on VET non-completion (e.g. Harris et al, 2001; Cully & Curtain, 2001) this study has shown that there is rarely just one single reason why apprentices and trainees fail to complete, rather there are most often complex, interrelated and multiple reasons, though as this and other studies show the majority of these are linked to a breakdown of the workplace relationship (NCVER 2002; Grey et al 1999; Ray et al 2000; Cully & Curtain 2001; 2001b). Complaints about being treated as cheap labour, being under too much pressure at work, not being paid properly, and being bullied were the sorts of responses provided by apprentices and trainees interviewed for this project. Problems with the quality of training and low wages were the two other most commonly expressed reasons for not completing training or being dissatisfied with their training. The decision to leave, however, appears to be a considered one in most cases. It was found that a lack of support in addressing some of these problems when they were confronted with them only worked to deepen their conviction that there was little point in continuing with the training.

Areas where change is needed

The findings from this research suggest that if completion rates and the training experience of apprentices/trainees are to be improved, changes are needed in three areas: the wages and conditions of apprentices/trainees need to be improved; the support structure for apprentices/trainees need to be strengthened; and improvements to the quality of training must be carried out.

Improving Wages and Working Conditions

Over the past year, considerable attention has been focused on the wages that apprentices and trainees receive. The recently released Australian Group Training commissioned study (Bittman et al 2007) identifies low wages as the major reason that many apprentices/trainees withdraw from training. Like the Bittman et al (2007) study, this study has shown how apprentices/trainees struggle to meet their financial obligations under the current rates of pay, with a substantial number relying on parents and family members or part-time employment to supplement their incomes. There was some evidence to suggest that the introduction of AWAs had made the financial situation considerably worse for some apprentices/trainees.

However, this recent focus on pay issues for apprentices/trainees, while significant, is only part of the story. Simply increasing the wages of apprentices will clearly not be enough to solve many of the problems within the system. Indeed this study found even the more highly paid and (financially) well looked after apprentices still had similar issues with the VET system to those in more poorly paid workplaces.

Conditions in the workplace were a far greater concern for many apprentices/trainees than were the wages they were receiving. Bullying, harassment, having to work long hours, and feeling like their employer expected them to perform at an unrealistically high level were often expressed by apprentices and trainees. Emerging from this study and of significant concern was also a range of unfair labour practices such as:

- Delays in processing contracts such that employees could be on a training wage for months before their 'official' time or any training started, and this often remained unaccredited
- Unsafe and sometimes culpably dangerous work practices
- Use and abuse of 'unpaid trials'
- Extensive unpaid overtime
- Lack of proper documentation such as payslips.

This highlights not only the failure on the part of some employers to comply with the National Code of Good Practice for Australian Apprenticeships (see Appendix XII), but also the laws governing basic employment standards. What is unclear from this study is if this abuse is simply a reflection of what workers are dealing with generally or if apprentices/trainees are much more vulnerable than other employees. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these practices are not exclusive to apprentices/trainees but that they are more vulnerable to these abuses, due to the nature of their status within the labour market.

Trainees are clearly in the most vulnerable position due to conditions under their employment contract. The training system has permitted a two-tier class of trainees to occur. Apprentices are employed under Set One Conditions which requires employers to seek OTTE's permission when suspending or cancelling the contract of an apprentice if an apprentice does not agree to have their contract changed or cancelled. If apprentices want to leave or feel like they have been unfairly dismissed OTTE may hold a hearing to resolve disputes. In addition, if a business is sold the new employer must continue the apprenticeship. Trainees, however, are employed under Set Two Conditions which effectively mean an employer can cancel their contract by simply giving notice. OTTE has no authority to hold a hearing to resolve disputes and if a business is sold there is no obligation of the new owners to keep them on (OTTE 2006: 12). Under these arrangements, it is no coincidence that some of the worst forms of

abuse by employers were found among trainees, nor that completion rate were found to be substantially lower among traineeships despite being considerably shorter in duration than apprenticeships.

The clear distinctions in experiences and in completion rates found between apprentices and trainees also reflects different motivations among these different types of students and the motivations for employers putting them on. As this research, and other research like it, has shown apprentices are typically motivated by the opportunity to improve their skills, a personal development and clear career pathway that many apprenticeships provide. For many trainees, the traineeship is a requirement of the job and this is their primary motivation for doing the traineeship. In some cases, existing employees are also expected to do a traineeship and this can be a requirement if they want to secure more permanent employment. While in some cases existing employees may find these traineeships valuable and a pathway into more senior positions within the company, this research has also highlighted how many trainees feel this type of training has been pointless, unchallenging and more for their employer's financial benefit than their personal advancement.

Recommendations

10. Traineeships and apprenticeships should be placed under Set 1³⁴ conditions — this would enhance the value of traineeships, improve recruitment practices and strengthen employers and trainees commitment to the training.
11. There is a need to increase wages for first year apprentices/trainees — those most at risk of cancelling. Wages for apprentices and trainees must be increased if any significant reduction in non-completion rates is to be achieved and if new people are to be attracted into the system.
12. While recent measures aimed at increasing the number and amount of allowances available to apprentices and trainees is welcome, further financial support by way of such things as accommodation, travel and fees allowances is needed. In most cases, financial supports to apprentices and trainees should be means-tested.
13. Access to training needs to be made more equitable for those living in regional areas, via such means as increases in travel and accommodation allowances.
14. Employers must comply with employment standards for apprentices/trainees. Closer monitoring, strengthened dispute processes, and/or a process whereby Commonwealth Government incentive payments are conditional on employer's agreement to uphold fair employment standards need to be introduced.
15. If AWAs remain a feature of the Australian industrial relations system research needs to be carried out to determine the impact of individual contracts on completion outcomes. Evidence from this study suggests AWAs have contributed to some people's decisions to not complete their training, but more systematic research is needed to improve our understanding of these matters.

Strengthening Support Structures

This research has highlighted the need to strengthen the level of support provided to apprentices/trainees if completion rates and the level of satisfaction among apprentices and trainees are to be improved. The support structures that should be available are failing far too often as demonstrated by many of the stories told by the apprentices/trainees interviewed for this project and as found by research elsewhere. The failure to provide sufficient support was found at a range of levels. Pre-apprenticeship training, work experience, school based apprenticeships, school preparation for apprenticeship training and careers advice have all provided important supporting roles for young people deciding to enter an

³⁴ See fn 12 Chapter Three for an explanation of Set 1 and Set 2 conditions.

apprenticeship/traineeship. However, many interviewees expressed a lack of support from their schools and career teachers for pursuing an apprenticeship/traineeship as a career path. The fact that many year 10, 11 and 12 students who are interested in doing an apprenticeship/traineeship often do not feel supported by schools and their careers teachers in pursuing such an option is disappointing and requires some attention. Apprentices/trainees generally expressed a level of satisfaction with the amount of information they received from their AAC at the time of sign-up. However, there appeared to be a range of approaches taken by AACs when carrying out orientation and induction programs, with some being more structured and developed than others. Those provided structured sessions appeared to have a much better grasp of the support mechanisms available, what was required of them, their employer and their training provider and about the avenues for pursuing assistance when needed. However, even in cases involving a structured orientation and induction program, it was clear from a number of the interviews that apprentices/trainees were not fully aware of the duties and responsibilities they would be required to perform on-the-job until they arrived at work. In some cases this contributed to some of them finding the work and/or training uninteresting and tedious while others found the work too difficult or demanding. In either case, it influenced their decision to withdraw.

Improving the match between employment and training expectations requires providing apprentices/trainees sufficient information to make informed decisions about the training prior to commencing training. If a new apprentice/trainee is not matched to a position that reflects their expected balance between employment and training they are unlikely to remain in training. Better matching of job and training expectations could be accomplished through a process whereby employers provide more detail about what is involved in the work they expect apprentices/trainees to perform, how training will be structured and how time will be allocated to training. This information can be passed onto group training companies, employment agencies and others involved in finding apprenticeship/traineeship opportunities for interested individuals. This information can then be used by apprentices/trainees to make a more informed decision about a particular training opportunity (Cully & Curtain 2001).

Beyond the sign-up stage apprentices/trainees also expressed a lack of support and a significant degree of confusion about where to go for support. Those employed by a group training company, in theory, had the support of field officers whose role was to find host employers and deal with placement matters, as well as provide a mentoring and supervision role. In some cases apprentices and trainees expressed positive experiences with the assistance that they received from their group training field officers. It was not uncommon, however, to also hear that they had not heard from their field officer in months or years, that they did not return their phone calls or that they had provided little or no assistance when they wanted it. Some felt the lack of follow-up support from field officers was because they were overburdened with work.

In addition to the usual support structures that apprentices/trainees often relied upon such as friends and family members, workplace managers and supervisors, trainers, and employee representatives they would also frequently look to their AAC for assistance. In many cases, however, it was fairly clear that most apprentices/trainees interviewed did not have an informed understanding of what the AACs role was beyond the sign-up stage. Typically they viewed AACs in one of two ways. Some perceived AACs as to be government agencies there to provide independent support and guidance, while others thought they were simply part of an RTO or group training company and could be called upon in similar ways as group training field officers. The reason for this confusion is understandable. As found in most parts of Australia, the AACs in Gippsland are owned and operated by private RTOs or group training companies and as in other parts of Australia, their publicity material is branded with the Commonwealth Seal so they resemble a government entity. The ambiguity and confusion about the AACs' role was compounded by the conflicting information apprentices and trainees received from AACs in their attempts to seek assistance during their training period.

For some, their less than positive experience with their AAC was simply an additional source of frustration. This frustration is not surprising. Throughout the course of this project, the researchers contacted both AACs and Government authorities about the AACs' roles and responsibilities only to receive a wide array of contradictory information. This exercise demonstrated that many AACs themselves are unsure of their roles and responsibilities as stipulated in the Commonwealth guidelines, which are a condition of government funding, and as outlined in the Code of Conduct for ACCs (see Appendix XI) and that no one appears to be actively monitoring their activities to see if they are complying with the guidelines and upholding the Apprenticeship Code of Practice (see Appendix XII). The potential for support functions of the AAC to be undermined by the fact that AACs are owned by RTOs is another area of concern to the researchers and some VET stakeholders. One ACC contacted, formerly an RTO, perceived the potential for a conflict of interest in being both an ACC and an RTO and has subsequently relinquished their role as an RTO. The scenario can be imagined where an apprentice has an issue with their training, but does not feel comfortable raising this with the AAC field officer who is employed by the same organisation as the trainers. Another possible result of this conflict of interest is the temptation to solve issues 'in-house', avoiding notifying OTTE field officers until the situation has deteriorated to an irretrievable breakdown. Strengthening the support function of ACCs and ensuring they operate independent of private interests within the VET system and thus in the best interests of apprentices and trainees and employers, are therefore important policy considerations.

The first four months is when apprentices/trainees are most at risk of dropping out of training. It is during this period, in particular, that ongoing support is needed. They should have access to good internal support through mentoring programs and other support mechanisms, but they also need easy access to outside support to resolve any difficulties that they may be encountering. There should be a government body that they can turn to for advice and one-on-one discussions about problems they may be dealing with and how to resolve them. While OTTE field officers play an important role in resolving disputes, there is a tendency for cases to be reported to OTTE field officers much too late, when the problems have become too immense and relations between employer and apprentice/trainee have broken down beyond repair. The immense case load and limited resources of OTTE field officers also places limits upon what can be achieved. Improvements in the resourcing and the number of field officers available in the region — as it currently stands two full-time staff are responsible for over 6,000 apprentices and trainees in-training — will go some way in improving the level of support available.

Improving government support to apprentices/trainees, however, is only part of the solution to improving the experience for apprentices/trainees. An improved mentoring system is a proven way to provide needed support (Cully & Curtain 2001: 35-36). Mentors should be someone they can turn to for advice and to act as an advocate if necessary when problems emerge. Mentors can be instituted at different levels. On-site mentors could be employees who have worked for the company a considerable amount of time and are at a skill level that surpasses that of the apprentice/trainee. Off-site mentors could be affiliated with training organisations and provide advice, support and assistance from a trainer perspective. The recent proposal by the Rudd Labor Government to trial a mentoring program that seeks to engage recently retired professionals and trades people in mentoring young apprentices and trainees is an important initiative. Employer associations, unions, youth workers, Local Learning and Employment Networks and employment services such as Job Pathway Programs could also work to develop innovative mentoring programs.

Recommendations

16. There needs to be better support and guidance from secondary schools and career teachers to students who express an interest in doing an apprenticeship/traineeship. The LLENs could play a strategic role here.

17. There is a need for employers to better inform group training companies, AACs, employment agencies and potential apprentices and trainees about what is involved in on-the-job training, the various pathways available and what to expect in the working environment.
18. There needs to be enforcement of both the AAC Code of Conduct (see Appendix XI) and the National Code of Good Practice for Australian Apprenticeships (see Appendix XII). Our research shows that while AAC funding is supposed to be dependent on adherence to these codes, this is not currently taking place in any form which is recognisable by apprentices and trainees.
19. There needs to be a better clarification of the AACs role. The ACCs should:
 - a. Become an independent government body rather than attached/affiliated with RTOs or private interests.
 - b. Ensure that all employers of apprentices/trainees have a training plan in place and have the capacity to provide the quality of on-the-job training necessary to deliver learning outcomes expected under the relevant training package, including that employers have sufficient trade qualified staff to provide supervision and training in the workplace — as per their obligations under the National Code of Good Practice.
 - c. Monitor apprenticeship/trainee completion rates among employers.
 - d. Provide one-on-one advice to apprentices/trainees who are confronting problems and conduct bi monthly in person interviews with all apprentices and trainees in the first 6 months of their training.
20. Early intervention and support for apprentices/trainees is needed where problems have been identified and/or apprentices/trainees have been laid off by their employers.
21. There needs to be additional OTTE Field officers and they need to be better resourced and provided the space and capacity to become involved in more proactive activities (e.g. educating employers, monitoring the progress of apprentices and trainees, monitoring the receipt and quality of training), rather than simply reactive work after relationships have broken down or problems have emerged.
22. Apprentice/trainee peer support programs should be established, whereby apprentices/trainees can access other apprentices/trainees who are further along in their training for advice and support. Mentoring programs should be developed at two levels:
 - a. within workplaces employing apprentices/trainees as a way to improve on-site support
 - b. among training providers so that apprentices/trainees receive off-site mentors.
23. Financial support may need to be provided to small employers for help in induction and mentoring apprentices/trainees.

Improving the Quality of Training

Improving the quality of training, both on and off-the-job, must be a priority if completion rates and the training experience are to be enhanced. Findings from this research suggest apprentices and trainees are generally satisfied with the training delivered by TAFE organisations. Those receiving their training from private RTOs or group training organisations, however, frequently raised issues about the quality of the training staff and the quality of training they received. For many of those interviewed it was one of the primary reasons they decided to withdraw from training. The quality of trainers and the factors contributing to a decline in the quality of training staff is an issue that needs to be examined

more closely. Is it a case of a lack of available trainers, a lack of sufficient pay to attract quality trainers or an over reliance on casual and part-time trainers among some RTOs and group training companies which is contributing to less than desirable outcomes?

Group training companies play an important role in the uptake of apprentices and trainees within an environment where employers are increasingly disinterested in training. However, the training practices and how group training companies manage apprentice/trainee placements with host employers and deal with situations when placements cannot be found are areas where concerns have been raised by VET stakeholders and apprentices/trainees. Striking the right balance between on and off-the-job training is not an easy task but apprentices and trainees, whose training did have an off-the-job component, generally expressed a desire to receive a mix of the two. The delivery of upfront training by group training companies, while vital in attracting placements with host employers for first year apprentices, should not be the beginning and end of off-the-job training they receive. Additional research may need to be carried out in order to better understand the particular practices of group training companies and how best to improve the delivery of their training.

The major problems with the quality of training appear to stem from the practices of employers and their commitment to on-the-job training. Cost, rather than quality can often drive the training choice of employers. There are nearly 1300 RTOs registered in Victoria (NTIS, 2007b), not to mention those registered outside the state but also operating in Victoria, who are actively competing to become the trainer of choice for the state's employers. Profit motives and the immense competitive pressures do influence private training providers to cut corners when it comes to delivering quality training programs. As Schofield points out:

a provider strategy that competes on price alone and which revolves around delivering low-cost, self-paced training supported by a large cohort of inadequately trained, inexperienced, mobile and casual trainers is unlikely to lead to the development of high-level skills within enterprises (Schofield, 2001: 256).

However, for some employers who view training as a 'third-order issue' (Schofield, 2001: 250) in their business strategy, low cost training is what is most attractive. Thus, while providing 'training for the trainers', as was suggested by several VET stakeholders in focus group discussions, may help to address quality issues, the problem may be much deeper and require more structural change.

Training, in many cases, is becoming secondary to other motivational factors when it comes to an employer's decision to put on an apprentice/trainee. The Commonwealth Government spends \$375 million or more a year of tax payer funded incentives for employers and assistance to apprentices (Cully & Curtain 2001: 38) but in some cases employers and training organisations have not provided the intended training. 'Tick and Flick' types of training are perceived to be quite widespread among many VET stakeholders and interviews with apprentices and trainees have confirmed the existence of this problem, particularly in the retail and hospitality industries where completion rates are at their lowest. In many cases employers would have received tax funded support for putting on an apprentice/trainee despite the fact that the apprentice/trainee did not remain in training and the employer had invested little or no money into training.

The failure of employers to provide sufficient on-the-job training was demonstrated by their lack of qualified staff to train unskilled apprentices/trainees, not providing sufficient time for on-the-job training to occur, expecting apprentices/trainees to do their workbooks outside working hours, and expecting unqualified trainees to train other staff members. The quality of much on-the-job training cannot be properly addressed while some employers are motivated to take on trainees for wage subsidies and financial incentives rather than delivering quality training. Apprentices and trainees appeared prepared to undergo financial hardship if they feel

t they were receiving quality training. It was when they were not receiving quality training that they began to feel like “cheap labour”. While it is clear that there are problems of unscrupulous employers as well as RTOs who see financial opportunity and nothing else, there are many ethical employers and RTOs committed to providing quality training, however, it is far too easy to take advantage of the current system. As pointed out by Cooney (2003: 69), in “the Australian system there is little regulation of the quality of training or the quality of supervision for trainees”. Auditing is procedural based rather than outcome based. The procedural ‘paper-based’ audit system has contributed to employers and RTOs paying close attention to bookkeeping and information contained on forms and training materials — a point which has not gone unnoticed by apprentices and trainees interviewed. Paper-based audits are inferior methods of assessing training delivery and training quality.

There is very little routine follow-up by the AACs or OTTE Field Officers after people have signed up, to see what they are doing and if indeed training is taking place. Field officers typically become involved when relationships have broken down between trainees and their RTOs or employers. Even in these situations they have very little capacity to investigate whether training is actually taking place or if some form of abuse by an RTO or an employer is occurring. Often it takes considerable political pressure for governments to react to quite serious cases.³⁵ With little regulation the system often relies on moral and ethical imperatives and the goodwill of employers and RTOs to do the right thing, and public outcry when they don’t. If better outcomes for trainees and apprentices, as well as the Australian tax payer, are to be achieved, the regulation and monitoring of quality standards must be strengthened. Other research has found that those who leave training due to poor training delivery and support took the most time to make their decision to leave (Group Training Australia 2005, 9). Through closer monitoring of training quality and earlier intervention to address training quality issues it should be possible to turn around an apprentices/trainees decision to leave.

Recommendations

24. RTOs may need to consider upgrading the skills of their training staff and provide more secure forms of employment to attract better applications.
25. Some attention needs to be paid to the number of apprentices that are being taken on by group training companies:
 - a. if they have sufficient placements for them
 - b. if they can continue to provide adequate training for them during the periods when host employers are not available
26. Training providers need to be involved in training throughout the duration of an apprenticeship or traineeship rather than the growing practice of delivering all training ‘up front’ during the first 6 months. This will help overcome the gaps between the theoretical and practical work involved in apprenticeships and traineeships.
27. The number of traineeships and apprenticeships which are solely on-the-job should be minimised. The risk being that this type of traineeship is limited in scope, rarely provides transferable skills and merely involves training that would have occurred regardless of the traineeship.
28. If the incentive system is to continue there need to be mechanisms put in place to minimise the practice of employers claiming the payment when they have not

³⁵ In 2003, for example, the State Government responded to a case uncovered by trade unions and the media where Virtual IT Training Company (a subsidiary company of Broadscope Training) received around \$18 million in Commonwealth funding for organising IT training programs for employers, but were subsequently found to be in serious breach of the Commonwealth and State guidelines (Gallagher & Anderson, 2005).

followed through with the training — having an independent government owned AAC to monitor training would enable this.

29. There needs to be improved regulation and oversight of the VET system to ensure quality training is taking place both on and off the job:
 - a. Auditing of RTOs must become more extensive and move beyond paper audits to a more broad based and in depth audit of the quality of training. This will help strengthen the mutual obligation of employers, RTOs and apprentices and trainees in committing to quality training.
 - b. Audits need to include unannounced checks by OTTE field officers who have the authority to interview apprentices and trainees, trainers, employees and managers of companies employing apprentices and trainees. These audits should not occur simply when an issue arises that requires an investigation.

Addressing Skills Shortages and Achieving Better Outcomes

The attrition of apprentices and trainees from the training system before completing their training is a significant cost to tax-payers and employers who have invested time and money into training. It is also a contributing factor to the acute skills shortage that Australia is struggling to deal with. According to a 2004 Australian Industry Group survey, 4 out of 5 firms want government assistance to address a skill shortage problem. Australian companies blame the Australian training system for not delivering a sufficient number of qualified workers and maintain that the system is placing Australia at risk of losing businesses to overseas competition (ABC 2004). As this research has pointed out, there are serious problems with the Australian apprenticeship system that need to be addressed if better outcomes are going to be delivered for apprentices, trainees, employers and tax-payers. However, more must be done than simply getting more people through the training system. Improving completion rates and getting more people through the system successfully, while a statistically significant achievement, will not necessarily address skills shortages. The decline in the quality of training is contributing to an environment where the qualification is holding less value. Employers and qualified apprentices/trainees both expressed a view that qualifications no longer held the meaning they once did and that they were losing confidence in the training system:

they come out with that certificate II or III but they are useless to the next employer ... they say oh I have got certificate whatever, well big deal what can you do and what sort of equipment have you used, so they are thinking they are selling you something and they have got nothing (employer, East Gippsland).

[The Certificate] was a waste of time ... because it is not widely recognised and I found that when I had left that position ... no other jobs that I applied for even took it into account. They don't care that you have finished this and that sort of traineeship ... it hasn't actually benefited me in any way. ... I think I applied for something like 70 jobs ... and all of them said yeah that's just irrelevant (male, retail trainee, completed training, aged 22).

The Australian apprenticeship system in its current guise has operated for over a decade. As this report and many reports like it have indicated it has not delivered the desired outcomes for many apprentices/trainees, employers or tax-payers. It may be time for governments at the State and Commonwealth level to take notice of the calls for a re-evaluation of the current system. As argued by Hall, Buchanan and Considine (2002), tax rebates and statutory contribution schemes by employers that are found in various countries throughout Europe and Asia are likely to prove superior to the current tax payer funded training subsidy system that

exists in Australia³⁶. Such an approach would help improve employer contributions to training, reduce costs to the tax-payer and improve training outcomes as employers come to 'value what they pay for' (Hall et al 2002). Pursuing a fundamental redirection of the Australian apprenticeship system will require policy makers — at the State and Commonwealth level — employers, training providers, intermediaries and employee representatives to have open discussions with one another and input into the type of training system needed to truly meet the nation's skills challenge for the future.

Recommendations

30. Further research into links between the quality of training, the training system and skills shortages, and the possible restructure of the system to address these issues is highly recommended.

³⁶ Australia introduced such a training system in the early 1990s. *The Training Guarantee Levy Administration Act 1990* brought into law a system which required firms over a certain size (\$200,000) to allocate 1.0 per cent of their payroll to 'structured' (certified and accredited) training. If they did not do so, they had to forfeit that amount, or the balance, to the Australian Taxation Office. Revenue generated from the levy was to be used to fund training initiatives at the State and Territory level. The scheme was suspended in 1994 and abandoned with the change of government in 1996 following mounting employer resistance (Hall, Buchanan and Considine 2002; Teicher 1995).

Bibliography

- ABC. (2004) "Australia facing skills shortage: Survey" *AM* program, 24 April <http://www.abc.net.au> (accessed 15 December 2007).
- ABC (2006) "Apprentice quota tied to public projects", *ABC News*, Oct 11, 2006 9:21 AEST, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2006/10/11/1762712.htm> (accessed November 11, 2007).
- ABS. (2006) *Census of Population and Housing*. Canberra: ABS
- ABS (2007) Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra. (accessed on March 31 2007) <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/7d12b0f6763c78caca257061001cc588/797f86dbd192b8f8ca2568a9001393cd!OpenDocument>
- ANTA (2002) *Research at a Glance: Outcomes and Completions of New Apprenticeships*. NCVER, Leabrook.
- Ball, K. (2005) "Factors influencing completion of apprenticeships and traineeships", paper presented at *Australian Labour Market Research Workshop*, University of New South Wales, 6-7 December 2004. (accessed 12 March 2007). Available at http://www.ncver.edu.au/pubs/confs/KBall_ALMRW2004.pdf
- Ball, K., & John, D. (2005) *Apprentice and Trainee Completion Rates*. NCVER, Adelaide.
- Bender, A. (2003) "Factors influencing completions in Australia's apprenticeship system", paper presented at *The Changing Face of VET the 6th Australian VET Research Association (AVETRA) Conference*, Sydney, 9-11 April. Available at http://www.avetra.org.au/abstracts_and_papers_2003/Bender.pdf (accessed October 24 2006).
- Bittman, M., Reavell, R. Smith, G. and Battin, T. (2007) *Living Standards of Apprentices*. A report prepared for Group Training Australia by the Centre of Applied Research in Social Science, The University of New England.
- Bowman, K., Stanwick, J. & Blythe, A. (2005) *Factors Pertaining to Quality Outcomes of Shorter Duration Apprenticeships and Traineeships*. NCVER, Adelaide.
- Buchanan, J., Evesson, J. & Briggs, C. (2002) *Renewing the capacity for skill formation: the challenge for Victorian manufacturing* University of Sydney, Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training (ACIRRT), Sydney.
- Callan, V.J. (2000) *Apprenticeship and Traineeship Non-completions*, University of Queensland/Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, Brisbane.
- Callan, V.J. (2005) *Why do Students Leave? Leaving Vocational Education and Training with no Recorded Achievement*. ANTA. NCVER, Adelaide.
- Crinall, K and Collis, M. (2000) *Unmet Need in Homeless Services Gippsland Region*. Unpublished Report, Gippsland Research and Information Services, Monash University, Australia.
- Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Programs, (1985), *Report of the Inquiry*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.
- Commonwealth of Australia (2007) Australian Government "Australian Apprentices" website, <http://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/about/centres.asp>, (accessed December 12 2007).
- Cooney, R. (2003) "Group training companies and inter-firm provision of training in Australia", *Labour & Industry*, Vol. 44 No.1, August, pp.59-72.

- Cully, M. (2006) *Kirby Comes of Age: the Birth, Difficult Adolescence, and Future Prospects of Traineeships*. Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Glebe.
- Cully, M. & Curtain, R. (2001) *Reasons for New Apprentices' Non-completions*. NCVER, Leabrook.
- Cully, M. & Curtain, R. (2001b) "New Apprenticeships: An Unheralded Labour Market Program", *Australian Bulletin of Labour*, Vol. 27, No.3, September: 204-214.
- DEECD (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development) (2007) *On-Track Survey, Gippsland Region*, Office of Policy, Planning and Evaluation, Presentation given at Trafalgar, October 29 2007.
- Dumbrell Consulting Pty Ltd (2004) *Literature Review for Review of Traineeships in NSW*. NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training, Sydney.
- Group Training Association of Victoria (2005) *Good Start: Great Finish- Improving Completion Rates in New Apprentices*. (OTTE) Group Training Australia Ltd.
- Grey, K., Beswick, W., O'Brien, C., Ray, D. (1999) *Trainee Non-completion*. Research and Evaluation Branch report 1/99, DETYA, Canberra.
- GRIB (Gippsland Region Information Bank) (1989) unpublished Employment and Industry Survey Data. Latrobe Regional Commission.
- Hall, R., Buchanan, J. and Considine, G. (2002) *You Value What You Pay For: Enhancing Employer's Contribution to Skill Formation and Use*. ACCIRT, University of Sydney and Dusseldorp Skills Forum.
- Harris, R., Simons, M., Bridge, K., Bone, J., Symons, H., Clayton, B., Pope, B., Cummins, G., Blom, K. (2001) *Factors that Contribute to Retention and Completion in Apprenticeships and Traineeships*. Report for ANTA, NCVER, Leabrook.
- Harris, R., Simons, M., Symons, H. & Clayton, B. (2001) "Factors that contribute to retention and completion in apprenticeships and traineeships" in Nigel Smart (ed.) *Australian Apprenticeships: Research Readings*. NCVER, Leabrook: 221-237.
- Harris, R., Simons, M., Willis, P., and Carden, P. (2003) "Exploring complementarity in on- and off-job training for apprenticeships". *International Journal of Training and Development*, 7(2): 82-92.
- Harris, R & Simons, M. (2005) "Exploring the notion of retention in apprenticeships", *Education & Training*. Vol. 47, No. 4/5: 350-365.
- John, D. (2003) *Rates of Apprenticeship and Traineeship Non-completion in Queensland*. NCVER for Queensland Department of Employment and Training.
- Karmel, T. & Virk, G. (2006) *What is Happening to Traditional Apprentice Completions?* NCVER, Adelaide.
- Kozdra, M. & Davenport, G. (2007) "OTTE Apprentice and Trainee Completion Rates Project", *NCVER 'No Frills' Research Conference*, 11 July.
- Kryger, T (2006) "The incredible shrinking public sector", Research Note no. 29 2005-06 Statistics Section, 24 March 2006, Parliament of Australia, Parliamentary Library. Available at <http://www.aph.gov.au/Library/Pubs/RN/2005-06/06rn29.htm>
- Lamb, S (2005) *Technical Report: Survey Methodological Options for a) Non-completers of VET and b) Apprentices and Trainees Over Time*. Centre for Post-Compulsory Education and Lifelong learning, University of Melbourne, Melbourne.
- Lamb, S, Malley, J. & Long, M. (1998) *Access and Equity in Vocational Education and Training*, ACER Research Monograph No. 55, ACER Press.

- Mackinnon-Slaney, F (1994) "The adult persistence in learning model", *Journal of Counselling and Development*, vol.72, no.3, pp.268–275.
- McInnis, C. Hartley, R. Polesel, J. & Teese, R. (2000) *Non-completion in Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education*. Canberra, DEETYA.
- Misko, J., Nguyen, N & Saunders, J. (2007) *Doing an Apprenticeship: What Young People Think*. NCVER, Adelaide.
- NCVER (National Centre for Vocational Education Research) (2000) *Australian Apprentice and Trainee Statistics: Apprentices and Trainees in Australia 1985 To 1999 - At a Glance* NCVER, Adelaide.
- NCVER (2001) *Australian Apprenticeships Facts, Fiction and Future*. NCVER, Leabrook.
- NCVER (2002) *Outcomes and completions of new apprenticeships: research at a glance* NCVER, Leabrook.
- NCVER (2005) *Australian Vocational Education and Training Statistics: Apprentices and Trainees - September Quarter 2004, Summary*. NCVER, Adelaide.
- NCVER (2006) National Apprentice and Trainee Collection, Number 51, unpublished data.
- NCVER (2007a) *Australian Vocational Education and Training Statistics: Apprentices and Trainees - September Quarter 2006, Summary*, NCVER, Adelaide.
- NCVER (2007b) *Australian vocational education and training statistics: Apprentices and trainees—December quarter 2006, Summary*. June 8. NCVER, Adelaide.
- NCVER (2007c) *Australian vocational education and training statistics: Apprentices and trainees — Annual*. September 27. NCVER, Adelaide.
- OTTE (Office of Training and Tertiary Education) (2006) *Apprenticeships Traineeships in Victoria: Building and Construction*, Office of Training and Tertiary Education, VIC. July.
- OTTE (2006) *Apprenticeships Traineeships in Victoria: Engineering*, Office of Training and Tertiary Education, VIC. December.
- OTTE (2007) Multivariate Analysis: Preliminary findings. Unpublished paper.
- Ray, J. (2001a) "A Concise History" in Nigel Smart (ed.) *Australian Apprenticeships: Research Readings*. NCVER, Leabrook: 15-42.
- Ray, J. (2001b) *Apprenticeship in Australia: An Historical Snapshot*. NCVER, Leabrook.
- Ray, D., Beswick, W., Lawson, C., O'Brien, C., and Madigan, S. (2000) *Attrition in Apprenticeships: An Analysis of Apprentices Commencing Between July 1994 and June 1996*, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra.
- Schofield, K. (1999a) *Independent Investigation into the Quality of Training in Queensland's Traineeship System*, Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, report prepared for the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, Brisbane.
- Schofield, K. (1999b) *A risky business. Review of the Quality of Tasmania's Traineeship System*. Available at: www.ovet.tased.ed.au/review/report/index.htm (accessed October 14 2006)
- Schofield, K. (2000) *Delivering quality. Report of the Independent Review of the Quality of Training in Victoria's Apprenticeship and Traineeship System*. Available at: www.otfe.vic.gov.au/publi/qualityreview/index.htm (accessed February 12 2007).

- Schofield, K (2001) "Quality in context: Reflections on factors impacting on the quality of apprenticeship and traineeship training" in Nigel Smart (ed.) *Australian Apprenticeships: Research Readings*. NCVER, Leabrook. 239-260
- Senate (2000) *Aspiring to Excellence: Report of the Inquiry in to the Quality of Vocational Education and Training in Australia*, Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Committee
- Smith, L.R. (1998) *Apprenticeships and Traineeships: Queensland Trends*. Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, Brisbane.
- Smith, L. (1999) *The Impact of User Choice on the Queensland Training Market: A Progress Evaluation*. DETIR, Brisbane.
- Smith, L. (2000) *Issues Impacting on the Process of Assessment in Vocational Education and training in Queensland*. Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, Brisbane.
- Strickland, A., Simons, M., Harris, R., Robertson, I. & Harford, M. (2001) "On- and off- job approaches to learning and assessment in apprenticeships and traineeships" in Nigel Smart (ed.) *Australian Apprenticeships: Research Readings*. NCVER, Leabrook: 199-219.
- Teicher, J (1995) "The Training Guarantee, a Good Idea Gone Wrong". The National Key Centre in Industrial Relations, Working Paper No. 36, Monash University.
- Toner, P. (2003) "Declining Apprentice Training Rates: Causes, consequences and Solutions" <http://www.dsf.org.au/papers/110.htm> (accessed December 12 2007)
- Vann, B. & Hinton, B. (1994) "Workplace social networks and their relationship to student retention in on-site GED programs", *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, vol.5, no.2: 141-151.
- Victorian TAFE Association Inc. (2000) "Victoria's Apprenticeship and Traineeship System: A Critical Analysis, A submission to the Review of the Quality of Training in Victoria's Apprenticeship system", Victorian TAFE Association, East Melbourne. Available at <http://www.vta.vic.edu.au/docs/PositionDiscussion%20Papers/apprentice.pdf> (accessed May 23 2007)
- WADOT (Western Australian Department of Training) (1998), *New Apprenticeships. Making it Work*. WADOT, Perth.

Appendices

Appendix I

Focus group Invitation (sample)

LLEN Members, stakeholders and friends

Interested in Apprenticeships and Skills Development in the region?

The Gippsland Apprenticeship Research Project seeks to understand the reasons why not all commencing apprentices and trainees complete their training courses. The project is being conducted by Monash University and is supported by a project team consisting of Regional Development Victoria, Monash University, the LLEN and each of the Gippsland Local Governments.

The project aims to

- (1) identify the factors underlying apprentice/trainees decisions to withdraw from courses and to evaluate the impact of entry level skills, previous pathways and experience on non-completion rates.
- (2) compare the perceptions of employers, RTOs, trade unions and other interested parties as to the reasons for non-completions with the reasons provided by apprentices and trainees who do not complete.
- (3) provide recommendations for best practice to address the issues identified by the research.

You and/or suitable representatives of your organisation are invited to participate in focus group discussions on these aspects of apprenticeships in the region. Your views on this subject will help us and policy makers to better understand the experiences of trainers, employers, trade unions and other interested parties,

<This forum will take place at the LLEN Office in Trafalgar (107 Princes Hwy) on Monday 9th October 2006 commencing at 12.30 - Lunch will be provided>

Attached please find the project terms of reference, an explanatory statement for the project and a consent form which needs to be filled in, signed and returned on the day if you wish to participate.

Appendix II

12 September 2006

Explanatory Statement – Employers, educationalists, training bodies, trade unions and community groups etc

The Gippsland Apprenticeship Research Project

Our names are Al Rainnie (Professor in the School of School of Business and Economics) and Darryn Snell (Sociology Lecturer in the School of Humanities, Communications and Social Sciences) and from Monash University. The research assistant on this project is Alison Hart (School of Humanities, Communications and Social Sciences at Monash University).

We are conducting a research project which seeks to understand the reasons why not all commencing apprentices and trainees complete their training courses. Through your association with your local LLEN, you have been invited to participate in a focus group, the purpose of which is to gather and understand your views on this subject. These focus groups will be held at a venue in your local LLEN area in October and November 2006.

We hope that your input, will help us and policy makers to better understand the experiences of trainers, employers, trade unions and other interested parties, so both the positive aspects of training processes as well as those areas where changes may be beneficial, can be more easily identified.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation; however your continued attendance today is taken as consent that any information gathered will be available for use by the project team, both in the project report and any further journal articles or publications which may arise from the project. While we will seek to protect the privacy of participants and no individual's names will appear in any publications, the nature of the research means that although all care will be taken to protect the identification of all participants and their organisation, due to the nature of this project we cannot guarantee the complete anonymity of the organisations involved.

Storage of the data collected will adhere to the University regulations and be kept on University premises in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet for 5 years. For the final report from the project please contact Darryn Snell on 51xxxxxx or e-mail Darryn.Snell@arts.monash.edu.au.

<p>If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator:</p>	<p>If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research (2006/870LIR EA) is being conducted, please contact:</p>
<p>Darryn Snell School of Humanities, Communications and Social Sciences, Monash University, Gippsland Campus, Churchill, Victoria 3842</p> <p>Phone: 51xxxxxx Fax: 51xxxxxx e-mail: Darryn.Snell@arts.monash.edu.au</p>	<p>Human Ethics Officer Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH) Building 3e Room 111 Research Office Monash University VIC 3800</p> <p>Tel: +61 3 9905 2052 Fax: +61 3 9905 1420 Email: scerh@adm.monash.edu.au</p>

Thank you.

Darryn Snell

Appendix III

18 October 2006

Explanatory Statement – Apprentice and Trainee group

The Gippsland Apprenticeship Research Project

My name is Darryn Snell and I am a Sociology Lecturer in the School of Humanities, Communications and Social Sciences at Monash University. The research assistant on this project is Alison Hart also from the School of Humanities, Communications and Social Sciences at Monash.

We are conducting a Gippsland based research project which seeks to understand why some apprentices and trainees complete their training and others do not. We would like to interview you if you are currently doing an apprenticeship or traineeship in construction, engineering, retail or hospitality or if you began an apprenticeship or traineeship in one of these industries, but did not complete the training.

As well as advertising for volunteers in local media, through local organisation newsletters and asking OTTE to organise a mailout to apprentices and trainees on their database, the researchers have asked staff at various Gippsland training providers to facilitate the study by allowing them a few minutes to explain the project to their apprentice/trainee classes and ask for volunteers to participate. We hope that by enabling you to tell your stories you can help us and policy makers to better understand the experiences of trainees and apprentices, so both the positive aspects of training processes as well as those areas where changes might be needed, can be more easily identified.

The study involves a very short voluntary questionnaire and follow-up semi-structured interviews for those who wish to participate. It is estimated the questionnaire will take no more than 2-3 minutes to complete and should you indicate on the questionnaire that you wish to participate in an interview, they will take approximately 30-45 minutes and will be tape recorded. They will be conducted during a time and in a location convenient to you.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do agree to be interviewed you may withdraw at any time during the interview, or decline to answer any questions which you feel are too personal or intrusive. We will seek to protect the privacy of all participants by ensuring that individual participants will not be identifiable in any reports or further publications that may come out of the data, as no real names will be used and all identifiable personal data will be destroyed before interviews are conducted.

Storage of the data collected will adhere to the University regulations and be kept on University premises in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet for 5 years. If you would like to be informed of the research findings, please contact Darryn Snell on 51xx xxxx or e-mail Darryn.Snell@arts.monash.edu.au.

<p>If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact the Chief Investigator:</p>	<p>If you have a complaint concerning the manner in which this research (2006/964) is being conducted, please contact:</p>
<p>Darryn Snell School of Humanities, Communications and Social Sciences, Monash University, Gippsland Campus, Churchill, Victoria 3842 Phone: 51xxxxxx Fax: 51xxxxxx e-mail: Darryn.Snell@arts.monash.edu.au</p>	<p>Human Ethics Officer Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans (SCERH) Building 3e Room 111 Research Office Monash University VIC 3800 Tel: +61 3 9905 2052 Fax: +61 3 9905 1420 Email: scerh@adm.monash.edu.au</p>

Thank you.

Darryn Snell

Appendix IV**Table A: Commencements 1995-2006 by Apprenticeships and Traineeships**

Year	Apprentices	Trainees	Total
1995	473	350	823
1996	480	866	1346
1997	496	985	1481
1998	594	1266	1860
1999	594	2027	2621
2000	659	2760	3419
2001	697	3048	3745
2002	866	3530	4396
2003	881	3274	4155
2004	1000	2588	3588
2005	1043	2350	3393
2006	1086	2286	3372
Total	8875	25337	34212

Table B Apprentices and trainees Australia, by contract status, 1995–2005 ('000)

Contract status	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Commencements	64.6	89.8	114.6	155.0	198.7	210.2	224.0	264.6	278.2	257.1	262.6
Completions	31.6	36.5	51.3	60.6	75.2	85.7	94.7	114.4	127.0	136.2	137.1
In-training	143.7	164.4	186.0	216.7	252.3	284.8	319.6	364.0	392.6	390.3	390.7
Cancellation/ withdrawals	28.2	37.0	44.2	55.4	76.1	84.8	93.7	106.5	124.7	124.8	128.9

Source: NCVET National Apprentice and Trainee Collection, June 2006 estimates

Table C Apprentices and trainees Gippsland, by contract status, 1995–2006

Contract status	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006*
Commencements	823	1346	1481	1860	2621	3419	3745	4396	4155	3588	3393	3372
Completions						1278	1632	2292	2447	2401	2434	1968
In-training						4935	5846	6517	6541	6205	5819	6247
Cancellations						875	1202	1433	1684	1523	1345	976

Table D Apprentices by contract status Gippsland, 1995–2006

Contract status	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006*
Commencements	473	480	496	594	594	659	697	866	881	1000	1043	1086
Completions						396	433	486	484	553	568	555
In-training						1849	1919	2091	2282	2513	2737	3059
Cancellations						161	194	208	206	216	251	209

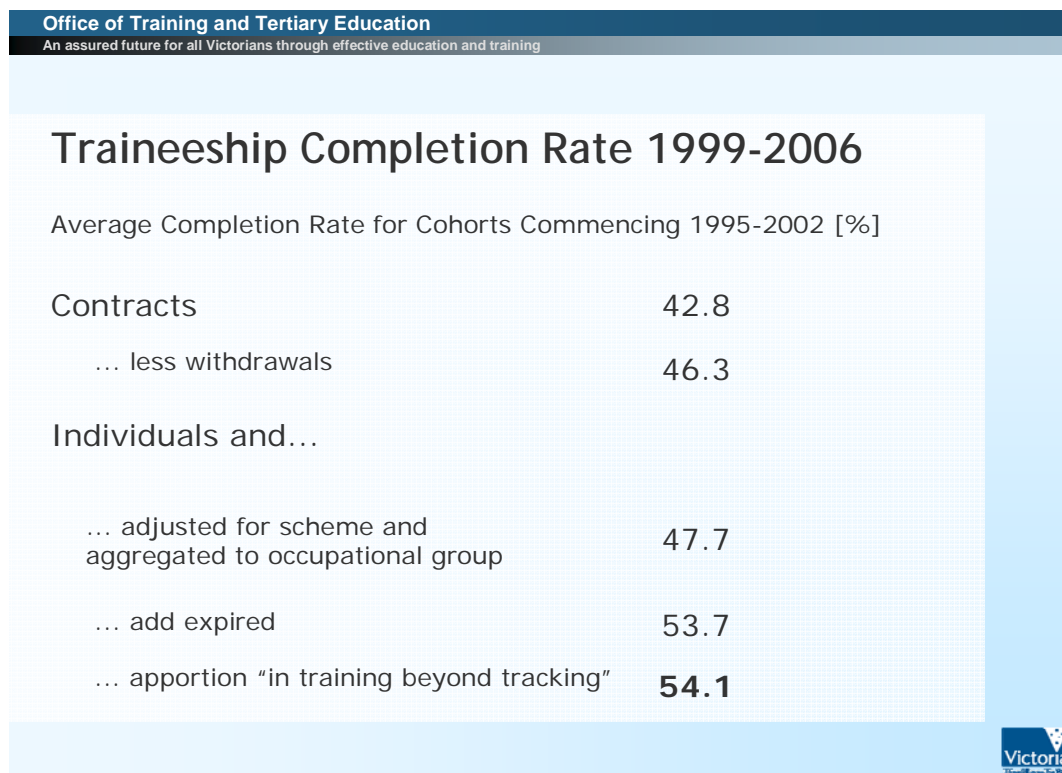
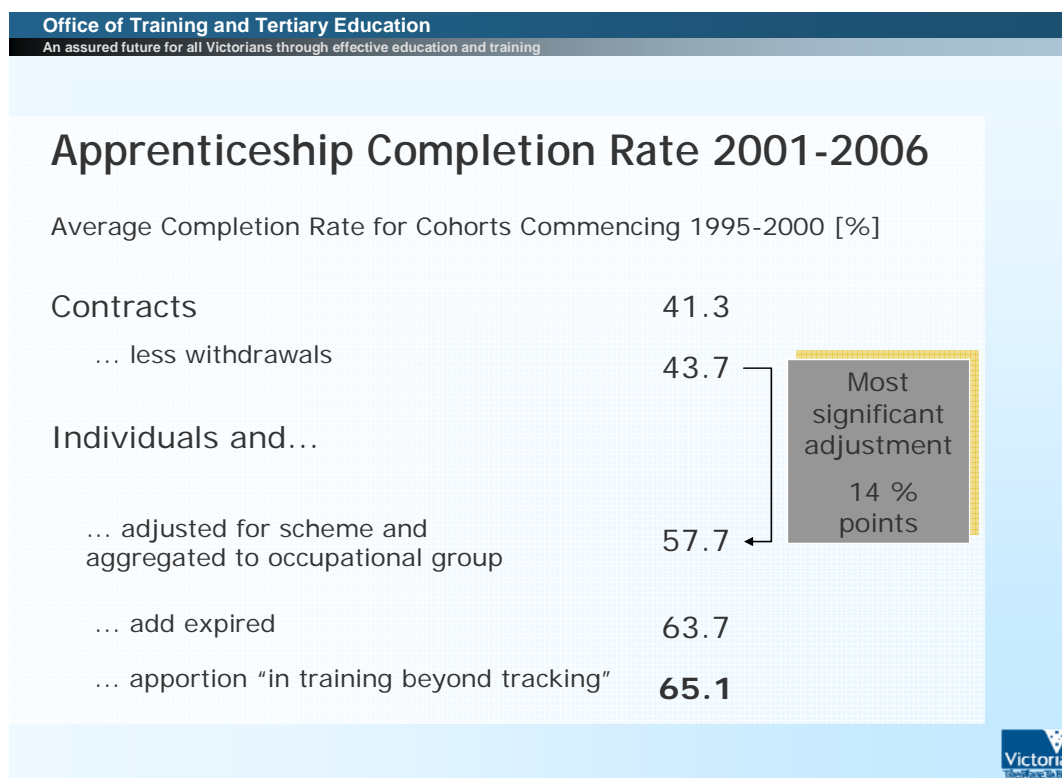
Table E Trainees, by contract status Gippsland, 1995–2006

Contract status	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006*
Commencements	350	866	985	1266	2027	2760	3048	3530	3274	2588	2350	2286
Completions						882	1199	1806	1963	1848	1866	1413
In-training						3086	3927	4426	4259	3692	3082	3188
Cancellations						714	1008	1225	1478	1307	1094	767

* Note 2006 completions and especially cancellations numbers are unreliable due to reporting time lag

Appendix V

OTTE Completion Rates Victoria



Source: Kozdra & Davenport (2007).

Appendix VI

Groups of organisations represented at focus groups and interviews:

Type of organisation	Number of Participants
Employers	12
Union representatives	6
Commonwealth, State and local Government	13
Local Learning and Education Networks	10
Employment Services	7
Apprentice Field Officers	3
TAFE	7
Registered Training Organisations	10
Group Training Organisations	5
Schools	9
Youth Workers	12
Local Community	4
Total	98

Appendix VII

Topics/questions for Focus Groups and individual interviews with employers, educationalists, training bodies (TAFEs & RTOs), trade unions and community groups.

1. What is your perception of why apprentices and trainees do not complete?
2. What factors do you associate with contributing to successful and unsuccessful outcomes?
3. What is your perception of entry level skills, previous pathways and past experiences among apprentices and trainees in determining successful outcomes?
4. What is your perception of different forces at work in the different industries under investigation?
5. What is your level of direct engagement in working with apprentices and trainees on a regular basis?
6. How do you currently respond to the situation/problem in your own capacity?
7. What do you think needs to be done to address the problem at a local, State and Federal level?

Appendix VIII

Gippsland Apprenticeship
Research Project
(GARP)

Please tick the box or boxes most relevant to you

- I am currently an apprentice/trainee in one of the 4 target or related industries
- I am currently an apprentice/trainee in one of the 4 target or related industries, but thinking about withdrawing from my training
- I have withdrawn without completing from an apprenticeship/traineeship in one of the 4 target or related industries
- I have completed a traineeship/apprenticeship
- I am under 18

Industry in which you were doing/are currently doing your apprenticeship or traineeship:

- Construction
- Engineering
- Retail
- Hospitality
- other related industry

If 'other' please state industry.....

Your name:

.....

Your contact details to arrange an interview (home phone number, mobile phone number or email address):

.....

.....

Your home postcode:.....

contact:

Alison Hart alison.hart@arts.monash.edu.au

Or Darryn Snell darryn.snell@arts.monash.edu.au

Gippsland Apprenticeship Research Project

HUMCASS

Monash University Gippsland Campus

Northways Road

Churchill VIC 2842

Phone: **03 xxxxxx**

Appendix IX

ATTENTION!

Gippsland Apprentices and Trainees

Are you doing an apprenticeship or traineeship, or did you start training but not finish, in one of these industries:

- **Hospitality**
 - **Retail**
 - **Construction**
 - **Engineering**
- or other related industry**

If so we would really like to interview you for our project on the challenges apprentices and trainees face in trying to complete their training.

If you have a story to tell or know someone who does especially if you/they began a traineeship or apprenticeship and did not complete it please contact us and register your interest.

Telephone or face-to-face interviews can be arranged at a time and place to suit you.

Gippsland Apprenticeship Research Project

Contact:

Dr Darryn Snell, HUMCASS, Monash Gippsland
darryn.snell@arts.monash.edu.au

Ms. Alison Hart, HUMCASS, Monash Gippsland
alison.hart@arts.monash.edu.au

Phone: 03 XXXXXX (please leave a message with your contact details)

Website <http://users.monash.edu.au/~alisonh/garp/>

Appendix X

Apprentice/Trainee interview Questions

1. General background:

Age/gender

last full year at school (year level and date)? – type of school?

Did you have part time work when you were at school?

2. App/traineeship details:

Which industry were you training in?

Is this the only app/traineeship you've done (if not give details of all)

Name of Cert & Level you trained at ie cert II or cert III

How long were you in /have you been in training?

Did you receive any subsidy/bonus/allowance

How did you travel to work/training?

3. Motivation/Path into apprenticeship:

Why did you choose an apprenticeship/traineeship?

Why did you choose this particular industry?

Do you have Family or friends in this trade or any trade?

Did you do VET/pre-apprenticeship?

Did you seek/get any advice/information prior to starting, if so where from?

Did you get any help with the application process – if so from who?

Did you receive information or help from the AAC

what follow-ups did they do post signing?

Apprenticeship/traineeship experience:

4. Did you ever think / have you ever thought about leaving before you finished?

5. have you had any difficulties/problems/issues while you were doing it?
if so how and by whom were they addressed?

6. What did you think of your training?

7. Have you stayed/ intend to stay in the industry?

8. When you were doing/while you've been doing your training are you aware of any of your co-trainees leaving before they completed?

9. Do you know why they may have decided to leave?

10. What advice would you give to a friend thinking of doing the same or similar training?

11. Is there anything else you would like to say about your experience as an apprentice/trainee?

Non-Completers only

1. What were your some of your main reasons for not completing your training?

2. Was your decision to leave a short or long process?

Did you seek help or advice in this decision – who from?

3. What did you do immediately after left?

4. What are you doing now?

5. What things do you think might have helped you decide to stay in training?

4. Do you think you may return to training at a later date?

Appendix XI

Australian Apprenticeship Centre Code of Conduct

This code applies to all Australian Apprenticeships Centres and their staff and represents the minimum standards to be applied in all their dealings with employers, Australian Apprentices and other interested persons.

The aim of the Code is to ensure the delivery of high quality support service with high standards of ethical behaviour exhibited to all parties concerned.

Australian Apprenticeships Centres will provide:

accurate, current, impartial and comprehensive information to employers, Australian Apprentices and other interested persons on:

- training products and delivery options appropriate to the needs of employers, particularly nationally endorsed Training Packages as they become available in each industry,
- their rights and obligations under Training Agreements, e.g., employers requirements to release Australian Apprentices to attend the off-the-job training components of training,
- packages or Australian Apprentices' obligations to attend work including off-the-job training,
- Australian Apprenticeships Incentives and Allowances,
- the operation of User Choice and the services available from Registered Training Organisations in the region,
- flexible training delivery including school to work arrangements, and
- industrial relations matters which may include referral to appropriate industrial relations agencies or employer organisations,
- an ongoing point of contact for the duration of the Australian Apprenticeship to help ensure successful completion of Australian Apprenticeships,
- advertising and information material that identifies the requirements of Australian Apprenticeships and is consistent with all Commonwealth and State legal requirements and reflects truth, accuracy and good taste,
- a process through which employers, Australian Apprentices and other interested persons can notify inadequacies or problems in the delivery of Australian Apprenticeships support services.

In addition, Australian Apprenticeships Centres will provide to DEST accurate and complete information in relation to claims for payment under

- contractual arrangements and the determining of eligibility for
- Australian Apprenticeships Incentive Programme payments.
- Australian Apprenticeships Centres will comply with Commonwealth fraud control and risk management requirements.

Australian Apprenticeships Centres will also work closely, cooperatively and openly with State and Territory Training Authorities and fully comply with State and Territory administrative and legislative requirements in relation to Australian Apprenticeships and the provision of information relating to their dealings with employers and Australian Apprentices.

Australian Apprenticeships Centres will fully participate in and support national arrangements for the promotion and growth of Australian Apprenticeships. In particular, they will reflect this in their dealings with employers, Australian Apprentices and other interested persons and organisations, including other Australian Apprenticeships Centres and Registered Training Organisations.

In adhering to the Code of Conduct,

Australian Apprenticeships Centres must:

- be open and honest at all times,
- be respectful and courteous in their dealings with all clients,
- inform clients of their rights, obligations and entitlements;
- ensure that provision of information is current, accurate, impartial and consistent,
- ensure that advice about training options, particularly National Training Packages, best reflects the training needs of the employer and the Australian Apprentice,
- adhere to the Australian Apprenticeships Incentive Programmes Policy and Administrative Guidelines when determining
- eligibility and processing claims for Australian Apprenticeships Incentives,
- refrain from making false or misleading statements to employers and Australian Apprentices in relation to eligibility for both Commonwealth and State Government Australian Apprenticeships Incentives,
- be easy to contact by telephone, facsimile and email during normal business hours as well as maintaining easily accessible premises,

- respond quickly and accurately to requests for information,
- treat complaints seriously and learn from them,
- comply with obligations under laws such as the Privacy Act 1988, the Freedom of Information Act 1982 and the Trade Practices Act 1974,
- not seek or accept fees, benefits or advantages either directly or indirectly from employers, Australian Apprentices or other interested persons for services funded by the Commonwealth,
- make available to any interested persons details of the controls and arrangements put in place to manage conflict of interest matters where such conflicts exist,
- maintain up-to-date knowledge in respect of all aspects of Australian Apprenticeships, but particularly Training Packages available within industry sectors and
- ensure that a positive reputation and outlook for Australian Apprenticeships is promoted to State and Territory Training Authorities, other key stake holders and the community.

Australian Apprenticeships Centres will be bound to the Code of Conduct through their contract with the Commonwealth (DEST). Australian Apprenticeships Centres should display a copy of the Code and ensure that all employers, Australian Apprentices and other interested persons are fully aware of it.

From the VECCI website,

<http://www.vecci.org.au/professional+services/new+apprenticeships/code+of+conduct/index1.asp>, accessed on 12.12.07.

What is an Australian Apprenticeships Centre?

Australian Apprenticeships Centres (formerly New Apprenticeships Centres) are contracted by the Australian Government to provide one-stop shops for those seeking to hire Australian Apprentices or to take up an Australian Apprenticeship as a career path.

Australian Apprenticeships Centres:

- provide assistance to employers, Australian Apprentices and training providers throughout the duration of the Australian Apprenticeship
- market and promote Australian Apprenticeships in the local area
- administer incentive payments to employers
- work with the [State and Territory Training Authorities](#) to provide an integrated service
- establish effective relationships with [Job Network](#) providers, [Group Training Organisations](#), Registered Training Organisations, schools and community organisations

Australian Apprenticeships Centres provide information, administration services and support to employers and Australian Apprentices. They assist with the signing of training contracts and also, assess, approve and process the payment of Australian Government employer incentives, scholarships, and income support payments to eligible Australian Apprentices specifically to assist them in the early years of their Australian Apprenticeship when their wages are generally at their lowest.

Australian Apprenticeships Centres also provide information which may assist employers and/or Australian Apprentices with Australian Apprenticeships placements. Australian Apprenticeships Centres will be able to refer such enquiries to appropriate organisations such as Job Placement Organisations and Group Training Organisations who will be able to assist them with their enquiries.

*In some states, Australian Apprenticeships are known as apprenticeships and traineeships. In the ACT and the NT they are referred to as Australian Apprenticeships.

From the Australian Government “Australian Apprentices” website,

<http://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/about/centres.asp>, accessed on 12.12.07.

Appendix XII



Australian Government

AUSTRALIAN
APPRENTICESHIPS

Your Life. Your Career. Your Future.

www.australia.gov.au/australianapprenticeships

National Code of Good Practice for Australian Apprenticeships

Australian Apprenticeships, which may be referred to as apprenticeships and traineeships in some States and Territories, offer many benefits to employers and Australian Apprentices. Employers can take on an Australian Apprentice who is trained to understand the specific requirements of their workplace and has the skills that match their business objectives. Australian Apprentices have the chance to gain valuable work experience, develop skills and acquire a nationally recognised qualification.

This Code of Good Practice has been developed to assist both parties entering into a Training Contract with a clear understanding of each other's obligations and expectations.

A copy of this Code should be retained by the employer and the Australian Apprentice.

Both Parties

Both parties understand that there is a formal agreement to train the Australian Apprentice. This agreement is known as the Training Contract, and it sets out the legal obligations binding the employer and the Australian Apprentice.

Both parties enter into the employment and training arrangement with a commitment to mutual respect, honesty and fairness.

Both parties agree to determine the qualification and the competencies that the Australian Apprentice is working to attain.

Both parties have a clear understanding of their contractual obligations including the duration of the Training Contract.

Both parties are clear about available dispute resolution avenues and understand what is required to terminate the Training Contract.

The Employer will:*Meet legal obligations*

This involves:

- conforming with relevant Australian Government and State/Territory legislation, including that relating to Australian Apprenticeship arrangements.

Provide a safe working environment

This involves:

- providing a safe workplace, free from bullying and verbal, physical, racial and sexual abuse;
- ensuring that all occupational health and safety requirements are addressed; and

- providing an appropriate introduction to the workplace, stressing those core occupational health and safety requirements essential to workplace safety.

Support structured training

This involves:

- providing opportunities to develop knowledge and skills;
- lodging Training Contract documentation with the relevant authorities, selecting a Registered Training Organisation and enrolling the Australian Apprentice within the timeframe determined by your State/Territory Training Authority;
- participating in the development of the training plan and providing facilities and expertise to assist in the training of the Australian Apprentice in the agreed qualification (this may include on-the-job training, supervision from competent people, mentoring, or time to undertake off-the-job training);
- ensuring that a record of training is maintained; and
- ensuring that the relevant authorities are notified on the completion of the Training Contract, or advising them in instances where the Training Contract is in danger of not being completed.

Provide supervision and support

This involves:

- providing the Australian Apprentice with a nominated workplace supervisor and could involve a coaching or mentoring arrangement, especially for Australian Apprentices with little experience of work; and
- being mindful that Australian Apprentices under the age of 18 are minors, and that their parents or guardians have legal responsibility for them.

Advise Australian Apprentices of their rights and responsibilities

This involves:

- ensuring that Australian Apprentices are encouraged to raise issues and problems both in the workplace and with the Registered Training Organisation;
- advising them of entitlements, such as wages, conditions etc;
- ensuring that the Australian Apprentice is aware that help and assistance are also available from the relevant State/Territory Training Authority; and

- providing comprehensive induction processes for commencing Australian Apprentices to ensure that they are aware, from the time of commencement, of the proposed training program, workplace safety requirements and their rights and responsibilities.

The Australian Apprentice will:*Be aware of and make a commitment to fulfil work responsibilities*

This involves:

- attending and performing work in a professional and courteous manner in accordance with the employer's requirements;
- taking care of workplace property and resources;
- respecting the rights of other Australian Apprentices and employees in the workplace;
- remembering that information obtained from the employer must be kept confidential and not disclosed without approval from the employer; and
- obtaining consent from a parent or guardian, if you are less than 18 years of age.

Be aware of and make a commitment to fulfil training responsibilities

This involves:

- making all reasonable efforts to achieve the competencies specified in the training plan and undertaking any training and assessment required;
- participating in the development of the training plan;
- attending training sessions or supervised workplace activities and taking advantage of learning opportunities; and
- maintaining a record of training such as a training record book.

For further information and assistance

Australian Apprenticeships Centres in each State and Territory can provide further information on Australian Apprenticeships. Their contact details can be obtained by:

Calling: **13 38 73**

Or visiting: www.australia.gov.au/australianapprenticeships

State and Territory Training Authorities can also provide further information.

Australian Capital Territory

ACT Department of Education and Training
Training and Adult Education Branch
186 Reed Street, Greenway ACT 2900
PO Box 1584, Tuggeranong ACT 2901
Ph: 02 6205 8555
Fax: 02 6205 8448
Web: www.det.act.gov.au/services/training.htm

Queensland

Department of Employment and Training
LMB 527, Brisbane QLD 4001
Ph: 1300 369 935 (QLD callers)
07 3247 0278 (interstate callers)
Web: www.training.qld.gov.au

South Australia

Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology
Traineeship and Apprenticeships Services
GPO Box 320
Adelaide SA 5001
Ph: 1800 673 097
Fax: 08 8463 5654
Web: www.employment.sa.gov.au

New South Wales

Commissioner for Vocational Training
NSW Department of Education and Training
Locked Bag 53, Darlinghurst NSW 1300
Ph: 13 28 11 (NSW callers)
02 9266 8704 (interstate callers)
Fax: 02 9266 8590
Web: <http://apprenticeship.det.nsw.edu.au>

Tasmania

Office of Post-Compulsory Education and Training
GPO Box 301, Hobart TAS 7001
Ph: 1800 655 846
Fax: 03 6234 4358
Web: www.opcet.tas.gov.au

Victoria

Office of Training and Tertiary Education
GPO Box 266, Melbourne VIC 3001
Ph: 1300 722 603
Fax: 03 9637 3564
Web: www.otte.vic.gov.au

Northern Territory

Department of Employment, Education and Training
Employment and Training Division
Mitchell Centre, 11th Floor, 55-59 Mitchell Street
PO Box 4821, Darwin NT 0801
Ph: 08 8901 1357
Fax: 08 8901 1326
Web: www.nt.gov.au/deet/etd/

Western Australia

Apprenticeship and Traineeship Support Network
Department of Education and Training
Locked Bag 145, Leederville WA 6903
Ph: 08 9318 5450 or 13 19 54
Fax: 08 9318 5451
Web: www.apprenticeships.training.wa.gov.au

Australian Apprenticeships – Your Life. Your Career. Your Future.

Source: Australian Apprenticeships website. <http://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/about/brochures.asp>

Appendix XIII

The recommendations from this report aim to improve completion rates amongst apprentices and trainees. The report's findings however, extend beyond those factors contributing to non-completion and dissatisfaction among apprentices and trainees and thus some of the recommendations relate to other issues such as: methods of data collection and analysis; ways to better address skills shortages; and areas where further research is needed. A complete reading of the final chapter of the report, Chapter Six, is essential to a full understanding of these recommendations.

Recommendations

1. The State and Commonwealth governments should commit to directly employing more apprentices and trainees and government tenders (particularly for large infrastructure projects) should require contractors to create additional structured training places.
2. A more concerted effort must be taken to get a higher proportion of women into apprenticeships. Matched with this effort must be mechanisms to provide better support to female apprentices once they enter training.
3. The payment system should be restructured so that commencement and completion bonuses more adequately reflect the differences in time and commitment between traineeships and apprenticeships.
4. There needs to be standardisation of the data system (definitions and methodology) Australia wide, including:
 - a. An agreed definition at State and Commonwealth level of what is an apprentice and what is a trainee and the adoption by all states of two new categories of contract status:
 46. transferred (to new employer),
 47. recommencement (using the current OTTE criteria).
 - b. An agreed definition and measurement methodology of non-completion so that meaningful and reliable regional, state and national comparisons can be made and completion data can be disaggregated at National, State or Territory, regional and industry level.
5. Regular reporting and collection of nationally consistent data on completion rates for apprentices and trainees is needed.
6. Exit surveys should be conducted for ALL apprentices and trainees who cancel, withdraw, pass expiry date, or complete their training, with the purpose of collecting information about their training experience, covering:
 - a. training both on and off the job,
 - b. employment experience and
 - c. level of support, including AAC and OTTE experiences
7. A dedicated OTTE officer would be best suited for conducting and collecting exit survey data, which could then be entered into the DELTA database. Unless AACs can be entirely independent of RTOs and employers, it would not be appropriate for them to administer these surveys.
8. Periodic analysis of exit survey data should be conducted by the State Training Authorities to help indicate where training/employment/support problems and other types of problems appear to be occurring.
9. Data from exit surveys should be made available to the AACs to better understand the reasons for non-completion, measure apprentice/trainee experiences and to use as a performance measure to identify those employers who should be endorsed as 'Good Apprentice/Trainee Employers'

10. Traineeships should be placed under the same contractual and employment conditions as apprenticeships (i.e. Set 1 conditions³⁷) — this would enhance the value of traineeships, improve recruitment practices and strengthen employers and trainees commitment to the training.
11. There is a need to increase wages for first year apprentices/trainees — those most at risk of cancelling. Wages for apprentices and trainees must be increased if any significant reduction in non-completion rates is to be achieved and if new people are to be attracted into the system.
12. While recent measures aimed at increasing the number and amount of allowances available to apprentices and trainees is welcome, further financial support by way of such things as accommodation, travel and fees allowances is needed. In most cases, financial supports to apprentices and trainees should be means-tested.
13. Access to training needs to be made more equitable for those living in regional areas, via such means as increases in travel and accommodation allowances.
14. Employers must comply with employment standards for apprentices/trainees. Closer monitoring, strengthened dispute processes, and/or a process whereby Commonwealth Government incentive payments are conditional on employer's agreement to uphold fair employment standards need to be introduced.
15. If AWAs remain a feature of the Australian industrial relations system research needs to be carried out to determine the impact of individual contracts on completion outcomes. Evidence from this study suggests AWAs have contributed to some people's decisions to not complete their training, but more systematic research is needed to improve our understanding of these matters.
16. There needs to be better support and guidance from secondary schools and career teachers to students who express an interest in doing an apprenticeship/traineeship. The LLENs could play a strategic role here.
17. There is a need for employers to better inform group training companies, AACs, employment agencies and potential apprentices and trainees about what is involved in on-the-job training, the various pathways available and what to expect in the working environment.
18. There needs to be enforcement of both the AAC Code of Conduct (see Appendix XI) and the National Code of Good Practice for Australian Apprenticeships (see Appendix XII). Our research shows that while AAC funding is supposed to be dependent on adherence to these codes, this is not currently taking place in any form which is recognisable by apprentices and trainees.
19. There needs to be a better clarification of the AACs role. The ACCs should:
 - a. Become an independent government body rather than attached/affiliated with RTOs or private interests.
 - b. Ensure that all employers of apprentices/trainees have a training plan in place and have the capacity to provide the quality of on-the-job training necessary to deliver learning outcomes expected under the relevant training package, including that employers have sufficient trade qualified staff to provide supervision and training in the workplace — as per their obligations under the National Code of Good Practice.
 - c. Monitor apprenticeship/trainee completion rates among employers.

³⁷ See fn 12 Chapter Three for an explanation of set 1 and Set 2 conditions.

- d. Provide one-on-one advice to apprentices/trainees who are confronting problems and conduct bi monthly in person interviews with all apprentices and trainees in the first 6 months of their training.
20. Early intervention and support for apprentices/trainees is needed where problems have been identified and/or apprentices/trainees have been laid off by their employers.
21. There need to be additional OTTE Field officers and they need to be better resourced and provided the space and capacity to become involved in more proactive activities (e.g. educating employers, monitoring the progress of apprentices and trainees, monitoring the receipt and quality of training), rather than simply reactive work after relationships have broken down or problems have emerged.
22. Apprentice/trainee peer support programs should be established, whereby apprentices/trainees can access other apprentices/trainees who are further along in their training for advice and support. Mentoring programs should be developed at two levels:
 - a. within workplaces employing apprentices/trainees as a way to improve on-site support
 - b. among training providers so that apprentices/trainees receive off-site mentors.
23. Financial support may need to be provided to small employers for help in induction and mentoring apprentices/trainees.
24. RTOs need to consider upgrading and codifying the skills of their training staff and provide more secure forms of employment to attract better applications.
25. Some attention needs to be paid to the number of apprentices that are being taken on by group training companies:
 - a. if they have sufficient placements for them
 - b. if they can continue to provide adequate training for them during the periods when host employers are not available
26. Training providers need to be involved in training throughout the duration of an apprenticeship or traineeship rather than the growing practice of delivering all training 'up front' during the first 6 months. This will help overcome the gaps between the theoretical and practical work involved in apprenticeships and traineeships.
27. The number of traineeships and apprenticeships which are solely on-the-job should be minimised. The risk being that this type of traineeship is limited in scope, rarely provides transferable skills and merely involves training that would have occurred regardless of the traineeship.
28. If the incentive system is to continue there need to be mechanisms put in place to minimise the practice of employers claiming the payment when they have not followed through with the training — having an independent government owned AAC to monitor training would enable this.
29. There needs to be improved regulation and oversight of the VET system to ensure quality training is taking place both on and off the job:
 - a. Auditing of RTOs must become more extensive and move beyond paper audits to a more broad based and in depth audit of the quality of training. This will help strengthen the mutual obligation of employers, RTOs and apprentices and trainees in committing to quality training.

- b. Audits need to include unannounced checks by OTTE field officers who have the authority to interview apprentices and trainees, trainers, employees and managers of companies employing apprentices and trainees. These audits should not occur simply when an issue arises that requires an investigation.
30. Further research into links between the quality of training, the training system and skills shortages, and the possible restructure of the system to address these issues is highly recommended.