

**Pathways through TAFE: Entry, Progress and Outcomes**

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## Pathways through TAFE: Entry, Progress and Outcomes<sup>1</sup>

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Over the past two decades, both the number and the proportion of young people staying in secondary schools past the compulsory years have increased dramatically. One effect of this growth has been an associated increase in participation in various forms of post-secondary education. Between 1987 and 2000, the number of young people aged 19 and under entering higher education increased by 60 per cent (DETYA, 2001). Between 1991 and 2000, the number participating in all forms of vocational education and training (VET) increased by more than 50 per cent (NCVER, 2002). This overall increase in participation in tertiary study has led to a focus on the provision of quality programs, with increased interest in institutional accountability and efficiency, resource allocation and student support services, as well as the benefits of vocational education and training.

During much of this period, the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) and its predecessors—Youth in Transition, the Australian Youth Survey and the Australian Longitudinal Survey—have followed young people as they make the transition from school. The three recent LSAY cohorts—Year 9 in 1995, Year 9 in 1998 and aged 15 in 2003—provide detailed data on this transition over the past 10 years. The data available from LSAY offer a perspective on post-secondary education that is not available from other data collections. For example, all members of the 1995 Year 9 cohort were in school in the same year (1995) and in the same year level at school (Year 9). The LSAY data also allow researchers to follow young people through their post-secondary school study, even if they change institutions or stop and re-start elsewhere, which is currently not possible with the national tertiary education data collections. This paper concentrates on one group from the oldest of these recent LSAY cohorts: members of the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort were in Year 9 in 1995, and most completed Year 12 in 1998. This group undertook study at an institution of vocational education and training—generally a college of technical and further education—but did not participate in an apprenticeship or traineeship; this study is therefore referred to as ‘non-apprenticeship TAFE’. Progress is tracked through 2001 only.

### Entry

By the end of December 2000, one in five of those remaining in the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort in 2001 had enrolled in non-apprenticeship TAFE study at some time after leaving secondary school. The majority of these enrolments—14 per cent of cohort members active in 2001—had occurred in 1999, the year after most of the cohort had completed Year 12.<sup>2</sup>

### *Characteristics of non-apprenticeship TAFE students*

Among the young people who enrolled in non-apprenticeship TAFE by the end of 2000, 17 per cent had left secondary school before completing Year 12. This means that the rate of participation in this form of post-school study was lower among Year 12 non-completers; that

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on the forthcoming report, J. McMillan, S. Rothman & N. Wernert, *Non-apprenticeship VET courses: Participation, persistence and subsequent pathways*, LSAY Research Report, Melbourne: ACER.

<sup>2</sup> An additional 4% of the cohort entered non-apprenticeship TAFE study during 2001, but were not included in the analysis as there would not have been enough time for these young people to discontinue their studies.

is, 16 per cent of non-completers had enrolled in non-apprenticeship TAFE compared to 21 per cent of Year 12 completers, even though non-completers had more time to do so.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1 Participation in a non-apprenticeship TAFE course prior to 2001, by selected background characteristics**

	Number in cohort	Per cent in TAFE
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	3359	17%
Female	3517	23%
<b>Parents' country of birth</b>		
Australia	4507	19%
Other English-speaking country	703	22%
Non-English-speaking country	1429	23%
<b>Parents' occupation group (1995)</b>		
Managerial	1389	20%
Professional	1102	15%
Paraprofessional	379	22%
Clerical/sales	969	21%
Trades	1421	21%
Other manual	1480	22%
Don't know/missing	136	19%
<b>Sector of school attended (1995)</b>		
Government	4647	21%
Catholic	1352	21%
Non-government, non-Catholic	878	15%
<b>School course and completion status</b>		
Completed Year 12	5484	21%
With VET subjects	1286	27%
No VET subjects	4198	19%
Did not complete Year 12	1390	16%
<b>Location of residence (1995)</b>		
Mainland state capital	3893	22%
Major urban region	650	17%
Large provincial city	485	13%
Small provincial city	286	18%
Other provincial	1346	18%
Remote	217	18%
<b>Achievement on reading tests in Year 9 (1995)</b>		
Lowest quartile	1620	24%
Second quartile	1631	24%
Third quartile	2125	18%
Highest quartile	1431	13%
<b>Achievement on mathematics tests in Year 9 (1995)</b>		
Lowest quartile	1529	27%
Second quartile	1954	23%
Third quartile	1921	18%
Highest quartile	1389	11%
Total	6876	20%

Notes: Parents' occupation groups are based on the first edition of the *Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO)* (ABS, 1986). Data may be missing for some characteristics. Cells may not sum to totals due to rounding.

<sup>3</sup> Some of the difference may be a result of differential attrition. Lower achievers and Year 12 non-completers are known to have higher rates of attrition from the surveys. The application of post-stratification and attrition weights accounts for most of this attrition; however, there may be additional unaccounted bias. Information on attrition and bias in LSAY is available in Rothman (2005).

Some sociodemographic groups of young people were over-represented among TAFE participants, including those from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds; those who scored below average on the LSAY achievement tests in reading comprehension and mathematics administered in Year 9; females; those living in mainland state capital cities; and those who had undertaken some VET subjects while in secondary school, particularly among Year 12 completers. A number of groups were under-represented among TAFE participants: those whose parents held degrees or diplomas and those who had attended non-government, non-Catholic secondary schools. Participation rates for selected background characteristics are shown in Table 1.

### *Areas of study*

The field of education in which young people in non-apprenticeship TAFE courses were enrolled varied according to Year 12 completion, gender and the level of study. Those who had completed Year 12 were more commonly in management and commerce, and information technology than those who did not complete Year 12, as shown in Table 2. Young men were much more likely than young women to be studying in the fields of information technology, and engineering and related technologies, while young women were more frequently studying in the fields of society and culture, and food, hospitality and personal services.

**Table 2 Broad field of education, by Year 12 completion status and sex**

Field of education	Year 12 completion		Sex		
	Non-completer	Completer	Female	Male	All
Information technology	4%	8%	3%	13%	7%
Engineering & related technologies	10%	7%	1%	16%	7%
Architecture & building	8%	4%	2%	8%	5%
Agriculture, enviro & related studies	7%	3%	3%	5%	4%
Health	3%	3%	4%	2%	3%
Management & commerce	22%	28%	30%	22%	27%
Society & culture	13%	14%	20%	5%	14%
Creative arts	10%	8%	8%	9%	8%
Food, hospitality & personal services	13%	17%	21%	10%	17%
Other	1%	4%	3%	5%	3%
Don't know/missing	10%	5%	5%	4%	5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total n	228	1144	792	580	1372

Note: Column percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Within these broad fields there were other differences in courses and course levels, although within some fields the numbers were too small to provide stable estimates of differences in enrolment patterns. Close to one-half of students at the diploma level or higher were in the management and commerce, or society and culture broad fields of education. By contrast, only one-third of certificate-level students were in these two broad fields (although 23 per cent were in management and commerce). Overall, 22 per cent of all certificate-level students were in the food, hospitality and personal services broad field of education, including one-fourth of those studying at certificate levels I and II.

### *Course level*

Non-apprenticeship TAFE courses are available at levels ranging from certificate I to advanced diplomas and associate degrees. Fifty-five per cent of the non-apprenticeship TAFE participants in the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort were enrolled in certificate-level courses, while 45 per cent were enrolled at the diploma level or above. A relatively large proportion of those enrolled in certificate courses were unable to specify their certificate level. The results reported in Table 3 show differences in the levels of non-apprenticeship TAFE courses

undertaken by Year 12 non-completers and Year 12 completers. These differences partially reflect the range of available pathways into TAFE courses.

Entry to certificate I and certificate II courses is by various pathways which may include the completion of *Year 10 or equivalent*, or completion of a recognized program and/or recognition of prior learning (ABS, 2001). Among non-apprenticeship TAFE entrants in the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort, Year 12 non-completers were much more likely than completers to commence certificate I courses (17% and 5%, respectively) and certificate II courses (24% and 7%, respectively).

**Table 3** Course level, by Year 12 completion status

Course level	Year 12 non-completer	Year 12 Completer	All
Certificate I	17%	5%	7%
Certificate II	24%	7%	10%
Certificate III	21%	17%	18%
Certificate IV	8%	14%	13%
Certificate (level unknown)	17%	6%	8%
Diploma	12%	42%	37%
Advanced diploma/associate degree	2%	9%	8%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Total n	228	1144	1372

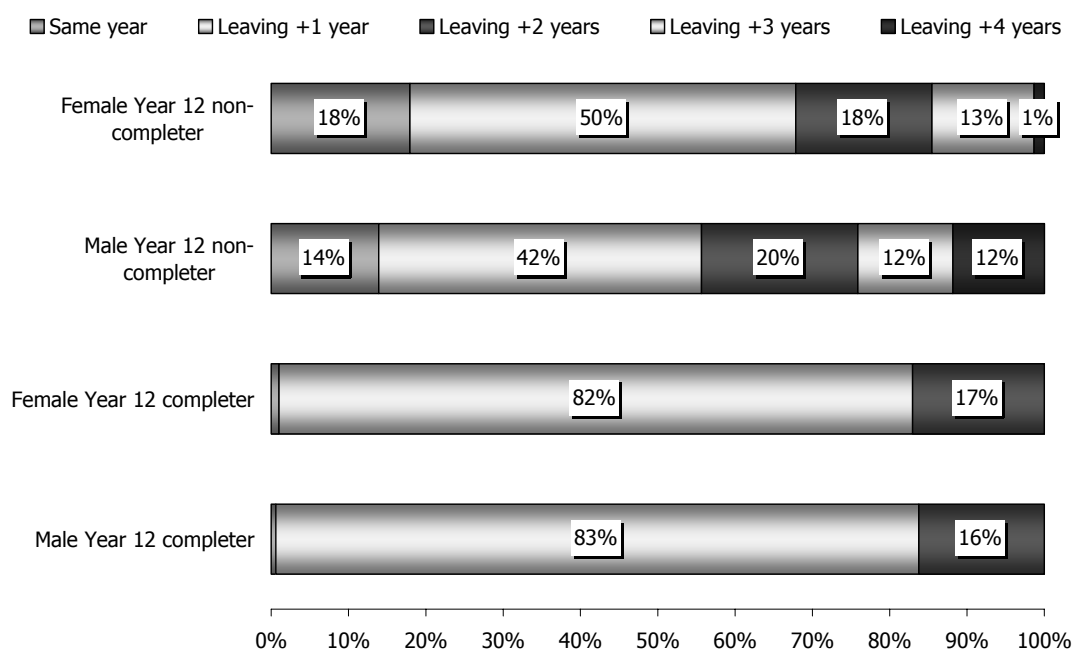
Note: Column percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Entry to certificate III courses is also by various pathways, but these may include the completion of *Year 10 or equivalent, or higher*, or completion of a recognized program and/or recognition of prior learning (ABS, 2001). Year 12 non-completers were slightly more likely than Year 12 completers to commence certificate III courses (21% and 17%, respectively).

In contrast, pathways into certificate IV, diploma and advanced diploma courses include the *completion of Year 12 or equivalent*, or completion of a recognized program and/or recognition of prior learning (ABS, 2001). Year 12 completers were more likely than Year 12 non-completers to be enrolled in certificate IV courses (14% and 8%, respectively), diplomas (42% and 12%, respectively), and advanced diplomas (9% and 2%, respectively).

#### *Time to enrolment*

Most young people who entered non-apprenticeship TAFE study did so within one year after leaving school, although it must be remembered that for those who completed Year 12 there were only two years in this study during which they could enrol. Nevertheless, among non-completers, 16 per cent entered study in the year they left school and another 46 per cent entered in the year immediately after they left school. Among this group, young women were more likely than young men to have begun their non-apprenticeship TAFE study within one year after leaving school, as shown in Figure 1. Similar time-to-entry patterns were seen among young people from this group of young people who entered apprenticeships and traineeships (Ainley & Corrigan, forthcoming).



**Figure 1** Time to entry into non-apprenticeship TAFE study after leaving school, by sex and Year 12 completion status

#### *Activities before TAFE*

Among the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort, 93 per cent of young people had done no formal study other than secondary school prior to the commencement of non-apprenticeship TAFE study. Eight per cent of those who did not complete Year 12 at school had participated in a New Apprenticeship before commencing their non-apprenticeship TAFE study. Four per cent of Year 12 completers had spent some time in higher education before commencing their non-apprenticeship TAFE study. McMillan (2005) reported that five per cent of 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort members who entered higher education had discontinued their university study and moved to the VET sector—including apprenticeships and traineeships—by 2001.

**Table 4** Main activity in the year prior to entry to non-apprenticeship TAFE study, by Year 12 completion status

Main activity	Year 12 completion		All
	Non-completer	Completer	
Secondary school	51%	83%	78%
Higher education	--	3%	2%
New Apprenticeship	8%	1%	2%
Full-time employment	13%	6%	7%
Part-time employment and/or study	12%	3%	5%
Not working and not studying	16%	4%	6%
Total	100%	100%	100%
Total n	228	1144	1372

Note: Main activity was measured at the time of the annual interview prior to entry to study. Columns may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

In the year prior to entry, most participants in non-apprenticeship TAFE study had been attending secondary school. This was true for five out of six Year 12 completers, but just over one-half of Year 12 non-completers (see Table 4). Among those who had not completed Year 12, one-fourth had been working—either full-time or part-time—or studying part-time,

and 16 per cent had not been working or studying in that year. There was little difference between young men and young women in their activities prior to study.

## Progress

### *The first non-apprenticeship TAFE course*

Students' progress through their first non-apprenticeship TAFE course, until late in 2001, is reported in Table 5. As not all students had been enrolled long enough to complete their course, both completion and continuation in their first course will be considered as 'successful' course progress for the purposes of some analyses in this paper. Sixty-two per cent of students had completed their first course, and another 14 per cent were continuing. Just under one-quarter of non-apprenticeship TAFE students (24%) had discontinued their first course, with one-quarter of this group (6% overall) commencing a second course. It must be emphasised that some of the 18 per cent who had no further TAFE study recorded during this period may return to study to complete their course at a later date, and they may have successfully completed some modules as part of their studies already undertaken.

**Table 5 Student progress in first non-apprenticeship TAFE course, by Year 12 completion status and course level**

Student progress	Year 12 completion		Course level		
	Non-completer	Completer	Certificate	Diploma or higher	All
Completed first course	70%	60%	72%	49%	62%
Continuing in first course	10%	15%	8%	21%	14%
Discontinued first course					
Commenced a second course	4%	6%	4%	8%	6%
No further TAFE study	16%	19%	16%	22%	18%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total n	228	1144	757	615	1372

Note: Columns may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

These results can be compared to the level of persistence (that is, completions and continuations) displayed by members of the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort who entered other forms of post-secondary education and training. The level of persistence in first non-apprenticeship TAFE courses (76%) is similar to the 74 per cent for initial university courses up to 2001 reported by McMillan (2005), but lower than levels reported for apprenticeships (85%) and traineeships (87%) (Ainley & Corrigan, forthcoming).

Students in certificate-level courses—especially certificate I/II courses—were more likely than those in higher-level courses to have *completed* their first course but were less likely than those in higher-level courses to be *continuing* their course in 2001. These differences reflect different course durations and the higher propensity of Year 12 non-completers to enrol in lower-level courses first, and to have had relatively more time to complete. Overall, students in certificate-level courses were less likely than students in higher-level courses to have discontinued their first course by 2001 (20% and 29%, respectively).

### *Factors associated with course progress*

Those who persisted in their first course (completed or continuing) were compared to those who did not (changed course or stopped study) to determine some of the factors that had an influence on the decision. This dichotomy (persist or discontinue) was examined using logistic regression, with a number of sociodemographic factors, secondary school factors and post-school factors in the regression model. The explanatory variables were added to the equation in three blocks. First, sociodemographic variables were added; second, school-based

information was added; third, variables related to the non-apprenticeship TAFE study were added. The results of the blockwise logistic regression are shown in Table 6. It should be noted that, as with other multivariate techniques, logistic regression allows individual variables to show their net effect on the outcome; that is, when all other variables in the model are considered.

*Sociodemographic factors.* Among participants in non-apprenticeship TAFE study, those with parents in paraprofessional, clerical and sales occupations were less likely to persist than those whose parents were in manual occupations or those whose parents were in professional and managerial occupations. Parents' education (trade or technical education, compared to no post-school study) was related to discontinuation when only sociodemographic variables were included in the model. Once the second and third blocks were added, accounting for school-based and post-school study, parents' education had no significant effect on persistence.

*School-based factors.* A number of factors relating to participants' secondary school experiences were statistically significant in explaining course persistence when other factors were included in the models. One of the strongest influences was the young person's self-assessment of academic ability when in Year 9. Those who said they were performing 'very well' or 'better than average' were more likely to persist than those who said they were performing 'average' or 'below average'. In contrast, achievement on the mathematics test administered to new cohort members when in Year 9 was negatively related to persistence: those with lower scores in mathematics were more likely to persist. Additionally, those who had aspired when in Year 9 to enter VET study were more likely to persist in their courses than those who had not planned on post-school study and those who had planned on studying at university. Khoo and Ainley (forthcoming) found that attitudes to school significantly influenced a young person's intention to enter post-school study and their actual entry among the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort.

Other educational factors measured while at school—literacy levels, school sector, participation in VET in Schools and Year 12 completion—did not have a statistically significant association with course progress among non-apprenticeship TAFE entrants. These variables were not included in the models reported in Table 6.

*TAFE study factors.* A number of factors relating to the young person's non-apprenticeship TAFE study were found to be significant in the model. Those who had indicated that the course they were following was their first preference for post-school study—similar to those who had intended in Year 9 to engage in post-school VET study—were more likely to persist in their courses than those for whom TAFE study was not the first preference.

Course level was also related to course persistence. Students enrolled in diploma or higher-level courses displayed lower levels of course persistence than students enrolled in certificate courses (grouped certificate I/II and certificate III/IV). This relationship was statistically significant after controlling for other factors. Levels of course persistence among students in certificate I/II courses and students in certificate III/IV courses, however, did not differ substantially (83% and 81%, respectively). This finding is most likely related to the length of the course and opportunities for diploma-level students to have completed specific competencies or to change course.

Additionally, 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort members who were engaged in paid employment while enrolled in non-apprenticeship a TAFE course were more likely to discontinue their studies. Young people working between 11 and 20 hours or more than 30 hours per week were less likely to persist in their studies, compared to those not working.<sup>4</sup> Working up to 10

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<sup>4</sup> The number of cohort members working 21–30 hours per week was too small to obtain reliable estimates of the effect of this time category on persistence.

hours per week had no significant effect on course persistence. This is consistent with other work on the effects of student employment, which has shown that students can engage in paid work for some time, but that long hours are detrimental (McMillan, 2005; Vickers, Lamb & Hinkley, 2003). The receipt of Youth Allowance was not related to persistence; this is also consistent with research on university students (McMillan, 2005).

**Table 6 Results of logistic regression to determine influences on course persistence**

	<b>Model 1: Socio- demographic factors</b>	<b>Model 2: + school-based factors</b>	<b>Model 3: + TAFE-study factors</b>
Intercept	1.32***	0.90***	0.56*
<b>Parents' occupation (relative to manual)</b>			
Professional, managerial	0.14	0.20	0.24
Paraprofessional, clerical, sales	-0.42*	-0.38*	-0.39*
<b>Parents' education (relative to no tertiary study)</b>			
Degree or diploma	-0.26	-0.20	-0.20
Trade or technical	-0.37*	-0.32	-0.30
<b>Achievement in mathematics</b>			
Standardised test score		-0.20**	-0.16*
<b>Self-assessed academic ability (relative to average or below)</b>			
Very well		0.61**	0.67**
Better than average		0.39*	0.38*
<b>Educational aspirations (relative to no tertiary study)</b>			
VET (TAFE or apprenticeship/traineeship)		0.53**	0.54**
University		-0.01	0.10
<b>Course preference (relative to not first preference)</b>			
First preference			0.55**
Not first tertiary course			0.56
<b>Course level (relative to Diploma or above)</b>			
Certificate I/II			0.54*
Certificate III/IV			0.57***
Certificate (level unknown)			-0.21
<b>In paid work (relative to not in paid work)</b>			
In paid work			-0.67***
Cox and Snell R <sup>2</sup>	0.01	0.04	0.08
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.05	0.11

Notes: Cells contain unstandardised logistic regression coefficients. Persons whose first non-apprenticeship TAFE course was not their first episode of tertiary education and training were not asked whether their non-apprenticeship TAFE course was their first preference. \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001.

### *Reasons for discontinuing in the first course*

All non-apprenticeship VET students in the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort who were no longer in their first course of study were presented with questions aimed at eliciting reasons for leaving their first course. Each group was presented with a set of reasons why people might leave their first course. Respondents were asked to indicate whether each reason was a factor in their decision to leave the course and which was the main reason for leaving. They were also permitted to specify a reason other than those listed. A summary of the responses provided by those who had withdrawn or deferred from their first course is provided in Table 7.

Among those who did not persist in their first non-apprenticeship TAFE course and did not change to another, close to one-half said that they had found that the course was not what they had expected (47%) or that they had lost interest (44%). While 41 per cent said that obtaining a job, apprenticeship or traineeship was *one* reason in their decision to stop study, 22 per cent stated that this was the *main* reason they had left, surpassing the interest-based reasons as the main reason.

**Table 7 Reasons for deferral/withdrawal from first non-apprenticeship TAFE course**

Reasons	A consideration	Main reason
<b>Interests and course preferences</b>		
The course turned out to be not what you wanted	47%	17%
You just lost interest, never really wanted to study	44%	17%
You never really intended to complete the course	6%	1%
Sub-total		35%
<b>Career, work and finances</b>		
Wanted to get a job, apprenticeship or traineeship	41%	22%
Had problems juggling study and work commitments	28%	9%
Financially you couldn't afford to continue	24%	8%
It wouldn't have led to a good job or career	17%	3%
Sub-total		42%
<b>Study load and results</b>		
The study load was too heavy	11%	2%
You had been getting poor results	17%	1%
Sub-total		3%
<b>Other</b>		
Because of health or personal reasons	20%	9%
Because of problems with access or transport	9%	3%
Other	--	7%
Sub-total		19%
Total		100%

Note: For the column 'A consideration', respondents could have nominated more than one reason, so sub-totals and totals are not provided. For the column 'Main reason', cells may not sum to sub-totals and sub-totals may not sum to 100% because of rounding.

Current work commitments were also a consideration for deferring or withdrawing, with 28 per cent stating that they had problems balancing their studies with work commitments but only 9 per cent citing this as the main reason. Only 11 per cent, however, stated that the study load was too heavy, so it is likely that the work-study balance may have been related to time overall rather than study load. Just under one-fourth of those who discontinued (24%) cited finances as a consideration, but only 8 per cent cited this as the main reason. Academic factors, such as getting poor results and having a high study load, were less prominent considerations, with 3 per cent indicating that one of these factors was the main reason for deferring or withdrawing.

Among university students in the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort who had deferred or withdrawn from study without completing a qualification, there was a similar pattern to the reasons cited for discontinuing. Among these former higher education participants, 37 per cent cited interests and course preferences as the main reason for discontinuing; 34 per cent cited career, work and finances; 5 per cent cited study load and results; and 25 per cent cited other reasons (McMillan, 2005). The major difference between non-apprenticeship TAFE discontinuers and university discontinuers is the greater emphasis on career and work reasons for former TAFE students.

## Outcomes

The LSAY files contain information about who completes and who stops post-secondary study, with information about other study they may enter. It is not possible, however, to determine if parts of a course have been completed. For example, among those who discontinue their non-apprenticeship TAFE course, it is not possible to determine who has successfully completed some modules and who has not completed any; all of those who stop their non-apprenticeship TAFE study are considered 'discontinued'. Other data sources, such as the national VET data collection, are better placed to distinguish module completions from

course completions. This section looks at outcomes for those who entered non-apprenticeship TAFE study and reports on the destinations of those who leave TAFE study—with and without their certificates or diplomas.

As noted earlier (Table 5), 62 per cent of all of those who entered non-apprenticeship TAFE had completed their initial course and 24 per cent had stopped their first course by the end of 2001; 14 per cent were continuing. This section reports on the 86 per cent who had stopped their first course, including those who undertook study in a second course.

### *Subsequent activity*

Among members of the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort, just under one in five of young people had entered further study full-time after stopping their first non-apprenticeship TAFE course. This was more common among those who completed courses at certificate level III or IV or diploma level (24%), than among those who completed at certificate level I or II, did not know the level of the certificate or discontinued in their course. Most frequently, however, young people moved from non-apprenticeship TAFE study into employment, with 45 per cent moving into full-time work, 16 per cent into part-time activities (part-time work or part-time study only), and 8 per cent into a New Apprenticeship. Twelve per cent moved to no work or study. These details are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8** Subsequent main activity in the year after stopping the first non-apprenticeship TAFE course, by outcome of first course

Outcome of first VET course	Full-time study	New Appren	Full-time work	Part-time work or study	No work, no study	Total	Total n
Discontinued course	14%	7%	47%	20%	12%	100%	311
Completed certificate I/II	15%	18%	34%	15%	18%	100%	171
Completed certificate III/IV	24%	5%	42%	16%	13%	100%	285
Completed certificate (level unknown)	16%	12%	45%	10%	17%	100%	53
Completed diploma or above	24%	4%	51%	16%	5%	100%	252
Total	19%	8%	45%	16%	12%	100%	1073

Notes: Main activity was measured at the time of the first annual interview after the semester of leaving the first TAFE course; persons who left their first TAFE course in Semester 2 of 2001 are excluded from analysis. Persons still enrolled in their first non-apprenticeship VET course and persons who had not been out of VET sufficiently long to participate in the interview were also excluded from analysis. Row percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Who moved into these subsequent activities varied according to their outcome status and the level of their study, as well as whether they had completed Year 12 at school. For example, those who completed a certificate level I or II or did not know the level of the certificate were more likely than others to be in the ‘no work, no study’ category. Year 12 non-completers were twice as likely as completers to be in this category. Year 12 completers were more likely than non-completers to move to full-time study after discontinuing their first course. Nevertheless, there was little difference between Year 12 completers and non-completers in being employed full-time after discontinuing their first course.

### *Subsequent study*

Fifty-six per cent of those who had participated in TAFE study did not enter other study in the period up to 2001 after stopping their first non-apprenticeship course, as shown in Table 9. This group is somewhat different from the group in the previous section, as that section reported on immediate activity; this section reports on any other study up to 2001. Further study was least common among those who had completed a diploma or higher-level qualification, but this is likely related to the length of the course and the opportunities provided by the qualification. Those who completed a course at certificate level I or II were

least likely to discontinue study, with 27 per cent entering another TAFE course and 20 per cent entering a New Apprenticeship. Among certificate level III and IV completers, 35 per cent entered another TAFE course.

**Table 9 Subsequent education and training activity after stopping the first non-apprenticeship TAFE course, by outcome of first course**

Outcome of first VET course	None	New Appren.	Other TAFE	Higher educ	Total	Total n
Discontinued course	55%	11%	23%	11%	100%	317
Completed certificate I/II	48%	20%	27%	6%	100%	173
Completed certificate III/IV	50%	4%	35%	10%	100%	298
Completed certificate (level unknown)	64%	13%	23%	<1%	100%	55
Completed diploma or above	67%	4%	11%	18%	100%	292
Total	56%	9%	24%	11%	100%	1136

Notes: Persons still enrolled in their first non-apprenticeship TAFE course were excluded from analysis. Row percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Eighteen per cent of those who obtained a diploma or higher-level qualification entered higher education, more than other completers, while 11 per cent of those who did not complete also entered higher education after stopping their TAFE course. Overall, the most common subsequent study among all cohort members who had undertaken a non-apprenticeship TAFE course was another non-apprenticeship TAFE course, particularly among certificate completers.

Table 5 earlier showed that 20 per cent Year 12 non-completers had discontinued their first non-apprenticeship TAFE course, comprising 4 per cent who entered another course and 16 per cent who did not undertake any further study up to 2001. Among all those who discontinued their first non-apprenticeship TAFE course, Year 12 non-completers were least likely to undertake any further study.

### Pathways and destinations

A number of separate pathways into, through and out of non-apprenticeship TAFE study can be identified from this study. They are based on three separate starting points—school, other full-time activity and other activity—two separate completion states—completed the first TAFE course or discontinued—and two types of destination—full-time activity (employment or study, including another TAFE course) and other activity. Results for these pathways are summarised in Table 10, which also included results for those who did not enter post-secondary education to the end of 2000.

**Table 10 Post-school pathways and destinations in 2001 among 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort members who participated in non-apprenticeship TAFE**

Post-school pathway	Full-time activity	Other activity	Total	Total n
Path 1: School → completed 1st VET course	78%	22%	100%	649
Path 2: School → discontinued 1st VET course	74%	26%	100%	255
Path 3: Other full-time activity → completed 1st VET course	86%	14%	100%	75
Path 4: Other full-time activity → discontinued 1 <sup>st</sup> VET course	79%	21%	100%	34
Path 5: Other activity → completed 1 <sup>st</sup> VET course	52%	48%	100%	87
Path 6: Other activity → discontinued 1 <sup>st</sup> VET course	68%	32%	100%	28
Path 7: No tertiary study by 2000	68%	32%	100%	845

Notes: Persons still enrolled in first non-apprenticeship VET course were excluded from analysis. 'Full-time activity' includes full-time employment and full-time post-secondary education and training. When referring to destinations, this includes full-time enrolment in a second non-apprenticeship VET course. 'Other activity' includes part-time employment, part-time post-secondary education and training, and neither working nor studying. When referring to destinations, this includes part-time enrolment in a second non-apprenticeship VET course.

Those who were engaged in full-time post-school education, training or employment prior to entry to a non-apprenticeship TAFE course (Paths 3 and 4) had the highest rates of engagement in full-time activities in late 2001, when they were approximately 20 years of age. The next highest rates of full-time engagement were for those who were in school prior to entry to TAFE (Paths 1 and 2). Within both of these broad groupings, those who completed a non-apprenticeship TAFE course were more likely than those who discontinued their course to be engaged in full-time activities. Those who were not in school, other full-time education and training or full-time employment prior to entry to TAFE (Paths 5 and 6) and those who had not engaged in tertiary study by 2000 (Path 7) were the least likely to be engaged in full-time activities in 2001.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

This paper used data from a national sample of young people who were in Year 9 at school in 1995 to trace entry into non-apprenticeship TAFE study, progress through their courses and some preliminary outcomes of that study. Data were available up to the end of 2001, six years after the participants were first contacted, three years after most had completed Year 12 at school and at a point when they were, on average, 20 years old. One-fifth of this 1995 Year 9 cohort from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) had begun a non-apprenticeship TAFE course by the end of 2000.

Among the group of young people in this paper, 80 per cent of entrants to non-apprenticeship TAFE courses commenced their study within one year of leaving school. The vast majority of entrants had not participated in any other post-secondary education and training, 3 per cent had previously commenced a New Apprenticeship and 4 per cent had previous experience in the higher education sector. In the year prior to course entry, 7 per cent of TAFE entrants had been in full-time employment.

Participation in non-apprenticeship TAFE was found to be more common among Year 12 completers, particularly those who had included some VET study while in school; among those who had scored lower on the Year 9 achievement tests taken by young people at the beginning of their participation in LSAY; among young people from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds; and among young people from the mainland capital cities. Young people who had attended non-government, non-Catholic schools were less likely to undertake TAFE study in the years immediately after secondary school.

Course levels were also associated with some school-related factors. Reflecting the entry requirements of different courses, Year 12 non-completers were more likely than completers to enrol in courses at certificate levels I, II and III, and less likely than completers to enrol in courses at certificate IV, diploma and higher levels. As Year 12 non-completers had been out of school for a relatively longer period of time, they were more likely than Year 12 completers to have completed their non-apprenticeship TAFE course and were less likely to be still studying in their first course.

Progress in a non-apprenticeship TAFE course was found to be related to a number of factors, including family socioeconomic status, achievement in mathematics when in Year 9, course level, participation in paid employment and attitudes toward VET study. Students with parents in manual occupations were more likely to persist in their courses than those with parents in paraprofessional, clerical or sales occupations, and had similar levels of course persistence as those with parents in professional and managerial occupations. Young people with lower mathematics scores were also more likely to persist. Entrants to relatively shorter certificate-level courses were more likely to persist than entrants to higher-level courses, consistent with past research (Grant, 2002; Lamb, Long & Malley, 1998; Shah & Burke, 2003). There was no difference between students who worked up to 10 hours per week and those who did not work, but more than 10 hours appeared to cause problems with students

trying to juggle their work commitments and study. This is consistent with recent research on attrition from higher education among the same cohort of young people (McMillan, 2005).

Overall, 62 per cent of entrants to non-apprenticeship TAFE courses had completed a full course, and 14 per cent were continuing at the end of 2001. Persistence is related to interests, including intentions to participate in VET when in Year 9 at school and enrolling in a course that was the first preference after school; discontinuation tends to be related to attitudinal factors, such as a loss of interest in the course. In this regard, it is suggested that better careers information, as either advice in school or better course information, would be beneficial for a number of young people.

The extent to which student flows differ between various sociodemographic groups has important equity implications for education. The data reported in this paper suggest that among non-apprenticeship TAFE entrants, students from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds are not disadvantaged in relation to course progress, and that gender, language background and home location are unrelated to course persistence. Any policy initiatives targeting these equity groups should focus on entry to all types of tertiary education or on branching points earlier in young people's education experiences.

There is some evidence that participation in a non-apprenticeship TAFE course—relative to no post-secondary education and training—is beneficial in terms of being engaged on a full-time basis in education, training and labour market activities at the age of 20. However, it will be necessary to examine the pathways of young people over a longer period of time in order to provide a more accurate assessment of the benefits of participation in non-apprenticeship TAFE. In particular, it will be of interest to compare the labour market outcomes of non-apprenticeship TAFE participants with those of young people who had entered New Apprenticeships and university, as well as those of young people with no experience of tertiary study.

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**APPENDIX: SUPPLEMENTARY TABLE**

The following table shows which members of the 1995 Year 9 cohort of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) were included in the analysis contained in this paper.

**Table A1 Year in which members of the 1995 Year 9 LSAY cohort commenced first post-secondary non-apprenticeship TAFE course**

<b>Year commenced study</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
1996	10	<1%
1997	53	1%
1998	62	1%
1999	980	14%
2000	268	4%
2001	247	4%
Don't know year	5	<1%
No non-apprenticeship TAFE course commenced since leaving school (1995–2001)	5252	76%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6876</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note: Columns may not sum to totals due to rounding.

**ABOUT THE LONGITUDINAL SURVEYS OF AUSTRALIAN YOUTH**

The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) is a series of surveys that focus on the progress of young Australians as they move from their mid-teens to their mid twenties, from their initial education to independent working life. These surveys involve large nationally representative samples of young people from whom data are collected each year about education and training, work and social development.

There are three active cohorts:

- More than 13 000 young people who were in Year 9 in 1995
- More than 14 000 young people who were in Year 9 in 1998
- More than 10 000 young people who were 15 years old and in school in 2003

Data from LSAY surveys provide descriptions of what young Australians are doing as they negotiate the transition from school, document changes as the group gets older and enable comparisons with other groups when they were the same age. Issues investigated in the LSAY project include school completion, participation in vocational and university education, employment and well-being. More detailed investigations examine the links between social characteristics, education and training, and employment.

LSAY is managed by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). DEST and the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment Training and Youth Affairs, through its National Fund for Educational Research, finance LSAY.

Further information on LSAY and copies of all published reports are available from the ACER website: <http://www.acer.edu.au/research/LSAY/overview.html>

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