

Investigating post-school education, training and employment pathways for secondary students who enrol in vocational education and training

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

Background

Vocational education and training (VET) programs have featured in the Australian secondary school curriculum since the mid-1990s. Around this time, the Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling specifically recognised the provision of VET programs as a national goal. These programs were targeted at upper secondary students and originally aimed at increasing retention of less academically engaged youth in school and preparing students for employment and further training. However, about 20 years since the introduction of VET programs in schools, there is inconclusive evidence about the extent to which their aims and vision have been realised.

The Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation has conducted an investigation into the post-school education, training and employment pathways of NSW students who recently enrolled in at least one VET course as part of their senior secondary education. In this report, we investigate four research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the secondary students who enrolled in VET and how do they compare to those of students who did not enrol?
2. Which characteristics independently predict secondary student enrolment in VET?
3. What are the post-school destinations of the secondary students who enrolled in VET and how do they compare to those of students who did not enrol?
4. Which features of VET delivery were associated with post-school destinations?

Key findings

- We found that the characteristics of the secondary students who enrolled in VET were somewhat different to those of students who did not enrol. For example, there were substantial differences in Year 9 NAPLAN Numeracy and Reading scaled scores and student and school measures of socio-educational advantage.
- When we used a multivariable model to investigate the second research question, we found that most of the assessed characteristics independently predicted student enrolment in VET. That is, when we accounted for the relationships between the explanatory variables, we still found independent relationships between most of the assessed characteristics and student enrolment in VET.
- When we compared secondary students who enrolled in VET to a group of students who had similar characteristics but did not enrol, we found that the students who did enrol were equally likely to much less likely to be not working or studying. These results provide evidence that the provision of VET as part of senior secondary education may help some students transition into work or study after they leave school.
- We found that differences in features of VET delivery (external provider versus VET at school, undertaking a work placement, and certificate level II versus III) were associated with different post-school destinations. For example, undertaking a work placement as part of a VET course decreased the likelihood that a student enrolled in VET would not go on to work or study.