

DEFERRING A UNIVERSITY OFFER IN REGIONAL VICTORIA

JOHN POLESEL

MAY 2009



CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Growth in deferral rate (metropolitan & non-metropolitan) 2004-2007	5
Table 2	Participating Local Learning and Employment Networks	5
Table 3	Designed and achieved samples for the longitudinal study: 2007 to 2009	6
Table 4	Comparison with 2007 deferrers from participating LLENs	7
Table 5	Comparison with all 2007 deferrers	8
Table 1.1	Main destinations in 2008 and 2009	10
Table 1.2	Main destinations in 2009 by gender	11
Table 1.3	Main destinations in 2009	11
Table 1.4	Study and labour market destinations 2009	12
Table 2.1	Destination of 2008 university commencers	14
Table 2.2	Destinations of students who discontinued uni. course commenced in 2008	14
Table 2.3	University discontinuation rate by hours worked at last contact	15
Table 3.1	Destination of 2008 VET Cert IV+ commencers	16
Table 3.2	Destination of 2008 VET Entry-Level commencers	16
Table 3.3	Destination of 2008 apprenticeship commencers	17
Table 3.4	Destination of 2008 traineeship commencers	17
Table 4.1	Destinations of respondents working full-time in 2008	18
Table 4.2	Destinations of respondents working part-time in 2008	18
Table 4.3	Destinations of respondents unemployed in 2008	19
Table 4.4	Destinations of respondents not in the labour force in 2008	19
Table 4.5	Hours worked per week by respondents not in education or training	21
Table 4.6	Perceptions of job by respondents not in education or training	21
Table 4.7	Reasons for difficulty finding a job	21
Table 5.1	Satisfaction with study choice	23
Table 5.2	Satisfaction with how school prepared me for further study (satisfied/very satisfied)	23
Table 5.3	Satisfaction with job (satisfied/very satisfied)	23
Table 5.4	Satisfaction with how school prepared me for work (satisfied/very satisfied)	23
Table A1	2009 Weighted Destinations by LLEN	34

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Main reasons for not being in education or training	20
Figure 2	Occupational categories of respondents not in education or training	20

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is based on research commissioned by a selection of non-metropolitan Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) and the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic). It presents the 2009 results from a longitudinal survey of regional school completers from the 2006 Year 12 cohort, who, when contacted as part of the Victorian On Track survey of school leavers in 2007, had deferred a place at university. The high rate of deferral amongst non-metropolitan school completers was the impetus for the current study, which is funded by a selection of non-metropolitan Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) across Victoria.

While annual surveys of school leavers provide a picture of their initial destinations, they do not provide a longer-term view of study and labour market transitions. For the target group of this study – regional students who have deferred a place at university – the longer term perspective is particularly important. Discovering what proportion of this group take up their deferred study (or another course) and understanding the barriers for those who do not are major issues. Describing the circumstances of those who are working or unemployed or not in the labour market are also important avenues of investigation if we are to ensure that the transition from school is a successful one for all young people. This longitudinal study of school completers from regional Victoria, who deferred their place at university, aims to do these things. It tracks the regional deferrers from the 2006 Year 12 cohort, who were first contacted in 2007, for a further two years, with a survey conducted in April/May 2008 and another survey completed in April 2009.

The current report, based on the recent 2009 recontact of the cohort, comments on the destinations, activities and views of regional deferrers in their third year out of school, outlining their study and labour market activities since they were first contacted in 2007.

KEY FINDINGS:

1. A trend of increasing regional disadvantage is evident in the pattern of rising rates of deferral amongst regional school completers, not just in Victoria but in other Australian states. In 2007, 15.7% of regional Victorian school completers deferred a place at university, two and a half times the rate of deferral found amongst metropolitan students. Moreover, cost-related factors and financial barriers are prominent in the reasons given by these young people for deferring a place at university. These trends formed the impetus for the current longitudinal study of the destinations of regional school completers from the 2006 cohort who deferred a university place in 2007.
2. The research also shows that non-metropolitan deferrers are much more likely to be from a low socio-economic status background than deferrers generally across Victoria. In fact, 82.8% are in the two lowest quartiles of socio-economic status, highlighting the greater economic vulnerability of non-metropolitan deferrers.
3. When contacted in 2008, the regional deferrers in this study displayed a range of destination outcomes:
 - Approximately seven in 10 (69.9%) had taken up a place at university.
 - A further 9.3% had entered vocational education and training courses, mainly at Certificate IV level or above.
 - A further 3.1% had entered traineeships or apprenticeships.
 - In all, over eight in ten (82.3%) were in some form of education or training.

- Of the remaining 17.7% of respondents, most were working (16.3%).
 - Only a very small group (1.0%) was unemployed, while an even smaller group (0.5%) might be classed as inactive, that is neither in education or training, nor working, nor seeking work.
4. When contacted in 2009, the regional deferrers in this study were in very similar destinations, although the proportion in apprenticeships and traineeships had increased:
 - Approximately seven in 10 (68.7%) were in university.
 - 7.0% were in vocational education and training courses, mainly at Certificate IV level or above.
 - 7.2% were in traineeships or apprenticeships.
 - In all, over eight in 10 (82.9%) were in some form of education or training.
 - Of the remaining 17.1% of respondents, most were working (14.5%).
 - Only a very small group (1.5%) was unemployed, while an even smaller group (1.1%) might be classed as inactive, that is neither in education or training, nor working, nor seeking work.
 5. The study has also provided data which indicate that, of those in education or training, most were satisfied with their study choice and satisfied with the way their school had prepared them for further study.
 6. Those who were working also showed high levels of satisfaction with aspects of their work, and were also satisfied, though to a lesser extent, with the preparation their school had given them. However, they were likely to be working in mainly low paid positions requiring no qualifications and offering little on-the-job training.
 7. A general question on the respondents' satisfaction with "life in general" at the time of the survey elicited a positive response from 96.6% of the survey respondents in 2008 and 96.2% in 2009.
 8. Despite these mainly positive outcomes, this research suggests that some deferrers in country Victoria were less likely to take up a university place than others. These included those students whose achievement profile was low and those who came from a lower Socio Economic Status background.
 9. In addition, financial barriers remained prominent among the reasons given by young people for having not taken up a place in education or training in both years of the survey (2008 and 2009).
 10. In addition, students working long hours while at university in 2008 were more likely to have dropped out of their course.

INTRODUCTION

This report is based on research commissioned by a selection of non-metropolitan Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) and the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic). It presents the 2009 results from a longitudinal survey of school leavers from the 2006 cohort who, when contacted in 2007, had deferred an offer of a place in university. These school leavers were originally contacted in 2007 as part of the On Track survey (Teese, R., Clarke, K. & Polesel, J. (2007) *The On Track Survey 2007. The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria*, DEECD, Melbourne. On Track is a program of annual surveys of school leavers designed to provide broader measures of the success of schools in securing outcomes for their students. It seeks to provide profiles of post-school transition that take into account the range of academic and vocational pathways that young people enter after leaving school.

The issue which this study has examined is whether deferral constitutes a disadvantage for young people living in non-metropolitan Victoria. For example, do deferrers eventually take up their offer or do they take up a different form of education or training – or none? Are some groups less likely to take it up than others? Of particular interest is the question regarding what barriers might prevent some non-metropolitan groups of deferrers from taking up their place. Past studies show that financial barriers are prominent amongst the reasons given by young people for deferring, particularly those in regional Victoria (Teese et al. 2007:57). Do these factors continue to disadvantage young regional deferrers? And finally, how successful are those who enter university? Do they continue in their studies or do they drop out?

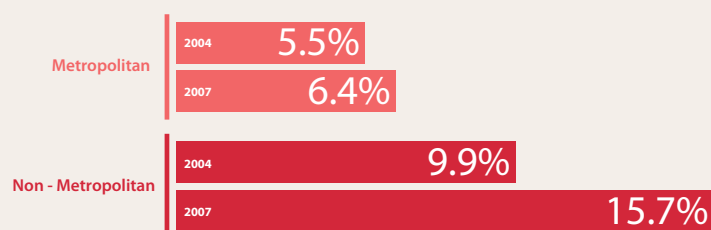
The argument that rural communities experience more economic and social hardship than their city counterparts – a phenomenon described as “regional disadvantage” – is commonly found in studies of unemployment, the labour market and investment (e.g., Kilmartin 1994, Western Research Institute 2004). In the Australian context, it has

also been applied to educational issues relating to curriculum provision in schools and the need to maximise access to technical and trade training facilities in VET (Parliament of Victoria 2006). With respect to higher education, research has found that students from rural and remote settings who move away from home to attend university need additional support (Australian Vice Chancellors Committee 2007) and that they face higher costs of university study, compared with metropolitan students (Parliament of Victoria 2006). The combined impact of low socio-economic status and rurality on rates of university participation was also emphasised in a recent review of higher education in Australia (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2008).

Related research suggests that these disadvantages have their origins in the higher per-student costs of delivering university courses in non-metropolitan settings, a factor which leads to diminished and limited provision in these communities (University of Ballarat 2007, LaTrobe University 2006). In response to these findings, the Victorian State Government has recently called on the Commonwealth to recognise these higher costs and to allocate greater numbers of university places to regional campuses of universities (Parliament of Victoria 2006). It should also be noted that, in general, university participation in rural communities has long been known to be lower than that in metropolitan areas (Stevenson et al. 1999, Marks et al 2000). Moreover, recent Australian Commonwealth Government data suggest that the gap between the proportions of metropolitan and non-metropolitan people with tertiary qualifications has been increasing, with the lowest proportions in the most remote areas of Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008).

Nevertheless, the role of deferral within the broader context of low university participation in rural communities has received relatively little attention. This is partly due to the fact that published data outlining the extent of the phenomenon of deferral has only recently become available. School leaver tracking studies in Queensland and Victoria have only recently

Table 1
Growth in deferral rate (metropolitan & non-metropolitan) 2004-2007



allowed the calculation of reliable estimates of deferral for metropolitan and non-metropolitan school completers. In other states, tracking studies are largely absent or relate to sample studies, such as recent New South Wales studies comparing samples of school completers (e.g., Helme et al. 2007) or to sector-specific cohorts, such as the Western Australian tracking program which focuses on state school students only.

In Victoria, an analysis of Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) tracking data confirms the greater propensity for school completers from rural and

provincial regions of Victoria to defer a university place, compared with school completers from the state capital city of Melbourne. Moreover, the author has found that the rate of deferral has risen steadily since tracking of school completers first began in Victoria in 2004, and that the rate of deferral amongst regional young people has grown even more rapidly than that of their Melbourne metropolitan counterparts, widening the gap between the two groups (see Table 1).

In regional Victoria this rate has risen from 9.9% in 2004 to 15.9% in 2007, although in terms of actual numbers, the rise is even more significant – from 541 young people in 2004 to 1403 young people in 2007 (author's analysis of DEECD data). Recent tracking work carried out in Queensland (e.g. Department of Education Training and the Arts 2007) also confirms the tendency of non-metropolitan school completers to defer university places at a higher rate and suggests that the phenomenon of higher rates of deferral amongst non-metropolitan school completers may be a widespread occurrence across rural Australia.

The current study is funded by a selection of non-metropolitan Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) across Victoria and is co-ordinated by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic). Participating LLENs are shown in Table 2.

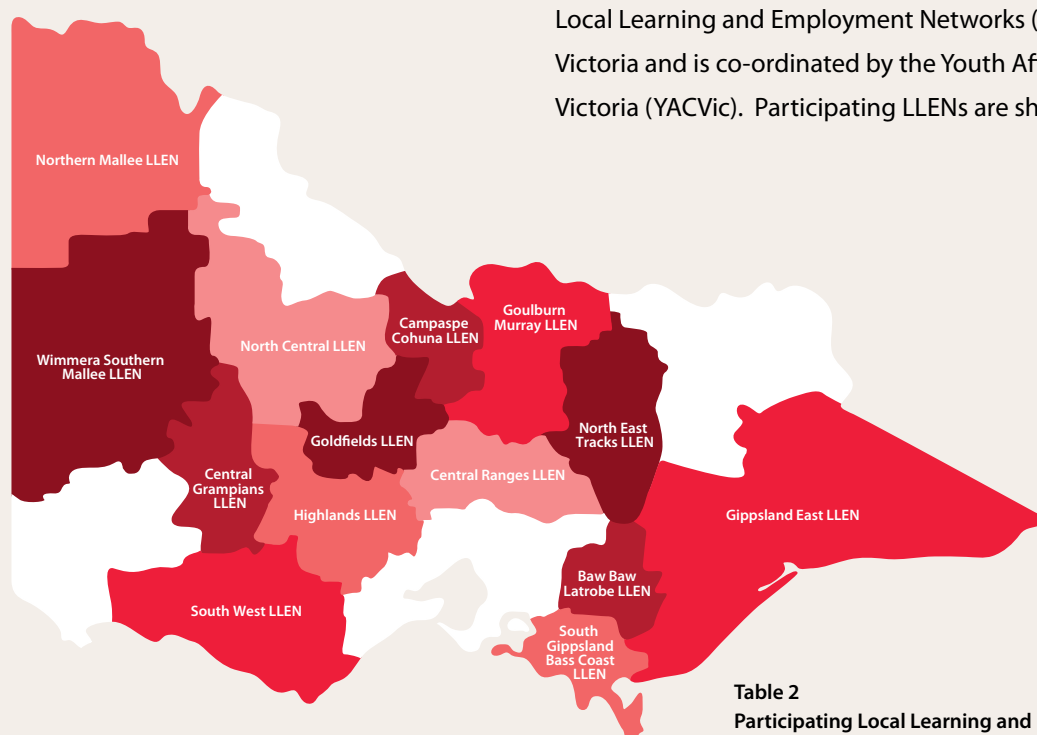


Table 2
Participating Local Learning and Employment Networks

Table 3
Designed and achieved samples for the longitudinal study: 2007 to 2009

Organisation	Deferrals in 2007	Recruited to study 2007	Surveyed in 2008	Surveyed as % of cohort# 2008	Surveyed in 2009	Surveyed as % of cohort# 2009
Baw Baw Latrobe	69	69	62	89.9%	53	76.8%
Campaspe Cohuna	31	30	28	90.3%	21	67.7%
Central Grampians	24	24	20	83.3 %	18	75.0%
Central Ranges	63	60	53	84.1%	44	69.8%
Gippsland East	68	61	55	80.9%	49	72.1%
Goldfields	148	137	119	80.4%	104	70.3%
Goulburn Murray	94	90	76	80.9%	67	71.3%
Highlands	126	125	112	88.9%	99	78.6%
North East Tracks	79	77	73	92.4%	64	81.0%
North Central	6	6	5	83.3%	4	66.7%
Northern Mallee	37	37	32	86.5%	31	83.4%
South Gippsland Bass	62	60	56	90.3%	52	83.9%
South West	95	93	90	94.7%	77	81.1%
Wimmera	28	28	25	89.3%	22	78.6%
Total	930	897	806	86.7%	705	75.8%

Cohort is defined as 2007 On Track respondents identifying as deferrers.

The current study had the following aims:

1. To recruit 2006 Year 12 completers during the 2007 On Track survey from non-metropolitan Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) for a study of deferment in non-metropolitan Victoria.
2. To survey non-metropolitan deferrers in 2008 and 2009 to determine their post-schooling destinations and pathways.
3. To analyse data and provide a written report on the destinations and pathways of deferrers in 2008, with data broken out by participating LLEN.
4. To analyse data and provide a written report on the destinations and pathways of deferrers in 2009, with data broken out by participating LLEN.

Deferral study survey sample

The survey was designed to capture the transition experiences over a two year period of regional school completers who had deferred a place at university. In broad terms, the target sample was school completers

from the 2006 Year 12 cohort who were located in non-metropolitan Victoria and who had deferred a university offer in 2007. For the purposes of this survey, the sample was defined as consisting of Year 12 school completers, who:

- Identified as deferrers when contacted during the 2007 On Track survey
- Attended a school located in one of the 14 LLENs participating in the study
- Agreed to be recontacted as part of the longitudinal deferral study.

Table 3 presents the designed and achieved sample sizes, broken out by LLEN. The “deferrals” column reports the number of school completers who identified as deferrers when contacted as part of the On Track survey in 2007. The next column reports the proportion of deferrers who were recruited (i.e. who agreed to be recontacted as part of the deferral study in 2008). The “surveyed” column reports the numbers of actual participants in the survey, while the final column reports participation in the survey as a proportion of all possible

deferrers, as identified in the “deferrals” column.

Both the recruitment and participation rates for the study were very high. Of the 930 deferrers identified in 2007, 96.5% agreed to be recontacted for the 2008 survey (897 recruits). Of this group, 89.9% were contacted and participated in the study in 2008 (806 respondents). Overall, 86.7% of the eligible cohort took part in the first survey, with rates of participation varying from 80.4% to 94.7% across individual LLENs. Of these 806 respondents, 705 were contacted in the second survey in 2009, resulting in just over three-quarters of the original cohort of deferrers remaining in the survey until the end.

While these survey participation rates point to a robust and reliable sample for the purposes of this analysis, they should not be taken as an accurate indicator of the dimensions of the phenomenon of early leaving. The numbers above almost certainly underestimate the original numbers of deferrers in each LLEN. On Track studies typically survey approximately only 70% of the eligible school completer

cohort, suggesting that there are considerably more than 930 deferrers in the 14 participating LLENs.

Characteristics of the sample

Compared with the original cohort of non-metropolitan deferrers:

It is important to examine the achieved sample in terms of its achievement, gender, and socio-economic status (SES) profiles. Table 4 compares these characteristics of the survey respondents contacted in 2009 with those of all the deferrers in the participating LLENs identified in the 2007 On Track survey. It can be seen that on all the measures reported, the final achieved sample is virtually identical to the original cohort of deferrers identified in the On Track survey. This reduces the likelihood of bias in the outcomes reported for the respondents in 2009 and strongly suggests that the final survey sample is representative of the broader cohort of non-metropolitan deferrers identified in 2007.

Table 4
Comparison with 2007 deferrers from participating LLENs

	2007 non-metro* deferrers	2009 achieved sample
Gender	Male	42.5%
	Female	57.5%
Achievement	Lowest quartile	13.9%
	Next lowest quartile	24.6%
	Next highest quartile	35.7%
	Highest quartile	25.8%
Socio-economic status	Lowest quartile	45.1%
	Next lowest quartile	36.9%
	Next highest quartile	15.9%
	Highest quartile	2.2%

* From participating LLENs

Compared with all deferrers:

The final achieved sample can also be usefully compared with all deferrers across Victoria in 2007 – the broader cohort of Year 12 completers from this sample was drawn (see Table 5). Once again, in terms of gender, the two groups are very similar. In terms of achievement, which is based on a composite measure of General Achievement Test (GAT) scores, the two groups are also very similar, suggesting that the non-metropolitan deferrers in our final achieved survey sample have a very similar achievement profile to the broader population of deferrers across Victoria. However, the final factor, socio-economic status (SES), which is based on a SEIFA (socio-economic index for addresses) value based on their home address, shows significant differences between the final achieved sample and the broader population of deferrers, as identified in the 2007 On Track survey. While deferrers in the broader population are more evenly dispersed across the four SES categories, those in the sample are heavily concentrated in

the two lowest SES categories, with nearly half (45.2%) of the group in the lowest SES quartile. More than eight in 10 (82.8%) are in the two lowest quartiles of socio-economic status. This suggests that non-metropolitan deferrers, as represented by the respondents in this study, are more likely to come from a much lower socio-economic status background.

This important finding highlights the greater economic vulnerability of non-metropolitan deferrers and suggests that the higher deferral rates evident amongst non-metropolitan students may be influenced by the impact of socio-economic status on the decisions taken by this group of school completers, particularly as this relates to the costs of living away from home, course fees and costs of travel.

Weighting

The final achieved sample has been weighted to reflect the original destinations of the deferrers in 2008, in order to avoid bias.

Table 5
Comparison with all 2007 deferrers

	2007 all deferrers	2009 achieved sample
Gender	Male	41.9%
	Female	58.1%
Achievement	Lowest quartile	11.9%
	Next lowest quartile	21.9%
	Next highest quartile	38.9%
	Highest quartile	27.3%
Socio-economic status	Lowest quartile	45.2%
	Next lowest quartile	36.9%
	Next highest quartile	16.0%
	Highest quartile	1.8%

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

- Chapter 1** Examines the study and labour market situation of respondents in 2009.
- Chapter 2** Examines the current situation and progress of those respondents who had entered university in 2008.
- Chapter 3** Examines the current situation and progress of those respondents who had entered vocational education and training in 2008.
- Chapter 4** Looks at the current situation and progress of those who were not in education or training in 2008.
- Chapter 5** Examines the respondents' satisfaction with their choices and provides some concluding remarks on the main themes and findings of the study.
- Chapter 6** Contains concluding remarks.
- Appendix 1** Includes a collection of case studies written by LLEN personnel from rural and regional Victoria. They give contemporary accounts of hardship that exists as a consequence of having to leave home in order to study.
- Appendix 2** Reports detailed 2009 destination data broken out by participating LLEN.



CHAPTER 1

MAIN ACTIVITIES IN 2009

This section examines the main destinations of Victorian regional school completers from the 2006 Year 12 cohort, in their third year out of school. It is important to note that young people contacted in the survey were asked detailed questions regarding both their study and their labour market situations. These were used to construct “main” destinations, for example university student or apprentice or full-time worker. These are reported in Table 1.1 and Figure 1. However, students may also be in the labour market, usually as part-time workers, but sometimes seeking work. Conversely, it is possible to be neither a student nor in the labour market, i.e. not working and not seeking work. These more detailed destinations, which illustrate both the labour market and study and training destinations of our respondents, are presented in Table 1.3.

Main activities in 2008 and 2009

For a detailed discussion of the activities and views of the cohort in 2008 (in their second year out of school) please see the previous report (Polesel 2008).

This section presents a summary of the destinations in 2008 and 2009 of regional deferrers who completed Year 12 in 2006 (see Table 1.1).

The left side of the table shows their 2008 destinations, while the right shows their destinations when recontacted in 2009. This table shows that 69.9% of the group were attending university in 2008. A further 9.3% were in a VET program and 3.1% were combining employment with training as apprentices or trainees. In total, 82.3% were in some form of recognised education or training.

The remaining respondents were not in education or training of any kind. Most were working full-time or part-time – 16.2%. Few were unemployed (1.0%), and a very small group (0.5%) was inactive, i.e. they were not in education or training and were neither working nor looking for work.

Table 1.1
Main destinations in 2008 and 2009

	2008 Destination		2009 Destination	
	#	%	#	%
University	563	69.9	553	68.7
VET Cert 4+	58	7.2	49	6.0
Entry-level VET	17	2.1	8	1.0
Apprenticeship	10	1.2	26	3.2
Traineeship	15	1.9	32	4.0
Working full-time	92	11.4	85	10.5
Working part-time	39	4.8	32	4.0
Unemployed	8	1.0	12	1.5
Inactive	4	0.5	9	1.1
Total	806	100.0	806	100.0

The activities of this group of young people in 2009 were not dissimilar. Almost the same proportion (68.7%) were in university as the year before, although some of the previous year's university students had discontinued and other new students had commenced in 2009. The proportion in VET had fallen slightly to 7.0%, but the proportion in apprenticeships and traineeships had risen to 7.2%. Overall, the proportion in education or training was marginally higher than in the previous year - 82.9%. The proportions in the various labour market destinations were very similar to the previous year. Gender differences are reported in Table 1.2.

The 2009 destinations can also be examined in terms of progression from the activity which respondents reported when surveyed in 2008. Such a view is summarised in Table 1.3.

Table 1.2
Main destinations in 2009 by gender

	Males		Females	
	#	%	#	%
University	227	67.2	326	70.0
VET Cert 4+	20	5.9	28	6.0
Entry-level VET	2	0.6	6	1.3
Apprenticeship	18	5.3	7	1.5
Traineeship	13	3.8	20	4.3
Working full-time	40	11.8	45	9.7
Working part-time	8	2.4	24	5.2
Unemployed	8	2.4	4	0.9
Inactive	2	0.6	6	1.3
Total	338	100.0	466	100.0

Table 1.3
Main destinations in 2009

2008 Activity	University	VET Cert IV+	Entry-level VET	Apprenticeship	Traineeship	Full-time work	Part-time work	Unemployed	Inactive
University	91.4%	1.4%	0.8%	0.2%	0.8%	2.6%	2.0%	0%	0.6%
VET Cert 4+	15.4%	55.8%	0%	0%	1.9%	17.3%	5.8%	3.8%	0%
Entry-level VET	42.9%	7.1%	14.3%	7.1%	7.1%	14.3%	7.1%	0%	0%
Apprenticeship	11.1%	0%	0%	88.9%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Traineeship	14.3%	0%	0%	0%	42.9%	28.6%	14.3%	0%	0%
Full-time work	12.9%	5.7%	1.4%	14.3%	10.0%	47.1%	2.9%	2.9%	2.9%
Part-time work	17.2%	0%	0%	3.4%	20.7%	24.1%	20.7%	6.9%	6.9%
Unemployed	0%	25.0%	0%	0%	25.0%	0%	25.0%	25.0%	0%
Inactive	25.0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	25.0%	50.0%	0%	0%

The 2009 destinations of the cohort are shown in Table 1.3 on the basis of their 2008 main activity. The table presents row percentages, which are the proportions of each group identified in 2008. For example, the first row shows that, of the deferrers who entered university in 2008, 91.4 per cent were still in university, while 2.6 per cent were working full-time. Similarly, of the respondents who were apprentices when surveyed in 2008, 88.9% were still apprentices in 2009. A detailed analysis, based on the trajectory of respondents in each of these 2008 starting points, follows in the ensuing chapters.

Table 1.4 presents a cross-tabulation of study level and labour market destinations, providing a more nuanced picture than that presented in Table 1.1. For example, while university degree students were previously presented as a single category, it is possible to see now their labour market

destinations – working full-time or part-time, unemployed or not in the labour market. This is also the case for young people in other study destinations. This shows that the proportion of young people in the labour market is actually much higher than shown in Table 1.1. For example, the number of part-time workers and the number of young people seeking work is much higher than can be gleaned from the summary destinations, even though most of these are university or VET students, whose labour market status may not constitute their primary activity or focus.

Similarly, the large number of respondents who are not in the labour market is principally made up of university students, who are not working and not seeking work. Once again, these data closely resemble the situation of the respondents when surveyed in 2008, although, as noted, the number of apprentices and trainees has risen.

Table 1.4
Study and labour market destinations 2009

	University degree		VET		Not in education or training		All
	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Not in the labour force	200	36.2	22	17.7	0	0.0	222
Apprentice/trainee	0	0.0	58	46.8	0	0.0	58
Working full-time	9	1.6	9	7.3	85	65.9	103
Working part-time	266	48.1	25	20.2	32	24.8	323
Unemployed	78	14.1	10	8.1	12	9.3	100
Total	553	100.0	124	100.0	129	100.0	806



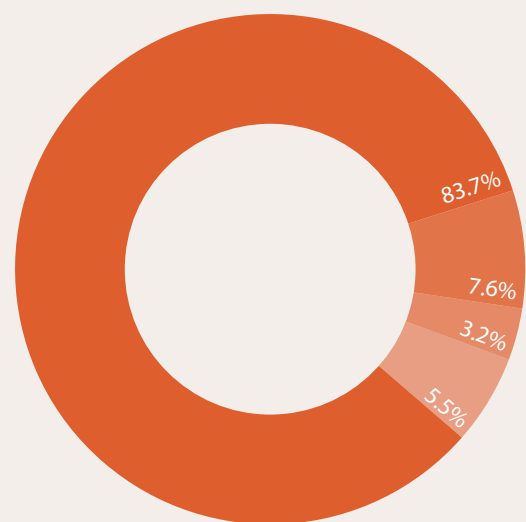
CHAPTER 2

THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

The 2008 survey of deferrers found that the most likely outcome for a regional deferrer two years out from school was the commencement of the university course they deferred or of another university course. In all, 563 of our 806 deferrers took up a place at university in that year. Of these, most (458) took up the course they had deferred the previous year, with a further 105 taking up a different university course. This chapter examines the pathways of the 563 young people who commenced university in 2008.

In 2009, over nine in 10 (91.4% or 514) of the 563 who commenced university in 2008 were still at university. Of these, 471 were still in the same course, while 43 were doing a different course¹. A relatively small number – 49 – had dropped out of university. Table 2.1 reports the summary destinations for those who commenced university in 2008.

Table 2.1
Destination of 2008 university commencers

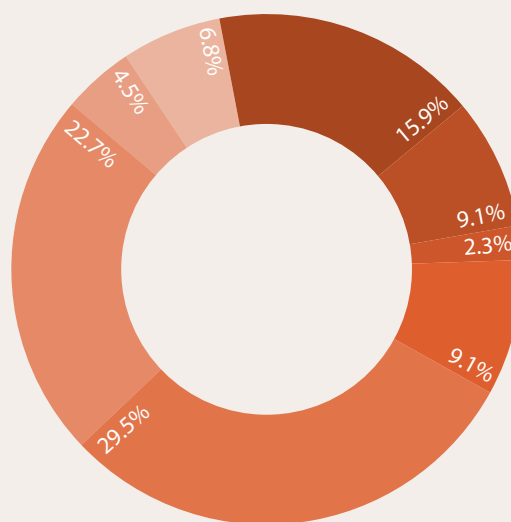


Still in the same university course	471
In a different university course	43
Discontinued university – other study/training	18
Discontinued university – not in study/training	31
	563

Table 2.2 below reports the 2009 destinations of those who discontinued. Most had entered the labour market – nearly 57 per cent, with most of these working and only two respondents currently unemployed. Just over one third had taken up an alternative education or training option, with most of these entering campus-based VET courses, in addition to one apprentice and four trainees.

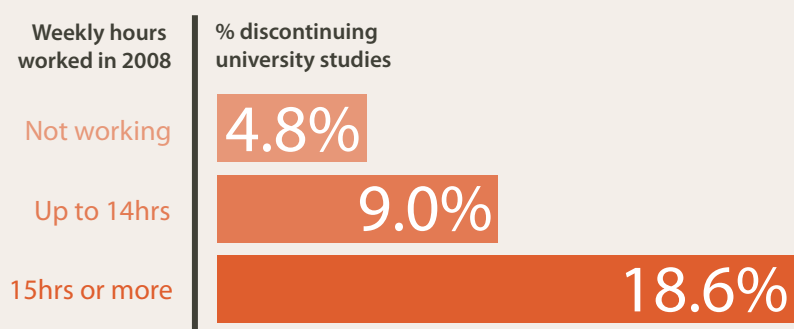
The main reason given for not continuing was that they did not like their course (65.3 per cent). A relatively small proportion cited financial pressures (8.2 per cent) although a further insight into the role of such pressures may be found in the data relating to hours worked while they were at university in 2008. The 2008 interim report from this project noted that the long

Table 2.2
Destinations of students who discontinued university course commenced in 2008



VET Cert IV+	8
VET EL	4
Apprentice	1
Trainee	4
Full-Time Work	14
Part-Time Work	11
Unemployed	2
Inactive	3
	49

Table 2.3
University discontinuation rate by hours worked at last contact



*Statistically significant – Pearson Chi-square value = 18.007. Asymp. Sig (2-sided): 0.000

hours worked by some students, as reported in their interviews in 2008, could place unsustainable pressures on their studies. Although the majority of students in 2008 were found to be working ten or fewer hours per week, a large group was working between 10 and 20 hours per week, and a smaller but significant group was working 21 hours or more per week. The longer hours worked by nearly half of the student cohort at the time raised concerns regarding the balance of study and work that these students might be able to achieve.

Table 2.3 below indicates that those university students working longer hours in 2008 were in fact more likely to have dropped out when recontacted in 2009. The table indicates a strong relationship between working long hours and discontinuation of their studies, with students' likelihood of dropping out increasing with the numbers of hours worked per week.

This suggests that, although financial pressures may not always be specifically cited, they may nevertheless be exercising a negative impact through the effects of long hours of part-time work.



¹ In fact these 514 university continuers had been joined by a further 39 young people entering university for the first time in 2009.

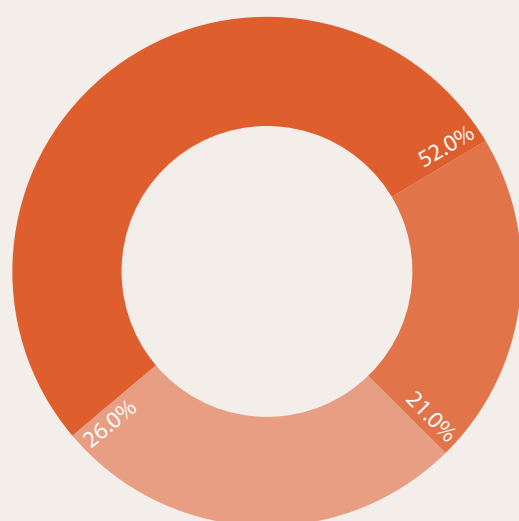
CHAPTER 3

THE VET STUDENTS

In 2008, 100 (or 12.4%) of the deferrers in our study entered vocational education and training, including apprenticeships and traineeships. Most of these were in course-based study in TAFE and private VET providers – 9.3%. Of these, 58 (7.2%) were in courses at Certificate IV level, Diploma level or Advanced Diploma level. A further 17 (2.1%) were in courses at Certificate I, II or III level. In addition, 15 respondents entered traineeships (1.9%) and 10 entered apprenticeships (1.2%).

The current activities of the respondents in each of these categories are reported in the tables below. Of the 58 respondents who commenced a VET course at Certificate IV, Diploma or Advanced Diploma level in 2008, 30 are still in the same course (see Table 3.1). A further 12 had changed course. In all 74% were still in education or training.

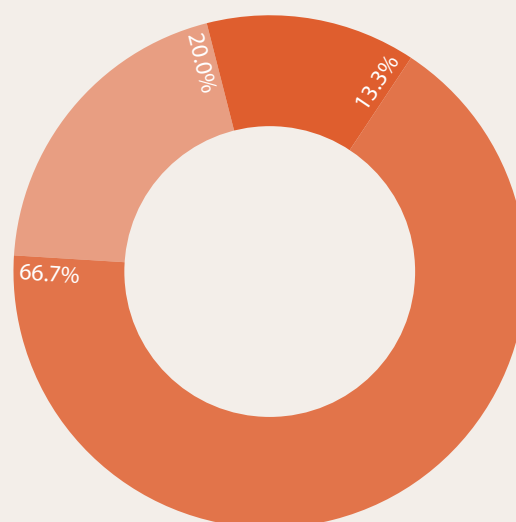
Table 3.1
Destination of 2008 VET Cert IV+ commencers



Still in the same VET course	30
Changed course	12
Not in education or training	15
(rounded weighted total)	58

Similarly, of those who had commenced a VET course at a lower level (or entry level), most were still in education or training, although a larger proportion had changed course. This is not surprising given the shorter duration of Certificate I and II programmes.

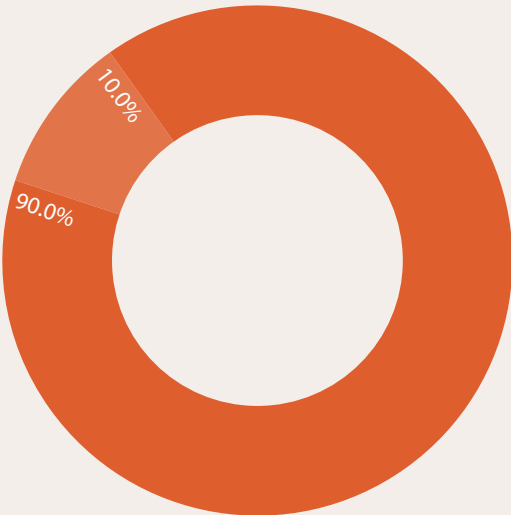
Table 3.2
Destination of 2008 VET Entry-Level commencers



Still in the same VET course	2
Changed course	10
Not in education or training	3
(rounded weighted total)	17

For the relatively small number of apprenticeship commencers, the picture was also very positive, with all still in education or training and most of these still doing their original apprenticeship.

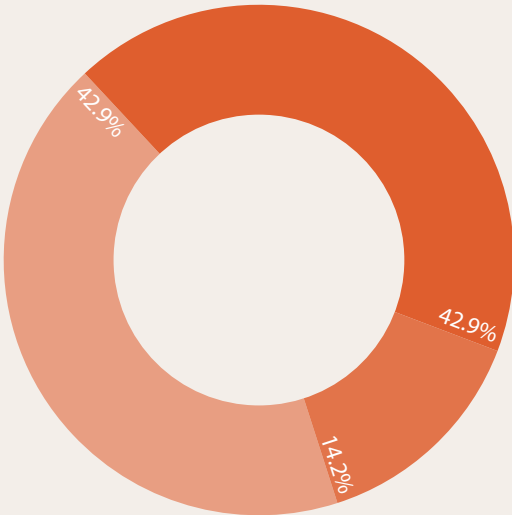
Table 3.3
Destination of 2008 apprenticeship commencers



Still in the same apprenticeship	9
Changed course	1
Not in education or training	0
	10

Those who had commenced a traineeship in 2008 presented a more mixed set of outcomes, which might be expected given that most traineeships are of one year's duration.

Table 3.4
Destination of 2008 traineeship commencers



Still in the same traineeship	6
Changed course	2
Not in education or training	6
(rounded weighted total)	15



CHAPTER 4

NOT IN EDUCATION OR TRAINING

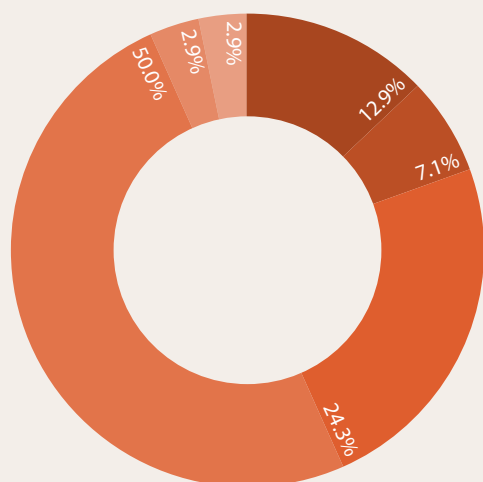
The proportion of respondents who were not in education or training when contacted in 2008 was relatively small – approximately 18% (or 143) of the cohort. The survey shows that most of these were employed, with 92 (11.4%) working full-time and 39 (4.8%) working part-time, with 8 (1.0%) unemployed and 4 (0.5%) not in the labour market.

This chapter reports the 2009 destinations of this group of young people.

As the 2008 report demonstrated, there were some respondents who, having deferred their original university offer, did not take up this offer or any other education and training option in 2008. The most common reason for not taking up study or training, given by nearly six in 10 of the group in 2008, was that they had found something else. Nearly half were planning to travel or take a gap year, and over

four in 10 were not yet ready for more study. However, the financial and distance-related barriers so evident in the deferrers' thinking when first contacted in 2007 were still apparent. Approximately four in 10 reported that they could not support themselves and that the costs of study were a barrier. Financial pressure on their family, concern regarding HECS debts and the costs of travel were all nominated by about one quarter of the respondents, and also reflected the continuing importance of financial barriers to the participation of non-metropolitan youth in education and training. Only being able to get into a fee-paying course and the need to qualify for Youth Allowance were also among the financial reasons cited. In all, approximately two-thirds (66.4%) of those not in education or training nominated at least one of these financial barriers as a reason for not being in education or training in 2008.

Table 4.1
Destinations of respondents working full-time in 2008



In study or training

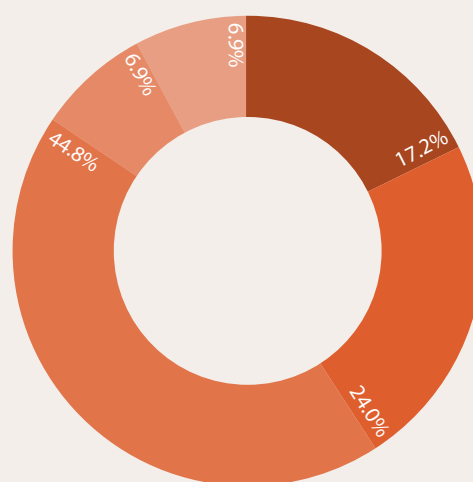
University	12
VET	6
Apprentice/Trainee	22

Not in study or training

Working	46
Unemployed	3
Not in the labour force	3

92

Table 4.2
Destinations of respondents working part-time in 2008



In study or training

University	7
VET	0
Apprentice/Trainee	9

Not in study or training

Working	17
Unemployed	3
Not in the labour force	3

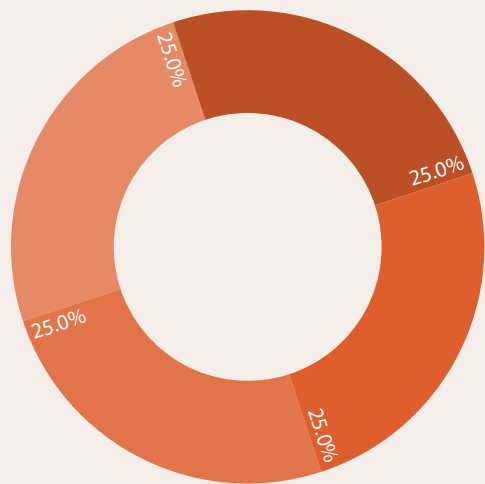
39

Other barriers related to regional disadvantage included the fact that study would require them to leave home or that their preferred course was not offered locally – each accounting for over three in 10 respondents. It should also be noted that approximately half (51.7%) of this group of young people had plans to enter study or further training at some time in the future.

Turning to the 2009 survey, the analysis presented above in this section shows that some of these respondents who were not in education or training in 2008 had still not entered any form of education and training when surveyed in 2009. Overall, these numbered 81 respondents.

It is instructive to examine the reasons of this group for not being in education or training. For this group, the main reason is that “they have found something else” (see Figure 1).

Table 4.3
Destinations of respondents unemployed in 2008

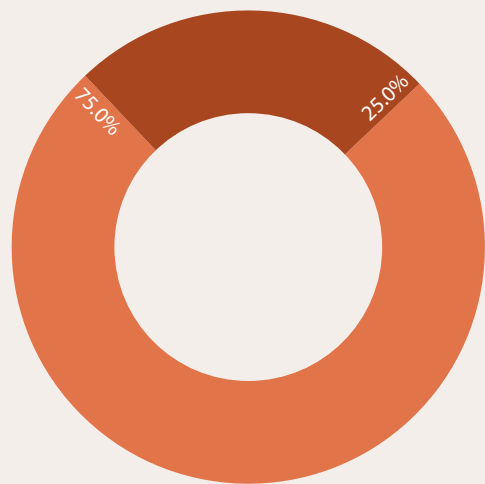


<i>In study or training</i>		
University	0	
VET	2	
Apprentice/Trainee	2	
<i>Not in study or training</i>		
Working	2	
Unemployed	2	
Not in the labour force	0	
		8

However financial factors and reasons relating to their regional location remain important. The costs of study and difficulties supporting themselves remain important for approximately one in five of these respondents. Overall nearly four in 10 continue to report a financial barrier of one kind or another as one of the reasons for not entering education or training. In addition, other reasons relating to their place of residence continue to exert an influence. For example, 16.0% say they have not taken up study because it would have meant leaving home and 13.6% claim it would have involved too much travel.

While the proportions reporting these kinds of financial barriers have fallen since the 2008 survey, they remain important for a large group of respondents. Moreover 34 of these 81 respondents (42.5%) had reported in 2008 that they planned to enter education or training of some kind. Clearly for this group, this had not yet become a reality in 2009.

Table 4.4
Destinations of respondents not in the labour force in 2008



<i>In study or training</i>		
University	1	
VET	0	
Apprentice/Trainee	0	
<i>Not in study or training</i>		
Working	3	
Unemployed	0	
Not in the labour force	0	
		4

Figure 1

Main reasons for not being in education or training

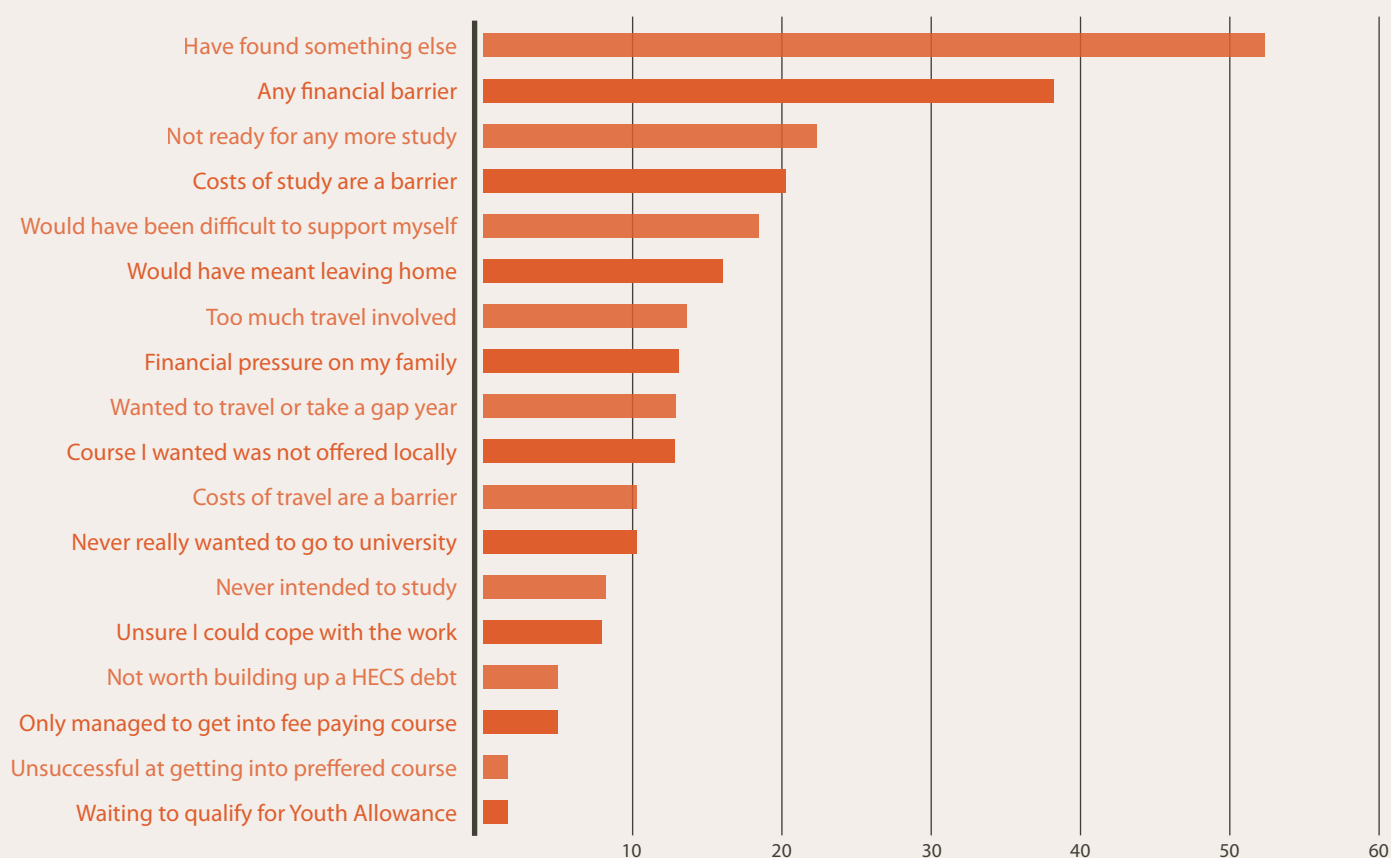
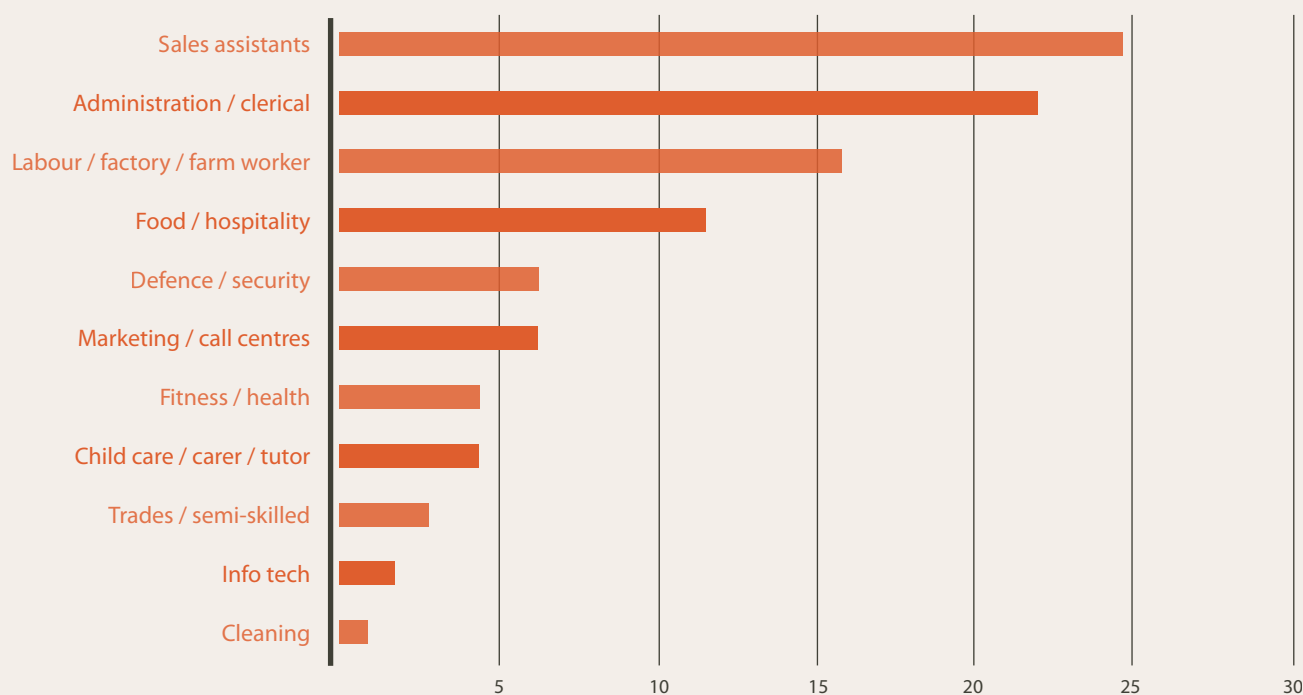


Figure 2

Occupational categories of respondents not in education or training



Those working

Overall, in 2009, there were 117 respondents not in education or training but working. Figure 2 shows the range of occupations in which they were employed. The most common occupational category is sales assistant, accounting for approximately one quarter of this group. This is closely followed by administration/clerical workers, who make up just over one fifth.

The remaining young people are dispersed across a range of categories. The largest ones are labourer/factory/farm workers and food/hospitality employees. These categories do not differ substantially from the mainly unskilled occupations usually entered by school leavers who do not undertake further education or training, although the higher proportions of farm workers/labourers may reflect the more rural context of the current cohort.

Table 4.5 shows the weekly hours worked by young people who are not in education or training. The data show that the majority of these young people may be considered to be working the equivalent of a full-time load. Overall, 72.3% are working at least 35 hours per week, a slightly higher proportion of full-time work than that recorded by the equivalent group in 2008. However, as in 2008, there remains a strong gender difference in this respect. While more than four in five young males are working a full-time load, less than two-thirds of young females are in the same position.

Table 4.5
Hours worked per week by respondents not in education or training

Hours worked per week	Males	Females
Fewer than 35 hours	16.9%	34.4%
35 hours or more	83.1%	65.6%

Other measures of the stability and quality of the employment of these young people were also provided in the survey, for example the respondents' reported satisfaction with the job, their perception of the job as a future career and the levels of formal training provided in the workplace (see Table 4.6).

These provide a mixed picture of the employment situation, but show more positive attitudes than those recorded by the equivalent group of respondents in 2008. Nearly half now see their job as a potential future career, and over one third report

Table 4.6
Perceptions of job by respondents not in education or training

Measure of satisfaction	2008	2009
Would like this type of job as career	40.5%	47.2%
Very satisfied with this job	29.8%	36.6%
Have had formal training in this job	32.1%	45.5%

a high level of satisfaction with their job. Moreover, a higher proportion of respondents than for the equivalent group in 2008 now report having received formal training (defined as seminars, workshops, presentations or other kinds of training organized by work). These measures show some progress in the satisfaction of workers not in education or training, compared with their position in 2008, but still show that most of the respondents do not regard their current job very highly.

Those unemployed or not in the labour force

Of those respondents not in education or training, those who were unemployed form a very small part – only 12 respondents in 2009. Therefore the data provided by these young people must be treated with some caution. However, the reasons they give for their difficulty in finding work are illustrative of some of the main challenges facing young people in non-metropolitan Victoria – a shortage of jobs and the need to move to find work (see Table 4.7). Lack of job experience and of skills and qualifications were also given as reasons for not being in work.

Table 4.7
Reasons for difficulty finding a job

Reasons	%
Not enough jobs available	88.6%
Not enough job experience	48.8%
Need to move away from home	43.2%
Problems with transport	20.7%
Not enough or appropriate skills or training	20.7%
Not enough or appropriate qualifications	20.7%
Health problem or disability	11.2%

A small group of respondents fell into the category of being neither in education or training, nor in the labour market (not working and not looking for work). These accounted for 1.1% (nine) of all respondents. Three were male and six were female.

CHAPTER 5

SATISFACTION WITH CHOICES

This project has focussed on regional school completers from the 2006 Year 12 cohort. These school completers had all deferred an offer of a university place when first contacted in 2007. This report, the final of two arising from this project, seeks to provide detailed data on the study and labour market destinations of these young people three years out of school. It reports on the courses and institutions they have entered, the kinds of jobs they are doing, the hours they are working, and the circumstances of those who are unemployed or not in the labour market. It seeks to provide a comprehensive picture of the transition from school for regional deferrers.

This study is based on the premise that regional (or non-metropolitan) school completers are much more likely than their city counterparts to defer an offer of a place at university. Previous research suggests that this is due to a combination of factors relating to isolation and financial hardship. The 2008 report confirmed the lower socio-economic status of regional deferrers, compared with school completers who defer statewide.

As noted, approximately seven in 10 took up a place at university in 2008, with a similar proportion at university in 2009. Many have taken up apprenticeships and traineeships since they were contacted in 2008. Overall, nearly 83 per cent were in education or training this year, with a further 10.5 per cent engaged in full-time work.

As was the case in 2008, the study has generated data which indicate that, of those in education or training, most were satisfied with their study choice – see Table 5.1.

A majority of the respondents in study also reported being satisfied with the way their school had prepared them for further study – see Table 5.2.

Of the remaining 17.1% of respondents, most were working (14.5%) and only a very small group (1.5%) was unemployed, while an even smaller group may be classed as inactive, that is neither in education or training, nor working, nor seeking work

(1.1%). Those who were working also showed high levels of satisfaction with aspects of their work, and were also satisfied, though to a lesser extent, with the preparation their school had given them – see Tables 5.3 and 5.4.

It might also be noted that a general question on the respondents' satisfaction with "life in general" at the time of the survey elicited a positive response from 96.4% of the survey respondents.

These positive responses certainly point to the resilience of these young people, but as this report shows, they do not disguise the fact that university remains out of reach for approximately 30 per cent of regional deferrers. Moreover, as the case studies reported in the appendix demonstrate, regional disadvantage can have a significant negative impact on post-schooling pathways in many individual cases.



Table 5.1
Satisfaction with study choice

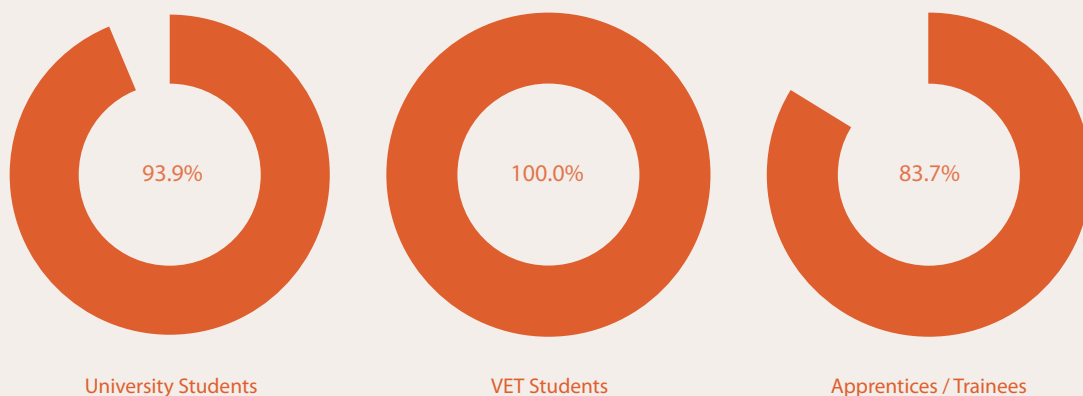


Table 5.2
Satisfaction with how school prepared me for further study (satisfied/very satisfied)

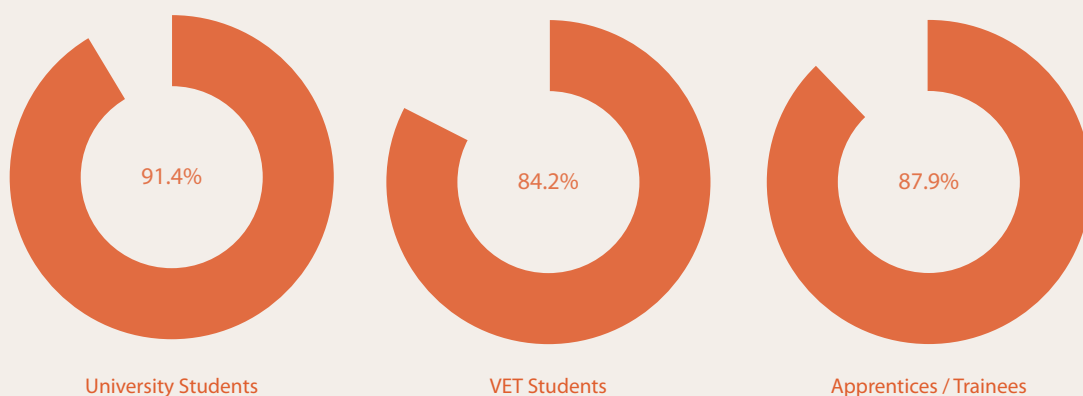


Table 5.3
Satisfaction with job (satisfied/very satisfied)

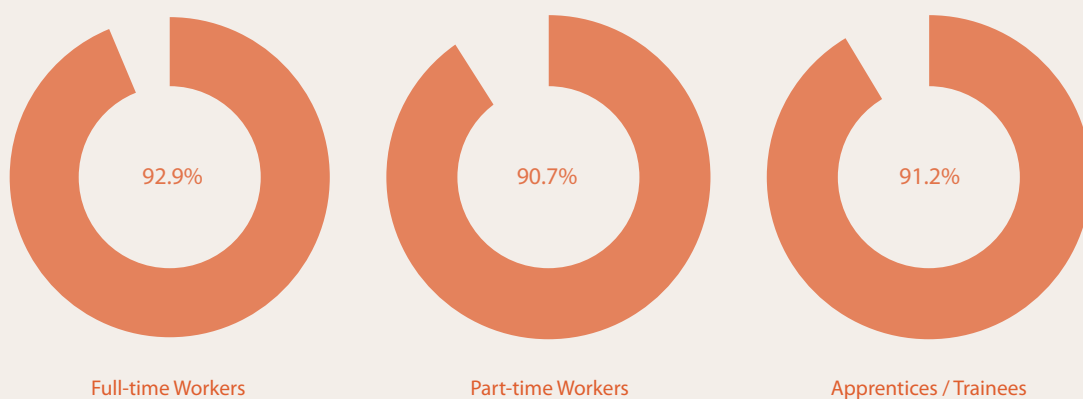
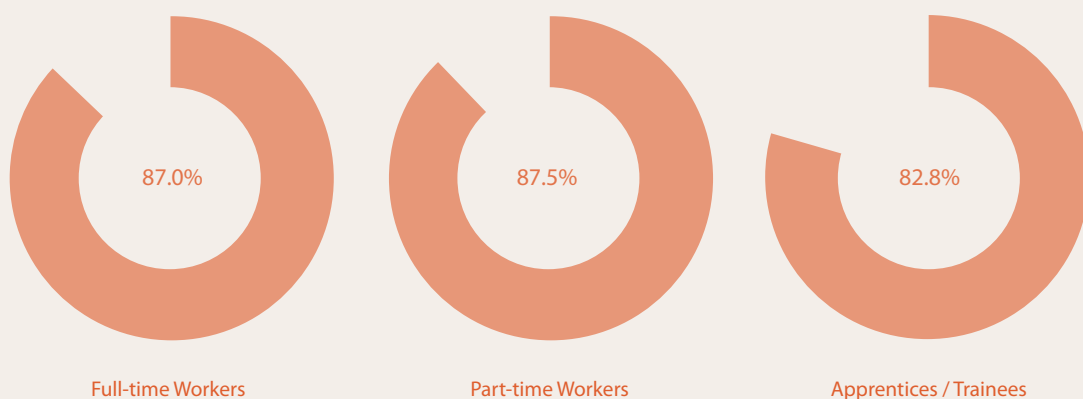


Table 5.4
Satisfaction with how school prepared me for work (satisfied/very satisfied)



CHAPTER 6

CONCLUDING REMARKS

During the period in which this research study was being conducted, the Federal Government in its 2009 Budget announced changes to support programs for students attending university. The most contentious of these was the change to the eligibility criteria for students wishing to access Independent Youth Allowance. This change has caused significant concern amongst many in regional communities, who have argued that non-metropolitan students face now face greater barriers to meeting the income thresholds required to qualify for the allowance.

These concerns prompted a Senate inquiry into the implications of existing and proposed Government measures for prospective students from rural and regional areas, including their financial impact on regional youth.

Tabled in Parliament on the 28th July, the Education and Training Committee's Final Report on its Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education noted that fewer students in regional areas applied for university courses and that students in non-metropolitan areas were much more likely to defer the offer of a university place than their metropolitan counterparts (33 per cent compared to 10 per cent in 2007/2008).

This all-party State Parliamentary inquiry also "found economic barriers to be the main reason why fewer regional students attend university than their city counterparts, with the Final Report recommending that all university students who are forced to relocate should receive government assistance" (Hall 2009).

The findings from the longitudinal study presented in this report, in addition to the case studies presented in the appendix, suggest that these concerns have some justification. Many regional deferrers face significant challenges in negotiating a pathway from school to university. While some positive findings have emerged – a majority taking up a place

at university and generally optimistic views of their current situation – many have not achieved their dream of entering university.

A trend of increasing regional disadvantage is evident in the pattern of rising rates of deferral amongst regional school completers, not just in Victoria but in other Australian states. The data from this study suggest that in 2007, 15.7% of regional Victorian school completers deferred a place at university, two and a half times the rate of deferral found amongst metropolitan students. Moreover, exit surveys first conducted a few months after leaving school suggest that cost-related factors and financial barriers are important reasons why young people living in non-metropolitan communities defer a place at university. The costs and challenges of moving away from home, of finding and paying for accommodation, and of working long hours to support themselves financially present an insuperable burden to some. A lack of access to local tertiary providers or to a very limited range of tertiary options weighs heavily on such students, compared with the educational choice which presents itself to their metropolitan counterparts.

The research also shows that non-metropolitan deferrers are much more likely to be from a low socio-economic status background than deferrers generally across Victoria. In fact, 82.8% are in the two lowest quartiles of socio-economic status, highlighting the greater economic vulnerability of non-metropolitan deferrers. The relatively much higher rates of deferral among non-metropolitan school completers make more sense when we consider the financial barriers to study associated with this vulnerability.

The longitudinal study suggests that many of these deferrers will subsequently take up a place at university – approximately seven in 10. But many do not, and two and a half years after leaving school, three in 10 are not at university.

The research indicates that those deferrers least likely to take

up a university place are those whose achievement profile is low and those who come from a lower SES background. Financial barriers remain prominent amongst the reasons they report for not being in education or training. These barriers are also evident in the behaviours of some students who entered university in 2008. Those who were working long hours while at university were significantly more likely to have dropped out when they were contacted in 2009.

Moreover, while some of those who have not entered university have made positive transitions to other education and training destinations, such as VET or apprenticeships and traineeships, a significant proportion has remained outside of education and training – approximately 17%. Amongst this group, most of those who are working report that they have had little formal training in their job, most are not very satisfied with their job and only a minority see it as a future career.

The case studies presented in the Appendix to this report further highlight the difficulties faced by regional school completers, relative to their metropolitan counterparts.

The recent Bradley review (2008) highlights the impact of economic hardship on university students and emphasises the need for financial support in order to allow young people to realise their educational potential. Yet definitive mechanisms for providing such support have not yet been developed and recent changes to the Independent Youth Allowance regulations may well make it more difficult for regional young people to achieve the economic independence needed to pursue studies in the higher education sector.

A report such as this focuses on the pathways and experiences of a particular cohort of young people – regional deferrers. Yet it should be noted that this is a relatively fortunate group of young country people. These are the ones who have not only completed Year 12 but have achieved sufficient academic success to win a place at university. There are many others who may see little advantage in completing school, given the

economic barriers to further study, or who, having completed Year 12, see no reason to apply for a university place that they cannot afford to take up. Aspirations and incentives to high achievement may themselves be unequally distributed, with metropolitan students having considerably greater incentives and opportunities to continue into higher education.



APPENDIX 1

CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY 1

Matt successfully completed his VCE in 2008 and was offered his first choice of Architecture at the waterfront campus, Deakin, Geelong. Matt decided to defer for 2009. He is currently engaged in a traineeship, Certificate III in Business Administration, at a secondary college where he attended as a student in 2008. Matt, who lives in the Goldfields region and recently turned 18, outlined three reasons for his deferral.

He was having trouble with his commitment to schooling towards the end of Year 11 in 2007 and into Year 12 in 2008. He managed to stay engaged until the end of 2008 but realised that he needed a break from formal university study in 2009. He and his parents were keen for him to develop independence through generating his own financial income in 2009 as well as positioning himself for AUS Study in 2010. Through his traineeship he expected to be able to generate enough income during 2009 to qualify for AUS Study in 2010.

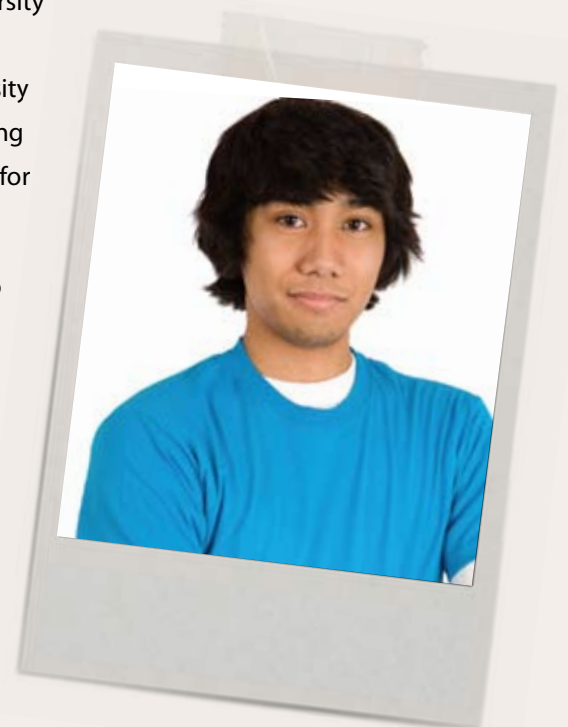
His older sister went straight to University from Year 12 and had difficulty clarifying what degree she wanted to pursue. She had since changed preferences since her initial university course. Matt reflected that it may have been more appropriate for her to take a year off. He found this older sibling's experience invaluable in reaching his decision to defer.

Matt was considered about how he would spend his deferral year. He was not interested in casual, limited pathway option employment. The opportunity to apply for a traineeship and a Certificate III outcome at the end of the year had great appeal as a targeted approach to enhancing his proposed university course and experience. He articulated two benefits: that a year in the world of work undertaking a Certificate would prepare him for university life and that he would be more mature to succeed at university by being a year older. He would also have generated enough income to qualify for AUS Study in 2010 to ensure he was independent of his parents.

He aims to buy a car in 2009 for independent transport and expects to live with his sister in Melbourne in 2010 and commute by train each day to Geelong. Matt thought that travelling on the train each day would allow him quality time to study away from the lecture/tutorial schedule; using the time as a way to discipline himself to keep up with his course demands.

The only disadvantage that Matt envisaged from deferral of his course was being a year older at the end of his 5/6-year course.

Author: Goldfields LLEN



CASE STUDY 2

Cailha completed VCE in 2006. Like many young people required through family circumstance to live independently, she has been continuously disadvantaged by the cost and the current Centrelink criteria required to her fulfil dreams of a university education.

Cailha is the eldest of three children with a large gap between her and her siblings. Her parents have a combined income of less than \$80,000.00. This has precluded Cailha from access to additional support. After completing her VCE, Cailha deferred from university and moved to Bendigo to start a retail traineeship, earning \$12 per hour. She remained in employment until moving to Geelong in anticipation of taking up her university offer. In Geelong she secured part time employment and expected to start university at the beginning of 2008.

However, Cailha was distressed to find out on her approach to Centrelink that she had yet to meet the criteria of the 18-month timeline. Cailha had to immediately seek full-time employment in the form of a retail position to remain supporting herself. The gap of three months with no income support was seen as impossible for Cailha and she forfeited her place at Deakin Geelong.

Cailha was frustrated that while working in an 'up market' retail environment there was a requirement that employees wear products from the floor. These came at a substantial cost (even after an employee discount) and were not a tax deduction because they did not fit the requirements of 'a labelled uniform'. This was a significant burden and impacted on the amount of money she was able to save. The 18-month criteria in accessing Youth Allowance may be the 'final straw' in undermining Cailha's aspirations of a university education at this time of her life.

As with many young people there is a commonly held misconception that the 'allowance' will become available at any time if financial independence is earned within an 18 month period. This time span requires that she not enrol until a mid year intake and the challenges associated with this were too great. Cailha also feels that the longer she is in the 'groove' of employment the more challenging it will become to change that pattern and lifestyle and re-engage in training.

It is likely that with the challenges faced to date, the current level of discouragement and the possible challenges yet to come, Cailha will not start let alone complete her university ambitions.

Author: North Central LLEN

CASE STUDY 3

Linda has lived in the one rural district in north-east Victoria all her life. She has lived with her father since she was 12. He owned a nursery which he had to shut because of the drought. His new job does not generate the same level of income as previously. In addition, her father has had to deal with huge financial costs in his court dealings related to the family breakup. Linda will be enrolled in a Social Work degree at RMIT in the centre of Melbourne. Her career choice is at least in part the result of her own experiences. She presents herself as a very determined and positive person. She would have much preferred to go to university this year but has had to defer because she and her Dad cannot manage the whole bundle of fees, materials, day to day living expenses and accommodation.

Deferral has allowed Linda to become independent in the workforce with the confidence to believe she can find work and take on different tasks. In the meantime she has been working towards savings targets for next year at university. Her employment at a local supermarket will gain her a transfer in Melbourne to assist her budget when she commences her tertiary studies. She also has a job at a Group Training provider but that job will disappear within the month. She will become eligible for the Youth Allowance.

Linda will not be able to save as much as she had hoped because it will be hard to replace her main employment in the current climate. She was very keen to start university this year as she was ready for the challenge. This young person feels that she will be a year behind in getting into her chosen career. Her friendships have also suffered from the separation and distance. They have in many ways moved on while she is still at the starting gate.

Author: NE Tracks LLEN

CASE STUDY 4

The Verley Family is facing a dilemma. The farming/shearing family has – according to the description of local teaching staff - six high performing and 'aspirational' young people. Parents Jackie and Shane have indicated that the years ahead will provide the family with serious challenges and that they are already ensuring their children know that university may not be an option until financial independence is achieved to Centrelink standards.

The nearest university campus is 120 kilometres from their home in north-central Victoria. This means accommodation and transport must be funded by the family in addition to general course fees and payments. Their situation is further complicated because this regional campus is limited in its offerings and would not offer all areas of training and qualifications (such as engineering and fine arts) which these students may pursue.

Living near public transport and access to a university campus would enable these young people to participate in higher education with little additional costs to the family. However, living in rural Victoria this family faces substantial financial barriers in accessing skilled training or further university education for their children.

Author: North Central LLEN

CASE STUDY 5

Facing university bills and living costs of almost \$500,000 for their three children, a Warrnambool district family fears they will spend the rest of their lives paying off the bills. The family has one child who deferred from university for 2009, another in year 12 and a third child in year 11. They calculate the university and living expenses over five years at \$468,840. General living costs will average around \$20,000 a year for each child. Before considering university fees the family would face living away from home costs of about \$200,000 over the next five years.

The family had expected each child to defer their university placement for a year so they could qualify for Youth Allowance. Changes to the Federal Government's policy have thrown out that option, leaving the family unsure how to pay the costs. "Come hell or high water we will do our best to get them through uni, even if we spend the rest of our working life paying for it," mum 'Stacy' said. "We might have to mortgage the house and take out a loan and pay it off over 25 years. There will be nothing left for us. We're looking at costs that are higher than buying a home. Before the Budget we thought we would cope; now we're not sure how we're going to do it."

Stacy said that using a cost calculator on the Australian Scholarships website she had determined that it would cost the family \$468,840 to send their three children to university from 2010-2014. This includes all university fees, living and accommodation expenses, relocation and travelling costs. The university fees add up to more than \$99,000 and while deferred by HECS loans Stacy points out "someone in the family still has to pay for it". Both parents work full time on average or slightly above average incomes. However, they don't have sufficient financial resources to pay the total costs of three concurrent university educations.

Their eldest son had trouble finding work for his gap year but in February took on a casual position with an agricultural contractor. He planned to save as much as possible this year and then use Youth Allowance in 2010 when he takes up a position in Engineering at Ballarat University. If he takes off a second year to try to organise his finances there is no guarantee that he will be able to enter his university position. Unlike teenagers in Melbourne with easy access to public transport, he has had to buy a car to get to work.

The family's second child is undertaking Year 12 this year and, like her brother, had planned to take a gap year. Now she is likely to be forced to reconsider those plans and go directly from Year 12 to her preferred course of Psychology in Melbourne. The result will be two children in first year of university, both living away from home. In 2011 the situation will get worse with the youngest child, now studying Year 11, planning to study Law in Melbourne. "We will be facing two years of having all three children at uni but now it looks like they won't receive Youth Allowance", Stacy said. "The 18-month eligibility rule isn't fair. For example, not every university will allow a two-year deferment. We've already set our plans and taken a year off based on the current conditions. Now it's all changed."

Stacy points out that the Government's changes are being made in a declining job market. "Our eldest son took longer than expected to find a job and it looks likely to get worse before it gets better."

Their children are also "stressing" about the changed criteria. "I'm really struggling to comprehend how I'm going to pay for it," said year 12 student Ami. "I expected to work full-time next year and get some money in the bank and qualify for the Youth Allowance. I don't know if I can work for at least 18 months and then go back to uni. I have no idea what I'm going to do. This has thrown everything into confusion."

Author: South West LLEN

CASE STUDY 6

The Smith family in North-Central Victoria has three young people aged between 18 and 24 years. Eldest daughter Sally completed secondary college and enrolled in university to commence a Bachelor of Teaching at Deakin University. Sally's experience was one that many other young people from rural backgrounds encounter:

Sally's family income would be termed as 'middle class' (combined family income of more than \$50,000 and less than \$100,000) deeming her ineligible for any support including Youth Allowance and living away from home supplement.

Sally lived 3 ½ hours from the university campus and was required to relocate, leaving a secure family and community environment. The cost of residential campus living was considered out of reach for the family and accommodation was sought with relatives. The rural community in which Sally lives does not have regular public transport linking to the nearest regional centre. This required the family to provide a vehicle to support her ability to attend university and come home.

Sally's first year university experience lasted two weeks and she withdrew to return to her local home town and weigh up her options and opportunities. Sally was entitled to no financial support to commence job seeking. In discussing with Sally the reasons for her withdrawal from university it becomes clear that if she lived in a large regional centre or metropolitan area she would have "rolled out of bed, jumped on a train and attended university while enjoying a sense of security and no big financial worries to contend with". Sally's family could not afford residential accommodation and living off campus increased the challenge of dealing with financial pressures, forming new friendship groups in a new environment with limited support and ultimately created a level of stress that could not be sustained.

While the next two years held a range of challenges for Sally, including dealing with a level of personal disappointment and the feelings of failure, there was also the issue of securing employment which is not readily available in most rural communities. Ultimately Sally realised that she would again have to leave the rural community to obtain employment and went on to endure a very challenging time for a further 12-month period. Sally ultimately found secure employment towards the end of her first year out of school. She maintained that job until she returned to university two years after completing year 12.

As Sally prepared to start university at the beginning of 2005, her brother Bob was just completing year 12. He applied and was successful in obtaining a place for a degree in Agriculture Science at Melbourne University. Bob chose to defer his placement (with some level of encouragement from his parents) to work on local farms and in labouring positions "wherever I can find them". Bob's plans changed when he received a full (HECS-free) scholarship to Melbourne University which included \$2000 cash per year.

There was still a serious amount of anxiety in the family as to how the full room and board, vehicle and living expenses would be supported, leading to some creative solutions instigated by Bob. He actively sought all possible scholarship opportunities and was successful in obtaining three individual scholarships which resulted in a total of \$13,000 cash payment each year. These scholarships supported his room and board (shared accommodation) and the bulk of his living expenses throughout the three-year university course and required only moderate assistance from his parents. Bob further supported himself through some local cash-in-hand maintenance work in Melbourne and by contract harvesting for the summer months back in his rural home town.

With the financial support he obtained, Bob feels that his experience was not the same as his sister Sally's as there was less stress with which to contend. Bob was also part of a smaller university faculty and living in shared accommodation provided an early opportunity to quickly establish friendships.

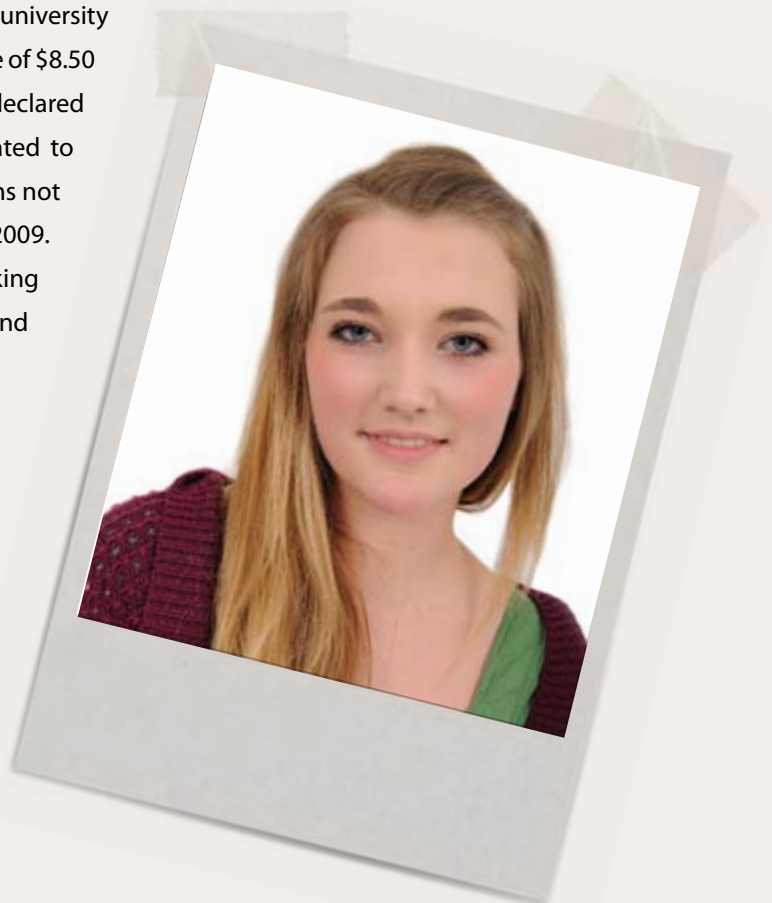
Bob commented on the stress his housemates were under as rural students in a similar situation to him without scholarships. They regularly worked between 20 and 30 hours each week to support themselves while attending a full time university course.

In 2007 the last Smith child completed VCE. Mary had seen the stress of her older sister and parents regarding the commitment and cost of living away from home. Mary has also had the longest exposure to the pressures and loss of income to her family during seven years of drought on the farm and knows that the family income and capacity has been severely reduced.

Based on the above knowledge and experiences, Mary deferred and was encouraged to do so by her parents. She obtained part time work immediately upon completion of VCE in her local town and started job seeking in the closest regional centre. Mary is not eligible for any Centrelink assistance while job seeking. She obtained work in retail and made a rental commitment in a shared house in Bendigo where she was to live independently and cover all of her own costs for the year of 2008. Mary became ill two weeks after starting work and was off work for eight weeks. During this period all financial obligations of rent etc needed to be met. These costs had to be paid by the family as no support was available due to the family income and asset test resulting in ineligibility for Youth Allowance.

The challenge in Mary's case is that she is very keen to start university in 2009. Based on her current income at the traineeship rate of \$8.50 per hour she will not obtain the benchmark earnings to be declared independent by Centrelink. She has been further frustrated to realise that she will have only been out of school 16 months not the 18 months required when the university year starts in 2009. Many families face similar or far greater challenges in seeking to provide their children with the opportunity to attend university at the completion of secondary college.

Author: North Central LLEN



CASE STUDY 7

Charlie has lived in rural districts of Victoria all his life. He currently lives at home in the Northern Mallee region with his family and has been trying for the past five months to get a job, which he has found difficult to do. He is enrolled in an Industrial Design Degree at UNI SA in Adelaide and plans to attend in 2010. He is passionate about his career choice and determined to achieve it.

The main reason for deferral from University was a desire to achieve the financial independence rating with Centrelink. If this isn't achieved it will make going away to university a much more difficult proposition for Charlie and his family due to the fees, materials, day to day living expenses and accommodation.

Deferral has given Charlie time to relax and enjoy a year off between intensive study, as well as enabling him to work towards his saving targets for the next year at university. His employment at a local pub/restaurant will enable him to gain valuable experience that he can possibly use when living in Adelaide as a supplementary income source. However, Charlie worries about the possibility of "losing track of my aspirations and drive for the next year's study". He has also found it very hard to gain employment and this has affected his ability to earn money for the next year.

Author: Murray Mallee LLEN

CASE STUDY 8

Sheila has lived in the same rural district of the northern Mallee all her life. She lives at home with her parents. She chose to have a gap year and deferred her enrolment in a Criminal Justice course at the Australian Institute of Public Safety in Melbourne. Sheila had been working part time for a local retail store but recently found her hours were being reduced. She wanted to work as much as she could this year and has started looking for more work.

The main reason for her deferral from university was the need to achieve the financial independence rating with Centrelink. If this couldn't be achieved it was felt that going away to study in Melbourne would be too expensive for Sheila and her parents. Sheila said this was her only reason for deferring. She didn't feel the need for or desire to have a break from study and if it hadn't been for this prerequisite to qualify for independent living allowance through Centrelink, she would have gone straight on with her studies.

Deferral was undertaken to allow Sheila to earn enough money to make the following year in Melbourne a manageable goal. However, another unexpected benefit has come from finding 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday employment. This new job has given her an insight into the working world and enabled her to find out what it's like to have a "proper job".

However, deferring could mean she abandons her university plans. Sheila felt that next year she may decide to keep her current job and follow a career path within the company that employs her. She said her job was very appealing, and the money, stability and opportunities may outweigh her desire to move away from home and endeavour to study in Melbourne, which would put both financial and emotional stress on herself and her family.

Author: Murray Mallee LLEN

CASE STUDY 9

Gladys is a grandmother of two students who did VCE in 2008. One lives in a rural area in south-west Victoria the other in a Melbourne suburb. Both aspired to go to higher education as they realised tertiary qualifications were essential for their career options.

The rural-based student, Natalie, in 2006 started working during school holidays and weekends to save for university. A conscientious student, Natalie did extra subjects in 2007 to ensure a high score, while continuing to work part time. The effort paid off and her ENTER score in 2008 was in the top 10% of the state giving her acceptance to any Melbourne-based university. However, her family was unable to afford this and so Natalie planned to go to Geelong where she could study a similar course (but with less prestige) while living cheaper. In 2009 she deferred and got a full time 12-month contract with the aim of being eligible for the Independent Youth Allowance. Natalie also kept her weekend work to help for next year, as her job could be transferable to Geelong and she realizes she will need to work while studying. She also completed a short hospitality course at South West TAFE to help with job seeking for 2010.

Natalie's parents are downsizing their home so extra money would be available to support her but with the budget decision to change eligibility for the allowance she will now have to find another job in 2010. This means it will be two years before she can start on her career path and she will still have to cope with the work/study/self sufficiency environment of living away from home on limited resources.

Meanwhile, her city cousin Jody completed the minimum subjects for VCE in 2008 and started a part-time job. He had intended to defer university and work for part of year so able to travel in 2009 but he did not obtain the ENTER score needed for his university course so instead enrolled in a TAFE course. He is living at home, not paying board and working part time for pocket money. His biggest problem is getting used to catching a train into the city each day. Jody is already onto his career path can transfer later to university. All support and financial help is coming from home. Jody continues with his local sport and social life and his parents are looking to buy a holiday home.

To Gladys these contrasting examples show the inequality and stress on rural based families compared to those in the city. In two years these families will be faced with same decisions for two more children.

"Please tell me why rural families have such unequal opportunities?"
Gladys asked.

Author: South West LLEN



Note: the names in these case studies have been changed for confidentiality.

APPENDIX 2

DESTINATIONS BY LLEN

Table A1
2009 Weighted destinations by LLEN

		Inactive	University degree	VET Certificate IV+	VET entry - level
Baw Baw Latrobe	#	0	47	3	0
	%	0.0%	78.3%	5.0%	0.0%
Campaspe Cohuna	#	0	19	1	0
	%	0.0%	82.6%	4.3%	0.0%
Central Grampians	#	0	13	1	0
	%	0.0%	68.4%	5.3%	0.0%
Central Ranges	#	0	28	4	2
	%	0.0%	56.0%	8.0%	4.0%
Gippsland East	#	0	33	8	0
	%	0.0%	60.0%	14.5%	0.0%
Goldfields	#	3	75	9	2
	%	2.5%	63.0%	7.6%	1.7%
Goulburn Murray	#	0	55	6	0
	%	0.0%	71.4%	7.8%	0.0%
Highlands	#	4	78	7	1
	%	3.4%	67.2%	6.0%	0.9%
North Central	#	0	3	0	0
	%	0.0%	75.0%	0.0%	0.0%
NE Tracks	#	0	56	3	1
	%	0.0%	78.9%	4.2%	1.4%
Northern Mallee	#	0	28	1	0
	%	0.0%	80.0%	2.9%	0.0%
South Gippsland Bass Coast	#	0	41	1	0
	%	0.0%	71.9%	1.8%	0.0%
South West	#	2	65	4	1
	%	2.2%	73.0%	4.5%	1.1%
Wimmera Southern Mallee	#	0	14	0	0
	%	0.0%	56.0%	0.0%	0.0%
TOTAL	#	9	553	49	8
	%	1.1%	68.7%	6.0%	1.0%

Apprentice	Trainee	Work full-time	Work part-time	Unemployed	TOTAL
0 0.0%	3 5.0%	3 5.0%	3 5.0%	1 1.7%	60 100.0%
0 0.0%	1 4.3%	1 4.3%	1 4.3%	0 0.0%	23 100.0%
2 10.5%	1 5.3%	0 0.0%	1 5.3%	1 5.3%	19 100.0%
5 10.0%	2 4.0%	6 12.0%	1 2.0%	2 4.0%	50 100.0%
1 1.8%	4 7.3%	7 12.7%	2 3.6%	0 0.0%	55 100.0%
2 1.7%	3 2.5%	17 14.3%	8 6.7%	0 0.0%	119 100.0%
1 1.3%	2 2.6%	8 10.4%	5 6.5%	0 0.0%	77 100.0%
1 0.9%	4 3.4%	11 9.5%	8 6.9%	2 1.7%	116 100.0%
0 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 25.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	4 100.0%
1 1.4%	1 1.4%	7 9.9%	0 0.0%	2 2.8%	71 100.0%
2 5.7%	0 0.0%	3 8.6%	0 0.0%	1 2.9%	35 100.0%
1 1.8%	4 7.0%	7 12.3%	2 3.5%	1 1.8%	57 100.0%
4 4.5%	5 5.6%	8 9.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	89 100.0%
4 16.0%	2 8.0%	5 20.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	25 100.0%
26 3.2%	32 4.0%	85 10.5%	32 4.0%	12 1.5%	806 100.0%

REFERENCES

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008), *Australian Social Trends*, 2008, Catalogue No. 4102.0, Canberra.
- Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee (2007) *AVCC Submission on Welfare Reform*, Deakin, ACT.
- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2008) *Review of Australian Higher Education*, Discussion Paper, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
- Department of Education Training and the Arts (2007) *The Next Step Report on the Destinations of Year 12 Completers in Queensland*, Department of Education and the Arts Queensland, Brisbane.
- Hall, P. (2009) Parliamentary Inquiry Finds Regional University Students Disadvantaged – Media Release, July 28th 2009.
- Helme, S., Lamb, S., Polesel, J. & Mason, K. (2007), *Destination and Satisfaction Survey of 2005 HSC VET Students in New South Wales - Final Report*, NSW Department of Education and Training, Sydney.
- Kilmartin, C. (1993) Regional Disadvantage and Unemployment, *Family Matters*, No. 37, pp. 42-45.
- La Trobe University (2006) *Submission from La Trobe University to Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities*, LaTrobe University Australia.
http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/rrc/inquiries/YoungPeople/submissions/69_Bob_Goddard.pdf
- Marks, G., Fleming, N., Long, M. & McMillan, J. (2000) Patterns of participation in Year 12 and higher education in Australia: trends and issues, *LSAY Research Report Number 17*, ACER, Hawthorn.
- Parliament of Victoria (2006) *Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities*, Government Printer for the State of Victoria.
- Polesel, J. & Teese, R. (2006) *The Next Step Report on the Destinations of Year 12 Completers in Queensland*, Department of Education and the Arts Queensland, Brisbane.
- Stevenson, S., Maclachlan, M. & Karmel, T. (1999) *Regional participation in higher education and the distribution of higher education resources across regions*, Occasional Paper Series 99-B, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra.
- Teese, R., Robinson, L., Lamb, S. & Mason, K. (2006) *The 2005 On Track Longitudinal Survey: the Destinations of 2003 School Leavers Two Years On*, Department of Education and Training, Melbourne.
- Teese, R., Clarke, K. & Polesel, J. (2007) *The On Track Survey 2007. The Destinations of School Leavers in Victoria*, DEECD, Melbourne.
- The University of Melbourne (2007) *Deferment Policy*, Melbourne Model Policy and Procedures Project 2007.
http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/policy/downloads/Deferment_Policy.pdf accessed 12th August 2008.
- University of Ballarat (2007) *Submission to the "Review of the impact of the higher Education Support Act 2003"*, Planning, Quality and Review, University of Ballarat.
- Western Research Institute (2004) Are enterprise zones a tool for reducing regional disadvantage in Australia?, paper presented to the *Bureau of Transport and Regional Economics Regional Research Colloquium*.
www.bitre.gov.au/publications/91/Files/t_murphy.pdf accessed 11th August 2008



Centre for Post-Compulsory Education
and Lifelong Learning
The University of Melbourne

