

Learners in pre-accredited courses: a labour force perspective on students, their motives and the benefits they gain

A research report for the

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Introduction

This is the second report from the ACFE Longitudinal Study of Learners in Pre-accredited Courses in Victoria.

An earlier report examined the motives of people who undertake pre-accredited courses and their levels of satisfaction with their courses. That report was based on the survey of learners who had taken a pre-accredited course in 2009 or 2010. The report made clear that work-related motives are very prominent and meet with a high, but variable level of satisfaction. Cultural motives are at least as important as economic motives and sometimes more important. But the two run hand in hand.

The present report, which is based largely on the cohort of 2011, returns to this diversity of motives before turning the spotlight on work-related reasons for study and work-related outcomes. This focus is important because many of the men and women who enrol in pre-accredited courses are economically vulnerable. They are often in relatively insecure situations within the labour market (under-employed, unemployed, or workforce-inactive, even while studying for work reasons). In addition, they commonly have low levels of qualifications (or none) and incomplete schooling. Pre-accredited courses offer a pathway to reverse the disadvantages of limited education and precariousness in the labour market.

This is not to suggest that cultural benefits are not important. A great many learners in pre-accredited courses are motivated by the intrinsic benefit of knowledge and learning, and they also see courses as promoting well-being and quality of life. These are widely shared motives for study, including amongst learners for whom job skills or job change are a high priority.

But the economic impact of pre-accredited courses on individuals is of such importance that it calls for an in-depth and focussed investigation. This report aims to do this.

Chapter One of the report maps the characteristics of the student population in pre-accredited courses. Who takes these courses, and are the groups who stand most in need of educational pathways well-represented in enrolments? Pre-accredited courses not only need to work well, they must also recruit populations whose needs are greatest and work well for them.

Chapter Two examines the motives of the class of 2011. Is there a relationship between relative economic need and what learners want to study?

Chapter Three begins on the question of who completes a pre-accredited course. This is important in itself and also because course completers are arguably best placed to judge whether a course produces a desirable benefit, though why some learners do *not* complete a course also matters. Attention then turns to whether learners are satisfied with the benefits they receive. Do pre-accredited courses lead to relevant gains?

Chapter Four analyses pathways to further study. Many learners in pre-accredited courses undertake further study, but at what level? How much transition is there from pre-accredited to accredited? Who undertakes further study, and are individuals with limited schooling and low qualifications more likely to do this? What is their experience of educational progression?

Chapter Five studies change in employment situation. The main concern of this chapter is to identify which groups experienced success in their employment history, whether completing a pre-accredited course made a difference, and also whether undertaking further study made a difference.

Chapter Six reviews the findings from each reporting chapter and then proposes a targeting of effort for particular learner groups, based on relative need and current patterns of access and outcomes.

To make this report as accessible as possible, each chapter is concluded with a list of findings in dot point form.

In the Appendix more detailed information of a supplementary kind or of a more technical nature is made available.

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Executive summary

1. Two main questions have driven this research
 - Are pre-accredited courses reaching the people whose needs are greatest?
 - Do pre-accredited courses work well for those they do reach?
2. The answer to the first question is yes, but not uniformly across all regions and groups.
3. The answer to the second question is also yes. But the impact of pre-accredited courses is variable, depending on the situation and characteristics of the group.
4. People enrol in pre-accredited courses to improve:
 - their economic circumstances
 - their capacity to manage the cultural demands of technological and social change
 - their quality of life and well-being more broadly.
5. The balance of these motives differs, but what all client groups have in common is an interest in enriching their lives through the acquisition of knowledge. Thus it is primarily as learners that people enrol in pre-accredited courses (rather than as economic agents) and the benefits they seek are in the first instance cognitive.
6. However, cognitive gain brings other rewards, economic and cultural, and it is these rewards that have a varied emphasis in the thinking of learners and point to a differentiated basis of need. While in this study we are unable to measure cognitive gain, we can measure the impact of learning through outcomes that represent these benefits.
7. To do this, we have adopted a labour market perspective on who undertakes pre-accredited courses and what they get.

8. Basically we are testing, not only whether pre-accredited courses reach the “right” people, but whether the needs of people in different workforce situations are being met.
9. Amongst the workforce-active, the needs of the under-employed and the unemployed differ from the needs of the fully employed. Amongst the workforce-inactive, the needs of discouraged workers differ from people who have retired.
10. By focussing on workforce situation, we are able to assess impact from the angle of what needs to change and how that change occurs.
11. For example, does completing a pre-accredited course improve the employment situation of people who are under-employed? Does transition to accredited vocational training get jobs for the unemployed (compared to not doing further study)?

Our main findings

Reaching high-need groups?

12. If pre-accredited courses are to perform their social role well, they should enrol high proportions of adults who are economically vulnerable. Vulnerability arises from limited schooling, low qualifications, employment in low-skill, poorly paid jobs, unemployment, and disadvantages of a social or personal nature (including stage in the life course). The policy aim is to reduce this vulnerability by equipping adults with skills and creating pathways to training and employment, where appropriate.
13. The socio-economic profile of learners confirms that pre-accredited courses draw disproportionately on groups who are economically vulnerable.
14. Pre-accredited courses enrol a higher proportion of people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds than is found in upper secondary school or in higher education or (marginally) TAFE/VET.

15. This socio-economic pattern is partly due to a strong rural bias in participation. While rural and regional Victoria contains 27% of the adult population, as many as 42% of all learners in pre-accredited courses are from country Victoria. Because of the social make-up of the rural population, this accentuates the low SES character of the learner population in pre-accredited courses. Approximately 60% of all low-SES learners are from country regions.
16. While pre-accredited courses enrol disproportionately high numbers of adults from low-SES communities, Eastern Metropolitan Region displays the reverse pattern. People from low SES areas are very poorly represented in pre-accredited courses in this region.
17. Despite the rural bias in participation, pre-accredited courses in country Victoria enrol (relative to their presence in the adult population), fewer adults with incomplete schooling, fewer adults with a permanent disability, and fewer unemployed workers than courses in metropolitan Melbourne.
18. Under-representation in pre-accredited courses is evident across Victoria as a whole amongst indigenous Australians (though not in every region) and also immigrant groups of longstanding in Australia (not recent arrivals).

Are courses completed?

19. Completion of pre-accredited courses of study is high (84%), but lower amongst the workforce-vulnerable.
20. One of the main reasons why under-employed and unemployed workers complete less often is related to their job situation (they have been looking for work or have found work).

Learner satisfaction with course outcomes

21. Many learners who are workforce-vulnerable report that their pre-accredited course helped them find or change jobs.

22. They are more positive about course impact (including the impact of further study) on employment potential (skills acquisition) than on finding more stable employment or longer hours of work.
23. Most learners who have been continuously employed report positive impacts on a range of productivity-related measures.

Transition to further study

24. Every third completer of a pre-accredited course goes on to further study, but workforce-vulnerable learners are much more likely to do so (40-47%). This finding is important because it shows that high-need groups build on their pre-accredited course participation and that a pathway is being used to improve location in the workforce.
25. The educationally vulnerable (incomplete schooling, no post-school qualifications) are least likely to progress to further study. But over half of those who do will take accredited courses.
26. The likelihood of poorly qualified learners enrolling in accredited courses at Certificate III level is only slightly higher than that of more qualified groups.
27. Better qualified learners do further study more often, but the most well qualified enrol in accredited courses less often.

Employment outcomes from completing a course

28. The biggest changes in employment situation are recorded by workers who are less well-integrated or poorly integrated in the labour market. Over half experience positive gains (more are employed or have more hours of work).
29. Does completing a course matter? For the under-employed, completion is associated with improved hours of work, while non-completion is accompanied by a higher

chance of being fully employed. Course completers are somewhat more likely to stay under-employed.

30. For the unemployed, those who do not complete a course are twice as likely as those who do complete to have found a full-time job, while course completers are more likely to find part-time work (whether with sufficient hours or not).
31. These findings should be read in the context that 80-82% of workforce-vulnerable learners complete their pre-accredited course. Non-completers are a minority of all under-employed and unemployed groups.

Employment outcomes from further study (short term)

32. Regarding the *under-employed*, the great majority completed their course (82%), but only 40% undertook further study. Of these, 43% recorded an improvement in their employment situation (they found either full-time work or part-time work with sufficient hours). By contrast, the group who did not undertake further study improved their situation in 58% of cases. Not doing further study is thus associated with higher incidence of improved outcomes, that is, over the short term (10-21 months).
33. Regarding the *unemployed*, in the short term further study is not associated with an employment advantage. A high proportion of the unemployed complete their pre-accredited course, and half progress to further study. Of this “further study” group, 47% register positive employment gains (full-time or part-time work). But the “no further study” group records a somewhat higher gain of 53%. Thus further study does not appear to advantage unemployed workers in the short term.
34. Part of the reason for the absence of an employment advantage may be the fact that many people who had undertaken further study were still enrolled in a course at the time of the second survey contact. Thus too little time had expired for further study to reflect any potential employment impact.

Employment outcomes from further study (long term)

35. Amongst the *under-employed*, not doing further study is associated with a higher incidence of improved outcomes in the longer term (up to 3 years and 9 months after commencement of their pre-accredited course). Whilst a sizeable proportion of both the “further study” group and the “no further study” group had improved their work situation when re-contacted, positive change was significantly greater for the “no further study” group (66% compared had found full-time work or more hours of part-time work, compared with 47% of the “further study” group). The “no further study” group also experienced less negative change, with a smaller proportion of respondents having either left the workforce or being unemployed (12% compared with 27%).
36. Amongst the *unemployed*, further study is associated with marginally more positive employment change. The “further study” group improved their employment situation in 57% of cases, while the unemployed who did not undertake further study improved their situation in 54% of cases. In terms of negative change, more of the “further study” group were unemployed at recontact (29% compared with 20%), however the “no further study” group recorded a larger proportion of people having left the workforce altogether (retirees excluded; 26% compared with 14%).
37. The modest impact of further study on the employment chances of the unemployed masks differences associated with the award level of the courses that the unemployed do undertake.
38. Focussing on the initially unemployed who also had low or no qualifications, those who undertook further study at Certificate III level or higher obtained better employment outcomes than those who undertook lower level study, or no study at all. The weakest outcomes of all were obtained by those who undertook lower-level or non-accredited study.
39. Regardless of whether or not they undertook further study, in the short term (2011 cohort), successful job seekers were more likely than the unsuccessful to be younger, less likely to be non-English speaking, less likely to have low qualifications, less often poor readers, and less likely to be disabled. In the longer term (2009/10 cohorts), unemployment was associated with disability, poor reading ability and low

qualifications. Older workers who were unemployed tended to have been unemployed for a longer period than their younger colleagues.

Targetting improved access and outcomes

40. Pre-accredited courses have an important role to play in (a) Victoria meeting COAG qualifications targets, and (b) contributing to economic growth and reducing pressure on services delivered by the Victorian government (and thus costs).

41. To improve access and impact, we suggest a focussing of effort along the following lines:
 - (1) Raise the level of participation in pre-accredited courses of people with disabilities living in rural and regional Victoria to at least the current level in Melbourne (i.e., from 3.1 learners enrolled for every disabled person in the adult population to 4 learners enrolled) (this should be subject to more detailed investigation of participation differences, involving consistent definitions of disability)

 - (2) Raise the level of participation of indigenous Australians to at least the level achieved in Loddon Campaspe (3.5 learners for every indigenous adult in the population)

 - (3) Raise the level of participation of unemployed workers in rural and regional Victoria to at least the level currently recorded in Melbourne (i.e., from 6.2 learners for every unemployed person in the labour force to 8.7 learners for every unemployed worker in the labour force)

 - (4) Lift the rate of study progression amongst the unemployed above its current level of 47% to broaden the long-term impact of further study amongst this group

 - (5) Pay particular attention to the needs and circumstances of the groups of unemployed who are less likely to find work, i.e., older men and women, the disabled, and people with poor reading skills

(6) Lift the rate of study progression amongst men and women who have not finished school and have low qualifications above the current level of 30%

(7) Increase the proportion of this group who undertake accredited study above the current level of 53%.

42. Some of these foci have been expressed as targets. The study progression foci are formulated as goals rather than targets. A more detailed view of the characteristics of learners who currently progress to further study would be desirable before attempting to set targets.

Chapter One

Who undertakes pre-accredited courses and are high-need groups adequately represented?

For pre-accredited courses to play a valuable role in adult education, they must reach the people who most need them and they must work well for these people.

Pre-accredited courses are particularly relevant for individuals who experience disadvantage owing to limited schooling and lack of recognized skills, who have poor literacy or English-language skills, who are socially disadvantaged due to employment vulnerability and low income, or have a disability that impedes their full participation in economic and social life.

More broadly, pre-accredited courses are important to many people who are not active in the workforce, owing to age or infirmity or to exclusion (which may occur through gender, age, or ethnicity/race). Discouraged workers belong to this broader population as do people of working age who have experienced an interruption in their employment history and face barriers to re-employment.

Pre-accredited courses help people who are not in the workforce to manage the challenges of “disconnection”—isolation, lack of regular social activity, lack of stimulation through interaction with others, and vulnerability to ill-health due to the risks of reduced activity (obesity, diabetes, heart disease).

Well-being is an important social objective in adult and community education, and grows in importance over stages in the life course. Pre-accredited courses are meant to be pathways to economic inclusion—they should lead to training, employment, and further study, where relevant—but they are also pathways to social integration and personal well-being.

The economic benefits produced by pre-accredited courses depend on these courses reaching the populations who most stand to benefit. To realize the returns to individuals that occur through higher skill levels and fuller employment, or the social returns in the form of taxes paid and income support benefits and health costs saved, presupposes that key groups in the population do enrol in pre-accredited courses (and that these courses do work well for them).

What is the evidence that pre-accredited courses reach all of these groups in the Victorian community, and are these groups represented at least in proportion to their size in the Victorian population?

Measuring community reach

We begin our analysis of “community reach” by examining the overall social profile of learners in pre-accredited courses. How well are people from different socio-economic backgrounds represented in course enrolments?

We also compare the social profile of learners in pre-accredited courses with the profiles of learners in other sectors of education. This helps capture the distinctive service of pre-accredited courses in Victorian education.

We then turn to regional differences in social profile. We ask whether pre-accredited courses are enrolling people according to social and economic need in each of the eight ACFE administrative regions. We also report more specifically on adults with incomplete schooling and lack of qualifications—individuals for whom “second chance” opportunities are particularly important.

People with disabilities are our next focus. We ask whether they are at least as well-represented in pre-accredited courses as we might expect, given their representation in the adult population, and whether this is true across all regions.

Similarly with respect to Indigenous Australians, are they enrolling in pre-accredited courses to the extent that we might wish, given the general and specific forms of disadvantage that they experience?

We also consider the participation of unemployed workers in pre-accredited courses, again from a regional perspective.

Finally, we measure the participation of people who speak languages other than English at home. Given the great diversity of languages spoken in the Victorian community, we have limited our discussion to the largest language groups. With respect to these larger groups, to anticipate our findings, the longer the period of establishment in Australia, the lower the representation in pre-accredited courses, and conversely. However, we consider that this is

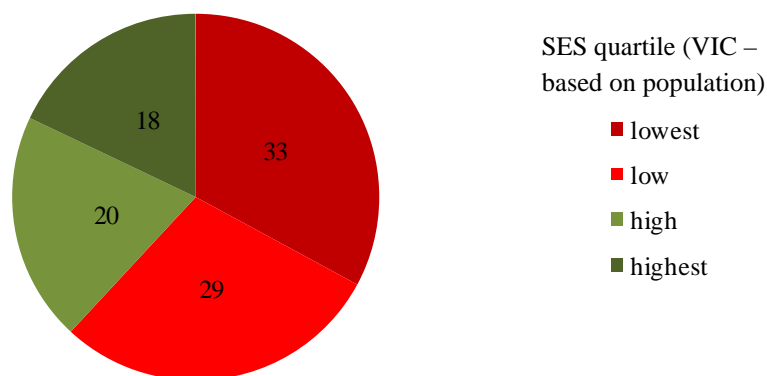
not a reliable guide to need. Long-established migrant groups are ageing, and older adults of non-English speaking origins are as vulnerable to isolation—perhaps even more vulnerable—as older men and women who speak English as a first language.

In this chapter, our data are derived from the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard (AVETMISS).

Social profile of learners in pre-accredited courses

Pre-accredited courses enrol a high proportion of people of low socio-economic status. Over 60% of learners are from the lowest two quartiles of the ABS Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (SEIFA) (which measures income, occupation and education levels). By contrast, learners from the highest quartile are under-represented (18% compared to an expected 25%) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 The social profile of learners in pre-accredited courses, 2009-2010 (%)



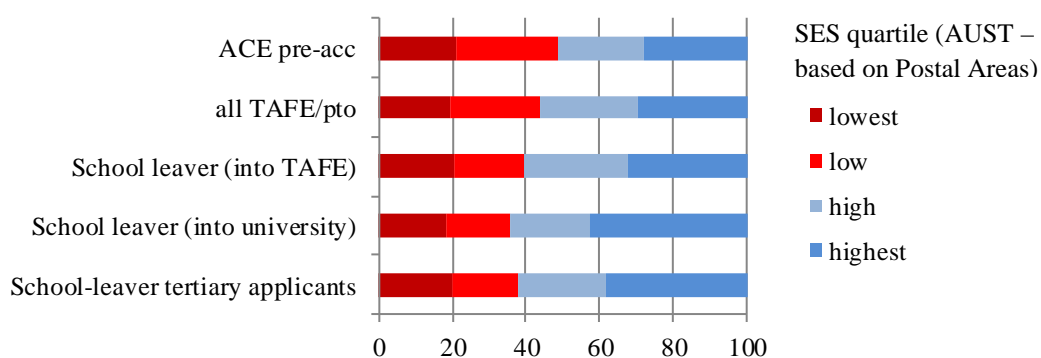
There are several factors which account for the high proportion of learners from low socio-economic status backgrounds. The community sector is open to all people, regardless of their level of schooling or their post-school qualifications. It is non-selective. Many of its courses are intended to create or restore opportunities for further education or training. Thus we should expect that individuals without qualifications and with incomplete schooling will be more strongly represented in the sector—especially in pre-accredited courses—than people who have completed school and hold diplomas or university degrees. But we should also

recognize that there are courses of broad appeal (e.g., ICT), and there are others that enrol some highly-qualified individuals who are second-language learners of English. For these reasons, we can also expect a broad spread of learners from across the social spectrum.

The social profile of pre-accredited learners compared to learners in other settings

How does the social profile of learners in pre-accredited courses compare with learners in other sectors of education and training? There is no single database that would enable a straightforward comparison to be made. Nevertheless it is possible by using different databases to give a general idea (for details, see the Notes to Chapter One).

Figure 2 Social profile of students in different sectors of education (VET sector 2010; school sector 2008)



For school, we have analysed the social background of Year 12 students who applied for a place in university or VET, commencing in 2009. It is important to note that school-leaver applicants for tertiary places are a selected group—they do not include non-applicants (e.g., many VCAL students), nor young people who have left school before reaching Year 12. As enrolment in VCAL, non-application for a tertiary place, and dropping out before Year 12 are all correlated with socio-economic status, the Year 12 students who do apply to VTAC for a tertiary place will have an atypical social profile, biased upwards. The analysis of school-leaver applicants bears this out. Only 20% are drawn from the lowest quartile of SES, while 38% come from the highest SES quartile (see Figure 2).

The social profile of adults in the VET sector aligns closely with the school student profile—nearly 1 in 5 are from the lowest SES band. Learners enrolled in pre-accredited courses are drawn in about the same proportion from the lowest band of SES, but a higher percentage come from the next-to-lowest band than is found amongst other groups (28% compared to between 17-25%). Taken together, nearly half of all learners in pre-accredited courses come from the lower two bands of SES.

This is the representative pattern which we should expect to find, if educational institutions recruited randomly from all strata of the Australian population. Upper secondary school draws selectively on the population, and this selectiveness is heightened when we look only at the sub-group of final year students who apply for a place in tertiary education. The social pattern which “should” be found in education if there were no selection is only found in pre-accredited courses in the community sector and in the VET sector more widely. This is in no small measure because people who enrol in accredited and pre-accredited programs are, in effect, reversing a process of early school leaving and selection out of school education or failure to enter tertiary education directly from school.

Unlike upper secondary school and university, pre-accredited courses in the community sector and courses in the VET sector more broadly are exposed to the whole of the Australian population. This includes people from more disadvantaged communities and individuals who experience multiple disadvantage. The Australian Bureau of Statistics measure of relative socio-economic disadvantage reflects not only dimensions such as occupation, education and income, but the proportions of people in a community who have a disability and the proportion of indigenous Australians (ABS 2009). Thus it is not only disadvantage of an economic kind or disadvantage based on limited education that is placed on the agenda of service in pre-accredited courses, but issues of exclusion, isolation, and powerlessness.

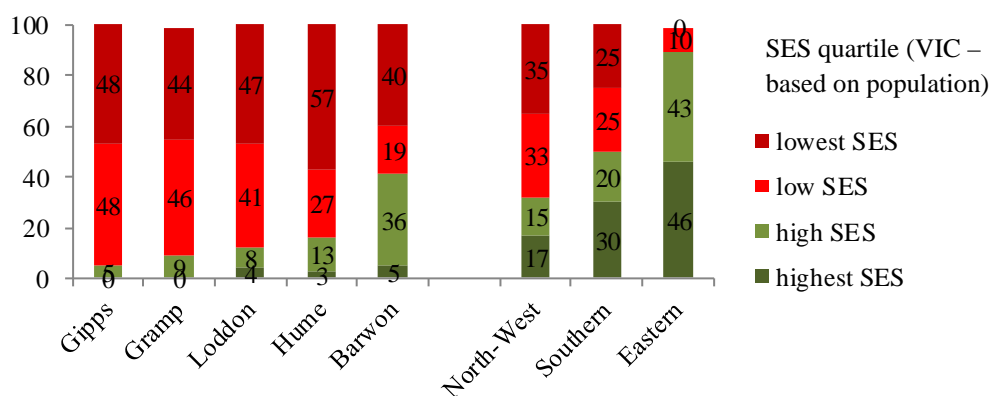
At the same time, pre-accredited courses are representative of people from higher SES backgrounds. Their needs include adjustment to changing technology, to shifts in occupational patterns, to lack of English language skills (in the case of many immigrants), and also involve adjustment to the stresses and challenges in the life course (ageing, withdrawal from the workforce, falling or uncertain income, isolation).

A regional analysis of the socio-economic profile of learners in pre-accredited courses

The community sector has a broad geographical base. Wide implantation and accessibility mean that, potentially, the sector is open to populations right across Victoria and should reflect the characteristics of the regions in which community providers are located.

There are many more low-income households in non-metropolitan areas of Australia than in capital cities (Harding 2004; NATSEM 2004). Does the social profile of learners in pre-accredited courses match this pattern? While in Victoria as a whole every third adult taking a pre-accredited course ranks in the lowest quartile of socio-economic status, this rises to 40% in Barwon South-Western region, 44-48% in Grampians, Loddon-Mallee and Gippsland, and as high as 57% in Hume (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 The social profile of pre-accredited learners by ACFE region (%)



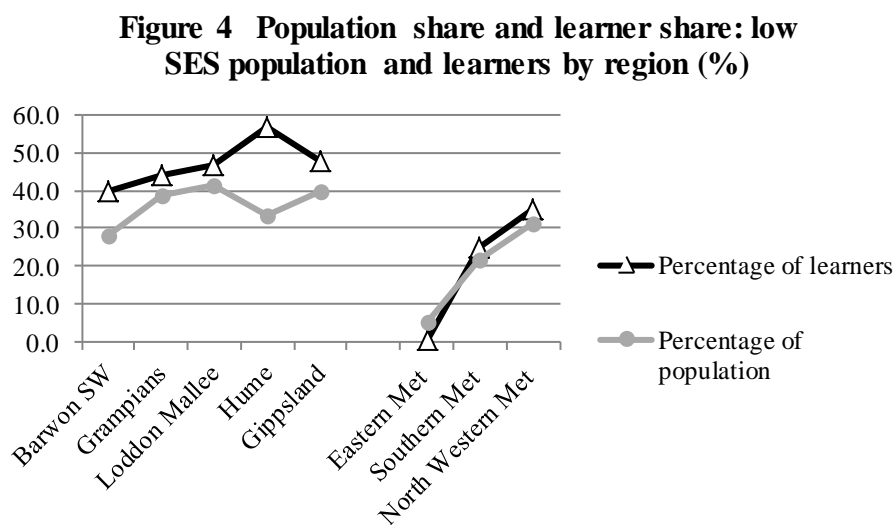
Within Melbourne, only the North-West region has proportionately as many learners from low SES backgrounds as in Victoria as a whole (35% compared to 33%). In the Southern and Eastern regions, there is a clear pattern of low representation of learners from the bottom quartile of SES—every fourth learner in Southern region and only 1 in 10 individuals from the bottom two bands of SES in Eastern metropolitan region.

Do these differences in enrolment patterns simply reflect the characteristics of the regions themselves? Or are pre-accredited courses unrepresentative, particularly of populations that stand most to gain from them?

To answer this question, we compare in each region (a) the *share of learners* represented by a particular group (e.g., learners with incomplete schooling as a percentage of all learners in pre-accredited courses), and (b) the *share of the adult population* represented by this group.

Population share is employed as a broad guide to learner share. If pre-accredited courses are inclusive of key population groups, we should expect that where a region has a large proportion of a particular group, it should also enrol a relatively high proportion of that group in pre-accredited courses. There may be a good reason why it does not, e.g., because the group is highly educated and has less need of continuing education or is more likely to use alternatives to a community setting. However, this needs to be assessed case-by-case.

For learners from low socio-economic backgrounds, the alignment between *learner share* and *population share* in each ACFE region is displayed in Figure 4. The black line in the chart reports the percentage share of learners in pre-accredited courses made up by people of low socio-economic status. The grey line measures the percentage share of the adult population in Victoria represented by this group.



Starting with Barwon South-West, low SES adults represent about 28% of that region's adult population. Learners from a low SES background, on the other hand, represent 40% of all learners in pre-accredited courses. Thus the region's community providers draw disproportionately from this group, and this by a substantial margin.

In some country regions, the gap between *population share* and *learner share* is smaller, e.g., Grampians (39% and 44% respectively), Loddon-Mallee (41% and 47% respectively). In

Hume, there is a very large gap—low SES individuals represent 33.5% of the adult population, but contribute 57% of all pre-accredited learners.

The metropolitan regions display a tighter relationship between population share and learner share. In both Southern and North-Western regions, the low SES share of pre-accredited learners is closely aligned to the low SES share of the adult population, with learners somewhat over-represented.

A more striking pattern is found with Eastern metropolitan region. There are very few individuals from the lowest SES quartile in this region—they represent about 5 in 100 of all adults. This tiny base contributes only 0.3 of 1 per cent of all learners in pre-accredited courses.

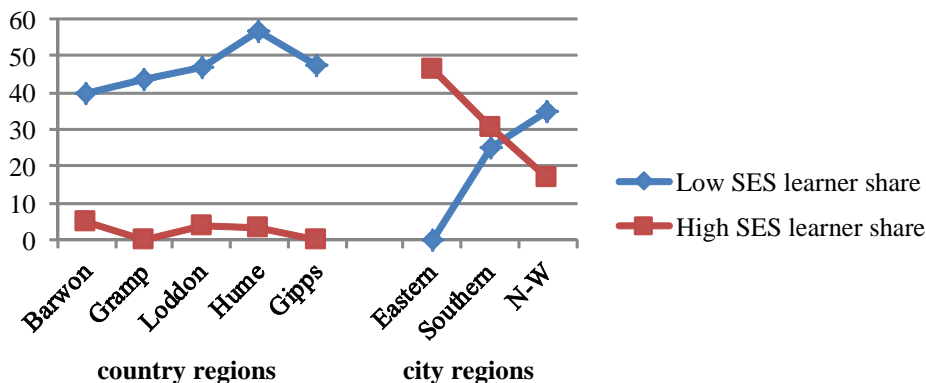
Looking across regions, we can say that pre-accredited courses enrol higher proportions of adults from poorer backgrounds than would be expected simply from the social profile of a region. The courses are reaching more individuals who are relatively disadvantaged in socio-economic terms than regional numbers would predict. This suggests that providers are successfully targeting social need through their offer of pre-accredited courses. They are creating opportunities for adults who, thanks to their socio-economic situation, are most at risk of social and economic change as well as growing vulnerabilities in their life-course.

However, we should also note that there are significant rural-urban differences in the extent to which low SES groups are represented in pre-accredited courses. In country regions, the learner share of low SES adults is always higher than their population share, and in some regions much higher. In metropolitan Melbourne, low-SES adults are only marginally better represented in pre-accredited courses than they are in the wider population.

One reason for this is the much greater use which adults of *high socio-economic status* make of pre-accredited courses in Melbourne as compared to country Victoria, where enrolment of high-SES adults is very much lower.

Figure 5 compares the high-SES learner share in country and city regions. This shows that high-SES adults are much more strongly represented in pre-accredited courses in Melbourne than in rural and regional Victoria.

Figure 5 Country-city differences in learner shares of low SES and high SES adults (%)



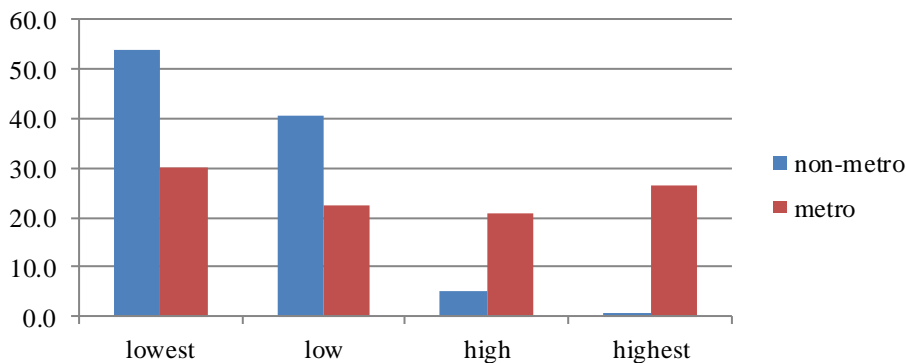
In Melbourne, there is not only a very much larger proportion of high-SES adults in the population (three times as many), but these individuals enjoy a very much higher rate of participation in pre-accredited courses (29% compared to only 2% in country Victoria).

Adults of high socio-economic status in Melbourne make greater use of pre-accredited courses than their social peers in country Victoria (about 3 times as much), just as, to a much smaller extent, adults of *low socio-economic status* make greater use of pre-accredited courses *in country regions* than their social peers in Melbourne (about 1.2 times as much).

If socially advantaged individuals in Melbourne make greater use of pre-accredited courses than their peers in rural and regional Victoria, this is in part because their needs are different. For example, many of people taking literacy courses are of middle to high socio-economic status.

Figure 6 gives a breakdown of learners in literacy and numeracy courses by socio-economic status band. The chart shows that in country Victoria most students are from the lower two bands (over half are from the lowest band), while in Melbourne nearly half are from the higher two bands of socio-economic status. This pattern reflects the relatively high socio-economic status of urban immigrants seeking to improve their English-language skills.

Figure 6 The socio-economic profile of learners in literacy and numeracy courses: rural/urban differences



Language, literacy and numeracy courses contribute to a much more socially mixed student population in pre-accredited courses in Melbourne (thanks in part to an immigration pattern), while in rural and regional Victoria there is a much stronger low-SES profile. In one setting, learners are typically more educated and have often finished school or even higher education. In rural and regional Victoria, on the other hand, learners will be typically adults with incomplete schooling and limited or no post-school qualifications.

While recognizing this greater diversity in metropolitan regions, it is worth recalling that the participation levels of low SES adults in pre-accredited courses in the city is only marginally greater than would be expected on the basis of population share. Competing demands from other groups may have the effect of limiting the participation of adults who experience relative disadvantage in educational, occupational and income terms and lead to a situation in which their needs are not always being met.

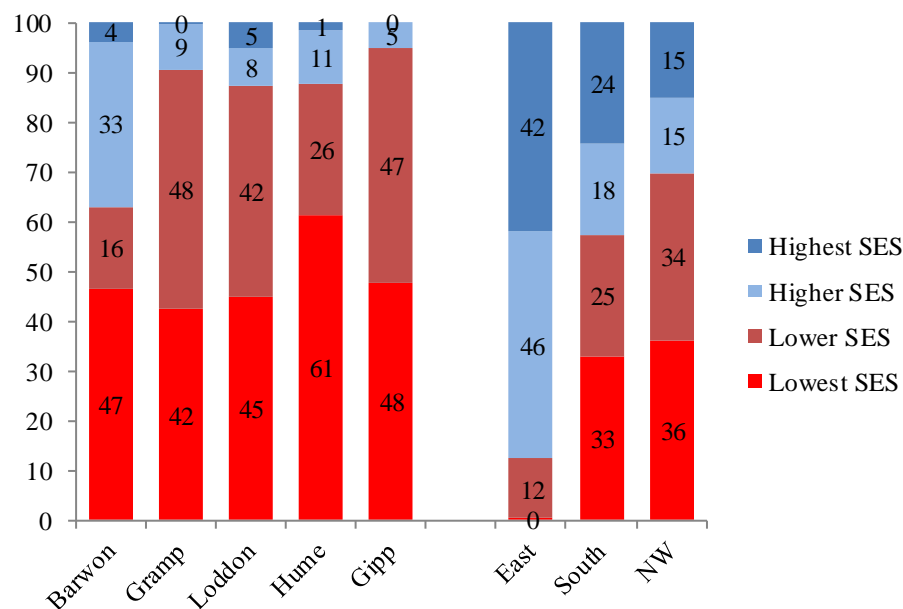
The geography of enrolment: schooling and qualifications profile

Educational disadvantage bears a strong relationship to socio-economic status, but the two are not identical. There are individuals of intermediate or higher SES who experience educational disadvantage, and it is important to examine whether pre-accredited courses in Victoria reach this diverse group. We have noted already that Australia receives immigrants

of relatively high SES who experience language barriers (and also non-recognition of credentials). This is one example of educational disadvantage transcending the boundaries of social strata.

Another example relates to people who have limited schooling and no post-school qualifications. These are drawn from all social ranks, though disproportionately from low SES strata. Given the broad social profile of people with incomplete schooling and lack of qualifications, it is important to ask whether they are well-represented in pre-accredited courses.

Figure 7 The social profile of learners with incomplete schooling by region (%)



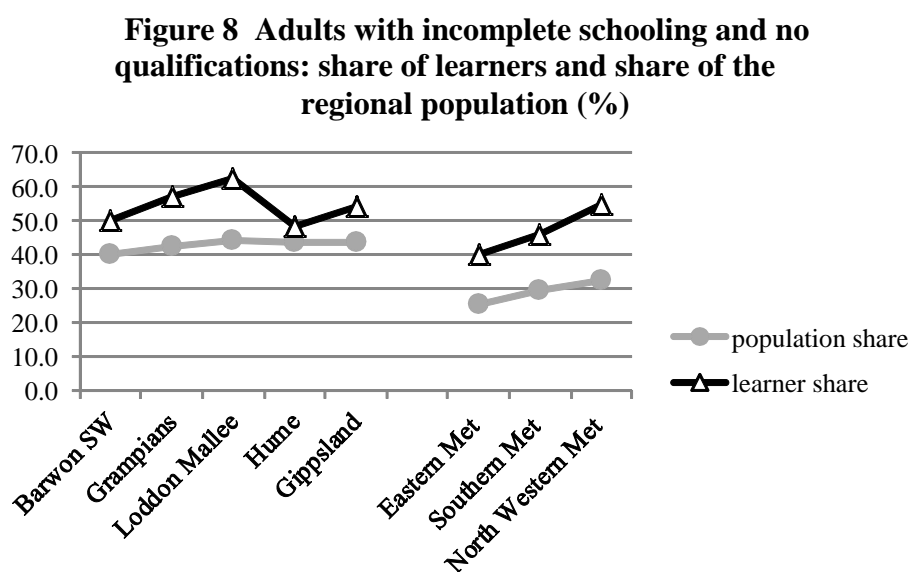
Firstly, we examine the social profile of all learners in pre-accredited courses in 2009-2010 who did not complete school. A regional analysis is given in Figure 7.

In most country regions, only a small proportion of learners with incomplete schooling come from the higher quartiles of socio-economic status—up to 13%. The exception is Barwon South Western, where Geelong contributes more diversity.

In Melbourne, on the other hand, learners with incomplete schooling are much more commonly drawn from the higher quartiles of SES—30% in North-West and 42% in Southern. Eastern metropolitan region enrolls very few learners from the lower quartiles of SES, so those with incomplete schooling come almost wholly from the higher quartiles.

Given regional differences in the social profiles of learners with incomplete schooling, how well are these learners represented in pre-accredited courses and does this vary significantly from region to region?

In rural and regional Victoria, learners with incomplete schooling and no post-school qualifications make up between 50-60% of people undertaking pre-accredited courses. This figure is higher than in the city, except in North-West metropolitan region (55%). While in country Victoria there are proportionately more learners with incomplete schooling, there are also more adults with this educational background in the population (40-44%) (see Figure 8). In the city, adults with incomplete schooling represent a much smaller proportion of the population (25-33%). Taking population shares into account, for every 1 adult with incomplete schooling in rural and regional Victoria, there are 1.3 learners with this background enrolled in pre-accredited courses. By contrast there are 1.6 learners with this background enrolled in courses in metropolitan Melbourne.



Pre-accredited courses reach a greater proportion of adults with incomplete schooling in the city than in country Victoria, even though in relative terms, there are many more adults in the country who never finished school.

This difference rests on a qualitative or compositional difference in the population with incomplete schooling rather than a quantitative one. In the city, many more adults who did not finish school come from higher social strata. As we have found previously, individuals of

higher SES make more intensive use of pre-accredited courses when they live in the city than when they live in the country.

Regional patterns in participation of adults with disabilities

Studying the relationship between *population share* (the relative importance of a particular group in a regional population) and *learner share* (relative importance of this same group in pre-accredited courses) is a way of identifying possible unevenness of participation across ACFE regions. Share of learners and share of population for particular groups are reported in Table 1. The information is broken out by ACFE region, and aggregated figures are recorded for rural and regional Victoria and for metropolitan Melbourne. For each group within each region, the learner share is divided by the population share to give a *standardized participation rate* (that is, the learner share is expressed in terms of the population share).

The comparative position of people with disabilities is highlighted by this approach. Rural and regional Victoria has a higher proportion of people with disabilities than metropolitan Melbourne. Taking into account differences in the size of the population in the ACFE regions, disabled people represent on average 6.6% of the adult population as compared to 5.3% of the population in metropolitan Melbourne. But while there are proportionately more adults with disabilities in rural and regional Victoria, the representation of disabled adults in pre-accredited courses is lower than in Melbourne. The average learner share of this diverse group is a misleading guide to the extent of the population share/learner share discrepancy—20.8% (country Victoria) and 21.6% (Melbourne). When we express the learner share in a region in terms of population share (divide one by the other), this brings out the discrepancy more sharply.

Table 1

Population and learner shares, selected groups in pre-accredited courses 2009-2010

	Rural and regional Victoria					Melbourne metro			Summaries		
	Barwon	Gramp	Loddon	Hume	Gipp	East	South	NW	Rural	Metro	Vic
<i>Based on the Census 2011</i>											
Disabled											
Population (%)	6.4	6.9	6.6	6.5	6.9	4.9	5.2	5.7	6.6	5.3	5.7
Learners (%)	16.9	20.1	21.2	24.5	21.7	23.6	20.3	21.7	20.8	21.6	21.3
<i>learners/pop</i>	2.7	2.9	3.2	3.8	3.1	4.8	3.9	3.8	3.1	4.0	3.7
Indigenous											
Population (%)	1.3	1.4	2.5	2.3	1.9	0.4	0.6	0.7	1.9	0.6	0.9
Learners (%)	0.7	0.8	8.8	1.5	1.0	0.1	1.2	0.5	2.2	0.6	1.3
<i>learners/pop</i>	0.6	0.5	3.5	0.7	0.5	0.3	2.1	0.6	1.2	1.1	1.4
LOTE at home											
Population (%)	7.4	4.0	5.0	6.9	5.1	28.0	26.0	39.3	5.8	32.1	25.2
Learners (%)	6.2	2.7	13.3	4.8	3.7	25.6	29.3	42.2	5.8	33.3	21.6
<i>learners/pop</i>	0.8	0.7	2.7	0.7	0.7	0.9	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.0	0.9
<i>Based on the Census 2006</i>											
Unemployed (population ratio)											
Population (%)	3.4	3.6	3.4	3.2	3.7	2.9	3.3	4.0	3.5	3.5	3.5
Learners (%)	20.0	19.5	35.5	20.6	24.5	22.6	27.2	30.4	23.7	27.1	25.6
<i>learners/pop</i>	5.8	5.4	10.3	6.4	6.6	7.8	8.1	7.6	6.8	7.8	7.4
Unemployed (workforce ratio)											
Workforce (%)	5.5	5.8	5.6	5.0	6.3	4.4	5.1	6.2	5.6	5.3	5.4
Learners (%)	32.4	28.2	50.5	31.1	34.0	38.4	47.8	50.3	35.0	46.2	40.9
<i>learners/pop</i>	5.9	4.9	9.0	6.2	5.4	8.8	9.4	8.2	6.2	8.7	7.6
No Year 12 (1)											
Population (%)	40	42.3	44.2	43.5	43.6	25.4	29.4	32.3	42.6	29.5	32.9
Learners (%)	50.3	57.3	62.3	48.6	54.2	40.4	46	55.1	53.8	48	50.5
<i>learners/pop</i>	1.3	1.4	1.4	1.1	1.2	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.3	1.6	1.5
Low SES											
Population (%)	27.9	38.5	41.2	33.5	39.8	5.1	21.6	31.1	35.7	21.1	25
Learners (%)	39.9	43.9	46.8	56.9	47.6	0.3	24.9	35	47.1	22.6	32.9
<i>learners/pop</i>	1.4	1.1	1.1	1.7	1.2	0.1	1.2	1.1	1.3	1.1	1.3
High SES											
Population (%)	13.3	8.3	11.1	8.1	5.1	44.1	32.6	20.4	9.6	30.7	25
Learners (%)	5	0.1	3.9	3.3	0	46.1	30.5	16.9	2.4	29.3	17.9
<i>learners/pop</i>	0.4	0	0.3	0.4	0	1	0.9	0.8	0.3	1	0.7

(1) and no qualifications

For example, in Barwon South Western, adults with disabilities participate in pre-accredited courses at 2.7 times their representation in the adult population—for every 1 disabled adult in Barwon South Western, there are 2.7 participating in pre-accredited courses. This rises to 2.9 (Grampians), 3.1 Gippsland, and 3.2 (Loddon Mallee). Hume is exceptional, with 3.8 disabled learners for every 1 disabled adult in the regional community. On the whole, the standardised participation rate in rural and regional Victoria is between 2.7 and 3.2. By contrast, the range in Melbourne’s three ACFE regions is between 3.8 and 4.8.

For Melbourne as a whole there are 4 disabled people participating in pre-accredited courses for every one such adult in the population, but only 3.1 disabled people in rural and regional Victoria participating for every adult in the population. Thus, while in country Victoria as compared to metropolitan Melbourne, there is one additional person with a disability for every 100 adults in the community, the reverse pattern is found in participation in pre-accredited courses.

Indigenous Australians in pre-accredited courses

Only a very small proportion of all students in pre-accredited courses are Indigenous—1.3%. Given the relatively limited educational attainment of Indigenous Australians, it is very important to assess whether the low rate of representation in pre-accredited courses is simply a reflection of population numbers and also whether this holds true across all regions in Victoria.

Ideally pre-accredited courses should operate as a broadly-based “second chance” option, enabling Indigenous Australians to reverse the effects of early school leaving and low qualification levels. For this to work, Indigenous Australians would have to be well-represented in the community sector (good access), complete their courses and progress to further study or training (good outcomes).

In 2011, Aboriginal Australians made up 0.9% of the adult Victorian population. The Indigenous share of pre-accredited learners (1.3%) is higher than this, pointing to a marginally favourable level of access. For every 1 Indigenous person in the Victorian community, there are 1.4 (or $1.3/0.9$) Indigenous people undertaking pre-accredited courses.

However, there are several disturbing aspects of this finding. Firstly, a higher rate of participation might have been expected, given the needs of the Indigenous community. How much greater the rate of participation should be—if it is to signal a significant equity effect—is difficult to judge. One approach is to compare the Indigenous participation rate with the rate for a broader category of the Australian population experiencing disadvantage in education and which includes many Indigenous Australians. For example, adults with incomplete schooling and no post-school qualifications—a classification which covers many Indigenous Australians—represent just over half of all learners in pre-accredited courses and 32.9% of all adults in the population (we use the 2006 census because analysis of educational levels at the 2011 census is not yet available). If the learner share (50.5%) is adjusted for population share (32.9%), this gives a standardized participation rate of 1.53, which is higher than the Indigenous rate of 1.4. In other words, Aboriginal students are less well-represented in pre-accredited courses than the broader population of Australians with incomplete schooling and no qualifications. This suggests that there are specific disadvantages experienced by Indigenous Australians in the Victorian community in accessing pre-accredited courses and that the observed rate of participation is lower than it should be.

Regional analysis leads to a second disturbing finding. In most of the ACFE regions, the participation of Indigenous Australians in pre-accredited courses when adjusted for population weight falls below 1. This means that there are *fewer* Indigenous Australians in pre-accredited courses than would be expected simply on the basis of their numerical weight in the Victorian population. This is true of Barwon, Grampians, Hume and Gippsland, and the Eastern and North-West regions in Melbourne. The reason why these low rates in the majority of ACFE regions do not result in a negative (below expected) participation rate for Victoria as a whole is because Loddon Mallee and Southern metropolitan region put in very strong appearances. Indigenous Australians represent 8.8% of all pre-accredited learners in Loddon Mallee (compared to 2.5% of the regional population), while in Southern metropolitan region, Indigenous Australians make up 1.2% of learners from a base of 0.6% of the population.

It should be stressed that having a high population share does not in itself mean a high learner share. The contrast between Hume and Loddon Mallee makes this clear. In these regions, Indigenous Australians represent respectively 2.3% and 2.5% of all adults, but 1.5% and 8.8% of all learners in pre-accredited courses. The Loddon Mallee pattern and to a lesser extent the pattern in Southern metropolitan region raise the standardized participation rate for

Victoria as a whole to a positive level (1.4). This falls below unity when these regions are excluded—the standardized participation rate drops by half in country Victoria (from 1.2 to 0.6) and by more than half in metropolitan Melbourne (from 1.1 to 0.5); for Victoria as a whole, the fall is from 1.4 to 0.7. This confirms that the Indigenous population in six of the eight ACFE regions is significantly under-represented in pre-accredited courses. This is not a function of population size as participation rates have been adjusted for this. However, care should be taken with this finding because the numbers of Indigenous people in pre-accredited courses may be understated as not all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people self-identify.

Unemployed workers

Unemployed workers in Australia tend to have limited schooling and either no post-school qualifications or only basic ones. This makes them vulnerable to both structural change in the Australian economy (long-term shifts in industry and occupation patterns) and cyclical change in the level of economic activity. Pre-accredited courses offer a significant potential benefit to unemployed workers by providing them with pathways to accredited vocational training as well as by imparting generic skills which enhance their work readiness. But do unemployed workers enrol in these courses, and what is the pattern across different regions?

Across Victoria, unemployed workers represented 5.4% of the workforce in 2006. This rate varied from a low of 4.4% in the Eastern suburbs of Melbourne to a high of 6.3% in Gippsland. Generally unemployment was higher in country regions and lower in metropolitan Melbourne, but there was also considerable variation in unemployment rates within rural and regional Victoria and within Melbourne.

While the rate of unemployment is higher in country Victoria than in Melbourne (5.6% compared to 5.3%), unemployed workers represent a smaller share of learners in pre-accredited courses than is found in metropolitan Melbourne. To measure the extent of representativeness, we look only at students *who are in the workforce* (not the population as a whole). Across country regions, unemployed workers make up about a third of all workforce-active students in pre-accredited courses (35%). Loddon Mallee is exceptional in that every second workforce-active participant in a pre-accredited course is not in work, but looking for work. Melbourne, by contrast, has a much higher concentration of unemployed workers

undertaking pre-accredited courses. In the North-Western suburbs and in Southern region, unemployed learners represent every second workforce-active learner (the same as in Loddon Mallee), while the ratio in Eastern metropolitan regions (38%) is higher than all the country regions (other than Loddon Mallee). When we adjust these ratios for the size of the unemployed workforce in a region, we find that for every 6 unemployed workers in regional Victoria who undertake pre-accredited courses, there are 8-9 unemployed learners in metropolitan Melbourne (a standardized participation rate of 6.2 as against 8.7). While unemployed workers are over-represented in pre-accredited courses in all regions in Victoria, an unemployed worker in Melbourne is 1.4 times more likely than an unemployed worker in country Victoria to undertake such a course.

Non-English speaking backgrounds

Adults of low socio-economic status, those with limited schooling and lack of qualifications, those with disabilities, Indigenous Australians, and unemployed workers are overlapping populations. Singling out a particular characteristic or attribute runs the risk of not seeing the full measure of need. On the other hand, it is an approach which is able to highlight strengths and weaknesses in participation and potentially also in provision.

There are other groups whose participation levels in pre-accredited courses can be measured at a general level, but whose composition is complex, making interpretation of findings problematic. For example, in the Australian context the categories of “overseas born” and “speaking a language other than English” are very broad. There are 155 languages other than English represented in the population taking pre-accredited courses in Victoria. The educational level of people speaking these different languages varies widely as does level of proficiency in English. Many migrants who have been in Australia for a long period speak English very well, though some do not speak English at all (ABS 2012).

While we measure the extent to which larger migrant groups are represented in pre-accredited courses, we recognize that there are complex issues relating to access and participation, e.g., knowledge of the availability of courses, the hours when classes are held, perceptions of relevance, the extent to which particular age-groups feel comfortable in the learning context, and the extent to which limited or interrupted schooling may act as a barrier to participation. Within the framework of this study, we can report findings only for larger language groups,

but we stress that pre-accredited courses enrol a great diversity of migrants and refugees, and the openness of the community sector to these many different individuals with varying needs is one of its great strengths.

People who speak a language other than English at home undertake pre-accredited courses in a reverse pattern to the longevity of their establishment in Australia. The longer they have been in Australia, the lower their participation. Two of the largest immigrant groups to come to Australia in the post-war period are Italians and Greeks (the history of their migration is, of course, very much older). People from these two Mediterranean backgrounds make up only a small proportion of all learners in pre-accredited courses—1.2% and 0.8% respectively. Yet this is less than half as many as might be expected, given their weight in the adult population—2.8% and 2.5% respectively. Thus for every 1 Australian who speaks Italian at home, there are only 0.4 learners of this background in pre-accredited courses, and for every 1 Greek-speaking Victorian, only 0.3 learners of Hellenic background.

As has been observed by the ABS, many non-English speaking people who came to Australia in the 1950s and 1960s now speak English well or very well, so one field of pre-accredited study—language and literacy courses—has become less relevant, at least for them. However, it should also be said that proficiency in English does not necessarily mean proficiency in other areas of human learning, e.g., computer literacy. As the post-war generations of migrants grow older, they do not become *less* dependent on knowledge and skills. They do experience greater risk of isolation (for example, through the loss of a marriage partner), and therefore more reliant on modern means of communication. As they withdraw from the workforce, they also risk losing the language skills they acquired partly through human interactions at work or in managing interactions with English-speaking others (doctors, shop assistants, office workers). For these reasons care needs to be taken in interpreting relatively low participation as a sign of low need. The need may be there, but there are cultural or other barriers to meeting the need.

People whose arrival in Australia was late in the post-war era (e.g., Turks, Lebanese, Vietnamese) are in some cases more highly represented in pre-accredited courses than immigrants from earlier waves, such as Italians and Greeks. For every 1 adult who speaks Turkish at home, there are 1.1 speakers of Turkish undertaking pre-accredited courses. Spanish-speaking immigrants (e.g., from South America) are more highly represented in these courses (1.4 learners for every adult in the population who speaks Spanish at home) as

are Vietnamese-speaking adults (1.3), Russian (2.4) and Korean (2.9). These findings bear out the observation that recency of arrival is associated with higher participation in pre-accredited courses.

Chinese-speaking adults represent perhaps the largest single group who speak a language other than English at home. However, this is a very diverse group, and their representation in pre-accredited courses varies from low to very high. Cantonese speakers participate in these courses at about half the rate that might be expected (0.5) as are Mandarin speakers (0.5). But there are groups of Chinese speakers—identified as speaking “Chinese” or a dialect—who have a large presence in pre-accredited courses. These include recent immigrants undertaking language courses.

Refugee groups have amongst the highest representation in pre-accredited courses. These groups include people who speak a Somali language (5.6 learners for every 1 Somali-speaking adult in the Victorian population) and Karen speakers (15.9 learners for every 1 Karen-speaking adult in the population).

While these patterns point to a reverse relationship between activity and longevity of establishment in Australia, it should be stressed that low levels of representation do not necessarily mean that need has been extinguished. And, equally, we should avoid the temptation of viewing the needs of non-English speakers as purely linguistic.

Notes to Chapter One

1. The comparative social profile of learners in pre-accredited courses. The profile of learners was derived from data supplied by ACFE and relates to all people enrolled in 2009 or 2010. The profile of school-leaver applicants for tertiary places is derived from VTAC admissions data for the 2009 intake year. The profile of VET students (other than pre-accredited course students) is derived from the VET Completions Database, constructed by Skills Victoria and Centre for Research on Education Systems (CRES). The population census. In examining the “reach” of pre-accredited courses into the Victorian community, we have worked with comprehensive data relating to 2009-2010 from the VET sector (community providers only) and wherever possible used the 2011 Census. The latest population census provides a suitable point of reference for a study of three cohorts (2009, 2010, 2011). However, at the time of writing some tables were not available from this census (e.g., unemployed, level of schooling, post-school qualifications, and socio-economic status quartiles). In these cases, we have used the population census of 2006. For some tables more than others, this presents a risk (e.g., unemployed workers before and after the Global Financial Crisis of 2008). However, alternative sources of population or labour force data are limited and also involve risk (e.g., high sampling error for regional estimates of unemployment levels).
2. All census data used in our analyses (with the exception of SES) is for the population aged 15 and above.
3. Unless otherwise stated, all SES quartile groups pertain to the State of Victoria, and have been calculated based on the Usual Resident Population of Victoria at the 2006 census.
4. The comparative social profiles of pre-accredited learners in metropolitan and non-metropolitan regions are displayed in the following charts.

Figure 9a Pre-accredited learners living in Metropolitan Melbourne by SES quartile

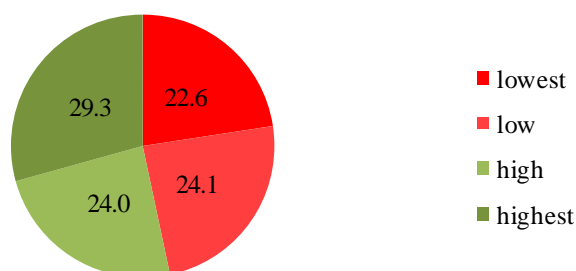


Figure 9b Pre-accredited learners living in non-Metropolitan regions of Victoria by SES quartile



Chapter One: findings in dot point

Who undertakes pre-accredited courses and are high-need groups adequately represented?

Socio-economic status

- Learners in pre-accredited courses in Victoria are drawn disproportionately from low SES backgrounds—as many as 1 in 3 come from the lowest quartile
- This varies from region to region, with Eastern metropolitan region having a very high social profile and few learners from poorer backgrounds in pre-accredited courses
- Compared to other sectors of education and training, the population of learners in pre-accredited courses is the most socio-economically vulnerable
- The vulnerability of this diverse group relates to low levels of schooling, lack of qualifications, low income, high rates of unemployment, and increased risk of isolation and ill-health
- While pre-accredited courses as a whole over-enrol low SES groups, this is greater in rural and regional Victoria than in metropolitan Melbourne, even after adjusting for population weight
- In Melbourne, low SES groups are only marginally more represented amongst learners in pre-accredited courses than their share of the adult population would predict
- This partly reflects the relatively high levels of participation of *socially advantaged* individuals in Melbourne (they make greater use of pre-accredited courses than their peers in country Victoria, e.g., high status immigrants taking literacy courses)
- But it also suggests that men and women from poorer backgrounds in Melbourne make less use of pre-accredited courses than their social peers in rural and regional Victoria
- Are poorly educated and low income populations in the city missing out? Eastern region seems to be least inclusive

Limited schooling and no qualifications

- Educational disadvantage is experienced by people from different social backgrounds, not only the poorest members of the community (though it is amongst them that there is the highest concentration)
- In Melbourne and in Geelong, a substantial minority of pre-accredited learners with incomplete schooling and no qualifications is drawn from higher SES quartiles (30-42%); this is very much higher in Eastern metropolitan region
- Living in the city confers an advantage on adults with incomplete schooling—they are more strongly represented in pre-accredited courses than their peers in country Victoria (after adjusting for population weight)
- This imbalance may be due to high SES groups in the city making more intensive use of pre-accredited courses than in the country (they represent a large share of learners, after adjusting for population weight)

Disabilities

- There are proportionally more people with disabilities in rural and regional Victoria than in Melbourne (6.6% at the 2011 Census compared to 5.3%), but there are fewer in pre-accredited courses
- In Melbourne, there are 4 disabled people enrolled in pre-accredited courses for every 1 such adult in the population, while in country Victoria there are only 3.1 disabled people in class for every 1 in the population
- Accessibility appears to be affected by the relatively greater difficulty (and cost) of creating opportunities for smaller groups of adults—for while there is a greater percentage of disabled people in the country *in total*, they are more widely dispersed and also have to travel longer distances with limited access to specialized transport

Indigenous Australians

- There are very few Indigenous Australians in pre-accredited courses in Victoria (slightly more than 1 in 100)
- This population is “high need” in view of low rates of school completion and achievement issues in school (as measured, e.g., by NAPLAN)
- While Indigenous Australians are more highly represented in pre-accredited courses than in the adult population, the level of over-representation is low

- This is shown by comparing the Indigenous participation rate with the rate for adults with incomplete schooling and no qualifications (a suitable population for benchmarking)—for every 1 adult who meets this educational profile in the population, 1.53 adults with the same profile enrol in pre-accredited courses; for Indigenous Australians, the rate is lower (1.4)
- Participation in some regions is much higher, after adjusting for population size (Loddon Mallee and Southern metropolitan), but across the state there is clearly an issue of under-representation
- In six of the eight ACFE regions, the Indigenous population is significantly under-represented, after adjustment for population size

Unemployed workers

- If a person is in the workforce, but out of work and looking for work, he or she is more likely to enrol in a pre-accredited course if living in Melbourne than in country Victoria
- In rural and regional Victoria, every third workforce-active learner in a pre-accredited course is unemployed; in Melbourne, the ratio is much higher (e.g., 1 in 2 in North-West metropolitan and in Southern metropolitan)
- The unemployed may experience more difficulties accessing courses in rural and regional Victoria than in Melbourne (or be less often referred to these courses) or perhaps view pre-accredited courses as less relevant to available employment in their region (perceived barriers to employed are investigated in the longitudinal survey)
- The result is that while there are relatively more unemployed workers in country Victoria than in metropolitan Melbourne (5.6% compared to 5.3%), they represent a smaller share of learners in pre-accredited courses than their weight in the workforce would predict
- An unemployed worker in Melbourne has 1.4 times the chance of an unemployed worker in rural and regional Victoria of enrolling in a pre-accredited course

Language background other than English

- Speaking a language other than English at home may imply disadvantage in economic or cultural terms, depending on circumstances and histories—there is great variation

in the situations of LOTE speakers in the pre-accredited learner population (representing over 150 languages)

- As a generalization, participation in pre-accredited courses presents a reverse pattern to longevity of establishment of a foreign-language community in Australia—the greater the length of settlement, the lower the level of participation, and conversely
- Thus long-established groups, such as Italians and Greeks, are represented less frequently than newly-established groups, such as Spanish-speaking immigrants, Russian, Korean, and still more so immigrants speaking a Somali language or Karen
- This reverse pattern does not imply that the needs of all groups are being met
- The needs of LOTE speakers should not be viewed in terms simply of language proficiency—other needs include computer literacy, vocational training to adjust to changing labour markets, and personal development courses to manage life course changes (including potential isolation)
- These needs may be greater amongst ageing language communities, long-established in Australia, than other groups; if so, the low rates of participation of the long-established communities appear problematic
- Regarding the larger groups, for every 1 Australian who speaks Italian at home, there are only 0.4 learners of this language background in pre-accredited courses, and for every 1 adult who speaks Greek at home, there are only 0.3 learners of Hellenic origin in pre-accredited courses

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Chapter Two

Why do people enrol in pre-accredited courses?

We have seen that the community sector through its pre-accredited courses has a wide reach. People from all social backgrounds enrol. The profile of the sector, as would be expected, is nevertheless weighted in favour of groups with relatively high need—people who have not completed school, the unemployed, the disabled, and Indigenous Australians. With other groups, including people speaking a language other than English at home, the picture is mixed—more recently-arrived sub-groups are very well-represented, while long-established communities are not. There are also significant regional variations in the extent to which high-need groups are present in the learner population.

For the community sector to work well, it is important to know, not only who takes pre-accredited courses, but why they do so. Study motives are reflective of need, and unless we understand need, we cannot say whether the community sector is working well or poorly.

From a design angle, as outlined in Skills Victoria policy documents, pre-accredited courses are focussed on creating pathways to nationally accredited training or employment. They are intended to help people gain in confidence and skills. The courses aim at meeting the needs of adults who have experienced barriers to education in the past and who find it difficult to undertake accredited programs as their first step back into education and training.

Given the diversity of learners undertaking pre-accredited courses, cultural as well as economic motives come into play, and the balance of these motives varies. As we shall see, many learners are looking for change in their employment situation, others are seeking to upgrade skill levels (rather than finding a job or changing jobs), many see pre-accredited courses as a way of building self-confidence, while for other learners it is new knowledge that motivates them and personal development. Generally these motives cohere—they are woven together. But their relative importance is influenced by economic situation, qualification level, personal circumstances and stage in the individual's life course.

The economic situation of the learner can be represented by location in the workforce. This is a limited way of viewing “economic situation” as it does not take into account income and wealth, occupation, or educational qualifications. But workforce status does provide a general

framework for examining the study motives of people enrolling in pre-accredited courses, usually with a view to improving employment or skill levels.

Individuals may be employed full-time or part-time, they may be under-employed, unemployed, or workforce-inactive (retired, unable to work, discouraged by labour market conditions, students, carers, amongst other categories). Within this broad framework of workforce status, we see other factors relating to personal circumstances or life course as coming into play and shaping more or less significantly the study aspirations of learners in pre-accredited courses.

These factors include education (level of schooling, post-school qualifications), age, language spoken at home, gender, indigeneity, geographical locality, and disability. People in the same workforce situation who differ in these ways may also view pre-accredited courses differently. But, as we shall see, there is also a great deal of commonality of outlook amongst people in the same workforce situation. This is partly because attributes such as gender and age are themselves associated with differences in the economic situation of the learner. For example, older people are more likely to have withdrawn from the labour market, women are more frequently unemployed than men (though not in all age-groups), and many people with a disability are prevented from working (or from working full-time).

A labour force framework of analysis

Some learners can be considered to be *relatively well-integrated in the labour market*. They have full-time work, or they have part-time jobs, but are not seeking more hours of work. Our expectation is that this well-integrated group will be focussed on skills and knowledge growth. They will be seeking to maintain or improve their work situation, including through the greater flexibility and mobility that should come with higher skill levels.

Many individuals hold part-time jobs and are seeking more hours of employment. They can be considered *less well-integrated in the labour market* because they are under-employed in terms of their stated preference for more work and also from the angle that part-time work is often casual rather than permanent and as a rule generates less income. They will be seeking to improve their position in the labour market, perhaps finding a new job with longer hours, a more secure job (permanent rather than casual) or extending the hours of their current job.

Unemployed people are *poorly integrated in the labour market*. They are seeking work and are in the labour force, but tenuously, and more so than under-employed workers, thanks to the impact of unemployment on job-search confidence and on the perceptions of potential employers. We expect that the unemployed will place a stronger emphasis on finding suitable work.

Finally, many learners in pre-accredited courses are *not in the labour force*, whether employed or unemployed. They are not seeking work and do not have jobs. Some people in this category of “inactive” are discouraged workers and can be considered to be on the margins of the labour market. But many others have withdrawn permanently from the labour force because they have reached the age of retirement or have a disability or possibly have independent means. Within this broad group, there are differences in qualification levels as there are amongst individuals who are relatively well-integrated in the labour market or less well-integrated, whether employed or unemployed.

The class of 2011: labour force status

So far we have been examining the profile of learners in pre-accredited courses using administrative data relating to the whole of the population of learners. However, we now want to turn to study motives and to investigate the links between why people choose to take pre-accredited courses and who they are. For this purpose, we use sample survey data rather than administrative data.

In this analysis, our focus is on the class of 2011. We have preferred this cohort over the earlier 2009-2010 cohorts because it is larger, more region-representative and more recent in time. However, we provide an analysis of the labour force status of the earlier 2009-2010 cohorts in Appendix A and we will draw on these older cohorts to look at longer term changes in labour force status.

**Figure 10 Labour force status of the 2011 cohort
(n=3030) (%)**

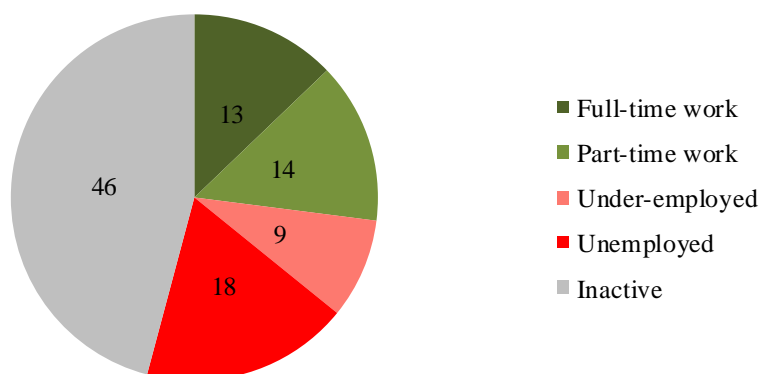


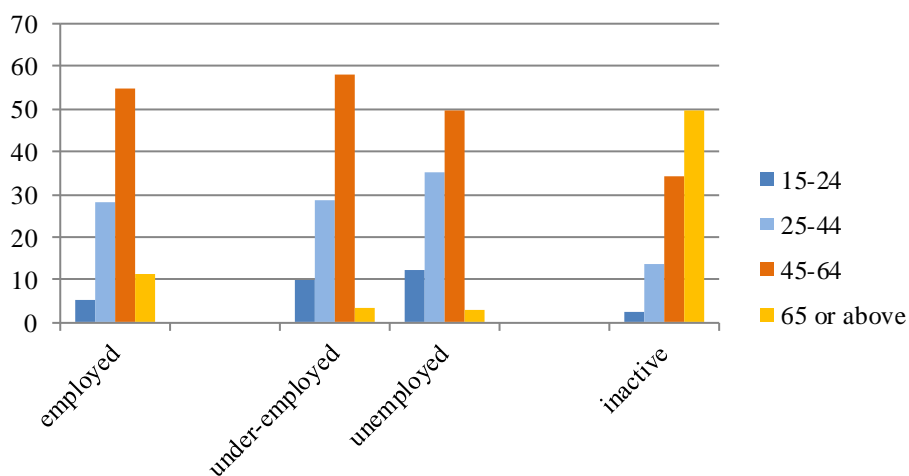
Figure 10 shows that just over half the learners in pre-accredited courses were active in the workforce at the time they commenced their course in 2011 (the 2009-2010 cohort had a slightly higher percentage in the workforce). Of these, 27% could be said to be relatively well-integrated in the labour market as they were either in full-time work or were part-time workers not seeking additional hours. However, the same proportion were either less well-integrated in the labour market (under-employed) or were poorly integrated (unemployed).

The age-profile of learners according to their status in the workforce

Learners taking pre-accredited courses include both workers (employed or not) and people not in the workforce. How do the age-profiles of these different groups compare? This is an important question in the context of understanding the motives that lead people to undertake pre-accredited courses.

Workers employed full-time or part-time (but not seeking additional hours) are, as we have suggested, perhaps the most well-integrated group in the labour market by comparison with people who are under-employed or unemployed. Of this relatively secure group, only a very small proportion is drawn from the youngest age-range (15-24 year-olds) (about 6%). Figure 11 shows that workers who are relatively well-integrated in the labour market tend to be older men and women—28% are in the age-range 25-44 years and 55% are in the age-range 45-64 years.

Figure 11 The age-profile of learners by their labour force status (%)



Older workers have much greater experience in the workforce. This is an advantage in helping develop strategies for maintaining or improving location in the labour market—older people have more contacts, more knowledge of opportunities, and perhaps clearer ideas of the kind of advancement they are seeking in career terms. But with age there also comes growing vulnerability to change in the labour market. Competitiveness based on experience may be offset by perceptions of inadequate or irrelevant skills and lack of flexibility. Older generations are also less schooled and less qualified.

Both apprehension of change and confidence in adapting to change may lie behind the fact that two-thirds of all “well-integrated” workers in pre-accredited courses are aged 45 or over. They see the need to adapt and also the means of adapting.

Under-employed and unemployed workers are in a more vulnerable position in the labour market. They, too, are heavily concentrated in the age-range 45-64 years (representing 58% and 50% respectively of these two groups). Their need for adaptation is greater as, at their age, they are already experiencing partial exclusion from the labour market. Amongst the under-employed and the unemployed, there are very few workers of retirement age (65 and over)—only 3-4% compared to nearly 12% of learners who are in full-time work. The oldest workers show a tendency to quit the workforce altogether rather than endure the uncertainty of too few hours of employment or no work at all.

By contrast, the insecure locations of under-employment and unemployment have twice as many younger workers as there are in the most secure categories of employment (between

10-12% compared to 5%). Young workers make much greater use of pre-accredited courses when exposed to the risk of exclusion from the labour market than when they are relatively secure in their jobs. They turn to training opportunities to reverse the risk, whereas the oldest workers abandon the labour market.

Finally, every second learner who is not in the workforce is of retirement age. A further third are aged 45-64 years. Only a small proportion of the workforce-inactive are younger learners, i.e., aged 15-44. Of this broad group, a third have a disability and a third speak a language other than English at home. Thus many face barriers to the labour market of one kind or another, and enrolment in pre-accredited courses may be viewed as addressing these barriers or at least compensating for the effects of labour market exclusion.

How age-typical are workers in pre-accredited courses compared to all workers?

The age-profile of our sample of learners who are in the workforce differs markedly from the profile of the Victorian workforce as captured by the national labour force survey. Pre-accredited courses have a much higher proportion of older workers. These older individuals are over-represented amongst workforce-active learners, while younger workers are under-represented.

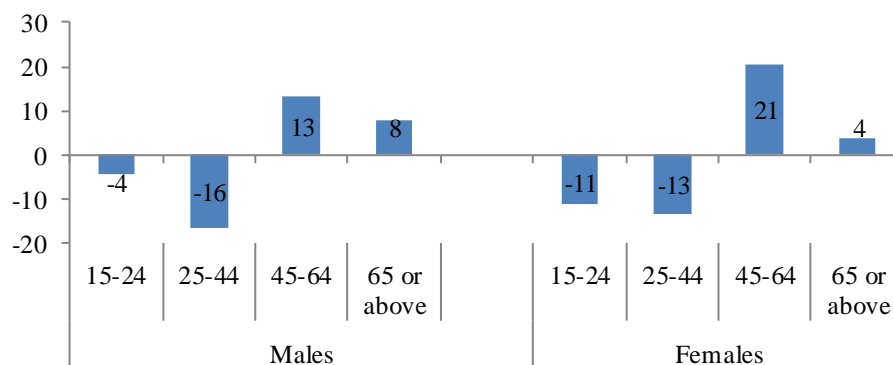
Figure 12 compares the age-profiles of the labour force in Victoria (June 2011) and the workforce-active sample of learners in pre-accredited courses (2011). Women in their late to mid-40s are much more highly represented in the workforce-active sample than in the Victorian labour force as a whole (+21%), and more highly represented than is the case with men, though they, too, are over-represented (+13%).

Workers who undertake pre-accredited courses are atypical in age. It is important to stress that our comparisons relate to *workforce-active* learners. These are people who are *combining* work and study rather than *replacing* work with study.

Both men and women in their mid to late-40s are drawn into pre-accredited courses much more often than would be predicted on the basis of their presence in the Victorian workforce. This highlights the strategic role which these courses are seen as playing. That is, pre-accredited courses are viewed as altering a relationship with the world of work, either defending it or improving it. This is at a point in the life course when women, for their part,

are becoming free of child-rearing (though not parenting as such), while both men and women face an employment landscape of increasing uncertainty.

Figure 12 Differences in the age-profile of the Victorian labour force and workforce-active learners in pre-accredited courses by gender (%)



Workers who take pre-accredited courses are also age-atypical in another way. Younger workers are markedly less well-represented amongst them than they are in the Victorian labour force as a whole. This is especially true of the age-group 25-44 years—men (-16%) and women (-13%).

Workers between their mid-20s and mid-40s connect with the community sector less often than older workers. This is perhaps because their rates of participation in the workforce are higher (75% of women who are 25-44 years old compared to 70% of women aged 45-64; and 91% of men aged 25-44 years compared to 82% aged 45-64 years). Younger men have lower rates of unemployment, not only higher rates of workforce participation, though the unemployment rate for women aged 25-45 is higher than for older women. It is also true that the “younger generation” is more schooled and more qualified than the older, and thus potentially less dependent on courses that are intended to reverse the effects of limited schooling and lack of qualifications.

The skewed age pattern of workers enrolling in pre-accredited courses reflects a greater labour market precariousness for some individuals—their hold on work is more tenuous and their need to improve their employability in an evolving labour market is greater. But participation in pre-accredited courses is not necessarily a sign of precariousness or vulnerability. Many workers taking pre-accredited courses are investing in skills and

knowledge to adapt to change and they are doing so from a relatively strong position in the labour market as measured by employment status and educational qualifications.

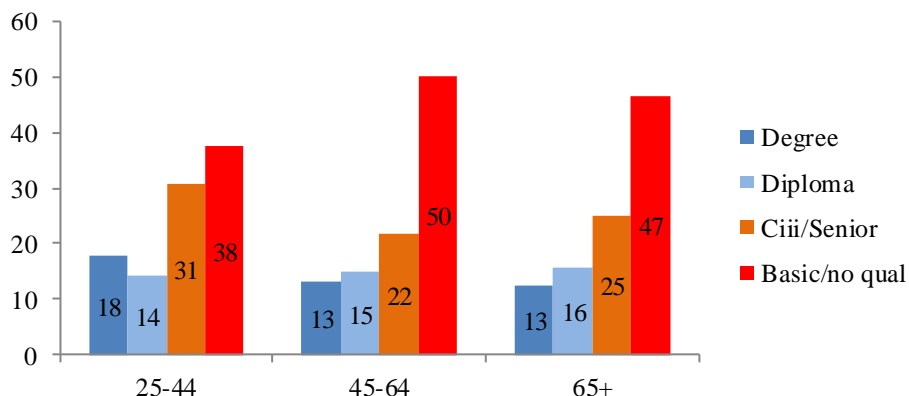
In every employment category, there are men and women workers with degrees or diplomas as there are men and women with skilled, basic vocational or no qualifications. Younger workers (aged 25-44 years) are more likely to be university-educated than older workers (45-64 years), while the latter are more likely to hold diplomas or other middle-level qualifications. This reflects an historical pattern of progressive expansion of opportunities for higher education. But it also confirms how higher initial platforms of educational attainment favour greater participation in continuing education.

While the qualifications profile of employed workers shows an educational multiplier at work—qualified people pursuing more knowledge and skills—there is also a pattern of qualifications compensation in which unqualified or poorly qualified workers make up lost ground through pre-accredited courses. Workers who are unemployed have the weakest educational profile of any workforce-active group in the community sector. They have the highest proportion of unqualified individuals and the lowest proportion of university graduates.

Strategies of platform-building—one foundational, the other more competitive—can be viewed as upward adjustments to skill levels in a context of ongoing labour market change and life course challenges. The oldest learners taking pre-accredited courses are typically outside the arena of labour demand and supply, but they are also the least well-educated and potentially the most vulnerable of all groups to the risks of isolation, loneliness, dependence, lack of stimulation, ill-health, and a sense of incapacity faced with technological and social change.

Most learners who are not in the workforce are aged 45 and over (84%). Figure 13 shows that only a minority of individuals in this older age-band have a degree or diploma and that between 38% and 50% have either basic qualifications or none at all.

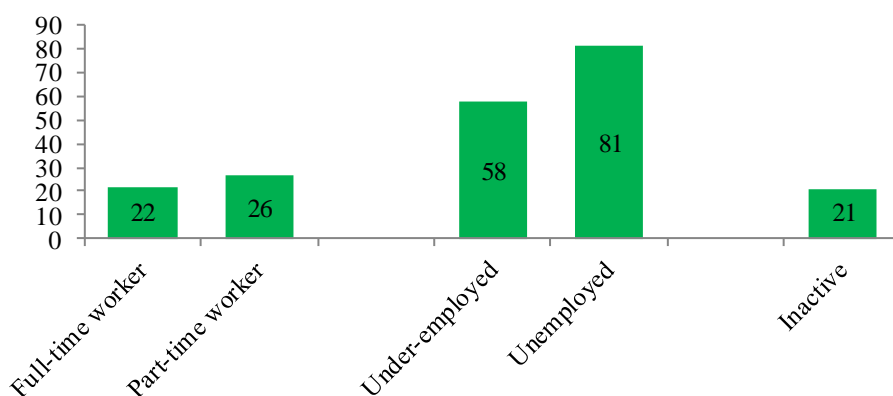
Figure 13 The qualifications profile of workforce-inactive learners by main age-group (%)



Study motives: finding or changing jobs

Location in the labour market has a major bearing on the study motives of learners in pre-accredited courses. Workers who are least well-integrated in the labour market—the under-employed and the unemployed—are between 2 and 3 times more likely than well-integrated workers to nominate finding or changing jobs (see Figure 14).

Figure 14 Enrolling to find or change jobs by workforce status (%)

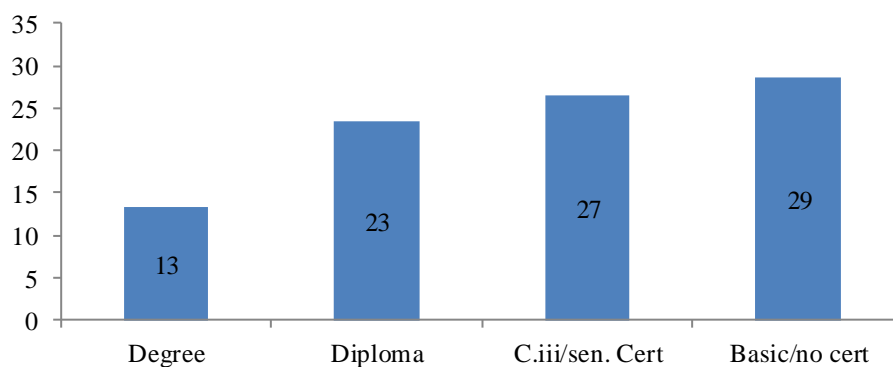


This motive is especially high on the agenda of workers without jobs (81%), but it is also nominated by a large majority of under-employed respondents (58%).

Amongst full-time workers and those part-time workers who are not seeking more hours of employment, the motive of finding or changing a job is far less important, but still attracts between 1 in 5 and 1 in 4 respondents in these employment categories. Pre-accredited courses are a means of employment change and adaptation for many people in work, not only a path to employment for those who are out of work or under-employed. This is borne out by the fact that the job-change motive amongst workers well-integrated in the labour market is stronger amongst the less qualified and weaker amongst the more qualified.

Figure 15 shows that the desire to find or change job through study is fairly low amongst university graduates (13%), but rises as the level of the respondent's qualifications falls. Amongst those with few or no qualifications, 29% are seeking employment change through study.

Figure 15 The find or change job motive amongst workers well-integrated in the labour market by qualification level (%)



This suggests that the full-time workers who are university-educated are more stable as regards their current employment and that they view their study activity as improving their skill levels either in the context of their current job or more widely. Less highly qualified full-time workers, on the other hand, appear to be more mobile or aspirational. They see the acquisition of job skills as part of a mobility strategy.

Given the connection between qualification level and earnings in Australia, less well-qualified workers have ground to make up as compared to university-educated workers. From this angle, it is not surprising that full-time workers with minimal or no qualifications are twice as likely as those with a university degree to view their study as a means of gaining a new job.

The desire for job change through pre-accredited study also tends to rise amongst the less well-qualified respondents who are under-employed or unemployed. This is a weaker trend, but is suggestive of a strategy to overcome the employment barriers that are experienced by people with incomplete schooling and only basic qualifications, if any.

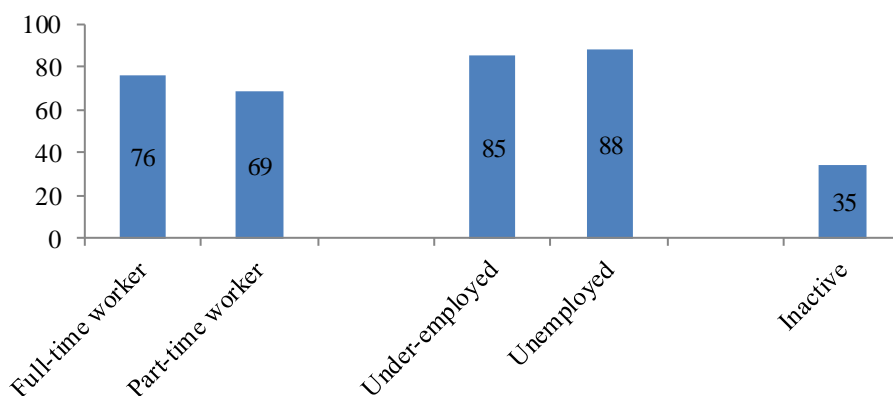
Amongst the *workforce-inactive*, there is also a desire to find work through pre-accredited study. Every fifth learner who was not in the workforce at the time of commencing a pre-accredited course undertook study to find work. These aspiring workers are mostly of prime employment age (25-64 years), three-quarters are women (which is proportional to their numerical importance amongst the workforce-inactive), about a third speak a language other than English at home, and over a third have a permanent disability. The tendency for the job motive to increase as qualification levels fall is also evident amongst the workforce-inactive.

In the course of this study, we investigate whether aspiring workers who were not in the workforce at the time they commenced their pre-accredited course were successful in finding work.

Improving job skills

Location in the labour market also influences the motive of improving job skills. It is again the least well-integrated workers who most frequently nominate this motive—85% of the under-employed and 88% of the unemployed. Respondents who are well-integrated in the labour market nominate improved job skills somewhat less frequently, but this still concerns a large majority—76% of full-time workers and 69% of part-time workers who are not seeking more hours of employment (see Figure 16).

Figure 16 Improving job skills as a study motive by labour force status (%)

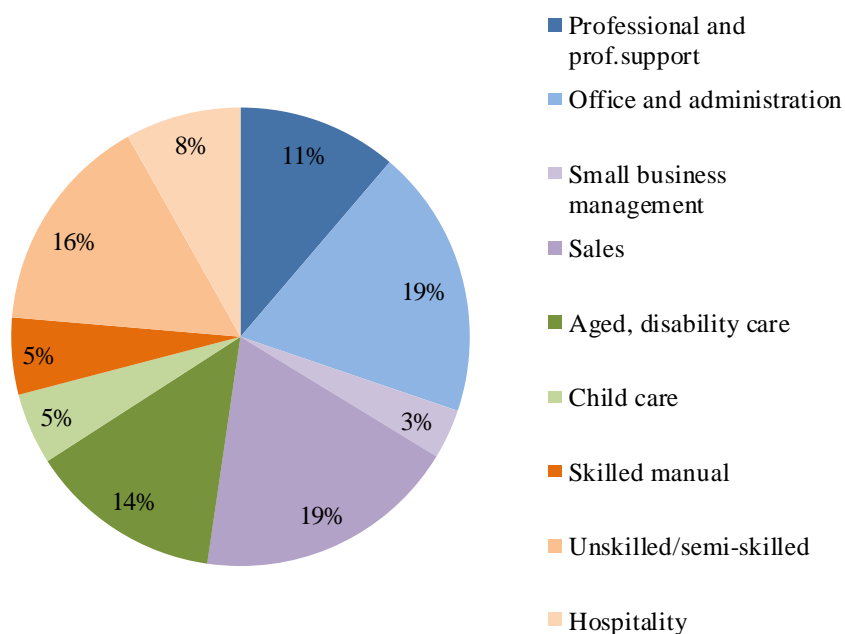


The motive of improving job skills is especially strong, as we have noted, amongst more economically vulnerable workers—the under-employed and the unemployed. Those who have work are often in low-skill, poorly paid and casual jobs. Many are in retail and hospitality (waitressing, barmen, counter staff, food preparation). Many are cleaners, labourers, machinists, storemen, drivers.

These service workers are in very insecure positions within the labour market, sometimes involving short and irregular hours which would place them at or below the poverty line. To re-position themselves within the labour market so that they have fuller hours, better remuneration and ongoing work, they need to acquire skills in demand, beginning with basic literacy and numeracy and extending to computer skills and broader employability skills. Often poorly educated they have few or no qualifications so that they are at the mercy of local employment conditions.

Many under-employed learners in pre-accredited courses are aged-care, community, and disability support workers. This group alone represents nearly 1 in 5 of the under-employed respondents in our sample (see Figure 17).

Figure 17 Occupations of under-employed workers in pre-accredited courses



To cater well for the needs of the aged or disabled people in their care, these workers need accredited training (e.g., a Certificate III in Aged Care, a Certificate III or IV in Home and Community Care, a Certificate IV in Disability). As the workforce in the aged-care industry becomes increasingly professionalized, more pressure will be placed on the mainly older women who care for the elderly to undertake training. Many will still have casual employment (currently about 40% of the aged-care workforce in Australia, according to *The Age* 20/10/12), and the difference in remuneration between trained and untrained workers is currently very small. But the skill requirements of jobs in aged and community care are growing, and this can be expected to render the industry less and less accessible to low-skill workers with little or no training.

Office workers represent an even larger proportion of the under-employed respondents in our sample. General clerical and administrative jobs amongst this group are frequently part-time as are bookkeeping and accounting roles, usually in small local businesses. Computing skills are essential for office workers, and the office environment, even in small business, is becoming increasingly complex through internet services and applications. To maintain or improve their position in the labour market, office workers need access to practical training, and it is not surprising that computing is one of the largest fields of pre-accredited study.

While we cannot offer a complete analysis of the occupations of workers in pre-accredited courses, the examples we have given underline why the demand for better job skills is so high on the agenda, especially for the under-employed and even more so for individuals who have lost their footing in the labour market entirely.

Investment in skills growth is very strong among all workforce-active respondents. But as a motive for study, it is also nominated by over a third of respondents who are not in the workforce. This may seem surprising if “workforce-inactive” is interpreted as a permanent state, signifying retirement or incapacity. Instead it appears that for a sizeable minority—mainly of prime employment age—“inactivity” is a transitional state which can be changed through education and training.

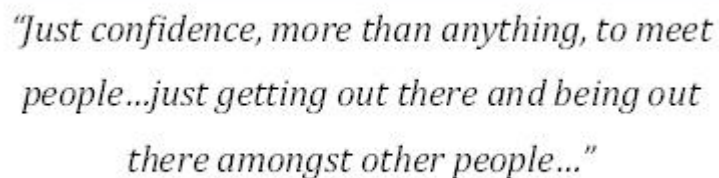
Every third respondent who is not in the labour force nominates improvement in job skills as a motive for study. The strength of this motive declines with age, and is strongest amongst the youngest—75% of respondents who are aged 25-44 years, 42% of those aged 45-64 years, and only 17% of those aged 65 or over. This pattern suggests that there are many

discouraged or aspiring workers who are currently not working or looking for work, but who are planning to enter or re-enter the workforce on the basis of a stronger skills profile.

Improving self-confidence

Gaining the confidence to make changes in one's working life is seen by many respondents as an important reason for undertaking study. Lack of self-confidence is a significant barrier which can develop over time through the force of circumstance, such as withdrawal from the workforce to have children, serious illness, retrenchment, or migration.

Being able to interact confidently with others is at the base of all paid work. To apply for a job, to manage a job interview, to build relationships in the work environment, to perform tasks well in a context in which effectiveness and efficiency depend on the quality of human interchange all hinge on having a positive sense of self and of one's capacity to contribute, particularly when facing new tasks and new people.



"Just confidence, more than anything, to meet people...just getting out there and being out there amongst other people..."

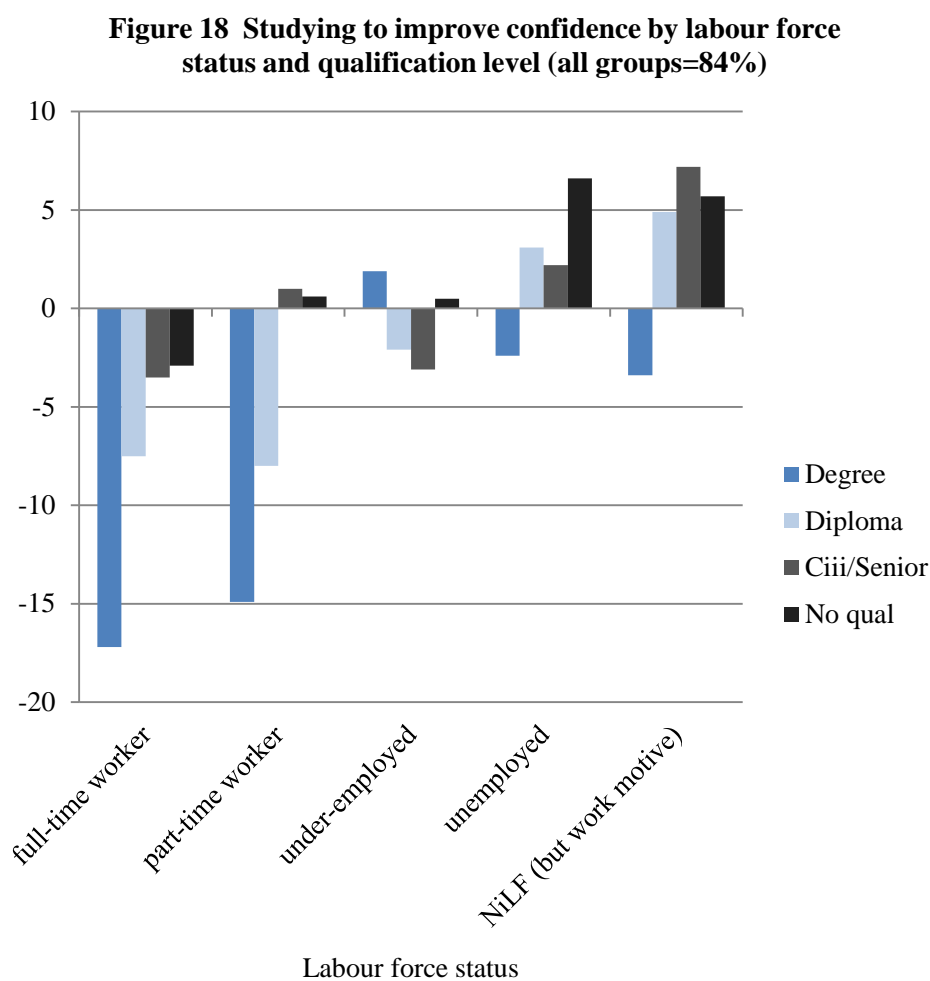
The desire to improve self-confidence through pre-accredited courses is stronger amongst learners with limited schooling and qualifications than amongst learners who are well-educated. People who have completed school and gone onto tertiary education have built a basis for confidence through the recognition they have received of successful learning in formal education. They hold degrees or diplomas, and these are a statement of what they can do (in broad terms) as well as what they have succeeded in doing.

But people who did not finish school or who hold only basic qualifications have had less contact with the institutional world of graded education and have gained fewer "credits". Confidence based on educational success has still to be built, or at least reinforced. This underlies the trend in which the "confidence" motive for enrolling in pre-accredited courses

rises as qualification level falls. Conversely the most highly qualified respondents are the least likely to cite “confidence” as a study motive.

Of people who are well-integrated in the labour market and also hold university degrees, 67% nominate “confidence” as a study motive. This rises to between 90% and 92% of people who are on the margins of the labour market (aspiring or discouraged workers, technically inactive) and who have at best finished school or hold a skilled vocational certificate.

In Figure 18, we analyse the frequency of the confidence motive in each labour force category of respondents, broken out by qualification level. Across all groups, 84% of respondents either in the labour force or on the margins cite “confidence”; the response frequencies within each group are expressed as deviations from this overall rate (represented by zero on the vertical axis).



Amongst most categories of respondents—full-time workers, part-time workers, the unemployed and people not in the labour force (but studying for work motives)—there is a stepwise pattern in which the motive for building confidence generally increases as the level of qualification falls. The pattern is not regular within all groups (and is different for under-employed workers), but confirms the greater interest of poorly qualified individuals in confidence building, regardless of location within the labour market.

Building self-confidence is also a strong study motive amongst the mainly older men and women who are not in the workforce and do not have work-related motives for study. Withdrawal from the workforce through age or infirmity may at first sight seem to relax the pressure on individuals to have an active and socially engaged life. For retirement is associated with the discretionary use of time and the absence of the timetabling effects of work and child-rearing (though many grandparents are doing a second shift). But retirement also brings with it potential isolation and a loss of the skills that social interaction exercises. Confidence in relating to others, in setting goals, in filling up the time freed of work in positive ways may weaken and lead to social reclusion, loss of activity and deterioration in physical and mental health.

Pre-accredited courses enable people to reconnect with the social world, whether face-to-face or virtually in cyberspace. The courses create a bridge of self-confidence between self and others. Most workforce-inactive respondents see pre-accredited courses in this light, and the creation of this bridge is more strongly emphasized by poorly-educated learners than by well-educated ones. Over two-thirds of university-educated respondents who are workforce-inactive and are not studying for work-related reasons nominate the “confidence” motive, but even more respondents with limited or no qualifications do (81%).

Preparing for further study or training

Pre-accredited courses represent an important first step for poorly qualified individuals to build up their skills and improve their economic situation. Individuals who are well-integrated in the labour market, on the other hand, and who are also well-qualified view pre-accredited courses as deepening or upgrading their skills and giving them the flexibility they need in the face of labour market and life course change. Both the relatively advantaged

group and the relatively disadvantaged frequently see pre-accredited courses as leading on to further study or training.

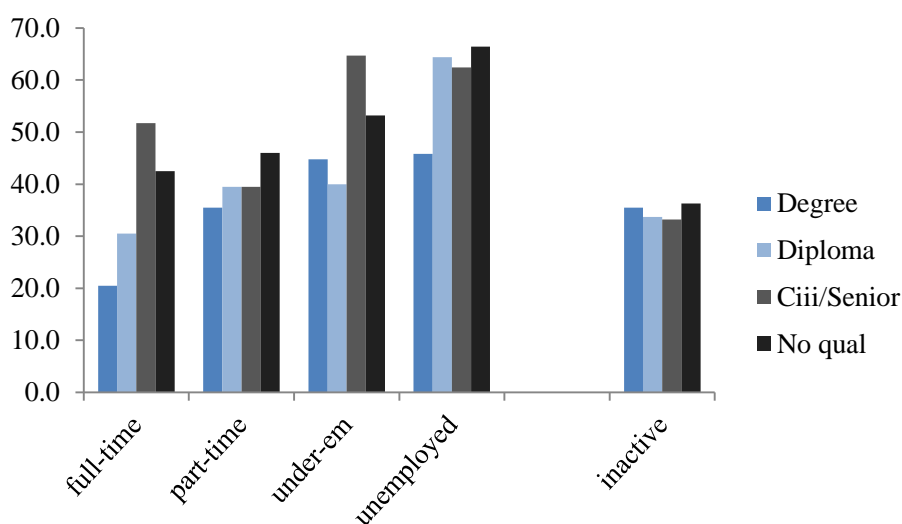
Access to further study through pre-accredited courses is a motive which is closely linked with both labour force status and qualification level. Full-time workers are the least likely to nominate further study as a motive (39%) as are part-time workers who are not seeking more hours of employment (40%). Under-employed workers and the unemployed, on the other hand, are much more likely to view the potential of pre-accredited courses in terms of a pathway to further study (53% and 62% respectively).

Economic security thus influences the extent to which the further study motive drives demand for pre-accredited courses. The greater the level of insecurity, as measured by labour market integration, the greater the level of demand.

But within this, the *relative advantage of educational credentials* also influences the likelihood that a learner in a pre-accredited course is seeking to create a pathway to further study. For within each labour force category, the “further study” motive increases as qualification level declines. As might well be expected, it is the less qualified who will seek higher level qualifications, while the more qualified already exercise a labour market advantage through the degree or diploma that they hold.

Figure 19 shows, for example, that amongst full-time workers, those respondents who have no qualifications are twice as likely as those with a university degree to view their pre-accredited course as a pathway to further study.

Figure 19 Seeing pre-accredited courses as a pathway to further study by labour force status and level of qualification (%)



When we shift our focus from what is happening within the labour market to the large group of learners who are not working and not seeking work, the general level of interest in further study falls and the relationship between the further study motive and the level of qualification disappears. Workforce-inactive learners are under less pressure to reverse the disadvantages both of labour market situation and educational level (though this does not imply an absence of economic pressures as such).

However, at the same time it should be noted that every third respondent who is not in the labour force is seeking to enlarge their study opportunities through pre-accredited courses, and this level of demand holds regardless of prior level of educational attainment.

Personal interest as a study motive

Much of our discussion so far has focussed on the economic and cultural motives of learners in pre-accredited courses—finding or changing jobs, improving job skills, developing confidence, preparing for further study. All of these motives look to a change in the quality of the learner's economic situation, their social integration or their access to the cultural world of knowledge and learning, both vocational and academic.

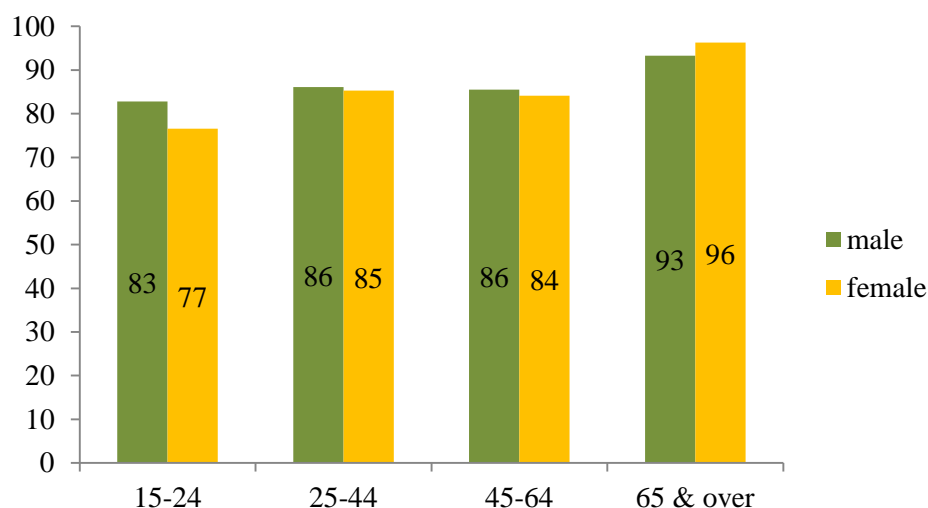
Many learners, especially older men and women who are not in the labour force, are attracted to pre-accredited courses through intrinsic interest, the pleasure of learning, and the stimulus of meeting new people. These motives can be regarded, on the one hand, as cultural—they relate to the ways in which people live, the exchanges between them (teacher to student, student to fellow student), and the things they value. But they are also motives of personal growth and well-being. They look to a change in quality of life rather than economic position (though often both these objectives are involved).

Like the “confidence” motive, the aim of “exploring a personal interest or activity” has a developmental aspect. It is not only about intrinsic interest. Similarly “meeting new people and sharing a learning activity” extends the social world of the learner, exercises social skills, and promotes personal growth as well as responding to intrinsic interest. Again like the “confidence” motive, “connecting with people in the local community” helps the learner improve self-esteem and personal skills through social interaction, but with an emphasis on a localized network of people rather than more broadly.

Exploring a personal interest of activity motivates almost all learners in pre-accredited courses (nearly 90%). The motive is stronger amongst men and women who are not in the labour force than those who are working or seeking work (93% compared to between 80% and 85%). While this shade of difference is understandable from the angle of workforce priorities, we should stress that pre-accredited courses are seen, even by the economically motivated, not only in functional terms, but as learning opportunities which are potentially attractive and engaging in themselves (whether this motive is satisfied, we will see later in this report). How well educated the learner is makes practically no difference: both the university graduate and the early school leaver without qualifications enrol to explore a personal interest or activity.

Age, however, does make a difference. The youngest learners are least likely to be motivated by personal interest, while the oldest are the most highly motivated. The age-gap in intrinsic interest is twice as great amongst women as men. Amongst young women aged 15-24, 77% nominate personal interest as a study motive. This rises to around 85% amongst women aged between 25 and 64, and peaks at 96% of women aged 65 and over. There is thus a 20 percentage point between the youngest and oldest women learners (see Figure 20).

Figure 20 The age and gender gap in personal interest as a study motive (%)



The weaker interest by young women appears to be linked to the type of pre-accredited course they take, though small numbers in this age-group make course-based comparisons hazardous. Young women taking *employment skills and self-development courses* have the

lowest levels of personal interest (69%), whereas amongst young men it is *literacy and numeracy courses*.

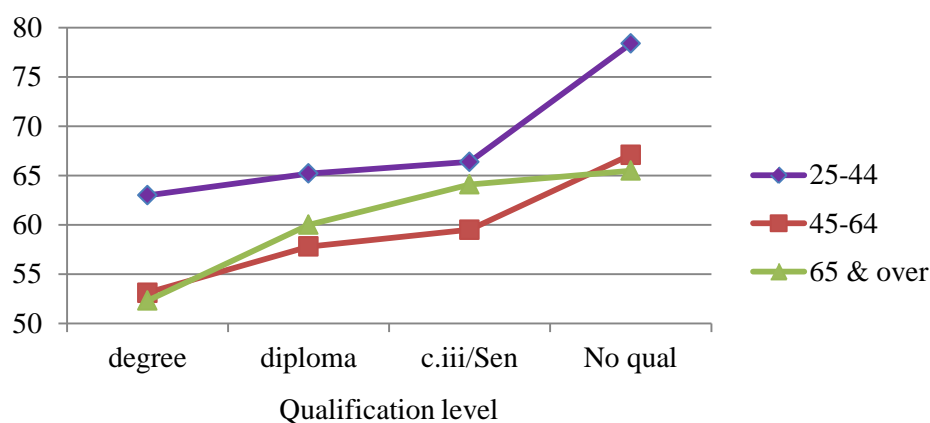
Meeting new people and sharing a learning activity

The social support which pre-accredited courses make possible through shared learning activities (as compared to private study) is a benefit which grows in importance as we descend the scale of educational attainment.

Amongst graduates, 57% nominate the motive of meeting new people and sharing a learning activity, amongst diploma-holders this rises to 60%, amongst respondents with a skilled vocational or senior school certificate to 63%, while amongst the least qualified the figure is 69%.

This holds true of all age-groups (see Figure 21), with age itself tending to lower the frequency with which the motive is nominated. Meeting new people and sharing a learning activity is more favoured by the 25-44 year-old age-group than by older respondents.

Figure 21 Meeting new people and sharing a learning activity as a study motive by qualification level and age (%)



More interesting than the age-gap (which is not regular) is the connection with credentials. The individuals with the least experience of formal education are also the group most likely to cite the “new people and share learning” motive, and the group itself represents almost 40% of all respondents.

Perhaps this response pattern reflects how the path back to study is seen by individuals who have few or no qualifications: they would rather take this path together, while individuals who have already proved themselves in formal education may attach less value to sharing learning, having more confidence in their own efforts.

Connect with people in the local community

Taking a pre-accredited course with a view to connecting with people in the local community is generally a weaker motive than other cultural or economic benefits (though not all). Overall about two-thirds of respondents nominate it. There is little connection between the community motive and workforce status or qualifications. However, there is a link with age.

While it might be thought that older people would endorse the “local community” motive in reaction to the greater risk of isolation they face in the life course, it is in fact younger respondents who nominate the motive more frequently.

There is a steady rise in the community motive from 58% of the oldest respondents to 64% of the 45-64 year-olds, 74% of the 25-44 year-olds, peaking at 77% of the 15-24 year-olds.

If respondents in retirement are least likely to study in order to connect with people in the community is this because “retirement” means withdrawal from social relationships as well? More likely older people interpret local community to mean the circle of their friends, neighbours and acquaintances, access to whom does not require taking a course. They may have other views about “the” local community (the local government area), but this is different from “their” community (represented by the people they can share views with).

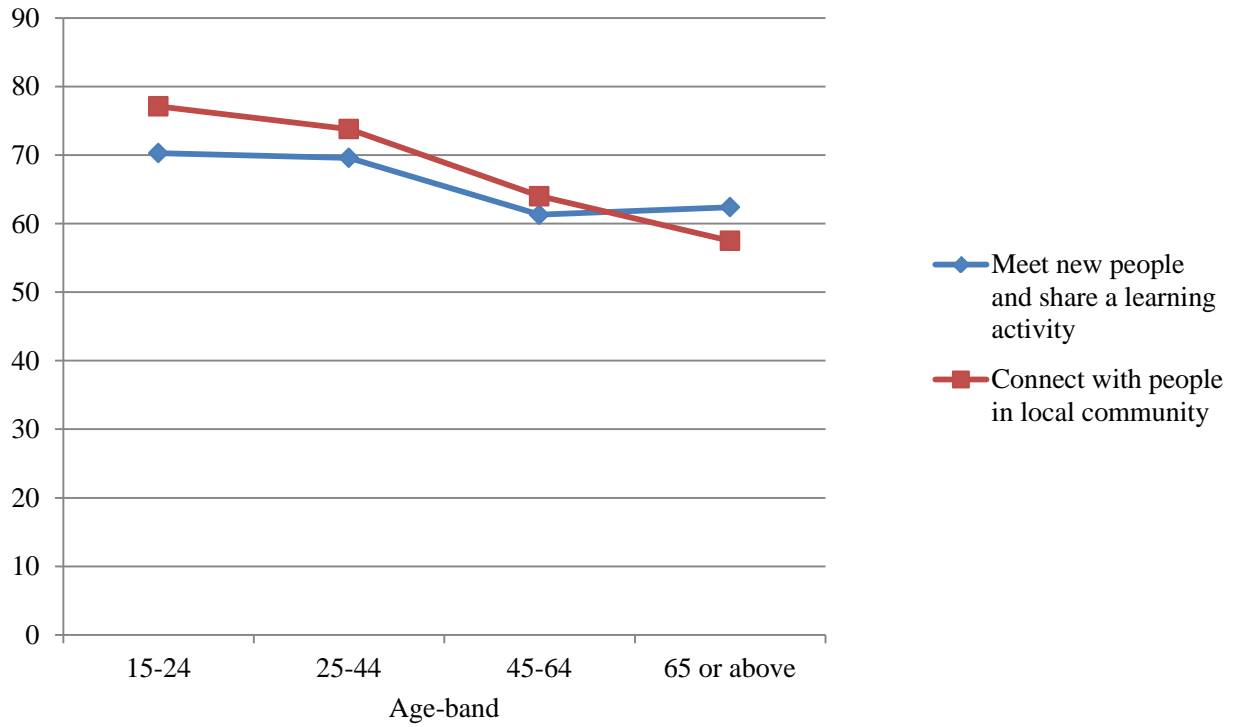
Meeting new people—a motive we have discussed earlier—does not attract a much stronger response. The two motives are graphed in Figure 22.

Older people undertake pre-accredited courses for cultural (as well as economic) motives that include gaining particular skills and knowledge, like computing (95%), or exploring a personal interest or activity (95%). Acting on these motives brings them into contact with new people (as a secondary benefit) and reducing the risk of isolation. But it is not social motives as such that explain their study activity.

Younger people, for their part, may have weaker links into their local community. They are less likely to own a house and more likely to rent. They are also more transient than older people. Perhaps as a result they more often see study from the angle of widening their

contacts. But for them, too, cultural motives of knowledge acquisition—and still more so, economic motives of skills growth and qualifications attainment are the main driving force.

Figure 22 Social integration motives for pre-accredited study by age-band (%)



Chapter Two: findings in dot point

A labour force framework for examining study motives

- pre-accredited courses are intended to act as pathways to accredited training, further study or employment, to build confidence and to develop skills
- the diversity of learners in pre-accredited courses results in a range of different motives which reflect these policy goals, but variably according to economic situation, qualifications attainment, personal circumstances and stage in the life course
- economic situation can be represented by location in the workforce; this is used as a general framework to analyse differences in study motives
- other differentiating factors, such as qualifications and age, are taken into account in the course of the analysis
- learners in pre-accredited courses can be viewed as (a) well-integrated in the labour market (full-time workers or part-time workers not seeking more hours), (b) less well-integrated (under-employed), (c) poorly integrated (unemployed), and (d) not in the workforce. Workforce-inactive people include discouraged workers and aspiring workers (studying for work-related motives)
- the “class of 2011” (which is the focus of this analysis) is a sample of over 3,000 learners in pre-accredited courses; the sample is almost evenly divided between respondents in the workforce (54%) and those not in the workforce (46%)
- the workforce-active are mainly aged 15-64, while the workforce-inactive are mainly 65 and over
- many of the workforce-inactive face significant barriers to employment, such as disability or poor English skills
- workers in pre-accredited courses are atypical in age—there are more older workers and fewer younger workers than would be expected on the basis of the population census
- they are combining work and study rather than replacing work with study
- the atypical age-structure of workers taking pre-accredited courses reflects the strategic role which pre-accredited courses play in labour market adjustment (e.g., women returning to the workforce after child-bearing, men and women upgrading skills, migrants acquiring English)

- older workers are considered to be more vulnerable to uncertainty in the context of industry, occupational and technological change and thus as more likely to undertake pre-accredited courses
- by contrast, younger workers have higher rates of workforce participation and lower unemployment; this reduces pressure on them to undertake further education
- thus we should expect to find that an age cross-section of workers in pre-accredited courses will be biased upwards towards older workers as compared to a random sample of people in the workforce
- amongst learners in pre-accredited courses, younger workers, while being a smaller group, are better qualified than older workers; the latter can be said to be engaged in a process of qualifications compensation—making up for early school leaving and lack of post-school credentials through skills acquisition in pre-accredited and ultimately also accredited training
- workers in pre-accredited courses who are unemployed have the weakest educational profile of any workforce-active group
- while there are different levels of need, all workers in pre-accredited courses can be said to be deploying strategies of educational platform-building—for many this is foundational, while for the most qualified it is competitive (maintaining or improving labour market position)

Study motives as nominated by learners in pre-accredited courses

(a) find or change jobs

- many workers in pre-accredited courses are studying with a view to finding or changing jobs—this is most common amongst the under-employed (58%) and the unemployed (81%); but about 1 in 4 well-integrated workers are also seeking job change
- the job motive tends to increase as level of qualification falls—workers with basic or no qualifications are more than twice as likely as university graduates to be studying for job change; this pattern reflects the weaker labour market situation of poorly qualified workers
- amongst learners who are not in the labour force, every fifth is seeking to find work through study (even though they are not technically “unemployed”)

- these “aspiring workers” are mostly of prime employment age (25-64 years), three-quarters are women, 1 in 3 speaks a language other than English at home, and over a third are disabled

(b) improve job skills

- the great majority of workers in pre-accredited courses are studying to improve job skills; however, this motive is much stronger amongst the under-employed (85%) and the unemployed (88%) than full-time workers (76%) or part-time workers not seeking more hours (69%)
- the occupations of the under-employed underline the importance of skills improvement—people in part-time jobs with too few hours of work are often employed in low-skilled, poorly paid and casual jobs in hospitality and retail; many work as cleaners, labourers, machinists and other semi-skilled or unskilled jobs
- many under-employed workers are employed as aged care, community and disability support carers or as childcare workers (together about 20%); they need access to accredited vocational training, and pre-accredited courses offer the promise of accessing this
- an even larger proportion of the under-employed have clerical and administrative jobs; they are under pressure to learn computing and office skills
- as found with the “job change” motive, around a third of *workforce-inactive* learners enrol in pre-accredited courses to acquire job skills

(c) improve self-confidence

- gaining confidence to make changes in one’s working life is an important reason for study for many respondents; pre-accredited courses offer the means of restoring confidence by successful learning and interaction with others in an accepting environment
- the confidence motive is stronger amongst learners with limited schooling and qualifications than amongst tertiary-educated learners; the latter are the least likely group of learners to cite confidence-building as a motive
- both labour market position and qualifications level influence the frequency with which “confidence” is nominated as a study motive; thus, amongst full-time workers,

the most qualified are less often seeking to improve confidence, while the less qualified are, and so on for most labour force categories

- in short, education weakness redoubles employment weakness
- building confidence is also important for learners who are *not* in the workforce; pre-accredited courses enable older people at risk of isolation to reconnect with the social world, both in real and virtual space
- again, qualifications attainment plays a role in accentuating or diminishing this motive—the less well-educated cite it more often, the more well-education, less often

(d) preparing for further study

- further study is a motive which is closely linked with both labour force status and qualifications level
- full-time workers and part-time workers not seeking more hours are the least likely to nominate this motive (40%) in contrast to under-employed and unemployed workers (53% and 62% respectively)
- thus the lower the level of labour market insecurity, the lower the interest in undertaking further study, and the higher the insecurity, the higher the interest
- however, within each labour force category, the frequency of the further study motive rises as qualification level falls
- for example, full-time workers with a skilled VET or senior secondary certificate are more than twice as likely as full-time workers who are university graduates to take pre-accredited courses as a pathway to further study
- workforce-inactive respondents are generally under less pressure to reverse labour market and educational disadvantage (though this does not imply the absence of economic pressures as such)
- many such respondents are interested in further study (around a third), and pre-accredited courses represent an accessible pathway for them

(e) personal interest as a study motive

- undertaking a pre-accredited course out of a desire to “explore a personal interest or activity” describes almost all learners taking pre-accredited courses (90%)

- it says a lot about the courses that people from so many different backgrounds and with many different interests and needs should be drawn into the community sector—the courses are both attractive and inclusive
- economic situation and qualifications level make little difference to the frequency with which the motive of personal interest is endorsed
- age, however, does make a difference—the youngest learners are least likely to be motivated by personal interest, while the oldest are the most highly motivated
- gender also makes a difference—gender doubles the age-gap in personal interest; there is a 20 percentage point gap between younger and older women (twice the age-gap amongst men)
- younger women taking employment skills and self-development courses appear to be the least motivated by personal interest, while amongst young men, it is literacy and numeracy

(f) meeting new people and sharing a learning activity

- this motive is influenced by qualifications level—as the scale of qualifications attainment is descended, the motive is nominated more frequently
- it appears that people who have had less experience of formal education (especially tertiary education) feel more comfortable and are more attracted to an informal environment of learning
- “sharing” offers security as against the pressure on individual performance which is characteristic of upper secondary school and university

(g) connecting with people in the local community

- local community is one of the less often cited motives for taking a pre-accredited course
- it is negatively related to age—the older the respondent, the less often nominated as a motive
- older respondents appear less concerned about creating relationships in their local community (or “meeting new people”), and may see themselves already well-integrated and accepted

- they may well derive a social benefit from taking a pre-accredited course, without on the other hand intending this or even being conscious of it as an outcome; this may be an example of Merton's distinction between manifest and latent functions
- older people have cultural (and not infrequently economic) motives for study, including gaining particular skills, like computing, or exploring a personal interest; these motives bring them to study, while study brings wider implicit benefits of social integration and personal well-being.

Chapter Three

Course completion and satisfaction with job-related benefits

Pre-accredited courses enrol people from many different backgrounds, with different needs and motives. Our task is now to examine the extent to which learners are satisfied with their courses, taking into account this diversity of orientations towards study. We divide learners into labour force status groups and analyse course satisfaction levels. We check whether other factors, like qualifications, age and language background, have a bearing on reported satisfaction.

Our concern in this chapter is with *job-related* or economic benefits of undertaking a pre-accredited course.

To measure course satisfaction in a meaningful way, we include only those respondents who completed a course. However, the reasons why non-completers discontinue provide a valuable perspective on course relevance and quality (while recognizing that other factors may be more important in the decision to discontinue).

To capture the perspective of non-completers, we begin by examining the extent to which pre-accredited courses are not completed, whether non-completion is more common amongst some groups than others, and what reasons are given by respondents for non-completion.

Completing a pre-accredited course

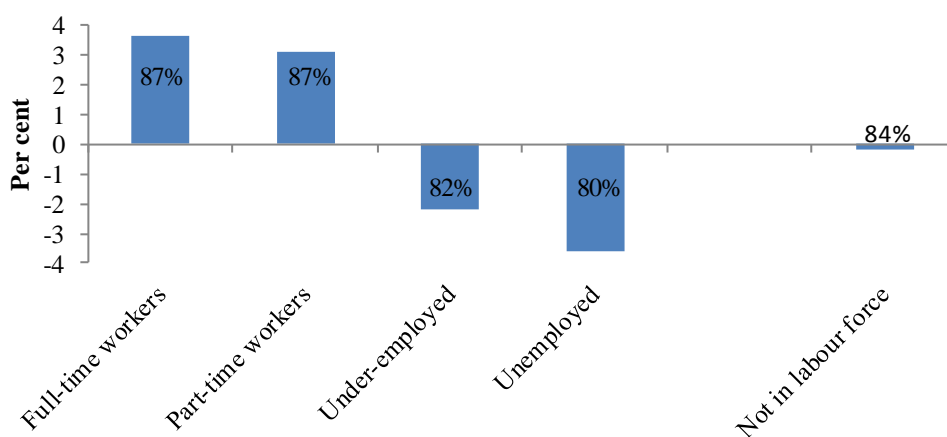
Pre-accredited courses are completed¹ by about 84% of learners. This high rate should be seen in the context of the generally short length of courses. More than 4 in 5 learners enrol in

¹ A small minority of learners who reported that they were still continuing their pre-accredited course when they were recontacted in 2012 (some 10-21 months after course commencement in 2011) are included amongst the course completers here and throughout this report. This is because pre-accredited courses are generally short and do not stretch across calendar years. It is more likely that learners who reported they were “continuing” did in fact complete their course in 2011, but subsequently re-enrolled in the same course in 2012 (e.g. learners undertaking the same English language classes until they feel ready or have the opportunity to move to a more advanced level).

pre-accredited courses of less than 50 hours duration, and some courses are less than 20 hours duration (this information relates to the 2009-2010 study cohorts).

Position in the labour market influences the likelihood of a learner completing a course. It is full-time workers, and close behind them part-time workers not seeking additional hours, who most often complete (87.3% and 86.8% respectively). By contrast, less well-integrated or poorly integrated workers complete less often—the under-employed (81.5%) and the unemployed (80.1%). In Figure 23, these different rates are expressed as deviations from the overall rate of 84%.

Figure 23 Completing a pre-accredited course by labour force status--deviations from the overall rate of 84%

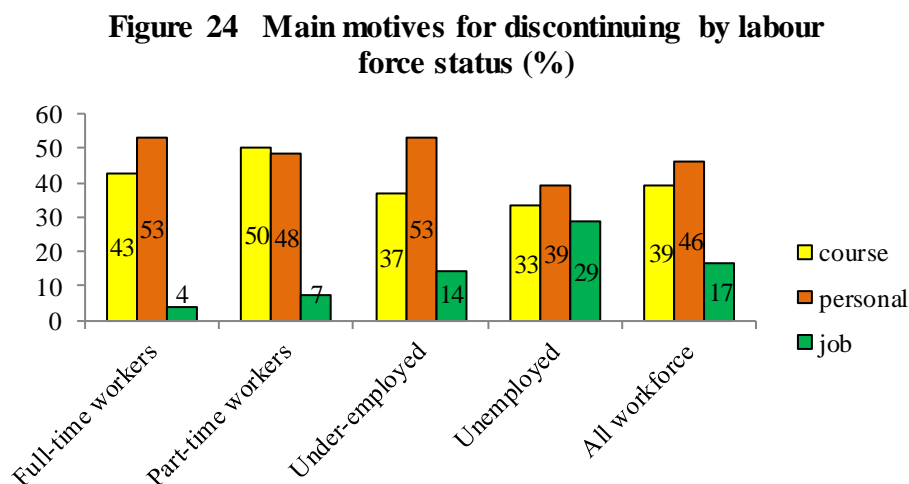


That not completing a course happens more often amongst the more vulnerable individuals in the workforce is not necessarily a reflection of failure, on the part either of student or educational provider. Individuals who are on the margins of the labour market—moving in and out, depending on circumstances, having an insecure foothold—owe greater loyalty to work than study. For work produces an income. Participation in a course may help obtain work, but lead to the course being abandoned through a change in circumstances.

Finding a job is cited as a reason for discontinuing a pre-accredited course by nearly 1 in 5 respondents who are workforce-active (17%). Workforce status at the time a course was commenced has a marked influence on the frequency with which finding a job is cited as a reason for discontinuing.

Figure 24 shows that finding or changing a job as a reason for discontinuation rises from only 4% of full-time workers and 7% of part-time workers not seeking more hours to 14%

amongst the under-employed and 29% amongst the unemployed. The least well-integrated groups can be considered the most likely to change employment situation, and they do.



Personal reasons—health, family circumstances or too much travel—have a somewhat larger impact and do not appear to be linked with labour force status.

Non-completers also express dissatisfaction with their course. Reasons of content, organization or teaching are nominated by nearly 40%. Thus failure in the educational process does play a role. This involves either dissatisfaction with content (the biggest factor by far) or with how a course was organized or how taught. (In the event that a respondent cites multiple course-related factors, the respondent is counted only once in Figure 24).

It is notable that course factors for discontinuing are cited more frequently by learners who are well-integrated in the workforce (between 43% and 50%) as compared to the less well-integrated or poorly integrated workers (between 33% and 37%). The least to complain about courses—the unemployed—also have the least experience in education and as a result may be the least demanding or discriminating of quality in instructional design or process.

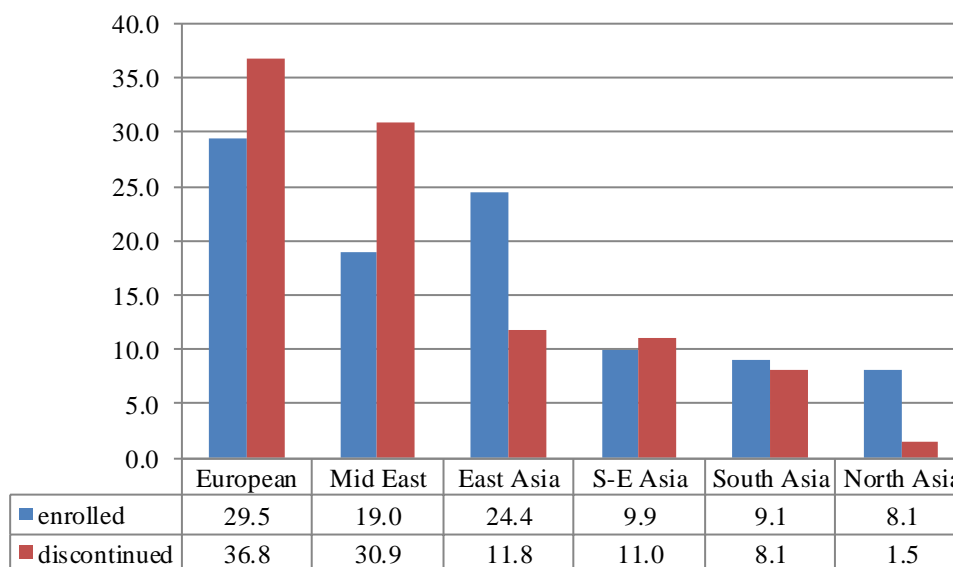
Qualifications themselves have little influence on rates of non-completion. It is not how well-educated a learner is that matters—even if this makes them more discriminating of quality—but his or her situation in the labour market. However, amongst learners who do discontinue, those with tertiary qualifications are more likely than those with lower qualifications to cite course-related reasons.

While labour force status influences rates of course completion, with the under-employed and the unemployed discontinuing more often, age and language spoken at home are other background factors that also have an impact. Amongst workforce-active respondents, those in their mid-twenties to mid-forties are more likely than others to discontinue (20% compared to an overall rate of 16%).

Speaking a language other than English at home greatly increases the chances of non-completion. Learners from non-English speaking backgrounds are twice as likely as learners who speak English at home to discontinue (27% compared to 14%).

Discontinuers come from a range of different language backgrounds. The largest group speaks a European language at home. They represent about 30% of LOTE speakers who take a pre-accredited course, but 37% of LOTE speakers who discontinue. Speakers of middle-eastern languages make up 19% of learners in pre-accredited courses, but a very much higher proportion of those who discontinue (31%). A reverse pattern is found amongst learners who speak a Chinese language at home. They contribute 24% of all LOTE speakers in pre-accredited courses, but only half as many non-completers (12%).

Figure 25 The languages of LOTE speakers who enrol and who discontinue (%)



It would require a separate study to determine why there are uneven patterns of completion amongst different groups of LOTE learners in pre-accredited courses. Geographical

groupings, such as “middle-eastern” or “European” ignore differences in context, such as displacement through war, low levels of school education or literacy and the relative difficulty of establishing a new life in Australia. However, even at this broad level of analysis, it is clear that different groups experience different degrees of integration in their courses and different rates of attrition.

The LOTE pattern of a relatively high rate of discontinuation raises the question whether language, literacy and numeracy courses have higher rates of non-completion than courses in other fields of study. While across broad fields of study, the course completion rate ranges from 83.5% to 87.7%, in language, literacy and numeracy courses it is as low as 70.6%.

Learner satisfaction with course outcomes

If the great majority of learners complete their pre-accredited course, this does not necessarily mean that their motives for study were satisfied. Reversing this, some learners report that their course led to benefits which they had *not* aimed at. Our approach to analysing learner satisfaction with outcomes is to look firstly at what the learner intended to achieve (motive-conditional outcomes). However, we also throw the net more widely to capture impact regardless of motive (motive-unconditional outcomes). This is done in the case of motives which are broad in nature (e.g., cultural, developmental) and is the subject of the next chapter. In respect of more specific motives that are economic—finding a job, improving job skills, productivity improvement—learner satisfaction with outcomes is under-estimated or “diluted” by the inclusion of many respondents for whom the outcome is not relevant. Consequently we have restricted our analysis of motive-unconditional outcomes to cultural and developmental benefits.

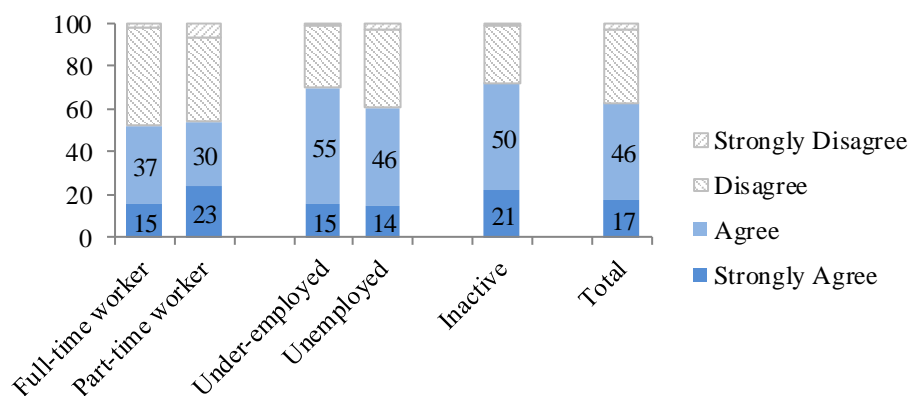
Our analysis of learner satisfaction with outcomes is based on a 75% recontact sample of the 2011 cohort (n=2,256). The recontact rate was fairly even across most labour force categories, though weaker for the unemployed (70.5%).

Finding or changing jobs

Learners who enrolled in a pre-accredited course with a view to finding or changing jobs are about evenly divided in their assessment of whether the course helped them achieve this

objective. However, position in the labour market matters. Just over half of full-time workers and part-time workers not seeking more hours agree that their course helped them find or change jobs. This rises to 70% amongst the under-employed and 60% amongst the unemployed. Agreement is in this higher range amongst the *workforce-inactive* who enrolled to find work (71%) (see Figure 26).

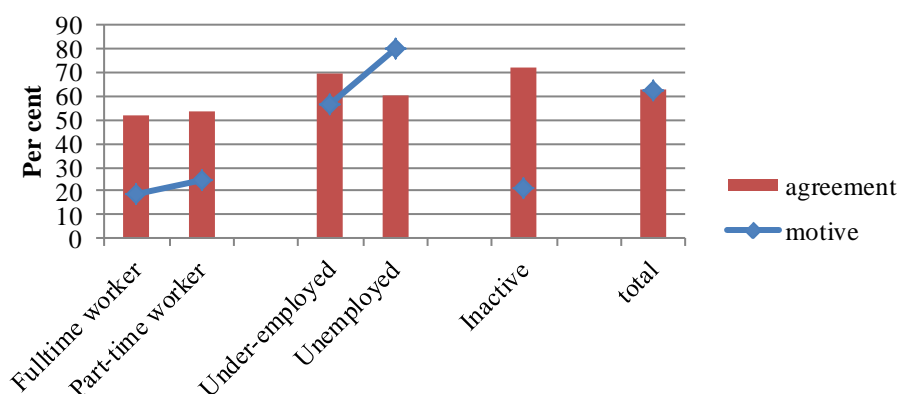
Figure 26 Agreement that course helped find or change jobs by labour force status (%)



The higher levels of satisfaction amongst respondents who were more insecure in their employment situation at course commencement should be seen in the context of their greater reported reliance on pre-accredited courses to deliver a job outcome. That is, not only is it true that under-employed and unemployed workers are more positive about the job impact of their courses: it is also true that more were seeking this impact.

Figure 27 reports the percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that their course was helpful in finding or changing jobs (column chart) and the percentage who undertook the course for a job motive (line chart). This shows that the workers who depended most on a job outcome (both objectively and in terms of motivation) also obtained this outcome more often. This is a very significant finding.

Figure 27 Course helped find or change jobs and learner enrolled for this motive by labour force status



How courses help workers with too few hours or with no work find jobs

Learners who have the weakest footing in the labour market need the most help in finding work. As we have seen, pre-accredited courses are a valued means of establishing a more secure and satisfactory position in the job market. Under-employed and unemployed workers who enrolled in a pre-accredited course to find or change jobs frequently report that the course indeed helped them in this regard (69% and 60% respectively). We now want to look more closely at the ways in which this happens.

To gain a fuller view of how courses operate to bridge less well-integrated or poorly integrated workers into employment, we widen our focus to include the impact both of pre-accredited study *and* any subsequent study or training. Later on in this report, we will isolate the employment effects of subsequent study. But in this section of our discussion, we are concerned with the impact that pre-accredited courses are seen to make, not only directly, but also indirectly by facilitating participation in further study or training.

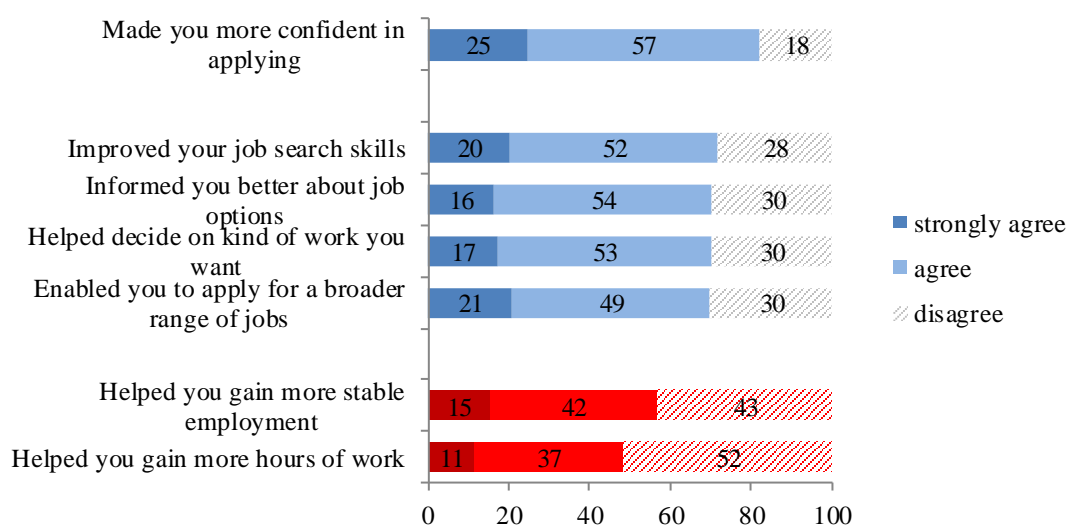
Though the under-employed and the unemployed report that pre-accredited courses are helpful in finding or changing jobs, an important distinction exists in their experience between (a) enhancing the *potential* for employment, and (b) finding *ongoing work*.

A great many workers with a weak or tenuous relationship to the job market report that pre-accredited courses (or subsequent study) have *enhanced their potential for employment*. The courses have made them more confident about applying for jobs (82% agreement), improved their job search skills (72%), made them better informed about job options (70%), helped them decide on the kinds of work they want to do (70%) and enabled them to apply for a broader range of jobs (70%). In all of these specific ways, pre-accredited courses enhance the potential for employment of workers who are poorly integrated in the labour market.

However, in regard to *securing ongoing employment*, the reports are somewhat less positive, and perhaps this should be expected. Factors other than training affect whether people are able to find stable employment. Changing economic conditions, whether generally or in particular industry sectors, structural unemployment (e.g., regional imbalances), and downsizing of firms or outsourcing of jobs all have an impact. Of the under-employed, 57% say that their course (or subsequent study) helped them gain more *stable employment*. Of the unemployed, the figure is lower at 48%. There is thus a clear separation in the perceptions of workers between being better prepared and stability in employment.

Figure 28 breaks out responses regarding each way in which employment potential is enhanced or ongoing employment secured by level of agreement and labour force status. This chart shows a clear weakening of reported impact as between enhancing the potential for employment and keeping a job.

Figure 28 Enhancing employment potential and gaining ongoing work: agreement amongst under-employed or unemployed learners(%)



The age-gap in enhancing employment potential and stable employment

Under-employed and unemployed workers are more positive about employment preparation through pre-accredited courses than about obtaining continuing work. But satisfaction on both dimensions weakens as workers age. Younger workers invariably have the highest levels of satisfaction, whether this concerns the range of ways in which pre-accredited courses enhance employment potential or whether it relates to keeping a job once found. The oldest workers are the least satisfied.

Figure 29 examines responses to two propositions—that the pre-accredited course (or subsequent study) enabled the learner to apply for a broader range of jobs and that the course helped make the learner more confident about applying for jobs. Agreement is highest amongst the youngest workers (80% overall for the first proposition; 92% for the second), weaker for workers aged 25-44, and weakest of all amongst those aged 45-64 years.

Not only is there a declining trend in overall agreement, but this rests largely on a more striking trend in *strength of agreement*. Those strongly agreeing to the proposition that they were able to apply for a wider range of jobs falls from high of 31% of 15-24 year-olds to 23% of 25-44 year-olds to its lowest level of 18% amongst 45-64 year-olds.

Figure 29 Widening job range and fostering greater confidence in applying--under-employed and unemployed workers by age-band (%)

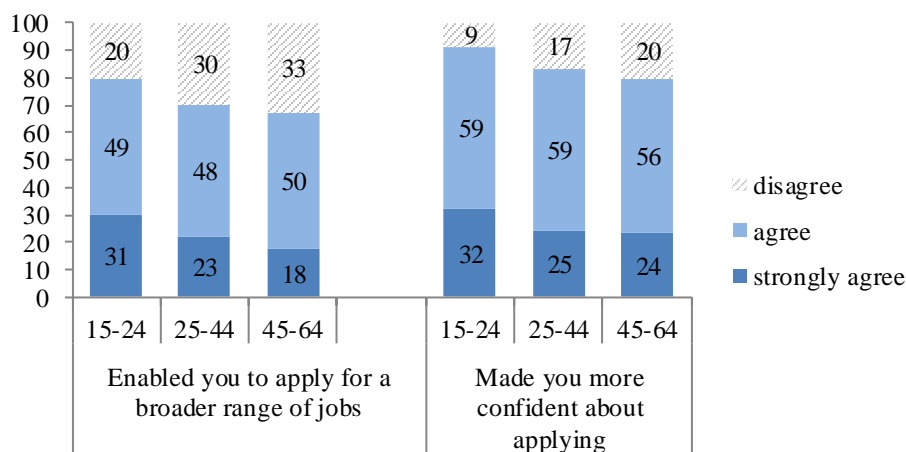
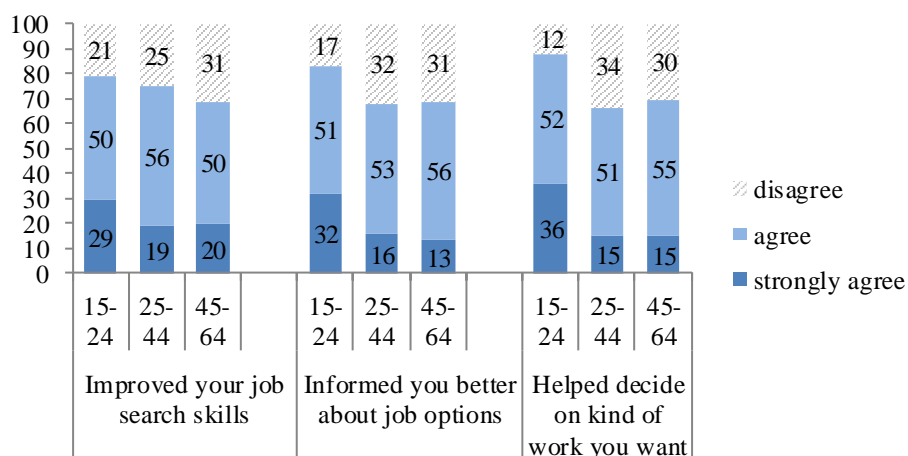


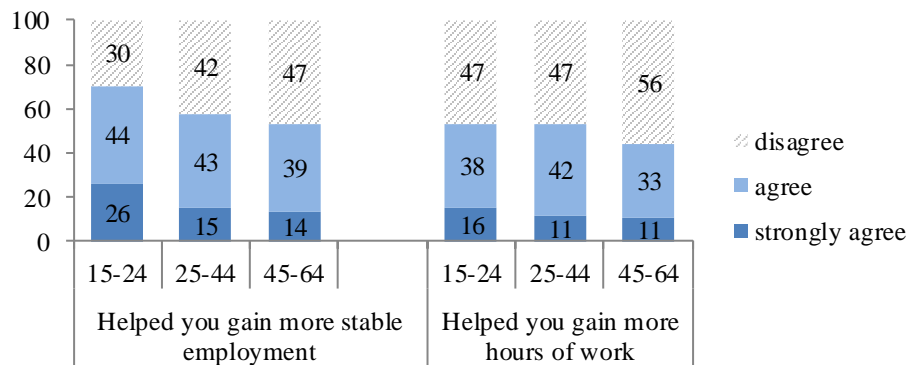
Figure 30 reports impact assessments of pre-accredited courses (or subsequent study) regarding job search skills, information about job options, and help in deciding on preferred kinds of work. In broad terms, we find the same age trend. The youngest workers are the most positive, while the oldest are the least positive. Again there is a sharp fall in *strength of agreement* as workers age, though not uniformly. Rather there is a polarity between the youngest workers (at one end) and all other workers (at the other).

Figure 30 Job search skills, better information and help targetting job options--under-employed and unemployed workers by age-band (%)



Securing stable work or at least more hours of work is reported in Figure 31. Respondents of all ages are less positive about this impact, whether it involves success in gaining stable employment or success in gaining more hours. However, in both cases, younger workers are more positive than older workers, and there is a clear stepwise fall in positive responses as workers age.

**Figure 31 Gaining stable work or more hours--
under-employed and unemployed workers by age-
band (%)**



Why does age matter? Older workers who become unemployed experience longer periods of unemployment than younger workers. This may be due to reduced geographical mobility (e.g., for family or property reasons), an occupational profile that is more difficult to fill (the worker will seek work in a familiar field and at a level commensurate with experience), and a lack of suitable training and qualifications. Prospective employers may have to make a greater financial and possibly training commitment to an older worker.

Changes in industry structure have a bigger impact on older and well-established workers. They need a longer period of time to adjust, but many may be unable to adjust because much of their working life has been confined within a narrow and shrinking field of employment and may be bound up with the history of a single firm in a declining sector.

Younger workers, on the other hand, are in general more mobile geographically, less expensive in wage terms, and may be seen by employers as more easily assimilated into the firm's role and culture. They may also be more confident than older workers.

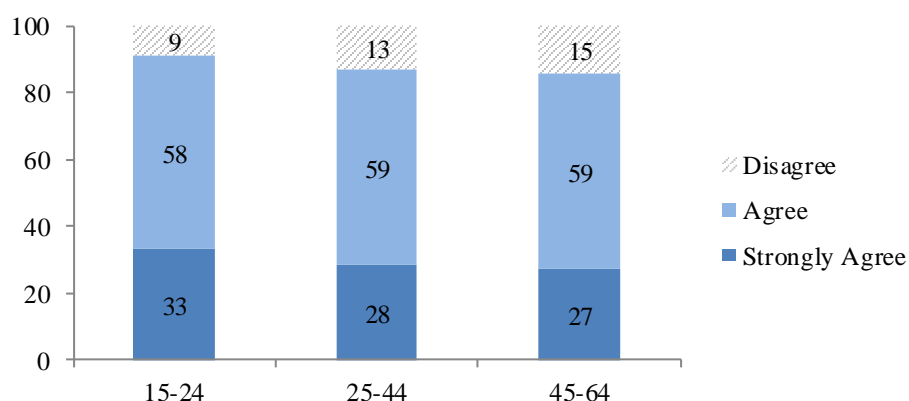
For these reasons, we would expect attitudes to be stamped with age, making the role of pre-accredited courses more critical for the old than the young, but also more demanding.

Improve job skills

Ongoing skills acquisition and development help overcome some of the barriers which older workers experience. When they assess skills improvement through participation in pre-accredited courses, older workers are indeed less positive than younger workers. Amongst those who did their course to improve their job skills, dissatisfaction grows from 9% of the youngest workers (15-24 years) to 15% of 45-64 year-olds, and conversely strength of agreement falls from 33% to 27% (see Figure 32).

While there is an age-gap in the extent to which pre-accredited courses are seen as helping improve skills, the distance in responses between youngest and oldest workers is not large, and this may be because the question relates to “job skills” generally rather than specific skills, such as how to search out job opportunities, how to find information on jobs, or how best to apply for jobs.

Figure 32 Course helped improve the skills I need for work by age-band (%)

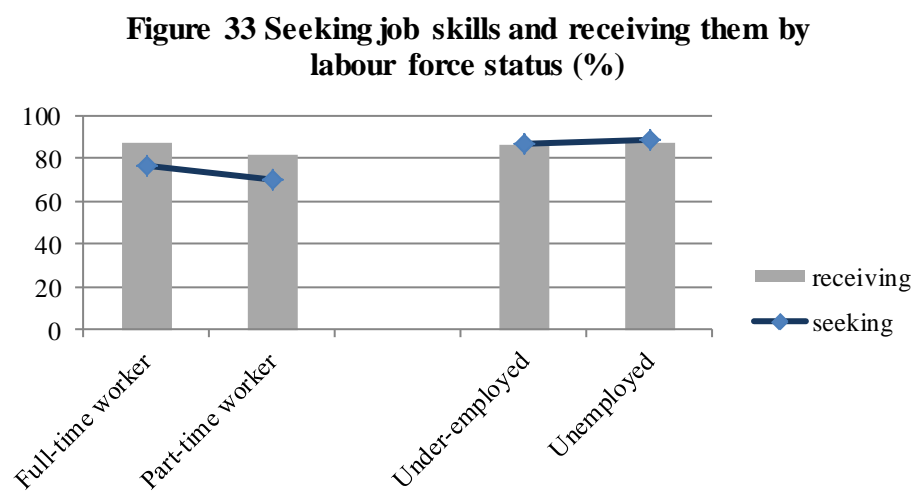


Posing the question in these general terms means that the different ways in which respondents interpret “job skills” add together to produce a globally-high summary assessment. The age-gap in positive responses should not overshadow this overall high level of agreement (between 85% and 91%).

Moreover a high level of agreement is found amongst *all labour force categories*. Between 82% and 88% of workforce-active respondents who had this motive agree that their course helped them gain job skills, and strength of agreement ranges from 1 in 4 to 1 in 3 respondents. The groups of respondents who are more vulnerable in the labour market—the under-employed and the unemployed—are at least as positive as the groups who are

relatively well-integrated. While the criterion of effectiveness is a broad one (“the skills I need for work”), this pattern of responses does suggest that pre-accredited courses work at least as well for the groups who are most reliant on them as for those who rely least on them.

It is important in this respect to note that more vulnerable workers are seeking to improve their job skills more often than other workforce-active learners. Thus the same high satisfaction comes on top of a higher level of reported need. This can be seen in Figure 33 which compares percentages of workforce-active respondents seeking job skills (line chart) and those agreeing that their course helped them gain job skills (column chart).



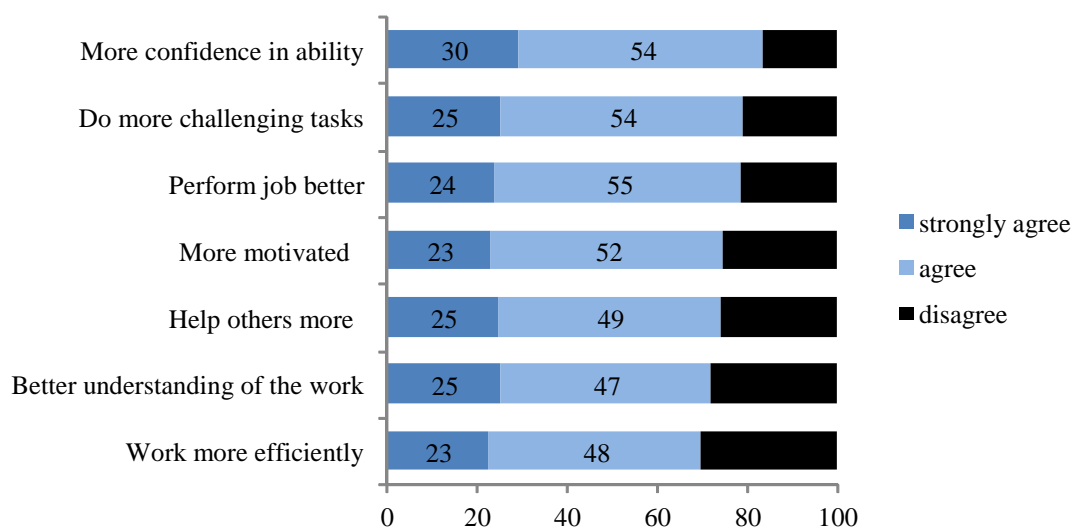
Well-integrated workers are seeking job skills through pre-accredited courses in 70-76% of cases (depending on whether they are full- or part-time workers), while less well-integrated or poorly integrated workers are seeking skills in 87-89% of cases.

Productivity impacts

Pre-accredited courses help people get jobs and improve job skills. Do they also improve the productivity of workers on the job? People may agree that they have better job skills, but not necessarily that this has changed the way they work. Skills may be a passport to a different job, either within the same firm or in another firm, and the acquisition of new skills is seen as a way of preparing for this kind of change rather than having a direct impact upon the performance of the current job.

A set of questions was put to learners with jobs² regarding possible changes that had occurred in how well they worked in their job. These questions covered different domains in which skills acquisition might be expected to have an effect. They included more motivation, confidence in abilities, a better understanding of the job, helping others more, the ability to take on more challenging tasks, working more efficiently, and performing the work better. Respondents were asked to reflect on the impact, not only of their pre-accredited course, but of any subsequent study or training. In this way, both initial and any cumulative effects could be measured.

Figure 34 Productivity related measures of outcome -- employed learners (% agreement)



Most learners agree that their pre-accredited course (or any subsequent study) has assisted them in their work in the ways indicated. Greater confidence in the ability to do the work is the strongest response (84% agreement). The ability to take on more challenging tasks and overall performance in the job are the next most highly ranked responses (79% each). Greater motivation (75%) and helping others more (74%) receive somewhat less agreement, but still very high, as do better comprehension of the work (72%) and greater efficiency in the sense of more work done in less time (70%) (see Figure 34 above).

² Specifically, those learners who were working both when they started their pre-accredited course and when they were recontacted.

Chapter Three: findings in dot point

People enrol in pre-accredited courses for a variety of reasons. How satisfied are they with intended economic or job-related benefits?

- The analysis of learner satisfaction with job-related outcomes is based on the responses of the 84% of learners who completed their pre-accredited course
- About 16% of learners do not complete their course, and reasons for non-completion are relevant to a wider assessment of the role and quality of pre-accredited courses

Course completers and non-completers; attributes and reasons for non-completion

- Men and women who are well-integrated in the labour market complete pre-accredited courses more often than less well-integrated or poorly integrated workers (around 87% compared to 81%)
- Under-employed and unemployed workers are much more likely than full-time workers or part-time workers not seeking more hours to cite “finding or changing a job” as a reason for discontinuation (between 14% and 29% as compared to between 4% and 7%)
- Personal circumstances, such as health or family issues, are the most frequently cited reason for discontinuation (between 39% and 53% of all workforce-active respondents)
- Course-related factors are nominated by nearly 40% of non-completers
- Dissatisfaction with courses relates above all to course content, but organizational aspects and quality of teaching are also cited
- Non-completers who cite course-related factors are more often full-time workers or part-time workers not seeking more hours (43-50%), whereas under-employed and unemployed workers are less likely to fault their course (33-37%)
- More well-integrated workers also tend to be more educated, and this may make them more educationally demanding and discriminating than poorly educated respondents
- Qualification level itself does not influence course completion, but it is related to how often course features are named as reasons for discontinuation
- Younger workers (mid-20s to mid-40s) are more likely than older workers (mid-40s to mid-60s) to discontinue

- This may be due to higher workforce mobility or to the more “cluttered” agenda of work and family commitments amongst the younger age-group
- Speaking a language other than English (LOTE) at home doubles the chance of non-completion (27% as compared to 14% non-LOTE)
- Language groups who are over-represented amongst non-completers (relative to their enrolment levels) include responding speaking a European language and those speaking a Middle Eastern language
- Language groups who discontinue less often than their enrolment share would predict include East Asian (Chinese) and North Asian (Korean, Japanese)
- The relatively high proportion of LOTE speakers who discontinue translates into a low rate of completion in language, literacy and numeracy courses (71% compared to between 84% and 88% in other fields of study)

Learner satisfaction with course outcomes

- Measuring satisfaction with economic (or job-related) outcomes needs to take into account the intention of the respondent; e.g., satisfaction with a course in helping the respondent find work would be under-estimated if all respondents (regardless of motive) were included in the analysis
- Between 1 in 5 and 1 in 4 learners who are well-integrated in the labour market enrol in a pre-accredited course with a view to finding a job or changing jobs; of this group, about half report that their course aided them to achieve this objective
- Under-employed and unemployed workers are much more likely to be seeking to obtain or change jobs (55-80%), and they report success in 60-69% of cases
- The labour force groups who most rely on pre-accredited courses to get them into work or help them change jobs also have the highest levels of satisfaction

The perceived helpfulness of pre-accredited courses (and any subsequent study)—workers with too few hours or with no work

- Respondents were asked about the helpfulness of their courses in enhancing their employment potential, finding more stable employment or gaining more hours of work. The focus was widened to include, not only their pre-accredited course, but any study or training they had subsequently undertaken. In the dot points which follow,

the findings relate to the combined impact of pre-accredited and any other course done subsequently

- Vulnerable workers—the under-employed and the unemployed—are more positive about pre-accredited and any subsequent study in *enhancing the respondent's potential for employment* than in *finding ongoing work*
- Pre-accredited and any subsequent study help make these workforce-active learners more confident about applying for jobs (82%), improving job search skills (72%), better informing them of job options (70%), helping them decide on preferred kinds of work (70%), and enabling them to apply for a broad range of jobs (70%)
- However, vulnerable workers are somewhat less positive about the effectiveness of courses in *securing ongoing employment* (48-57% of the unemployed and the under-employed respectively)

The age-gap in enhancing employment potential and finding stable employment

- In respect both of enhancing the potential for employment and gaining ongoing work, vulnerable workers who are younger are also more likely to credit pre-accredited and any subsequent study than older workers; age weakens the perception that the courses do benefit vulnerable workers in these ways
- Older workers may see less impact from study because objectively their labour market situation is more constrained (their circumstances are more difficult to tackle, regarding of the quality of the course)
- The duration of unemployment of older workers is longer; this is due to less geographical mobility, an occupational profile that is more difficult to fill (the worker seeks employment in a similar field to past employment and at a wage level commensurate with experience), and lack of suitable training or qualifications
- Industry change also takes a heavy toll on older workers (they are able to adjust less well), while younger workers are less expensive to hire and may be viewed by the employer as more adaptable
- The situation of older vulnerable workers and their weaker reported assessments of study impact make it all the more important that courses effectively target these workers and address their specific needs

Improving job skills

- Older workers are also less satisfied than younger workers in regard to improvement of job skills through pre-accredited courses and subsequent study
- However, the age-gap is small, and the great majority of all workforce-active learners confirm that pre-accredited and any subsequent study does deliver improved skills for the workplace
- Satisfaction with job skills is high for *all* labour force categories (82-88%)
- It is notable that gaining job skills is confirmed as much by the under-employed and the unemployed as by more well-integrated workers; this is significant as vulnerable workers are more dependent on the successful functioning of courses than more secure and well-positioned workers
- The same pattern, but more marked, is found in regard to “finding or changing a job”—the more vulnerable need this outcome more, and are at least or more satisfied with pre-accredited courses in delivering the outcome

Productivity impacts

- Does participation in pre-accredited and any later study improve the work performance of learners?
- Learners who were in employment on commencing their pre-accredited course and when recontacted in 2012 were asked a series of questions relating to the possible impact of their course—or any subsequent study—on how they performed their work
- The biggest reported impact on work performance was the greater confidence learners gained in their own abilities (84%)
- Other relatively high-impact areas included undertaking more challenging tasks (79%), performing the job better in overall terms (79%), being better motivated (75%), helping co-workers (74%), and having a better understanding of the nature of the work (72%)
- Within a fairly narrow response range, getting “more work done in less time” recorded the lowest agreement rate (70%).

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Chapter Four

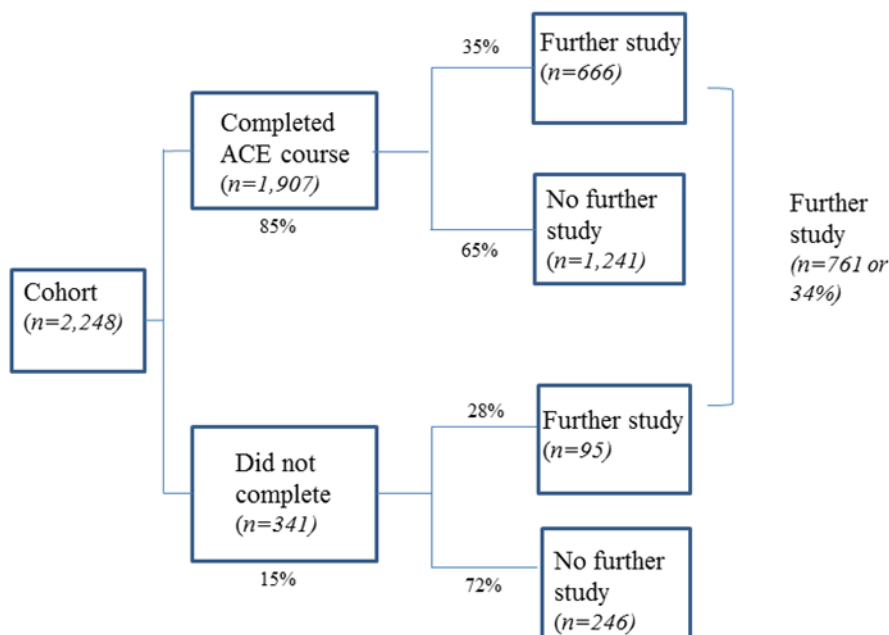
Further Study following a pre-accredited course

Pre-accredited courses are a bridge to further study and training. But how many learners cross this bridge, who are they, and what types of further study do they undertake? We also want to understand why people do not undertake further study, especially groups who are economically vulnerable through their position in the labour market.

How many learners undertake further study?

Figure 35 shows that every third learner who enrolls in a pre-accredited course undertakes further study (34%).

Figure 35 Transition to further study (class of 2011) by completion of pre-accredited course



Learners who complete a pre-accredited course undertake further study more often than learners who do not. Given the range of factors which underlie non-completion, this is not surprising. For example, personal circumstances relating to health or family extend from non-completion to not undertaking further study, as we will see further below.

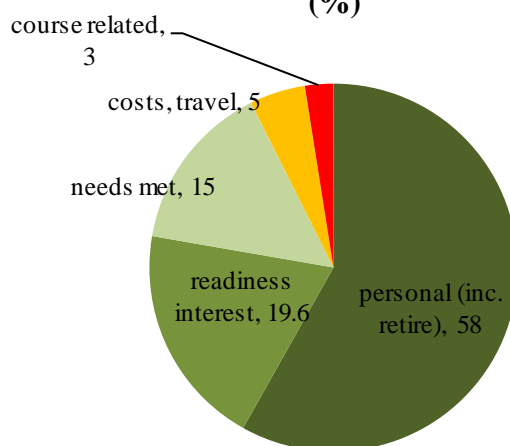
It also needs to be kept in mind that pre-accredited courses differ widely in content, purpose and duration. These differences may affect not only the rate of completion (as with literacy courses), but whether learners undertake or do not undertake further study.

Reasons for not undertaking further study

Taking the cohort as a whole, the main reasons for not undertaking further study relate to personal circumstances—health, family, retirement (58%). But lack of readiness or interest (20%), and satisfaction of need by the pre-accredited course (15%) are also important. Many learners do not feel ready for more study or do not have the interest, and many feel their needs were met by their pre-accredited course.

Costs and travel account for only a small proportion of reasons (5%), and course-related factors even smaller (3%) (see Figure 36).

Figure 36 Reasons for not undertaking further study (%)



Examining responses from workforce-active learners reveals that factors which affect only a very small minority of all learners loom larger for *workforce-disadvantaged* learners. Underemployed and unemployed workers are twice as likely as full-time or part-time workers to cite a *lack of readiness* for more study (6-9% compared to 3%). *Course costs and travel* are also a bigger factor (8-9% compared to 3-5%). This might be expected, given the weaker financial position of people who do not have enough hours of work or have no work at all. *Job search* as a constraining factor is cited by around 7% of the unemployed.

The view that *needs have been met* is much more common amongst full-time workers (21% compared to 9-12% of all other workers), and both they and part-time workers who are not seeking more hours report a *lack of interest* more often (16-19% compared to 10%).

Work motives for study and the influence of labour market position

Making the transition to further study is more prevalent amongst learners who took their pre-accredited course for work motives than amongst those who did not have this motive (39% compared to 26%). In other words, an employment orientation to study extends from taking a pre-accredited course to doing more study or training.

However, location within the labour market exercises a marked influence over who does make this transition.

Under-employed and unemployed workers more frequently undertake further study than full-time or part-time workers not seeking more hours. This is shown in Figure 37.

Figure 37 Undertaking further study by labour force status at the time of doing a pre-accredited course (%)



As relationship to the labour market weakens, the proportion of learners who progress from pre-accredited courses to further study increases. Between 30% and 33% of more well-integrated workers continue in study compared to 40% of the under-employed and 47% of the

unemployed. Amongst workforce-inactive learners, 39% of those who had a work motive for taking a pre-accredited course undertake further study.

Transition to an award course

Greater economic dependence increases the likelihood of undertaking further study. To an extent, also, this greater dependence is associated with taking *award courses* rather than *non-award courses*. Amongst full-time workers who enrol in further study, 56% take award courses. This rises to 59% amongst part-time and also under-employed workers. But enrolment in award courses jumps sharply to 72% amongst the unemployed.

However, while people who are poorly integrated in the labour market enrol in award courses more often than well-integrated workers, the qualification level of the award courses they take is typically lower.

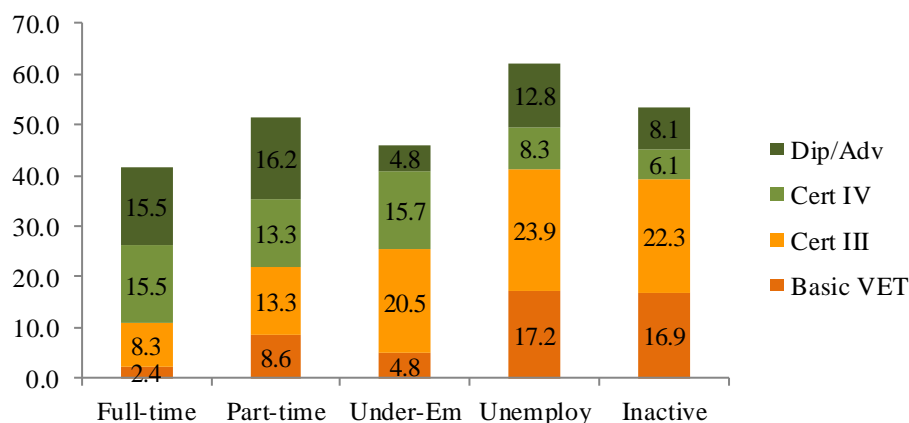
The full-time employed and the part-time employed study at higher qualification levels. Not only are they in an advantageous position in employment terms, they are also engaged in accessing the credentials that offer the highest returns on education and training.

These well-integrated workers take higher level courses in every third case (35% and 34% respectively). Their courses include degree programs, diplomas, advanced diplomas, Certificate IV courses.

By contrast, people who are in a relatively weak position in the labour market, while more likely to undertake further study, take courses at a typically lower qualification level, leading to credentials that have less impact on lifetime earnings.

Amongst those who undertake further study, taking a basic or skilled vocational course (Certificates I-III) rises from 11% of full-time workers to 22% of part-time workers, and from 25% of under-employed workers to 41% of the unemployed (see Figure 38). Full-time employees and part-time employees who are not seeking more hours take courses at these qualification levels less frequently (27% and 24% respectively).

Figure 38 Qualification level of VET courses undertaken after studying a pre-accredited course by labour force status (%)

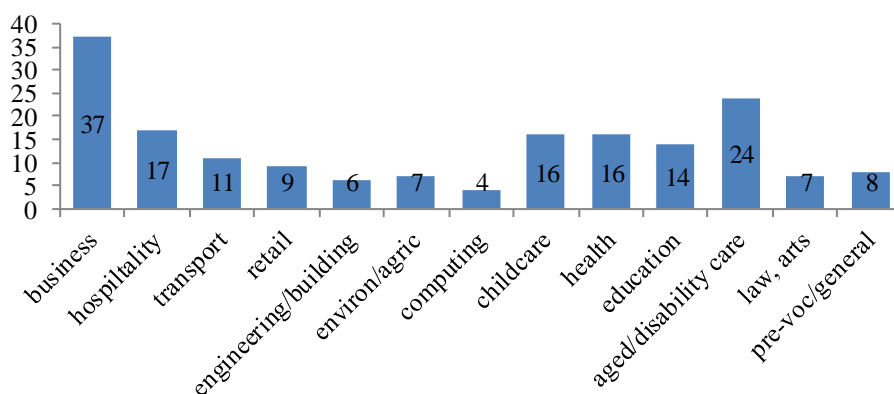


Award courses and fields of study

Taking an award course gives to economically more vulnerable workers (and others) access to a wide range of accredited training. A striking feature of the courses taken by under-employed and unemployed workers is the breadth of industry coverage.

The larger fields include business (37%), aged care and disability care (24%), hospitality (17%), childcare (16%), health (16%) and education (14%) (see Figure 39).

Figure 39 Award courses by field of study: under-employed and unemployed workers (%)



This breadth is in itself a very important measure of the impact of pre-accredited courses. Citing only the larger fields does not adequately convey this. To the list of major fields should be added transport, retail, engineering, building, environmental management, horticulture, computing, law and arts.

Transition to a non-award course

The distinction between award and non-award courses is important because it relates to the certification of skills and competencies and to consistency in the nature of the cognitive demands made on learners from one instructional site to another. The credentials that award courses produce represent educational capital which can be cashed on the labour market. But non-award courses also play a role in securing access to employment and in seeking to improve the worker's relative position in the job market. From this angle, non-award does not imply 'non-vocational' or 'non-economic', either with respect to motives for study or the impact that study makes. This is also apparent in the nature of the non-award courses that are taken by people who choose to do further study.

Most of the non-award courses taken by respondents who do undertake further study have either an economic emphasis or a potential economic application—they equip the learner with skills and understanding that are relevant to the jobs people perform.

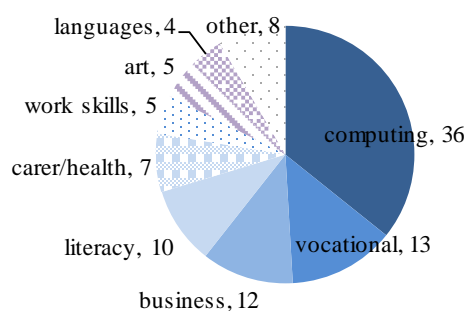
The largest single field of study is computing. This accounts for over a third of learners who have made the transition to further study, enrolling in a non-award course. While computing knowledge and skills have a wide application beyond the confines of work, their application in the workplace is also hard to overlook. The same is also true of courses in business accounting. While these courses may be taken for personal reasons, the impact is to equip the learner with skills, such as spreadsheeting, which can be applied in many different jobs.

Vocational (13%), business (12%), literacy (10%), carer training (7%), and work skills (5%) represent the other main fields of potential economic application (see Figure 40).

Art and foreign languages stand out as cultural pursuits rather than elements of an economic strategy. But together these account for only about 1 in 10 learners whose transition to further study has been within the pre-accredited domain rather than moving beyond it.

Non-award courses taken by under-employed and unemployed workers show a stronger economic bias. Vocational and business courses are more prominent as are literacy courses. However, there is also a greater area of uncertainty. A much larger group of workforce-vulnerable learners are taking courses which are difficult to classify and whose purpose is not clear (14% compared to 8% of all workforce-active learners).

Figure 40 Field of study of non-award courses taken after a pre-accredited course (workforce-active respondents) (%)



Educational progression

Much of our discussion so far has been from a labour market perspective. This is important in helping assess the strength of the pathway from study to employment (for those, at any rate, whose motives are employment-related). However, pre-accredited courses are not only a pathway for workers in different “locations” in the labour market to secure or improve on those locations. Pre-accredited courses also enable people with different levels of qualification to access higher levels of knowledge and skills. The pathway viewed from this angle leads into the world of learning, both theoretical and practical.

The knowledge pathway is also a pathway to economic security or advancement. But a qualifications perspective and a labour market perspective are not the same. The poorly qualified, for example, do not always occupy the most vulnerable locations in the labour market, and people who are highly qualified do not always occupy the heights of the labour market.

We cannot answer the question whether pre-accredited courses are contributing to the qualification levels of the population unless we trace changes in the activity and outcomes of people undertaking pre-accredited courses with different qualification backgrounds.

Our focus in the analysis which follows is on the poorly qualified. This is the group whose educational profile most needs to be raised, both from the point of view of their economic and cultural needs and in view of national attainment targets.

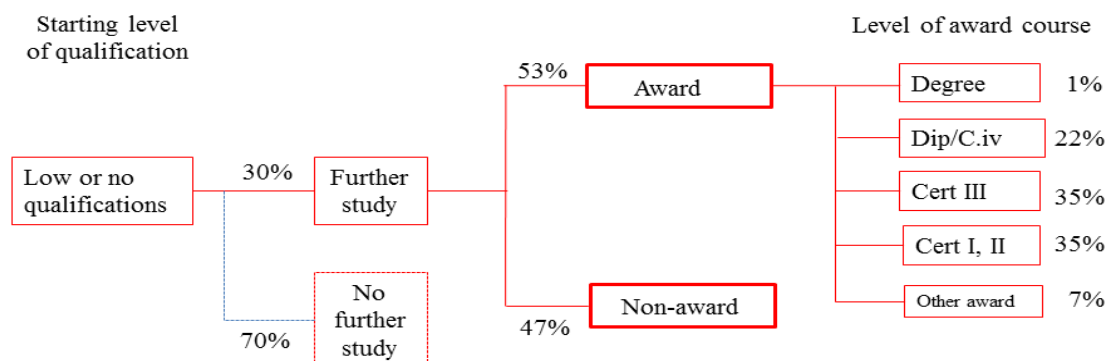
The comparative educational progression of poorly qualified learners

Poorly-qualified men and women make up about 40% of the class of 2011. They have completed basic vocational training at most and have generally not finished school. Nearly 7 in 10 are below retirement age, most are women, and fewer than half are in the workforce. However, of those who are in the workforce, many have too little work or no work at all. Every fourth person who is poorly qualified has a permanent disability.

Pre-accredited courses create economic and cultural benefits which are valuable in themselves, but also give access to further education and to an expansion of benefits, based on the learner's progression. The profile of the "poorly qualified" is one of multiple disadvantage. So we should not assume that progress is or should be the norm. Nevertheless for sub-groups, such as the economically active or those for whom education can remove barriers to a better quality of life and fuller participation, progression may well be important.

Figure 41 maps the educational progression of poorly qualified men and women who started a pre-accredited course in 2011 and were recontacted in 2012 (n=858). It shows that 3 in 10

Figure 41 Transition to further study and award level of the course: poorly qualified individuals



enrolled in further study. Of this “further study” group, 52% enrolled in an award course. In most cases, this was a vocational course at Certificates I-III level. Smaller numbers enrolled in a Certificate IV or Diploma program, and only a handful began a degree (we exclude any respondent who was concurrently enrolled in an award course and the pre-accredited course they took in 2011). Non-award course enrolled nearly 1 in 2 of poorly-qualified learners who did undertake further study.

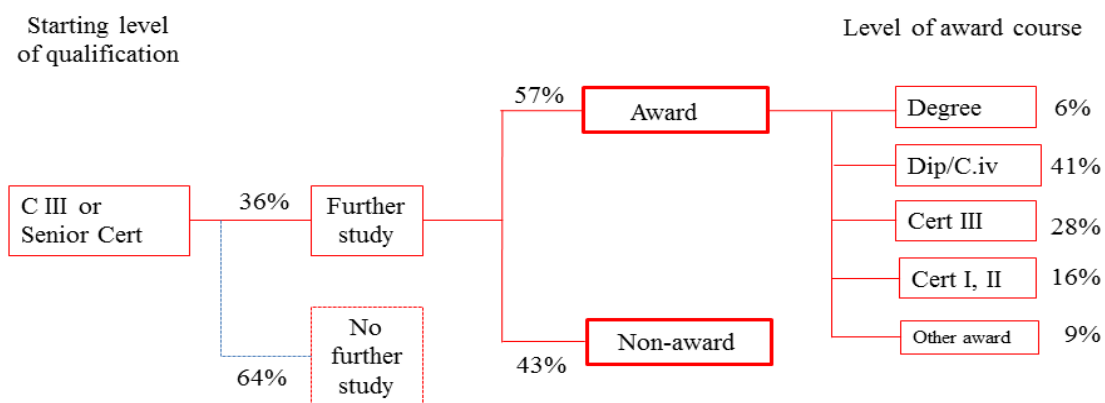
Participation in award courses has a pattern or structure which might be expected. Most activity is in basic or skilled VET courses. These are accessible to poorly-qualified individuals. However, it is notable that some learners have made their way into higher-level courses (diploma, advanced diploma, degree). Later on we will assess the significance of this.

Leaving aside pattern or structure in award course participation, is the *rate of transition to accredited further study* about what we should expect? Is it too low, too high?

To answer this question, we need to see the rates of transition to accredited further study for other educationally defined groups.

Figure 42 presents the same analysis of flows, but for 643 learners who had completed secondary school or held a skilled vocational certificate at the time they commenced their pre-accredited course.

Figure 42 Transition to further study and award level of the course: skilled VET or senior certificate



School completers or Certificate III holders display a somewhat higher rate of educational progression than early school leavers or Certificate I-II holders (36% compared to 30%).

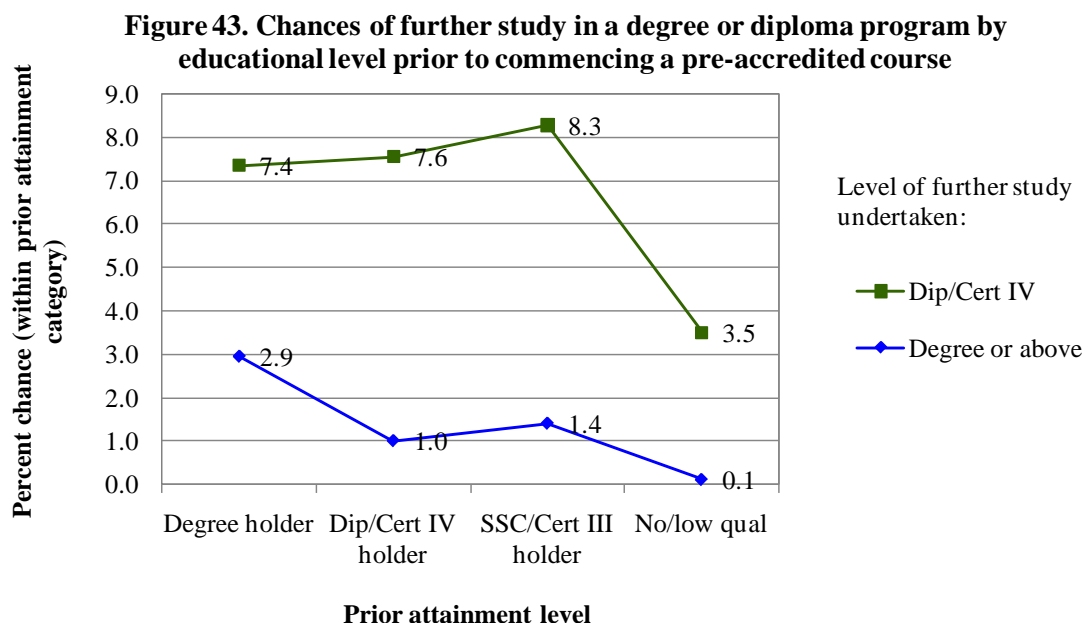
They also enrol in award courses more often (57% as against 53%), and they are nearly twice as likely to attempt a Diploma course (41% compared to 22%).

The award structure of study destinations is biased upwards, and this reflects the higher initial platform of qualifications of learners with a senior school certificate or a skilled vocational certificate (Certificate III).

Charts for individuals with a Diploma or Certificate IV (n=398) and for those with a university degree (n=340) are provided at the end of this chapter. Transition to further study observed for differently qualified individuals leads to two conclusions. Firstly educational progression rises as a function of initial educational level (though this trend is weak). Secondly the structure of award progression also rises in line with initial educational attainment level (this trend is more pronounced).

Drawing this information together, we can examine the chances of poorly-qualified individuals progressing to award study at different levels and compare these with the chances of other educationally defined groups.

Figure 43 reports the chances of undertaking further study at diploma or higher level.



Men and women who were poorly qualified at the time they undertook their pre-accredited course have 3.5 in 100 chances of progressing to a diploma-level course in their further study

trajectory. This doubles to 7 or 8 in 100 for learners who held a higher qualification, whether this was a senior school certificate or Certificate III, a diploma or other middle-level award, or a university degree.

For the poorly qualified, the chances of progressing to university following a pre-accredited course are remote (1 in 1,000). Only a very small proportion of all commencing students in under-graduate courses in Australian public universities are admitted without prior qualifications (about 6%) (see Wheelahan 2009: 23). Progression to higher education climbs tenfold for the more educated groups, to between 1 and 3 in 100. There is practically no interface between pre-accredited courses and university courses, so this is not surprising. The transition that does occur between these courses is based on already-acquired qualifications, and as we have noted few people are admitted to university on a basis other than formal credentials (completing a pre-accredited course in itself does not count).

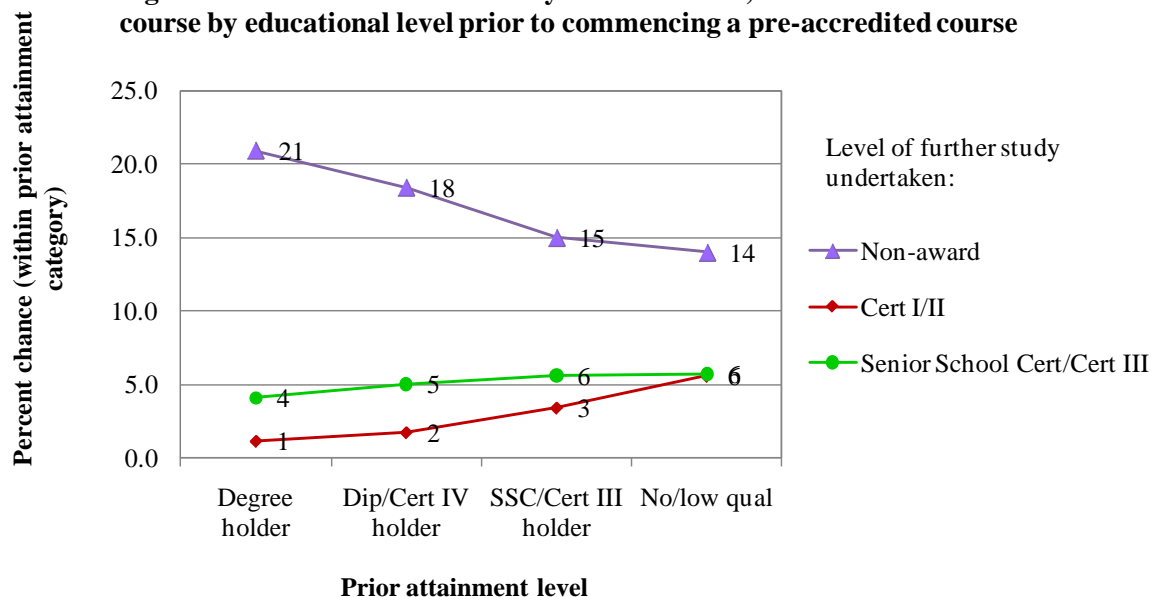
The transition between pre-accredited courses and diploma-level courses is likewise based on already-acquired qualifications, though here there is more flexibility through recognition of prior learning and generally greater flexibility in admissions policy. But transition operates in favour of individuals who have at least finished school, and between this group and the “no qualifications” group there is a large gap in chances of progression.

Basically the poorly qualified have little or no access through pre-accredited courses to the economically most profitable levels of post-school study. It is extremely difficult for them to reverse a history of limited educational attainment in a single step.

However, they can make progress by accessing training or other accredited study at lower levels of the qualifications hierarchy. Here their history is less of a bar to educational progression.

Figure 44 shows that as we descend the scale of prior educational attainment—from university graduate to individuals with few or no qualifications—the chance of enrolling in a basic VET course (Certificate I or II) rises sharply. University graduates rarely take these courses (1 in 100), nor do diploma holders (2 in 100), and only slightly more often do individuals who completed school or hold a Certificate III (3 in 100). Men and women who were the least qualified on undertaking a pre-accredited course are twice as likely to enrol in a basic vocational course (6 in 100).

Figure 44. Chances of further study in a basic VET, skilled or non-award course by educational level prior to commencing a pre-accredited course



The poorly qualified are just as likely to enrol in a Certificate III course as in a basic vocational course (6 in 100). However, these odds are not much better than the odds of more highly qualified people taking a Certificate III course. As Figure 44 shows, there is only a weak association between enrolment in a skilled vocational course and prior educational attainment, which casts a doubt on the extent of access of poorly qualified learners to this level of accredited training.

Before returning to our question as to whether transition to accredited further study is adequate, we should consider the chances of transition to further study in *non-award courses*. While transition to these courses might be expected to be higher amongst the poorly qualified (as there are generally no course prerequisites), it is in fact the lowest. As Figure 44 shows, the trend in progression to non-award courses rises in line with prior qualifications attainment rather than inversely to it.

This suggests that the higher the initial level of educational attainment, the more that further study takes the form of selective or discretionary choice to complement educational profile rather than to construct it from the bottom up. For the well-educated, the profile has already been built. While this enables them to take *award* courses at a high level—it is largely the more educated who have access to these courses—it also sets up an orientation to further study which exploits the many opportunities represented by *non-award* courses.

The poorly qualified, on the other hand, continue in any form of study less often, take award over non-award courses when they do continue (the most well-educated do the opposite), and in the main take lower level or skilled VET award courses (which make up for the “lost profile” of incomplete schooling).

Do the poorly qualified continue in study to the extent that would be desirable (as distinct from what might be expected)? Early school leavers without qualifications may experience other forms of disadvantage in addition to the employment and income risks associated with incomplete schooling and lack of credentials. Pre-accredited courses help them build educational profile, but less than 1 in 3 continue in study and barely half of these take award courses. While more likely than other groups to take basic VET courses, this involves only 6 in 100 of the group, and they are only slightly more likely than other groups to enrol in skilled VET courses. Relative to need and by comparison with more educated groups, the extent of educational progression does not appear to be adequate.

Additional charts

Figure 45 Transition to further study and award level of course: diploma or Certificate IV holder

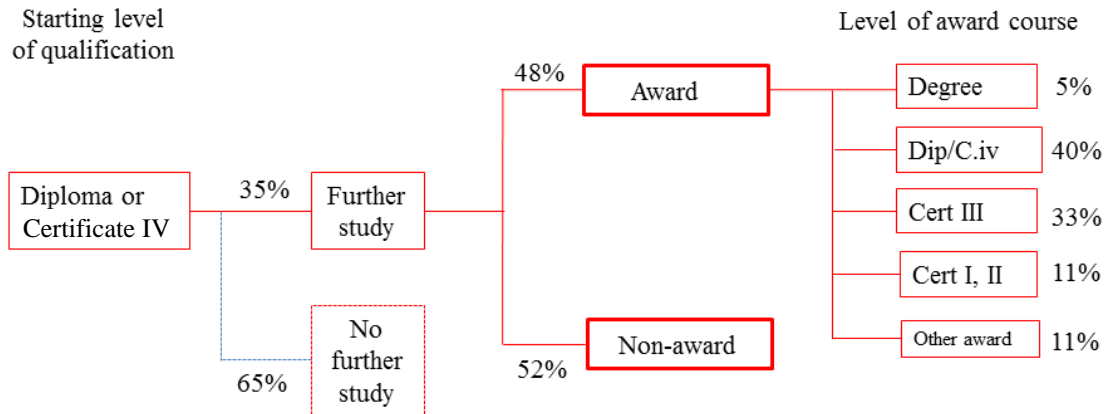
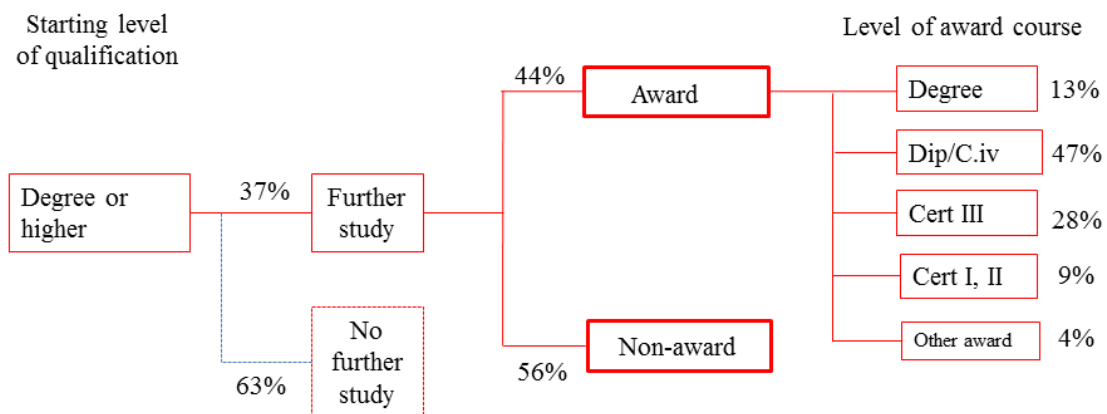


Figure 46 Transition to further study and award level of the course: university graduate



Chapter Four: findings in dot point

Undertaking further study

- Every third person who enrolls in a pre-accredited course subsequently undertakes further study
- Course completers do so more often than non-completers, but the difference is small
- Reasons for non-progression include health, family and retirement (58%), lack of readiness or interest (20%), and satisfaction of need by the pre-accredited course (15%)
- Cost and travel factors are cited by few respondents, and course-related (discouraging) factors even less
- Learners who are poorly or less well-integrated in the labour market are twice as likely as well-integrated workers to cite lack of readiness, and course costs and travel are also a bigger factor; job search also contributes to non-progression
- That needs have been met is, on the other hand, a common response amongst full-time workers (21%), and lack of interest is also more common amongst these and part-time workers not seeking more hours of employment

The influence of labour market position

- Further study is much more likely amongst learners who took a pre-accredited course for work-related reasons (39% compared to 26% of those who did not); an employment orientation to study extends from taking a pre-accredited course to taking other courses as well
- Position in the labour market exercises a marked influence over study progression
- Under-employed and unemployed workers more frequently undertake further study than full-time or part-time workers (between 40% and 47% compared to 30-33%)
- The weaker the position in the labour market, the greater the recourse to further study

Transition to an award course

- Position in the labour market also affects the likelihood of progressing to an *award* course (from 56% of full-time workers to 72% of the unemployed)

- While more vulnerable workers progress to award courses more often, the *qualification level* of these courses is typically lower
- Full-time workers and part-time workers not seeking more hours study at higher qualification levels—they are thus both in a relatively advantaged economic position *and* take courses with a bigger economic return
- Under-employed and unemployed workers are in a relatively weak position in the labour market, and while they are more likely to undertake further study, this is in lower level courses that have less impact on lifetime earnings

Award courses and fields of study

- The award courses taken by learners after their pre-accredited course display a breadth of industry coverage
- The larger fields include business (37%), aged and disability care (24%), hospitality (17%), childcare (16%), health (16%) and education (14%)
- This breadth of coverage is an important indicator of the impact of pre-accredited courses

Transition to a non-award course

- Pre-accredited or “non-award” courses play an important role in securing or improving employment; the high proportions of people who progress to a non-award course should not be viewed as without economic significance, even though the course is not sanctioned by a national qualification
- Most non-award courses taken by people who progress to further study have an economic emphasis or a potential economic application (e.g., computing, literacy)
- The main fields of non-award study including computing (36%), vocational (13%), business (12%), literacy (10%), carer training (7%), and work skills (5%)
- Non-award courses that do not have an economic emphasis (or at least an explicit one) account for relatively few learners who take non-award courses (e.g., art and foreign languages represent a total of 9%)
- Under-employed and unemployed workers place a stronger economic emphasis on their study (vocational and business courses are more prominent as are literacy courses)

- However, there is a large grey area made up of non-award courses of uncertain purpose; a much larger group of workforce-vulnerable learners are found in this area (14% compared to 8% of all workforce-active learners)

Educational progression: the experience of poorly qualified learners

- While a labour market perspective on educational participation is important, so is a qualifications or educational background perspective; we need to know about differences in the likelihood of educational progression according to prior educational attainment (which does not equate to workforce status)
- We cannot answer the question whether pre-accredited courses are contributing to growth in the qualification levels of the Australian population unless we monitor activity and outcomes from an educational background perspective
- The focus of this analysis is on the poorly qualified; this is because these individuals are potentially the most vulnerable, they often experience multiple disadvantage, and the strengthening of the poorly qualified is a national priority
- Poorly qualified men and women make up 40% of the class of 2011; generally they have not finished school and have at most basic vocational qualifications; nearly 7 in 10 are *below* retirement age, but fewer than half are in the workforce; most are women; those who are in the workforce have too little work or no work at all; every fourth person who is poorly qualified has a permanent disability
- Of the poorly qualified, 3 in 10 undertake further study
- Of this “further study” group, 52% enrolled in an award course (mostly at AQF Levels I-III)
- Nearly 1 in 2 took a non-award course
- To assess whether the educational progression of poorly qualified learners is at a desirable level, comparisons are made with other educationally defined groups
- Very few poorly educated learners progress to diploma or degree courses (as might be expected given their lack of suitable qualifications); for diplomas, the chances of progression are 3.5 in 100, and for degree programs, 1 in 1,000
- More educated groups undertake award courses at diploma level twice as often, and even more often in the case of degree programs

- Pre-accredited courses may encourage further study, but access to diploma or degree studies is based on already-acquired qualifications rather than the pre-accredited course itself
- The poorly qualified have little or no access through pre-accredited courses to the economically most profitable levels of post-school study; they cannot in general gain access through a single step
- Much depends, therefore, on the additional steps represented by lower level VET qualifications
- Learners without qualifications enrol in basic VET courses at least twice as often as other educationally defined groups (6 in 100)
- However, their progression to skilled vocational courses (AQF III) is the same as, or only slightly better than, other groups; they have little advantage at this level; there is only a weak association between taking a Certificate III course and prior educational attainment
- The poorly qualified have the weakest chance of all groups of undertaking a non-award course (14 in 100 compared to between 15 and 21 chances in 100)
- It is the most well-educated who take non-award courses more often
- While it is to be expected that poorly qualified men and women who do undertake accredited further study will do so in courses at lower qualification levels (because they lack threshold credentials), the rate of transition to any further study is the lowest of all groups (30%), the rate of enrolment in skilled vocational courses is similar to that of more educationally advantaged learners, and the rate of enrolment in non-award courses is the lowest of all groups
- For these reasons, we conclude that the educational progression of poorly qualified learners is weaker than it should be, especially given multiple and complex need.

Chapter Five

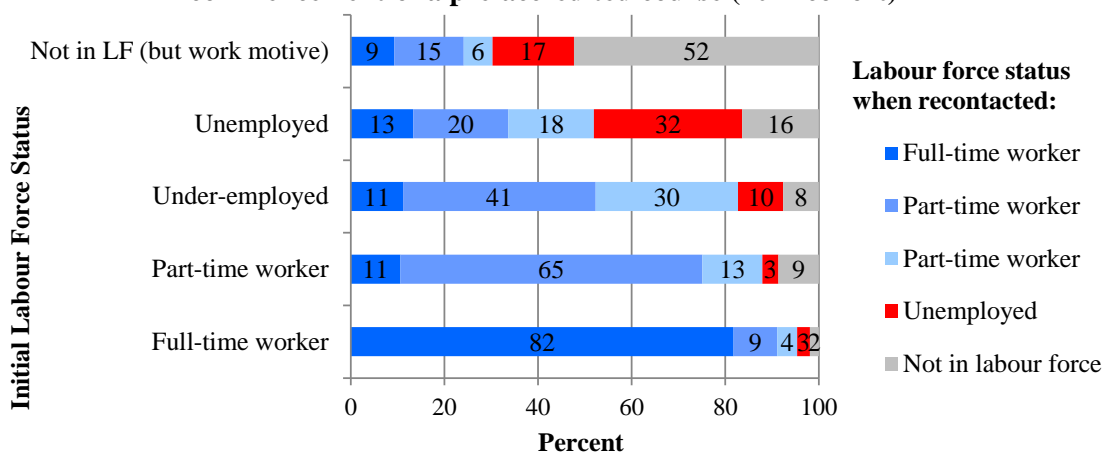
Employment Outcomes

Most men and women in the workforce who take a pre-accredited course—and indeed some on its margins—do so for work reasons. They want to find or change jobs or improve their work skills. Most are satisfied that their courses did equip them with valuable skills, but those seeking a change in employment are less positive. For under-employed and unemployed workers, pre-accredited courses are seen to help in about half of all cases (58% and 53% respectively, ignoring motive).

When we examine changes in workforce status between the time when a pre-accredited course was started and the point in time when a respondents were recontacted—a variable period of between 10 and 21 months—we find that most change has occurred amongst less well-integrated or poorly integrated workers and those on the margins of the labour market.

Figure 47 reports labour force status at the point of recontact for each category of worker aged 15-64. Amongst well-integrated workers, those in full-time employment show the least change in labour force status. Confirming their relatively advantageous position in the labour market, 82% were still in full-time work. Some were now in part-time work, and either satisfied with their hours of employment (9%) or seeking more hours (4%). Those no longer in work, but seeking work represented about 3 in 100 of the category as does the small group no longer in the workforce (retirees excluded).

Figure 47 Changes in employment status 10 to 21 months after commencement of a pre-accredited course (2011 cohort)*



* Amongst learners aged <65 years, excluding those who were retired and those unable to work due to permanent disability.

Part-time workers who, at the start of their pre-accredited course, were not seeking more hours also exhibit considerable stability in employment status. Nearly 2 in 3 were in the same position (not necessarily occupation) as before (65%), while about equal numbers were now working full-time or on the other hand were now under-employed (11% and 13% respectively). Unemployment is low amongst this group as it is amongst full-time workers, again confirming that they are well-integrated. However, more were no longer in the workforce—neither working nor seeking work (9%). These workforce-inactive respondents were not retired.

Under-employed workers at the time they commenced their pre-accredited course show considerable change in status. Only 30% were still under-employed. Just over half reported on recontact to either having sufficient hours of employment (still part-time) or working full-time (41% and 11% respectively). Against these positive shifts, there were now 1 in 10 who were unemployed and almost as many who were no longer in the workforce. The picture for this group is thus a mixed one. Many have improved their situation, but nearly 1 in 5 are in a more vulnerable position.

Unemployed workers show the greatest change. Just over half now have work. In the main, this is part-time. While 20% of once-unemployed workers have found part-time jobs and have sufficient hours, 18% are under-employed. Full-time jobs have been taken up by 13% of the once-unemployed. This is the positive side of the ledger. On the negative side, nearly a third were unemployed at the time of recontact (32%) and nearly 1 in 5 were no longer in the workforce. Thus the picture is again mixed as it is for the under-employed.

Workforce-inactive learners who took a pre-accredited course for work motives display much change in their labour force status. Almost 50% have moved into the workforce. Of these, the majority have jobs, while a total of 17% are seeking work. The majority remain on the margins of the workforce (52%).

Does course completion make a difference?

The groups with whom we are most concerned are those who most depend on study impacts to make a difference to their economic position—the under-employed, the unemployed, and “marginal workers” who are not in the labour force. It is these groups who exhibit most

change in workforce status. But are the changes that we observe related to whether they completed their pre-accredited course or not?

Is it reasonable to expect change? On the one hand, pre-accredited courses are quite diverse in nature and not necessarily targeted to the particular barriers which vulnerable workers have to overcome. Some courses are clearly intended to boost employability skills, and others target language and numeracy skills that have to be raised to facilitate employment or further training. But many courses aim at skills development at a more general level (e.g., computing). These equip people to work better (depending on the work environment) and make potential employees more attractive to employers. But they will not necessarily distinguish between applicants for a position, perhaps only levelling the playing field rather than enhancing competitiveness. Skills growth, e.g., literacy, may also occur over a longer period and depend on changes in literacy practice, not just the instructional effect of the course. For these reasons we should be cautious in our expectations of change, particularly when it concerns job shift as distinct from skills acquisition.

Besides these course-related factors, job shift is influenced by external non-course factors. These include regional labour markets, structural unemployment, business restructuring, and the economic cycle itself. These “macro” factors shape the level of labour demand and structure job offer in industry and occupational terms. Individuals adjust to these changes in environment, including through education and training. But adjustment may involve a sequence of decisions and changes, some ineffectual, others producing a result, but only over the longer term.

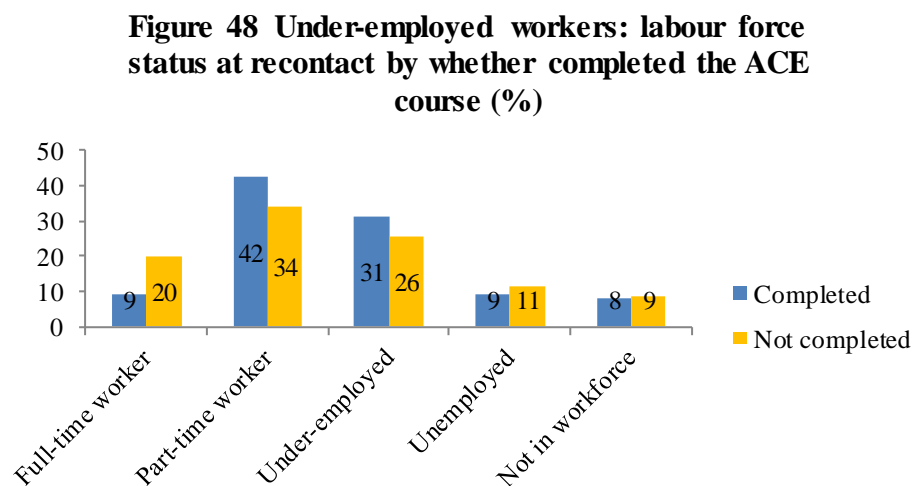
Under-employed workers and employment outcomes

Under-employed workers show considerable change in their labour market over 10-21 months. Just over half improve their situation, either by gaining more hours (while still being employed part-time) or by finding full-time jobs.

Those under-employed workers who completed their pre-accredited course improved their position by finding *part-time work with more hours*. On recontact, 42% of course completers reported working part-time and *not* seeking more hours.

Under-employed workers who did *not* complete their pre-accredited course improved their position by finding *full-time work*. They were more than twice as likely as course completers to find full-time jobs (20% compared to 9%). This may be in part because they chose *between* completing their course and taking a full-time job.

Figure 48 compares change in workforce status for under-employed workers according to whether they completed or did not complete their pre-accredited course.



Under-employed course completers gain by improving their hours, while non-completers gain by finding full-time work. Both also experience losses. Some of the completers are now unemployed or inactive, and this is also true of non-completers. On balance the non-completers experience more loss—20% have a more insecure workforce status than in the past compared to 17% of course completers. But this difference is small and not statistically significant.

To the extent that we can link *positive change* in workforce status to undertaking a pre-accredited course, those under-employed who completed a course were more likely to gain more hours of part-time work, while those who started, but did not finish, more often found full-time work. Does doing a pre-accredited course make a difference? It is associated with increased hours of employment. Does completing a course make a difference? It is associated with finding more hours of part-time work as distinct from finding full-time work.

Unemployed workers and employment outcomes

More overall change in labour force status is experienced by unemployed workers. As we have already noted, just over half have found work. While we cannot attribute this to taking a pre-accredited course—for the reasons outlined earlier—nor can we dissociate the change in employment from the experience of doing the course. The course may admittedly be only one element, but significant nonetheless. Of the unemployed who do show an improvement in employment status, 58% agree that doing a pre-accredited course helped them find work. We consider that the change in employment status coupled with the observation of the unemployed worker represents evidence of a course effect.

Does completing a course make a difference? Completing a course is associated with 50% change in employment status. That is, every second unemployed worker who completed a pre-accredited course shifted from being out of work to being in work. Not completing is associated with a slightly higher change (54%).

Differences in the composition of the change are very similar to what has been observed in the case of under-employed workers. Course completers gain more hours of part-time work, while non-completers gain more full-time jobs.

Figure 49 Unemployed workers: labour force status at recontact by whether completed the ACE course (%)

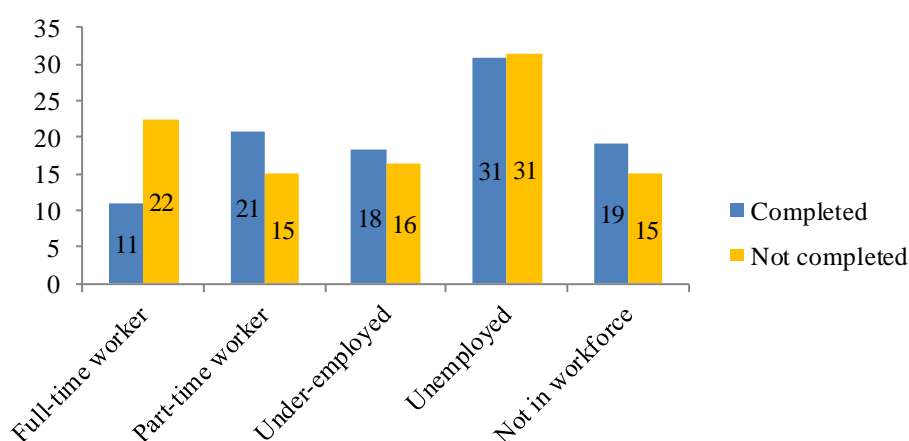


Figure 49 shows that 39% of unemployed workers who completed a pre-accredited course were in part-time work (whether wanting more hours or not) 10-21 months later. Amongst

non-completers, 31% gained part-time work. But the non-completers were twice as likely as the course completers to find full-time work (22% as compared to 11%).

Employment outcomes and further study: the experience of under-employed workers

So far we have been considering the impact of course completion on job outcomes. Many men and women who take pre-accredited courses go on to further study, whether or not they complete their pre-accredited course. Looking only at workforce-active learners and the inactive who had a work motive for study, nearly 40% undertook further study. More did so if they completed their pre-accredited course (41% as against 34% who did not complete).

Is participation in further study associated with change in employment status? Does further study make a difference?

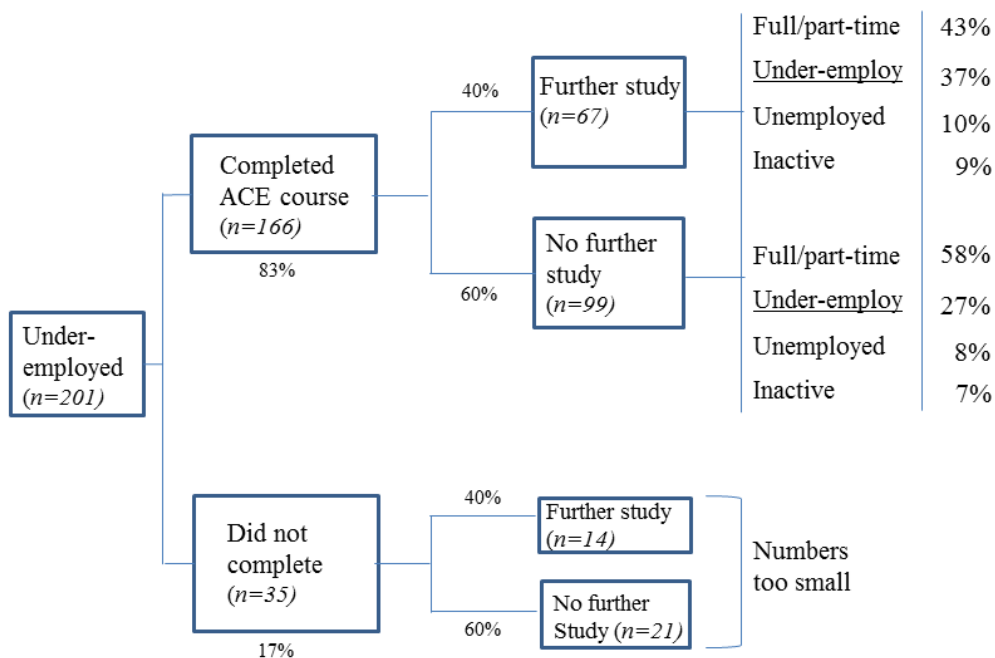
We begin with *under-employed workers* (n=201, successfully recontacted, but excluding retirees). Most of this group completed their pre-accredited course (83%). Given the small numbers who did not complete, we restrict our analysis to the completers. If they undertook further study, what changes do we observe in their employment status?

Nearly two-thirds experienced change (63%). Most of this change was due to finding more hours of work (39% of total change) or finding full-time work (4% of total change). Having been under-employed, 43% have improved their situation. However, some change of a negative kind has also occurred. About 1 in 10 under-employed workers are now unemployed and almost as many have withdrawn from the workforce (9%). It is a matter of interpretation whether this last group are worse off than before. But some, at any rate, could be discouraged workers, so their labour market situation has deteriorated.

What changes occurred amongst under-employed workers who did *not* undertake further study? These men and women make up a larger proportion of the cohort of under-employed who completed a pre-accredited course (60%). More of this “no further study” group experienced change than is observed amongst the “further study” group (73% compared to 63%). Much of the change they experienced was positive and involved finding more hours of work (45% of total change) or finding full-time work (12%). The remaining change was divided equally between slipping into unemployment (8%) and withdrawing from the labour force (7%).

On balance, under-employed workers who did *not* undertake further study recorded positive change more often than their more studious peers (58% positive change compared to 43% positive change). Conversely, the “no study” group recorded less negative change (15% as against 19%). These findings are set out in Figure 50.

Figure 50 Under-employed workers: employment change by further study participation (%)



Many individuals in each group, it should be stressed, did experience positive change. In the main, this was by finding more hours of work (finding full-time was not necessarily a goal). However, undertaking further study is associated with less positive change and not doing further study is associated with more positive change. How do we account for this?

This difference should be seen in the context that scarcely half of the “further study” group had completed their new course at the time of recontact (49%). As many respondents were either still in the course (43%) or had dropped out (7.5%). For further study to have a chance of demonstrating an impact, the experience of only half the students is available as evidence. Basically a longer period of time would be needed to test whether further study does make more or less of a difference to job outcomes than no further study.

However, even within the relatively short time between enrolment in a pre-accredited course and undertaking a further course of study, there is evidence that the additional study does

contribute to positive changes in the labour market experience of under-employed workers. As many as 43% register improvement, and some of the weakening in labour market situation which is also observed (e.g., the increased percentage of inactive respondents) may be due to study commitments. Later on we will consider impact over the longer term, based on the 2009 and 2010 cohorts.

Employment outcomes and further study: unemployed workers

Unemployed workers represent a larger proportion of the men and women who take pre-accredited courses than under-employed workers, and while they complete their courses to about the same extent (81% compared to 83%), they enrol in further study more often (49% compared to 40%).

The unemployed who do undertake further study report positive change in about half of all cases—30% have found full-time work or part-time work (with sufficient hours) and 17% are part-time employed, though with too few hours. Over a third of this “further study” group have experienced no change in their employment status (36%), and about 1 in 5 have withdrawn from the workforce (17%).

By comparison, the unemployed who did *not* undertake further study reported positive change in 53% of cases (compared to 47% of the “further study” group). They found full-time work or part-time work with sufficient hours marginally more often (33% compared to 30%), and also part-time work with insufficient hours (20% compared to 17%) (see Figure 51).

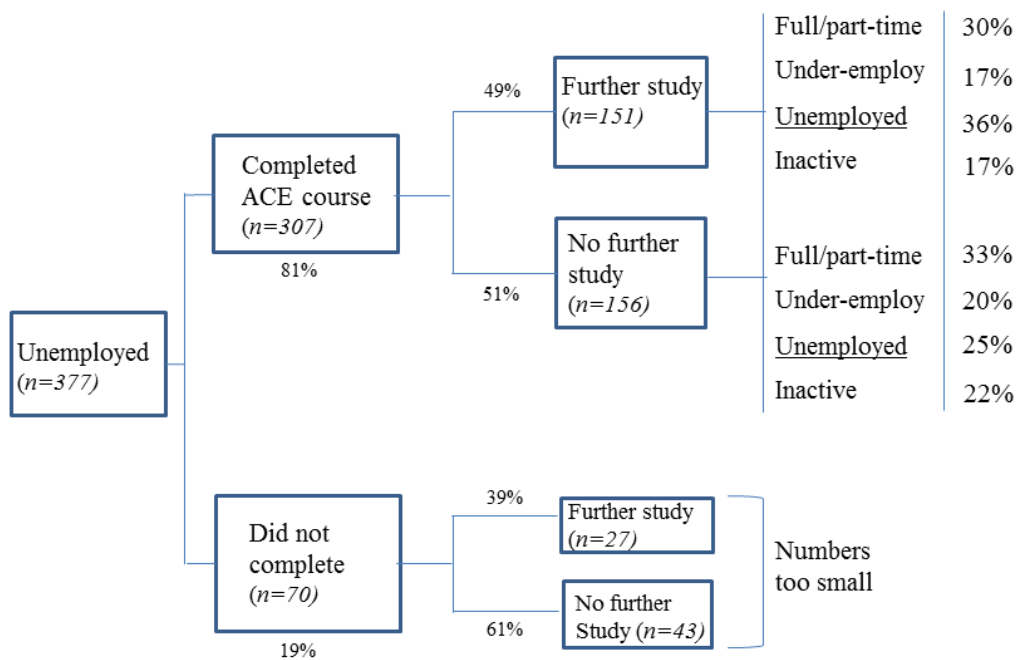
While not doing further study is associated with more positive outcomes, this does not mean that further study is relatively ineffectual (makes no difference relative to not doing further study).

Part of the reason for the apparent lack of relative impact of further study is the high proportion of respondents who are still doing their new course. Looking only at the negative changes (continued unemployment, exit from the workforce), almost 1 in 2 of respondents (46%) are still in study.

If hours of study have a constraining effect on job search activity or if completion of a course of study is required for the job seeker to be competitive, this will drive up the numbers of

respondents who either remain unemployed or withdraw from the workforce. The high number of respondents continuing in their course means that further study cannot display any effects that it might have (in the next section, we investigate longer term change).

Figure 51 Unemployed workers: employment change by further study participation (%)



Of greater importance is the fact that many unemployed workers who continue in study (including some who are still studying) have experienced positive change in their employment situation.

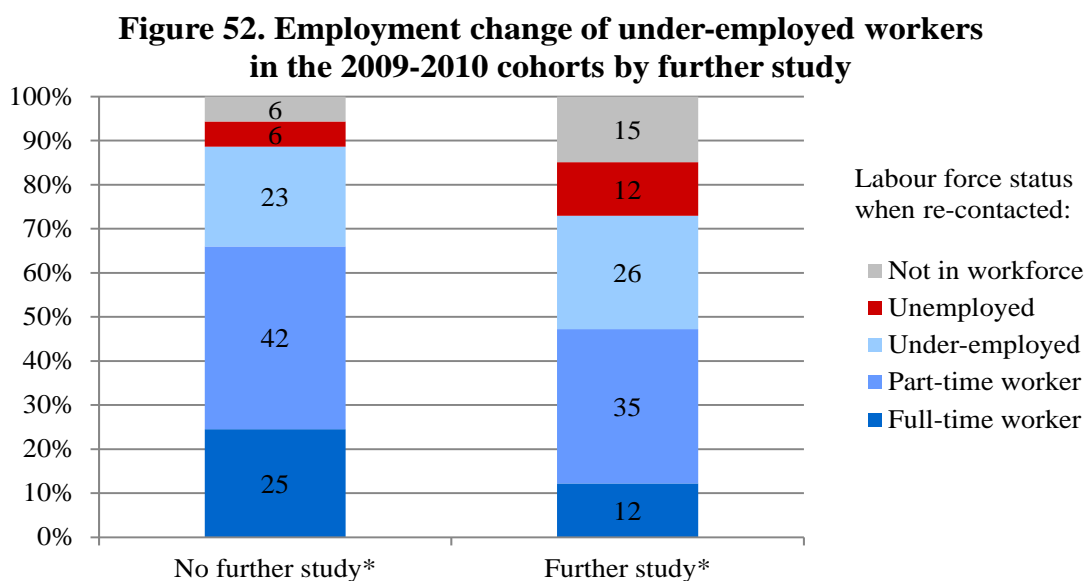
Longer term employment change: the experience of the 2009-2010 cohorts

Through the experience of the 2009-2010 cohorts, we have a longer term perspective within which to view the possible impact of further study following a pre-accredited course. Our analysis is based on 127 under-employed workers who were successfully recontacted in 2012 and who were not in retirement, and 294 unemployed workers.

For the 2009 cohort, the reference period over which we measure change in employment is up to 3 years and 9 months. This is from the earliest month in which a respondent could have commenced a pre-accredited course until recontact in September 2012. For the 2010 cohort, the reference period is up to 2 years and 9 months. To conserve numbers, we combine these two cohorts. As they are roughly equal size (865 learners from the 2009 cohort recontacted; 979 from 2010), the average lapse of time over which any observed change in employment situation occurred is about 40 months.

For *under-employed workers*, is undertaking further study associated with a different pattern of employment change than not undertaking further study? We divide our sample of under-employed workers into two groups: (a) those who undertook further study and completed or were continuing that study (n=74), and (b) those who did not undertake further study or who discontinued it, if they did (the latter are only a small number) (n=53).

Under-employed workers do show some difference in employment change as between those who studied and those who did not. The results are presented in Figure 52.



Notes:

* "No further study" includes those who discontinued further study.

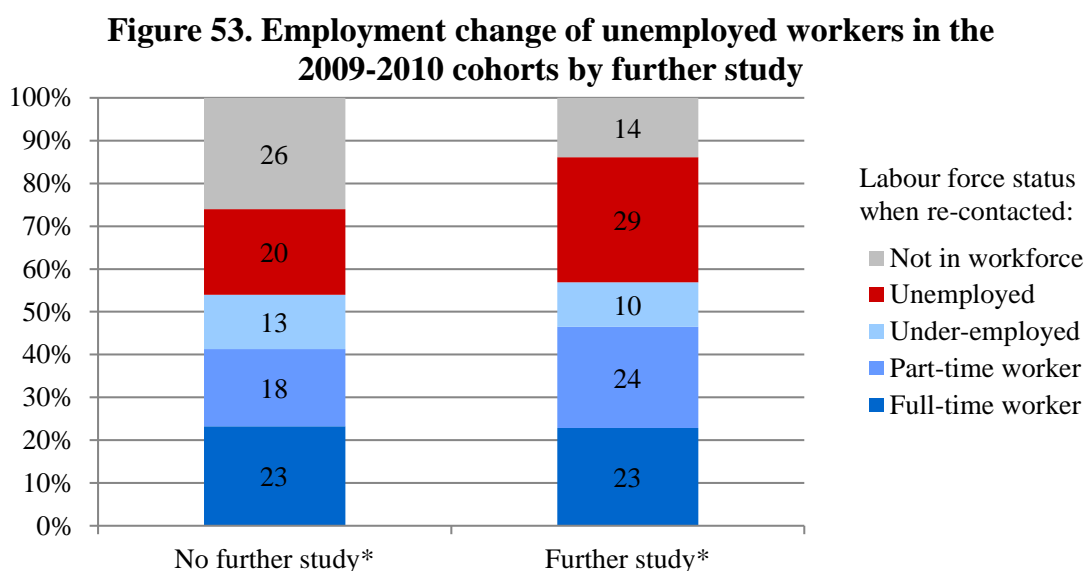
* "Further study" includes those still continuing their study.

Whilst a large proportion of *both* groups improved their employment situation, positive change was greatest amongst those who *did not* do further study. Amongst the "further study" group, 47% had found full-time work or part-time work with sufficient hours, whilst amongst the "no further study" group, 66% had improved.

About 1 in 4 of both groups reported being under-employed (the no-change situation) (26% of the “further study” group and 23% of the ‘no further study’ group). Looking at negative change, those who did further study were twice as likely to be unemployed as those who didn’t study (12% compared to 6%), and more than twice as likely to have withdrawn from the labour force (15% as opposed to 6%).

Bearing in mind that the numbers of learners in each of these groups is small, care needs to be taken in drawing any conclusions. Nevertheless, looking at the pattern of employment differences as a whole, it would appear that *for under-employed workers* not doing further study produces more positive changes over the longer term than doing further study. Both the “studious” and the “not studious” record significant gains in employment as measured by the increased numbers in full-time jobs and in part-time jobs with sufficient hours. However, the no further study group is more likely to record a positive employment change, and less likely to record a negative employment change. (The “no change” situation (under-employment) occurs with the same frequency for both groups.)

The picture is somewhat different with *unemployed workers*. The findings are presented in Figure 53.



Notes:

* "No further study" includes those who discontinued further study.

* "Further study" includes those still continuing their study.

Amongst the unemployed who undertook *no further study* or did not complete (n=150), a total of 54% improved their employment situation. This was through full-time work (23%), part-time work with sufficient hours (18%) or part-time work with insufficient hours (13%).

If unemployed workers enrolled in and completed (or were continuing) further study (n=144), their results are marginally better in terms of employment gain. Gains were recorded by 57% (as compared to 54% of the “no further study” group). Full-time jobs were obtained by 23% (the same as for the “no further study” group), part-time jobs with sufficient hours were obtained by 24% (which, by comparison with the “no further study” group, is where the main positive difference occurs), and part-time work with insufficient hours were obtained by 10% (lower than the 13% achieving the same result without further study).

More of the further study group were unemployed (29% compared to 20% of the no-study group), while the no-study group recorded a larger proportion of people leaving the workforce (26% compared to 14% of the further study group).

From this analysis, we conclude that unemployed workers who undertaken and complete (or are continuing) further study achieve marginally better employment gains than unemployed workers who do not. The main positive differences are that (a) the further study group is more frequently employed part-time (with sufficient hours), and (b) this group also remains in the workforce instead of withdrawing (though at increased risk of unemployment). As we shall see, other factors come into play, such as the level of further study and the background characteristics of the learners themselves (e.g., age, disability, educational background).

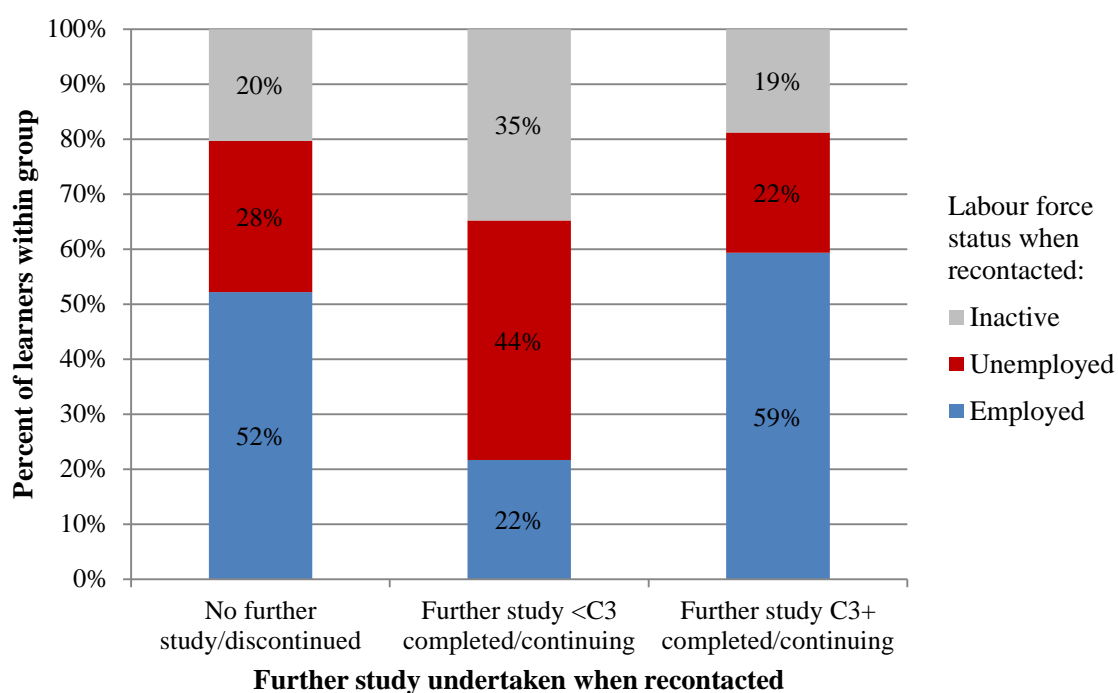
In the sections which follow, we explore these aspects further. Firstly, we take the group of learners who were unemployed when they started their pre-accredited course and who had no or low qualifications and we investigate whether the level of further study has an impact on their employment situation. We then turn to the background characteristics of all unemployed learners in order to further examine who does and who does not end up finding work.

Does the level of further study matter?

Unemployed workers with no or low qualifications are amongst those who potentially stand to improve their economic situation the most through acquisition of vocationally relevant skills and credentials. For this reason, we focus on them here.

Figure 54 looks at how the level of study undertaken may influence employment outcomes. It compares outcomes amongst once-unemployed learners who, following their pre-accredited course in 2009/10, took three different study paths. The first group undertook training at Certificate III level or above, the second did lower level courses (such as those leading to a basic vocational certificate) or non-accredited training, whilst the third group did not attempt any further study at all (or discontinued it if they did).

Figure 54. Unemployed learners with no or low qualifications: impact of further study on employment outcomes (2009/10 cohorts)



Clear differences are apparent between the three groups. Those who undertook further study at the higher levels can be seen to have improved their work situation the most when they were recontacted in September 2012. Almost 60% had moved from unemployment into full- or part-time employment. On the negative side of the ledger for this group, one in five had withdrawn from the workforce (retirees excluded). About one in four were still unemployed (the “no change” situation).

Looking at those who undertook lower level study, outcomes are much poorer. Only 22% were working (whether full-time or part-time) when recontacted. One in three had withdrawn from the workforce (retirees excluded). The balance (44%) were again unemployed.

Turning to those who did not undertake any further study (or discontinued it, and again excluding anyone who retired), outcomes are better than for those who undertook lower level courses, but not as good as for those undertaking study at Certificate III or higher. A total of 52% of the no-study group had found work (as opposed to 59% amongst those who studied at Certificate III or above). One in five had left the workforce (this was also the case for the higher-level study group), whilst 28% were looking for work (compared to 22% of those who did higher-level study).

From the above, the group that stands out as having achieved the weakest employment outcomes is the one comprising learners who undertook lower-level or non-accredited study. On the other hand, learners who undertook further study at Certificate III level or above had the best outcomes.

Whilst one might have expected that those who undertook higher level study would be more successful in securing employment than those who did either no or low-level study, one needs to consider other factors to fully understand the observed results. Background characteristics of the learners in each of these groups also come into play, such as age, disability and English language proficiency. These are examined further below.

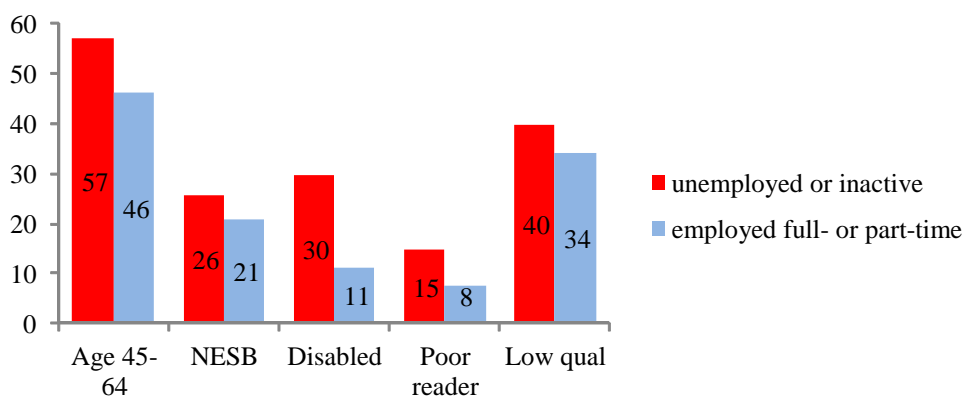
Who amongst the unemployed finds work and who doesn't?

Many workers who were unemployed at the time they started their pre-accredited course were also unemployed at the time of recontact (31%). A further 18% had withdrawn from the labour force. Who was not successful in their search for work and who was successful? Our analysis relates to the 2011 cohort.

We recognize that some people may have found work, only to lose their job during the interval between first and second survey contact, and that this may have happened more than once. So this comparison is based simply on two snapshots.

Figure 55 compares the profiles of successful job seekers with those of the unsuccessful. The first group found work, whether full-time or part-time (including being under-employed), while the second either was unemployed at second contact or was inactive.

**Figure 55 Who found work and who didn't:
comparative profiles**



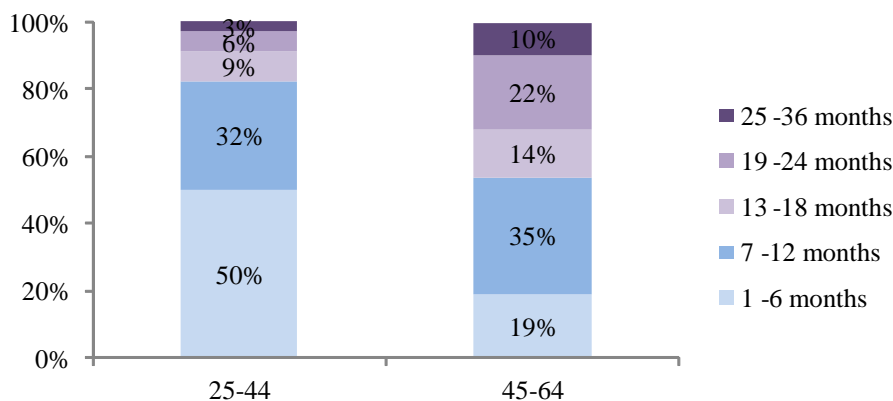
Successful job seekers were younger than unsuccessful—46% were aged 45-64 compared to 57% of those who were not in work at second contact. The unemployed who found work were also somewhat less likely to be non-English speaking (21% compared to 26%), were less likely to have low qualifications (34% as against 40%), and were less often poor readers (8% compared to 15%). A very marked difference in profiles relates to the number of disabled people—11% of successful job seekers had a permanent disability compared to 30% of job seekers who were unsuccessful.

These differences in profile between successful and unsuccessful job seekers highlight the risk factors associated with long-term unemployment—age, non-English speaking backgrounds (though this is variable), low achievement at school (or skills attrition), and disability.

The vulnerability of older workers to unemployment has particular relevance to the community sector and to the role of pre-accredited courses. For a large proportion of learners in these courses are older and unemployed. Of the class of 2011, nearly 1 in 5 are unemployed workers, and over half of these are aged 45 and over. It is this older group who are most vulnerable to long-term unemployment, especially men in their 'fifties. Bureau of Statistics labour force survey data show that the duration of unemployment for men aged between 55 and 59 peaks at 26-52 weeks, while duration for the youngest men (late teens) peaks between 4 and 26 weeks. The duration of unemployment as reported by survey

respondents also shows a sharp age pattern. Of those aged 25-44 years who were unemployed both when they commenced their pre-accredited course and at the time of recontact, 50% report being out of work for up to 6 months. Amongst those aged 45 to 64 years, 46% reported being out of work for between 13 and 36 months (see Figure 56).

Figure 56 Unemployed on course commencement and at recontact: duration by age (%)

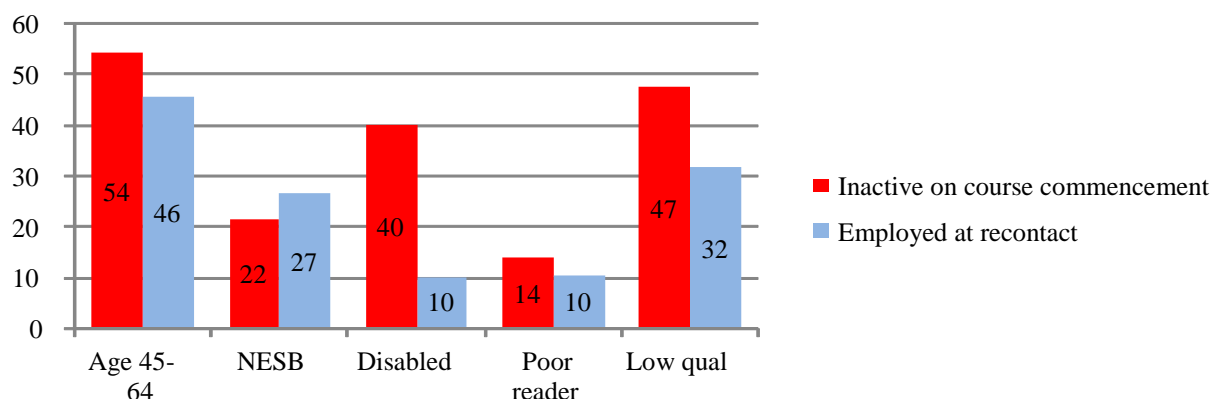


Who amongst the inactive finds work?

At recontact, a group of formerly inactive learners of working age reported that they were now working. They represent 30% of the group who were inactive at the start of their ACE course (see Figure 47 above). In addition, some of those entering the workforce were unsuccessful in finding work, but were still seeking work. These represent 17% of the inactive cohort. In this section of our discussion, we look briefly at the characteristics of those who found work and those who did not, and we compare profiles of these two sub-groups with that of the cohort as a whole.

Figure 57 looks firstly at the cohort of inactive learners when they commenced their pre-accredited course (and with retirees removed). For each selected characteristic, they are compared with the sub-group of inactive learners who reported being employed at second contact. Note that comparisons all concern only the group of respondents who were successfully recontacted.

Figure 57 Inactive learners who found work compared to all inactive learners (%)



Of the workforce-inactive, younger men and women find work. So, too, do those from a non-English speaking background (though the difference is small). The better-qualified find work as against the poorly qualified, and here the difference is much larger—47% of the whole cohort were poorly qualified as compared to only 32% of the sub-group who found work. Job finders amongst the inactive are better readers (though here, too, the difference is small). However, the greatest difference concerns the disabled. They make up 47% of the recontacted sample of workforce-inactive learners, but only 10% of the sub-group who found work.

We have previously commented on the importance of investigating the work and study experience of men and women who are not in the workforce. One of the reasons lies in their movement in and out of the workforce. This suggests, but does not necessarily mean that they are motivated by economic need, as is the case with discouraged workers. When we examine the experience of these “workers at the margins”, we find that they move into the employed workforce if they are younger, better-qualified and not disabled. Conversely those who do not participate in the workforce tend to be older, less well-qualified, and disabled.

Chapter Five: findings in dot point

Change in employment status for each workforce category

- Finding or changing jobs is an important motive behind studying pre-accredited courses. To what extent did change occur in employment status up to a period of 21 months from when the class of 2011 began study and the situation on recontact in September 2012?
- The least change occurs amongst full-time workers and part-time workers with sufficient hours (these two groups are “well-integrated” in the workforce). The most change occurs amongst under-employed and unemployed workers (the less well-integrated or poorly integrated in the workforce). Much change also occurs amongst the workforce-inactive
- Amongst *full-time workers*, a small number report now working part-time (with sufficient or insufficient hours) (13%) and a still-smaller group were now unemployed (3%) or inactive (2%)
- Amongst *part-time workers with sufficient hours*, there were two directions of change. Some were now in full-time jobs (11%), while others were now seeking more hours (13%). A small number had lost their jobs (3%), while a rather large proportion had withdrawn from the workforce (9%)
- The *under-employed* show considerable positive change. Just over half have found full-time work and part-time work with sufficient hours (11% and 41% respectively). This represents an improvement in their employment situation. As against this, 30% remain under-employed, 10% are now out of work, and 8% have become inactive. Thus about 1 in 5 are now in a more vulnerable or potentially vulnerable situation
- With the *unemployed*, there has been substantial progress. Over half have found work—13% full-time, 20% part-time (with sufficient hours), and 18% part-time (but with insufficient hours). On the downside, just under a third remain unemployed (32%), and almost 1 in 5 are no longer in the workforce (the inactive do not include retirees)
- Finally *workforce-inactive learners* who took a pre-accredited course for work reasons display a mixed pattern of partial success in the labour market, partial lack of

success, and (for the majority) a continuation of their inactive status (52%). Altogether 30% find full- or part-time work and 17% are actively looking for work

Does course completion make a difference?

- We focus on course impacts for the more vulnerable workers who undertook pre-accredited courses—the under-employed, the unemployed and “marginal workers” not technically in the workforce, but work motivated
- Can we reasonably expect employment change through pre-accredited study? Pre-accredited courses vary widely in nature and they address quite varying needs, though some are clearly targeted to employability skills, vocational skills or literacy. This diversity cautions us against an expectation of impact. Greater homogeneity in courses and more targeting of courses to defined needs would lift that expectation
- Pre-accredited courses may be more successful in skills acquisition than job shift, as the responses of learners themselves would suggest
- Many economic factors beyond the reach of courses impact on unemployment, including structural unemployment (e.g., regional mismatch), business restructuring, industry change over the longer term, and the economic cycle itself. These factors may neutralize the otherwise positive effects of training, including pre-accredited courses
- While we do find evidence of course impact, this is a matter of association rather than causation. We see pre-accredited courses (and subsequent study, where undertaken) as *contributing* to better employment outcomes, a position confirmed by the perceptions of those experiencing employment change. However, other factors undoubtedly also play a role (job search unaided by a course, referrals, networks, the personal motivation of the individual, educational level, etc.)

(a) the under-employed

- Comparative analysis of the employment situation at the time a pre-accredited course was commenced and the situation on recontact shows that the *under-employed who completed a course* improved their situation by *gaining part-time work with more hours* (+42%)
- The under-employed who did *not* complete a course improved their situation by *finding full-time work*. This happened much more often than amongst the course

completers (20% compared to 9%). This may be due to non-completers choosing work over completing a course

- Under-employed course completers gain by improving their hours, while non-completers gain by finding full-time work
- Both groups also experience “losses” or negative change. Some of the under-employed who did complete a course are now unemployed or inactive. This is also true of the non-completers. However, positive changes outweigh negative ones

(b) the unemployed

- Completing a pre-accredited course is associated with a 50% change in employment status amongst the unemployed. Every second unemployed worker who completed a pre-accredited course shifted from being out of work to being in work
- Not completing a course is associated with a marginally higher rate of change—54% of the unemployed who did not complete a course found work
- As with the under-employed, the unemployed who complete a course gain more hours of work, while non-completers gain more full-time work. It is difficult to escape the impression of a tension between the objective of completing a course and the imperative of finding a job. The gap in finding full-time work as between unemployed completers and non-completers is high (11% compared to 22%)

Further study and its employment impact

- Many men and women who enrol in pre-accredited courses go on to further study. Those who complete their pre-accredited course are more likely to enrol in another course more often than non-completers (41% as against 34%)
- Does participation in further study have an impact on employment status?
- *The under-employed.* Nearly two-thirds experience workforce change (63%). Most of this is due to finding more hours of work (39% of total change) and finding full-time work (only 4% of total change). Altogether 43% of the under-employed improve their situation
- Some change also occurred in a negative direction. Of the under-employed who enrolled in further study, about 1 in 10 is now unemployed or inactive. As retirees have been excluded, we interpret “inactive” to be at least potentially a more vulnerable situation

- The under-employed who did *not* do further study record more total change in employment than the under-employed who did further study (73% compared to 63%), Total change includes both upward and downward mobility. Most of the positive change was due to finding part-time work with sufficient hours (compared to having too few hours) (45%), but 12% of change was due to finding full-time work. The remaining change was “downward”—8% due to unemployment and 7% to withdrawal from the labour market
- All in all, the “no further study” group of under-employed workers recorded more positive change than the “further study” group (58% compared to 43%) and conversely less negative change (15% compared to 19%)
- While many under-employed workers made employment gains, whether having enrolled in further study or not, those who did invest time and effort in a new course experience less mobility than those who did not. Why?
- Scarcely half of the further-study group had completed their new course at the time they were recontacted (49%), As many were either still doing the course (43%) or had dropped out (7.5%). Thus we only have the experience of half the further-study group to assess the impact of additional study. A longer period of time is needed to test whether further study improves employment situation as compared to not undertaking further study
- However, within the limited timeframe during which the class of 2011 was followed up, some 43% of under-employed workers who did do further study also improved their employment situation, and some of the weakening in employment that does occur may be linked to conflict with study commitments
- Later on, we report the results of our analysis of *longer term employment impacts*, based on the experience of the 2009-2010 cohorts
- *The unemployed.* Workers who are unemployed and seeking work represent a larger proportion of all learners in pre-accredited courses than the under-employed, and while they complete their courses about as often, they enrol in further study more often (49% compared to 40%)
- The unemployed who do further study report positive change in employment in every second case—30% have found full-time work or part-time work with sufficient hours and 17% are employed part-time (though with not enough hours). On the other hand, 36% remain unemployed, and about 1 in 5 have withdrawn from the workforce

- Unemployed workers who did *not* do further study report positive change in 53% of cases (compared to 47% of the further-study group). They found full-time work or part-time work (with sufficient hours) marginally more often (33% compared to 30%) and also part-time work (with insufficient hours) (20% compared to 17%)
- Before concluding that further study for the unemployed is relatively ineffectual, it should be noted that a high proportion of the further-study group are still in study, so that there has not been enough time for study to exhibit any employment effects it might have. Looking only at negative changes amongst the unemployed (continued unemployment, exit from the workforce), almost 1 in 2 respondents are still in study (46%)
- If hours of study have a constraining effect on job search or if completion of a course is required to make the job seeker competitive, this will drive up the number of respondents who either remain unemployed or withdraw from the workforce
- Of greater importance is the fact that many unemployed workers who undertake further study (including some who are still studying) have experienced positive change in their employment situation

Longer term gains in employment—the 2009-2010 cohorts

- Employment gains over the longer term can be investigated on the basis of the experience of the 2009-2010 cohorts
- For the *under-employed*, those who undertook further study report employment gains in 47% of cases. A better result is reported by those who did *not* undertake further study (67%)
- Equal proportions had part-time jobs with insufficient hours (the no-change outcome). However, the further study group were twice as likely as the no-study group to be unemployed (a deterioration in employment status). They also gained protection from unemployment by reducing their participation in the workforce (twice as often as the no-study group)
- We conclude that while employment gains were recorded in over half of all cases, positive change was greatest amongst initially under-employed learners who did not do further study
- For the *unemployed*, those who undertook further study recorded positive employment changes marginally more often (a total of 57% compared to 54% of the

no-study group found work). Negative change as represented by withdrawal from the labour force was lower amongst those who did further study (14% compared with 26%). However, the further study group were more likely to be unemployed than the no-study group (29% compared with 20%)

- We conclude that unemployed workers who undertook further study recorded only a marginal improvement in their employment status as compared to their no-study counterparts. The further study group gained work slightly more often, they were half as likely to have withdrawn from the workforce, but on the other hand were more likely to be searching for work
- It may be that other factors are coming into play to produce the above observations, such as the level of further study undertaken, and background characteristics of the learners themselves (e.g. age, disability, educational background)

Does the level of further study matter?

- To investigate the impact of study level on employment outcomes, we looked at once-unemployed learners who, following their pre-accredited course in 2009/10, took three different study paths. The first group undertook training at Certificate III level or above, the second did lower level courses (such as those leading to a basic vocational certificate) or non-accredited training, whilst the third group did not attempt any further study at all (or discontinued it if they did)
- The group that stood out as having achieved the weakest employment outcomes was the one comprising learners who undertook lower-level or non-accredited study (only 22% of whom had a job at recontact). On the other hand, learners who undertook further study at Certificate III level or above had the best outcomes (59% were now working). Those who undertook no further study at all fared much better than those who did low-level or non-accredited study, but not quite as well as the group doing higher level study (52% were in employment at recontact)
- Whilst one might have expected that those who undertook higher level study would be more successful in securing employment than those who did either no or low-level study, one needs to consider the background characteristics of the learners in each of these groups to fully understand the observed results

Amongst the unemployed, who finds work and who does not?

- Every third learner who was unemployed at the time of commencement of a pre-accredited course was also unemployed at the time of recontact (31%). On the other hand, 51% found work—either full-time or part-time; the remaining 18% had withdrawn from the workforce
- What distinguishes the successful job seeker from the unsuccessful? Success comes to those who are younger, more qualified, and without a permanent disability. The successful tend to have better literacy skills and are less often of non-English speaking origins
- A very marked difference relates to disability: 11% of successful job seekers were disabled compared to 30% who did not find work
- The risk factors for unemployment are age, migration background (variable), low achievement at school (and attrition of literacy skills), and disability
- The vulnerability of older workers to unemployment has particular relevance to the community sector. Nearly 1 in 5 learners in pre-accredited courses are unemployed, and over half of these are aged 45 or over
- Older unemployed workers experience much longer periods of unemployment. Of the 2011 cohort, 50% of workers aged 25-44 who were unemployed both when they commenced their pre-accredited course and when recontacted had been out of work at recontact for up to 6 months. In contrast, 46% of those aged 45-64 years had been out of work for between 1 year and 3 years

Who amongst the inactive find work?

- As with the unemployed, the workforce-inactive who find work—about 30% of all inactive respondents who had a work motive for doing their course and who were recontacted—tend to be younger, better qualified and not disabled.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

In this study, we have been concerned with the reach of pre-accredited courses into the Victorian community and the impact that these courses make on the people who are reached.

We begin our conclusion by reviewing the findings reported in each chapter—community reach, aspirations, course completion, learner satisfaction with job benefits, further study, and employment outcomes.

Following this review, we identify the improvements in reach and impact that we see are needed to enhance the role of pre-accredited courses for the Victorian community.

Who undertakes pre-accredited courses and are high-need groups adequately represented?

Pre-accredited courses offer a set of pathways to vocational training, further study or employment and act as a source of personal development and well-being, especially for older people no longer in the workforce. Given this diversity of roles, we should expect to find a diversity of learners in pre-accredited courses, reflective of the social make-up of the population, but biased towards lower SES groups. It is amongst these groups that educational and economic disadvantage are more frequently experienced. Looking at Victoria as a whole, we do find such a socially-weighted pattern. This suggests that pre-accredited courses are inclusive and have a good balance of intakes.

However, the social bias that we observe owes much to rural and regional Victoria. The social profile of country Victoria is very heavily skewed towards lower SES groups, and this has a big influence on the statewide profile. Rural regions contribute approximately 60% of all lowest-SES learners in pre-accredited courses, while metropolitan regions contribute only 40%, despite the size and complexity of Melbourne. If we look just at metropolitan Melbourne, lower SES groups are enrolled only marginally more than their population shares would indicate—their needs do not outweigh others, they are not over-represented. Within

Melbourne, if we look only at the Eastern metropolitan region, adults from the lowest fourth band of SES are under-represented. This may be due to a different balance of courses, e.g., literacy for migrants with high levels of qualification, or a different balance of motivation, with adults who are more well-educated making more intensive use of courses, such as computing.

While a question hangs over the social balance of enrolment in metropolitan Melbourne, a different perspective emerges when we examine the participation of learner groups identified by more precise measures of need. Adults with incomplete schooling and lack of qualifications, Indigenous Australians, unemployed workers, and people with disabilities enrol to different degrees in pre-accredited courses. But with respect to all these groups, there is clear evidence of *rural disadvantage*. There are a greater proportion of adults who did not complete school in rural and regional Victoria than in Melbourne, but they are less well-represented in pre-accredited courses than in the capital city. There are a greater proportion of unemployed workers in country Victoria, but compared to Melbourne they are less well-represented in pre-accredited courses. There are proportionally more disabled people outside of Melbourne, but fewer in pre-accredited courses. Indigenous Australians are thinly represented in four of the five country regions (but also in two of the metropolitan regions). Once we adjust participation rates for population weight, relative disadvantage is shown to be more a rural than an urban issue.

For each of these high-need groups, we can suggest possible barriers, some of which are more obvious—wide dispersion of the population, distance to travel, lack of specialized transport or facilities, higher costs of provision or access. But there are perhaps other barriers that are more cultural than economic, and more subtle. Who sees that a course is relevant or would make a difference to employment prospects, given the regional labour market? Who enjoys the stimulus of learning with others? Who has the confidence that they can learn? It is as important to know the story of those who do not cross the threshold to study as those who do. But understanding the motives, perceptions and outcomes of the many people who do take pre-accredited courses can help the community sector reach those who do not.

Why do people enrol in pre-accredited courses?

People undertake pre-accredited courses to improve their economic security and their quality of life. Over half of all learners in pre-accredited courses are in the workforce. A majority of those who are least well-integrated in the labour market—the under-employed and the unemployed—seek to use pre-accredited courses to find or change jobs. They want to enhance their job skills, lift their confidence, and pursue further study. Workers who are poorly integrated in the labour market are also often poorly educated. To improve their economic security, they need to reverse the labour market relegation they experience—many have low paid, low skill, and casual jobs. Pre-accredited courses are seen as a vehicle for doing this.

People who are well-integrated in the labour market use pre-accredited courses to deepen or enlarge their knowledge and skills and to build on the higher qualifications that they often have. More secure, they still face uncertainty through changing occupational and industry patterns and technological change. As workers age, they also become more vulnerable to these changes and must respond through greater flexibility and adaptability. Thus they, too, are reliant on education and training pathways, even though they are often well-qualified.

There are different strategies in play across the labour market—poorly qualified workers need to create or re-create a foundation of relevant skills and knowledge, while well-qualified workers need to remain competitive in the changing world of work.

Economic motives also lead many people to undertake pre-accredited courses who are neither working nor looking for work. Technically they are not in the workforce. About a third of all workforce-inactive learners are work-oriented—they want to find work through study and they want the skills that will get them work. Pre-accredited courses are seen as the way forward. Many have an initial barrier in low self-confidence, and an important motive for undertaking a pre-accredited course is to lower this barrier.

While economic motives are very strong amongst workforce-active and many workforce-inactive learners, cultural motives are also very strong. Knowledge and skills acquisition is itself a cultural motive. It is based on the way we see the world and our relationship to the world; it is a values commitment to self-transformation through learning, through study, and it extends from how we relate to ourselves to how we relate to others. Almost all learners see

pre-accredited courses in “knowledge” terms. Almost all (90%) sign up out of personal interest. Thus, while pre-accredited courses are overtly seen as delivering benefits of an economic kind, they are viewed first and foremost as knowledge. To profit from them economically thus implies enjoying them educationally.

Inside the envelope of knowledge there are other cultural benefits. These include the sharing of learning with people in an informal setting—a motive which increases as prior education levels falls. The stimulus of learning with others can improve quality of life and personal well-being by reducing isolation, raising confidence, multiplying activities which involve interaction with the outside world, and mastering new technologies (which allow still wider engagement in the outside world). These secondary effects may not be high on the learner’s agenda or even acknowledged as relevant motives—and the older the learner, the *less* relevant they seem. They are “latent” or implicit benefits rather than “manifest” or explicit ones (Merton). But for the learner to access knowledge, he or she must take many steps that have these secondary effects, so that knowledge itself is not the only reward.

Course completion and satisfaction with job-related benefits

Is it worthwhile from an economic angle to take a pre-accredited course? Will it make a difference? Will it make a difference to the groups of learners who most depend on pre-accredited study to improve their economic situation? Improvements in well-being and quality of life for these and other groups depend on economic security, and the main source of economic security is ongoing, gainful work, preferably of a skilled nature.

For pre-accredited courses to have a beneficial impact, they must be designed well, taught well, articulated with accredited courses, and made widely accessible. If all these things are done, learners for their part must complete a course to have a reasonable expectation of benefit. The great majority of people taking pre-accredited courses do complete them. This is true of courses in most fields of study, though not in literacy and numeracy, where the completion rate is well down. If only a minority of learners do not complete a pre-accredited course (16%), this is due to an important extent to content, organization or instructional practice, and this reflects on design, targeting to client, and delivery, no doubt in some courses more than others.

Completing a course enables the learner to make a reasonable assessment of its worth, if necessarily a subjective judgement. Many learners are active in the workforce and enrol in pre-accredited courses for economic as well as cultural or developmental reasons. Learners with the weakest hold in the labour market also have the most fragile relationship to their pre-accredited course—they are more likely to discontinue. This is not only to find work and take jobs as these become available, but also for course-related reasons, though the economically most vulnerable are not the pedagogically most critical. They are, however, more vulnerable to course weaknesses—for they are the least well-educated—and this redoubles the disadvantage they experience in the labour market.

Pre-accredited courses are widely seen by learners as economically effective. Those who want work often find it with the help of their course, and those who want improved job skills mostly gain them. Workers who are less well-integrated in the labour market or poorly integrated are of particular concern in assessing the economic impact of pre-accredited courses. They have very favourable perceptions of *enhancement of employment potential* through a course. This happens through a range of specific impacts—job search skills, better information, confidence-building, forming job preferences. But these same workers are more guarded about two impacts on economic situation—gaining ongoing employment and obtaining more hours of work. Overall their assessment is positive, but a lot weaker than in respect of the enhancement of their employment potential. Economic security hinges on having ongoing work and sufficient hours to earn a reasonable standard of living. So weaknesses in the impact of pre-accredited courses—including through any subsequent study that these courses facilitate—are significant. Older workers are less satisfied than younger workers, and they are also more exposed to long-term unemployment than younger workers.

While many workforce-active learners achieve a change in employment situation through their pre-accredited study, still more raise their skill levels and thus lay the basis for economic improvement or at least protection. Again younger workers are more positive than older workers about the skills impact of pre-accredited courses, but the age-gap is fairly small. Of more interest is the fact that the labour force groups who depend most on improvement in their job skills are at least or even more satisfied with their courses than the groups who are relatively secure in the labour market. This is also the pattern found in responses to the question of whether pre-accredited study has helped find or change jobs—those who need this benefit the most also confirm it most. Finally a clear majority of learners with ongoing employment report improvements in their productivity. They are more

confident in their abilities, their job performance is better, they support others more, have greater motivation and better comprehension of their work. Thus the benefits of pre-accredited study extend from obtaining work to improving job skills, and from being more skilled to working better.

Further Study following a pre-accredited course

Transition to study from a pre-accredited course involves every third learner. Economic insecurity drives this up to nearly 1 in 2 of the most workforce-disadvantaged. Weakness in the labour market also drives up progression to award as compared to non-award courses. These are usually basic or skilled vocational certificates. Relative economic security, on the other hand, reduces the rate of further study and also transition to award courses. But the award courses that are taken by the economically advantaged are typically at a higher qualification level and are also the economically most profitable type of study from the perspective of future earnings and access to primary labour markets.

The award courses that attract learners from pre-accredited courses represent a broad range of Australian industry. This is a strength of the community sector. Non-award courses also cover a large range of activity, and most non-award courses that are taken by workforce-disadvantaged learners have an economic emphasis. Nevertheless a not-insignificant minority of these learners take non-award courses of unclear emphasis or purpose. This may be a weakness in activity or a classification problem.

Progression to further study is particularly important, not only for the economically disadvantaged, but for the *educationally* disadvantaged. No doubt these forms of disadvantage overlap. But they are not the same, and it is important to study progression from the perspective of educational background. Poorly qualified individuals represent the largest single educationally-defined group of learners in pre-accredited courses (40%). Many have disadvantages in addition to limited education. Progression to further study involves 3 in 10 of this group, about half into award and half into non-award courses. Very few move from pre-accredited courses to diploma or degree programs. These are governed by threshold credentials (above all the senior school certificate). Poorly qualified learners enrol much more often in basic vocational courses. However, they enjoy little advantage in access to skilled vocational courses, and they are the least likely to take non-award courses.

By and large, progression from pre-accredited courses to further study is limited to a minority of learners (at least within the time span of 10-21 months). Economic disadvantage boosts transition, but educational disadvantage lowers it. People in weak positions in the labour force have strong incentives to compensate for their vulnerabilities, but incomplete schooling and low qualifications represent the “background” of widely different individuals who do not all occupy common economic ground. Education history itself—the biography of individuals—can work against further study as surely as it also favours further study, discouraging some, encouraging others. While the *economically advantaged* progress to further study less often, the *educationally advantaged* progress to study somewhat more often. Conversely, the *economically disadvantaged* undertake more study more often, and more award study, while the *educationally disadvantaged* progress to further study less often.

Employment outcomes

Pre-accredited courses are taken by men and women who are well-integrated in the labour market and also by less well-integrated and poorly integrated workers. The full-time employed and the part-time employed who have sufficient hours of work display the least change in situation. They are also the least likely to be seeking a change in jobs. For these well-integrated groups, the impact of pre-accredited courses relates much more to skills gain than job gain, though clearly these are linked (we have considered only change in labour force status, not change in jobs or change in occupation). For less well-integrated or poorly integrated workers, pre-accredited courses are taken much more often with a view to finding or changing jobs, and it is these groups who display the most change in employment situation. We should stress that it is these groups who also most depend on education and training to improve their work situation.

Positive change in employment is recorded by just over half of *under-employed* workers. Some have found full-time jobs, but most have got more hours of work. Both those who complete a pre-accredited course and who do not complete experience employment gain. The completers get more hours of work, while the non-completers gain more full-time jobs. There appears to be a trade-off between course completion and full-time work. Completing a course is secondary to earning an income.

Under-employed workers will go on to further study more often if they complete their pre-accredited course, but further study does not necessarily improve their employment situation, either in the short term or in the longer term. Those who do *not* do further study experience more positive change in employment than those who *do* undertake study. The inferior impact for the more studious group should be viewed in the context that only half complete their study in the short term. Even in the longer term, not all learners have completed their studies. In addition, factors such as the level of study undertaken and the background characteristics of the learners themselves are likely to come into play. It should also be kept in mind that the observations above relate to *under-employed* workers. They have jobs, but not with adequate hours. The further study that they may be able to undertake will be constrained by this fact, such that the courses that have a high impact are effectively unavailable to them.

Unemployed workers gain from completing a pre-accredited course. Every second unemployed worker experiences an improvement in employment situation. These represent the majority of the unemployed (and the unemployed are a larger group than the under-employed), so this impact is significant. Unemployed workers who do *not* complete also experience positive employment change (and slightly more in total than course completers). The two groups gain in different ways—completers get more hours whilst non-completers get more full-time jobs.

Further study on the part of unemployed workers does not produce a short-term advantage in employment outcomes over not doing further study (in fact the reverse). And in the longer term, further study produces only a marginal advantage—57% had found work compared with 53% of those who had not done further study. The further study group was also more likely to remain in the workforce (albeit without a job) than to exit from it completely. As noted above for the under-employed, other factors such as the learner's background, the level of further study undertaken, and whether or not they were still continuing that study, are likely to impact on employment outcomes.

Focussing on those who were unemployed and also poorly qualified when they commenced their pre-accredited course, those who undertook further study at Certificate III level or higher had better employment outcomes than those who did no further study. And both of these groups did considerably better than those who undertook either non-accredited or low level study.

Looking at all of the initially unemployed, regardless of whether or not they did further study, those who were successful in their job search tended to be younger, from an English speaking background, without a disability, not to be poor readers, and to be better qualified.

Improvements in community reach and impact

We have seen that pre-accredited courses enrol a wide range of learners, with a bias towards men and women from poorer and less well-educated backgrounds. We have also seen that there are weaknesses in this otherwise desirable needs-oriented profile. These weaknesses become apparent through regional analysis, but also by adjusting the enrolment shares of different learner groups for population weight. People with incomplete schooling, the disabled, and the unemployed are less well-represented in pre-accredited courses if they live in country Victoria than in Melbourne. Indigenous Australians are under-represented in most country and metropolitan regions, and migrants who are long-established in Australia enrol in pre-accredited courses much less often than their share of the population would suggest.

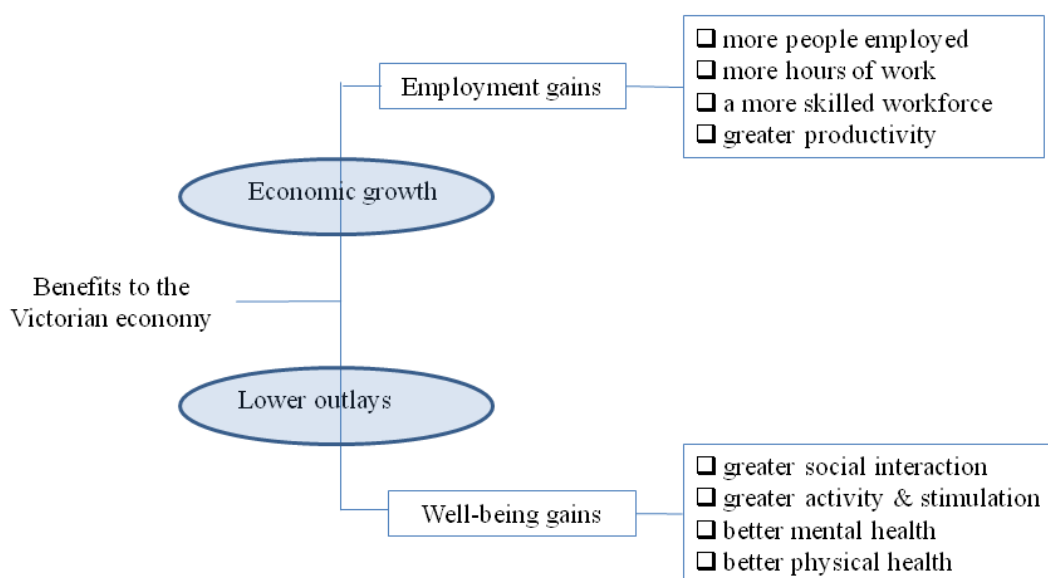
On the impact side, the great majority of learners complete their pre-accredited course and most are very positive about the outcomes. Many of the workforce-vulnerable undertake further study (40-47%), and over the longer term further study improves employment outcomes for unemployed workers by comparison with no further study. Against this, it should be noted that amongst the unemployed, those who are less likely to find work include older men and women (45-64 years), the disabled, and learners with poor reading skills.

Weaknesses in outcomes which need to be addressed should be seen both in the national context and in the Victorian context. COAG national targets aim to halve the proportion of Australians without qualifications at Certificate III level or above from 2020. In 2009, fewer than half the Australian population had qualifications at this level (COAG Reform Council 2010, p. xv). Pre-accredited courses play an important role in laying down pathways for higher levels of attainment, but the least qualified of adults are also the least likely to progress from pre-accredited courses to any form of further study (30%), and nearly half of those who do make this transition undertake non-award courses. For an individual who has not completed school and has no post-school qualifications, the probability of progressing to accredited further study at Certificate III level is about 6 chances in 100, and this is only slightly higher than the chances for better qualified individuals.

From the angle of the Victorian economy, better access and better impact can be viewed as delivering two types of benefit. On the one hand, economic growth will be promoted through more people working, more hours of work, a more skilled workforce and greater productivity of the workforce. On the other hand, improved physical and mental well-being through participation in pre-accredited courses should reduce government outlays on health and community services.

Figure 58 represents the benefits likely to flow to the Victorian economy through economic growth and lower government outlays over the longer term.

Figure 58 Benefits to the Victorian economy through better access and impact



To improve access and impact, we suggest a targeting of effort along the following lines:

- (i) raise the level of participation of indigenous Australians to at least the level achieved in Loddon Campaspe (3.5 learners for every indigenous adult in the population)
- (ii) raise the level of participation of unemployed workers in rural and regional Victoria to at least the level currently recorded in Melbourne (i.e., from 6.2 learners for every unemployed person in the labour force to 8.7 learners for every unemployed worker in the labour force)

- (iii) subject to further analysis based on consistent definitions of the disabled, raise the level of participation in pre-accredited courses of people with disabilities living in rural and regional Victoria to at least the current level in Melbourne (i.e., from 3.1 learners enrolled for every disabled person in the adult population to 4 learners enrolled)

- (iv) Lift the rate of study progression amongst the unemployed above its current level of 47% to broaden the long-term impact of further study amongst this group

- (v) Pay particular attention to the needs and circumstances of the groups of unemployed who are less likely to find work, i.e., older men and women, the disabled, and people with poor reading skills

- (vi) Lift the rate of study progression amongst men and women who have not finished school and have low qualifications above the current level of 30%

- (vii) Increase the proportion of this group who undertake accredited study above the current level of 53%

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