

TeachWise

RESEARCH FOR EDUCATORS

Research for educators: what the studies found, and what it means for practice

EDITION 3 · SEPTEMBER 2026

IN THIS EDITION

Foundation Skills in Australia

The Evidence

Micro-credentials and Short Courses

What the Research Shows

Online Learning in VET, the Evidence

Completion, Satisfaction and What Good Online Delivery Looks Like

Work-Integrated Learning and Placements, What Research Says

VET in Schools, Outcomes in the Data

Edited by Sukh Sandhu | teachwisemag.com

EDITION 3 | SEPTEMBER 2026

Contents

Edition 3: September 2026 3
Foundation Skills in Australia: The Evidence 4
Micro-credentials and Short Courses: What the Research Shows 13
Online Learning in VET, the Evidence: Completion, Satisfaction and What Good Online Delivery Looks Like 21
Work-Integrated Learning and Placements, What Research Says 30
VET in Schools, Outcomes in the Data 38
Follow us on LinkedIn 46
About TeachWise 48

EDITORIAL

Edition 3: September 2026

By Sukh Sandhu, Editor-in-Chief

5 articles on what the research says, and what it means for the people who teach and train.

Welcome to Edition 3 of TeachWise. Each article in this edition reads a body of research on education and training, sets out what it found using the reports' own figures, notes its limits, and ends with what it might mean for practice, labelled as our interpretation.

In this edition

- Foundation Skills in Australia: The Evidence
- Micro-credentials and Short Courses: What the Research Shows
- Online Learning in VET, the Evidence: Completion, Satisfaction and What Good Online Delivery Looks Like
- Work-Integrated Learning and Placements, What Research Says
- VET in Schools, Outcomes in the Data

Research rarely gives simple answers, and evidence from one setting does not always transfer to another. Where that matters, we say so.

Thank you for reading. Tell us which research you would like us to read next.

Warm regards,
Sukh Sandhu
Editor-in-Chief, TeachWise

TEACHWISE

Foundation Skills in Australia: The Evidence

By Sukh Sandhu

Australia has not measured the literacy and numeracy of its whole adult population since 2011 to 2012, and a new national survey will not report until 2027. In the meantime, the best evidence on adult language, literacy, numeracy and digital (LLND) skills comes from the people who turn up: job seekers in the Skills for Education and Employment program, migrants in the Adult Migrant English Program, learners in foundation skills units and qualifications, and people answering the national digital inclusion survey. This article reads Jobs and Skills Australia's first Foundation Skills Study report, NCVER's tracking of foundation skills learners through VET, the 2025 Australian Digital Inclusion Index and NCVER's latest national VET activity data, and sets out what they mean for trainers, assessors and foundation skills teachers.

Report	Publisher	Year	Method	Sample
Foundation Skills Study: Administrative data report	Jobs and Skills Australia	October 2025	Analysis of program, VET and test administrative data	AMEP, SEE and FSfYF participants; VET foundation skills enrolments 2019 to 2023; LANTITE and NAPLAN
Journeying through VET: a case study of foundation skills learners (Circelli and colleagues)	NCVER	2022	Linked VET activity data; propensity-weighted survey comparison	145,540 students; 228,640 foundation skills enrolments, 2016 to 2019
Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: 2025 Australian Digital Inclusion Index	RMIT, Swinburne and Telstra	October 2025	Household survey, data collected in 2024	3,065 survey respondents plus 2,805 First Nations respondents
Total VET students and courses 2025	NCVER	22 July 2026	National VET activity collection	5.1 million students
Foundation Skills Study (Understanding Skills Across Australia survey)	Jobs and Skills Australia	Updated September 2026	Face-to-face skills survey	Around 10,000 adults; report expected early 2027

A national gap in the evidence

The last time Australia measured adult literacy and numeracy across the population was the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) in 2011 to 2012. Australia did not take part in the OECD's 2023 round, so it has no recent internationally comparable data, although the Australian Government announced in January 2024 that Australia would rejoin PIAAC's second cycle. To fill the gap, Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) is running a Foundation Skills Study with four parts: a national survey of adult literacy and numeracy, a feasibility study on measuring the foundation skills of First Nations people, analysis of administrative data for priority groups, and work on defining digital literacy (Administrative data report, pp. 5 to 6).

The survey, called Understanding Skills Across Australia, is designed to assess around 10,000 adults. JSA chose face-to-face interviews so that people with lower literacy or accessibility needs could take part, and worked with Roy Morgan on fieldwork. At September 2026, JSA reported that data collection had concluded in all states and territories and that a detailed report was "expected to be published in early 2027". For the First Nations component, called Murtu Yayngiliyn, JSA is seeking advice from a First Nations Cultural Advisory Panel.

The policy frame around this work has also changed. The National Foundation Skills Strategy 2025 to 2035, developed under the National Skills Agreement, sets a shared direction for Commonwealth, state and territory governments. DEWR states that $53 million is available under the Agreement to support the Strategy's activities, and that the Agreement also includes $77 million for foundation skills training through the adult and community education sector. The Strategy groups foundation skills into two categories: LLND skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, numeracy and digital literacy) and employability skills such as initiative, planning, problem solving and teamwork (Administrative data report, p. 5).

What the administrative data show

JSA's October 2025 report is the first output of the study. In 2023 it consulted more than 60 organisations and found that "no single dataset could fully capture the foundation skills levels of Australian adults" (p. 6). It therefore pieced together data from programs that assess people against the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF), from VET enrolments and completions, and from two tests, LANTITE and NAPLAN. It reports each participant's most recent assessment, which may come before, during or after the program, and it warns that the results describe people who used these programs, not the adult population, and are "not intended to compare programs" (p. 8).

Who uses the Commonwealth programs

Program	Years analysed	Average commencements a year	Women	First Nations	CALD
Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)	2017 to 2019	27,000	64%	Not reported	100%
Skills for	2018-19 to	14,000	65%	9%	73%

Program	Years analysed	Average commencements a year	Women	First Nations	CALD
Education and Employment (SEE), job seeker model	2022-23				
Foundation Skills for Your Future (FSfYF)	2020-21 to 2023-24	600	Reported in chart only	Reported in chart only	Reported in chart only
Australian population (comparison)	2021 Census		51%	3%	19%

Source: JSA 2025, Foundation Skills Study administrative data report, Figures 1, 2 and 4, pp. 8 to 11. CALD means culturally and linguistically diverse.

The proficiency findings, drawn from the report's text rather than its charts, are sobering for some groups and reassuring for others.

- **AMEP.** Just under 50% of recent migrant participants were assessed at Pre Level 1 across learning, reading, writing and oral communication in their latest assessment, while about one in five were at Level 2 or above (p. 9). Women showed a slightly higher share at Level 2 and above.
- **SEE.** Nearly half of all participants were assessed at Pre Level 1 A or B in numeracy, a pattern consistent across women, First Nations and CALD participants (pp. 11 to 12). First Nations participants were more often at Level 2 or above in oral communication, with writing concentrated at Level 1 or below.
- **FSfYF.** This smaller program for employed or recently unemployed adults showed most participants at Level 2 or above in learning, reading, writing and oral communication, while numeracy and digital literacy showed a wider spread, particularly among CALD and First Nations participants (pp. 14 to 15).

The SEE data relate to the program before July 2024. From 1 July 2024 SEE was redesigned into two streams, General SEE Delivery and SEE First Nations, with eligibility widened from job seekers to anyone aged 15 or over who has left school (p. 10). FSfYF closed in June 2024 and its lessons were folded into the new SEE. DEWR describes General SEE as delivered by 22 contracted providers, while SEE First Nations funds community-controlled organisations and other First Nations bodies to design their own training.

Foundation skills inside VET

The VET data cover far more learners. Between 2019 and 2023 there was an average of 490,960 enrolments a year in units from the Foundation Skills (FSK) Training Package, 113,400 enrolments a year in LLND qualifications and 15,200 in employability skills qualifications (pp. 18 and 22). Subject load pass rates in FSK units were consistently high, between 82% and 84% across skill areas (p. 19). Two patterns stand out:

- **Level 2 is a sticking point.** Learning, writing and numeracy units aligned to ACSF Level 2 had a noticeable dip in pass rates compared with both Level 1 and Level 3 units (p. 19).

- **First Nations learners do better in lower-level units.** Their pass rates ranged from 88% in Pre Level 1 units to 66% in units aligned to Levels 4 and 5 (p. 19).

The completion data tell a more uneven story.

Group	Share of LLND enrolments	Share of LLND completions	Share of employability skills completions
CALD learners	46.5%	34.5%	10.3%
First Nations learners	Similar to completions	7.3%	11.9%
Learners with disability	Below completion share	11%	21.9%

Source: JSA 2025, Foundation Skills Study administrative data report, Figure 15 and text, pp. 23 to 24, from NCVER Total VET students and courses 2023.

CALD learners make up almost half of LLND enrolments but only about a third of completions, the clearest gap in the report. Women account for 58% of LLND completions, slightly above their enrolment share. People with disability account for a larger share of completions than enrolments, especially in employability skills qualifications. Across the whole period, an average of 29,900 LLND qualifications and 7,150 employability skills qualifications were completed each year (p. 23).

Readiness for mainstream VET

The report also analyses pre-enrolment ACSF assessments supplied by training providers and assessment tool owners for 2019 to 2023. More than half of those assessed achieved Level 3 or above in all five core skills, and numeracy showed the widest spread, with many at Level 2 (p. 16). This dataset has important limits: it holds no personal characteristics, may contain several assessments for the same person, and does not show which assessments were done for VET Student Loans eligibility (p. 16).

What happens after a foundation skills qualification

Using the VET National Data Asset, JSA reports outcomes for people who completed the most common foundation skills qualifications in 2019-20.

Qualification (2019-20 completers)	Employment rate	Change in employment rate	Further study in higher-level VET
Certificate I in Access to Vocational Pathways	40%	+10 points	34%
Certificate I in Skills for Vocational Pathways	45%	+19 points	51%
Certificate I in Spoken and Written English	30%	+19 points	74%
Certificate II in Skills for Work and Vocational Pathways	57%	+23 points	33%
Certificate II in Spoken and Written English	35%	+18 points	68%

Source: JSA 2025, Foundation Skills Study administrative data report, Table 1, p. 28, from the VET National Data Asset.

Employment rose after every one of these LLND qualifications, and progression into higher-level VET was strongest after the spoken and written English courses. The report describes LLND as "a key stepping stone in educational pathways" (p. 26). These are before-and-after figures for completers only, with no comparison group, so they show movement rather than the effect of the course.

NCVER: the long and winding road

NCVER's *Journeying through VET* is the most careful Australian study of foundation skills learners' pathways. It used the unique student identifier to follow 145,540 students with 408,865 enrolments, including 228,640 in foundation skills programs, from 2016 to 2019 (p. 9). Its first finding is that foundation skills learners are not one group. More than half of LLND students were born overseas (52.4%), while about 71.4% of employment skills students were born in Australia; Indigenous students (15.0% compared with 6.8%) and students with disability (37.7% compared with 13.9%) were more common in employment skills programs than in LLND programs (p. 9).

The researchers sorted learners into four journeys, and completion depended heavily on which one a learner took.

Learner group (based on 2016 enrolment)	Share of 2016 students	Completed any VET program by 2019
Foundation skills only	40.7%	31.8%
Foundation skills, then other VET	13.6%	69.7%
Foundation skills and other VET at the same time	27.4%	68.5%
Other VET, then foundation skills	18.3%	63.0%
All foundation skills learners	100%	52.7%

Source: NCVER 2022, Journeying through VET, pp. 9 to 10 and Table 6, p. 27.

> *Learners who combined foundation skills with other VET were about twice as likely to complete a nationally recognised program as those who studied foundation skills alone.*

The authors caution that some learners were still enrolled at the end of 2019, so the figures are not final completion rates, and that the groups differ in who they contain. Women completed at higher rates than men in every group, and Indigenous learners at lower rates than non-Indigenous learners. In the foundation-skills-only group, learners with disability were more likely to complete than those without (41.7% compared with 30.2%) (p. 28).

The outcomes analysis linked VET activity to the 2020 National Student Outcomes Survey and used propensity score weighting, which adjusts the comparison group to match the foundation skills learners on observed characteristics.

Outcome, 2019 qualification completers	Foundation skills	Comparison group
Employed after training	30.1%	41.8%
Not employed before, employed after	13.7%	23.4%
Enrolled in further study after training	42.3%	38.5%
Training improved writing skills	74.7%	54.9%
Training improved numerical skills	65.9%	53.5%

Source: NCVER 2022, Journeying through VET, Table 7, pp. 30 to 31.

Foundation skills completers had poorer employment outcomes and were less likely to recommend their training, yet were more likely to go on studying and much more likely to say their writing and numeracy had improved. Those who were employed were more likely than their peers to say the training was relevant to their job. The authors' conclusion is a warning against judging foundation skills by job outcomes alone: "For some learners, getting a job may not be the goal" (p. 10). Weighting can only adjust for characteristics in the data, so differences in motivation or circumstances may remain.

The digital dimension

Digital literacy is now part of the national definition of foundation skills, and the Australian Digital Inclusion Index is the main national measure. The 2025 Index, drawing on data collected in 2024, found that Digital Ability rose 8.7 points between 2023 and 2025 to 73.6 (pp. 7 to 8). Gains were largest among groups starting furthest behind, which the authors link to people becoming internet users for the first time and to efforts to support digital skills.

Digital inclusion measure, 2025 ADII	Figure
Australians excluded or highly excluded	20.6%
Excluded or highly excluded, did not complete secondary school	54.5%
Excluded or highly excluded, First Nations people	40.9%
Digital Ability, did not complete secondary school (2023 to 2025)	38.5 to 54.4
Digital Ability, aged 75 and over (2023 to 2025)	23.3 to 41.5
Digital Ability gap, university qualification compared with no secondary completion	28.3 points
Recently used a generative AI tool	45.6%

Source: Thomas and colleagues 2025, 2025 Australian Digital Inclusion Index, pp. 7 to 9.

Two findings matter for adult educators. People who left school early are both more likely to be excluded and more likely to rely only on mobile access (17% compared with 9.7% of all Australians), which limits online study (p. 7). And the authors call for Digital Ability targets to support "safe and appropriate engagement" with generative AI, warning that rapid adoption creates risks for users with limited digital and information literacy (p. 9).

JSA's report concludes that data collection needs to improve, particularly for digital literacy and disability status (p. 34).

Foundation skills in the wider VET system

NCVER's *Total VET students and courses 2025*, released on 22 July 2026, shows where foundation-level learning sits in national activity. Government-funded short courses "are more likely to be foundation-level courses", and the top two English as an Additional Language courses grew by 12,160 enrolments, or 76.4%, from 2024. NCVER also notes that Western Australia's government-funded short course figures for 2025 were affected by a transition to a non-accredited foundation skills support model, a reminder that some foundation skills provision now sits outside the national accredited data altogether.

Language, literacy and numeracy also shape outcomes in mainstream training. The 2024 Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System lists language, literacy and numeracy support among the extra services at-risk apprentices need, and in England's 2023 apprenticeship survey, 36% of non-completers had studied English or maths as part of their apprenticeship (Strategic Review, p. 82; DfE 2024, p. 26).

Limits of the evidence

- **Not a population measure.** JSA is explicit that its administrative data describe program users, who are more likely to have low skills, not Australian adults generally. Population estimates await the 2027 survey report.
- **Different assessment points.** The "latest assessment" may be an entry assessment, an exit assessment or a withdrawal assessment, so the data cannot show how much participants improved.
- **No impact estimates for programs.** None of these sources evaluates SEE, AMEP or FSfYF against a comparison group. The graduate outcome figures are before-and-after changes for completers only.
- **Missing groups.** Disability status is poorly recorded outside VET, CALD status is derived from country of birth and language, and the pre-enrolment assessment data hold no personal characteristics.
- **Dated cohorts.** NCVER's tracking ends in 2019 and the graduate outcomes relate to 2019-20, before the redesign of SEE and the new national strategy.
- **Digital self-report.** The ADII measures digital ability through a survey scale, not an observed task, and its 2025 affordability measure is not comparable with earlier years.

What this means for your practice

The following points are our interpretation of the research, not recommendations made by the report authors.

1. **Expect numeracy to be the weakest skill.** Across SEE, FSfYF and pre-enrolment assessments, numeracy is consistently among the weakest or most variable domains. Build explicit numeracy into vocational units rather than assuming it will develop alongside literacy.

2. **Pay attention to the step up to Level 2.** Pass rates dip in Level 2 units for learning, writing and numeracy. Learners moving from Level 1 may need more scaffolding, more practice time and more frequent feedback at that point.
3. **Combine foundation skills with vocational learning where you can.** NCVER's tracking shows learners who studied foundation skills with or before other VET were about twice as likely to complete a program. Concurrent or integrated delivery, with a clear pathway into a vocational qualification, appears to keep learners moving.
4. **Look closely at CALD learners' completion.** They are almost half of LLND enrolments but about a third of completions. Check whether timetables, assessment language, digital requirements or family and work pressures are getting in the way, and offer bilingual or settlement support where available.
5. **Build on oral strengths for First Nations learners.** Several datasets show stronger oral communication than writing among First Nations participants. Using spoken tasks as a bridge to writing, with culturally safe delivery, works with that pattern.
6. **Measure more than jobs.** Foundation skills completers report large gains in writing and numeracy and high rates of further study even when employment is low. Record learners' own goals at enrolment and report progress against them, alongside ACSF levels.
7. **Treat digital skills as foundation skills.** One in five Australians is digitally excluded, rising to more than half of early school leavers. Check device and data access before moving learning online, teach the digital tasks your course requires, and include safe, critical use of generative AI.
8. **Use pre-training assessment to plan support, not only to screen.** Most pre-enrolment assessments show readiness, but numeracy varies widely. Use the results to plan targeted help in the first weeks of a course.

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TEACHWISE

Micro-credentials and Short Courses: What the Research Shows

By Sukh Sandhu

Micro-credentials are often presented as the future of tertiary education: short, stackable, industry-designed and quick to market. The research is more measured. In Australian VET, short courses and stand-alone units already make up most of the activity, but much of it is first aid and compliance training. In higher education, a funded pilot is still being evaluated. In Europe, a major study of how learners and employers see micro-credentials found real interest but also confusion, uneven trust and weak reach to the people most in need of new skills. This article reads Australia's National Microcredentials Framework, the Universities Accord final report, the Microcredentials Pilot in Higher Education, NCVER's 2025 national VET activity and student outcomes data, and Cedefop's 2023 study of end users, and sets out what they mean for trainers, course designers and education leaders.

Report	Publisher	Year	Method	Sample
National Microcredentials Framework	Department of Education, Skills and Employment	November 2021	Consultation, environment scan, working group	More than 120 individuals from about 70 organisations
Australian Universities Accord: Final Report	Department of Education	2024	Policy review	Submissions and consultation
Microcredentials Pilot in Higher Education (program page and factsheet)	Department of Education	Pilot 2023-24 to 2025-26	Funded pilot with independent evaluation	Up to 4,000 students; 76 courses funded over two rounds
Total VET students and courses 2025	NCVER	22 July 2026	National VET activity collection	5.1 million students
VET student outcomes 2025	NCVER	17 December 2025	National Student Outcomes Survey	276,304 VET students
Microcredentials for labour market education and training: first look at mapping microcredentials	Cedefop	2022	Mapping, surveys, case studies	87 VET providers; employer and employee organisations
Microcredentials for labour market education and training: the	Cedefop	2023	Online surveys, interviews, case studies	Up to 730 learners, employees and unemployed

Report	Publisher	Year	Method	Sample
added value for end users				people; 100 employers

What counts as a micro-credential

Australia has had a national definition since November 2021. The National Microcredentials Framework, built from consultation with more than 120 people from about 70 organisations and a scan of more than 35 definitions, defines a micro-credential as:

> *"a certification of assessed learning or competency, with a minimum volume of learning of one hour and less than an AQF award qualification" (National Microcredentials Framework, p. 3)*

The Framework adds four unifying principles (outcome-based, responsive to industry need, tailored to lifelong learning, transparent and accessible) and eight critical information requirements. These include clearly stated learning outcomes, a required assessment whose method is stated, a stated volume of learning, any industry or credit recognition, and, where no regulated standard applies, a statement of quality assurance (pp. 3 to 4). Its authors describe consensus as "challenging" and say stakeholders wanted the Framework to "err on the side of minimalism" to protect flexibility (p. 2).

Two of the requirements are directly relevant to VET designers. When a micro-credential describes foundation or general capabilities, providers are asked to consider the descriptors in the Australian Core Skills Framework. And where a micro-credential counts for credit only when stacked with others, that must be stated (pp. 3 to 4). The Framework also notes that it supplements, rather than replaces, existing rules such as the Australian Qualifications Framework and the Standards for RTOs, and that each institution remains responsible for deciding how it issues and recognises micro-credentials (pp. 8 to 9).

That breadth has since been questioned. The Universities Accord final report called the definition "extremely broad" and said this breadth was affecting the consistent rollout of micro-credentials in higher education (p. 95). It reported that VET stakeholders most often identified 5 or 6 hours of learning as a sensible minimum, while higher education respondents generally pictured single-subject courses, with, for example, eight micro-credentials forming a semester (p. 95).

In VET, the closest equivalents are already part of the national system. NCVER counts "short courses" (training package skill sets and accredited courses) and "stand-alone subjects" (nationally recognised units of competency and accredited modules taken outside a qualification). The Accord itself notes that VET "has a robust system of nationally recognised microcredentials through skill sets or accredited short courses" (p. 94).

The scale of short-form VET

NCVER's *Total VET students and courses 2025* shows how much of Australian VET is already short-form.

Type of training, 2025	Students or enrolments	Change from 2024

Type of training, 2025	Students or enrolments	Change from 2024
Students in qualifications	1,982,745 (38.6% of students)	Down 5.2%
Students in short courses	228,395 (4.4% of students)	Up 3.5%
Students in stand-alone subjects	3,656,585 (71.1% of students)	Up 1.7%
Short course enrolments	264,905	Up 1.1%
Stand-alone subject enrolments	9.2 million	Up 3.0%

Source: NCVER 2026, Total VET students and courses 2025. Students can be counted in more than one type of training, so shares sum to more than 100%.

Three details matter for anyone designing short courses.

- **Growth is in fee-for-service.** Domestic fee-for-service short course enrolments rose by 81,505, or 63.7%, between 2021 and 2025. Government-funded short courses remain comparatively low, which NCVER links to funding agreements that historically prioritised Certificate III and above.
- **Much of it is compliance.** Fee-for-service short courses are mainly workplace compliance and regulatory training, such as responsible service of alcohol, first aid and workplace safety. The Responsible service of alcohol skill set alone grew 253.4% to 43,630 enrolments in 2025. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation, first aid and basic emergency life support made up 51.9% of all stand-alone subject enrolments.
- **Government-funded short courses look different.** They are more likely to be foundation-level courses, and the top two English as an Additional Language courses grew by 76.4%.

NCVER also observes that students in stand-alone subjects have been increasing since 2015, alongside growth in students at private providers, and that 77.7% of private provider students and 88.2% of community education provider students were in stand-alone subjects, while 87.3% of TAFE students were in qualifications.

What short course learners report

The National Student Outcomes Survey includes short course students, and its 2025 results suggest short-form training usually meets its narrow purpose.

Short course students, 2025 survey	Share
Trained for employment-related reasons	83.4%
Main reason: a requirement of their job	41.2%
Did not complete their full course	3.1%
Short course part-completers naming a training change that would have helped	37.4%
Short course part-completers saying nothing could have changed	22.6%

Source: NCVER 2025, VET student outcomes 2025.

NCVER reports that, for short course students and subject-only completers who trained for employment-related reasons, over 90% achieved that reason. Together with the job-requirement figure, this points to a market dominated by mandatory, well-defined training

where success is easy to define. It says less about whether short courses help people change careers or progress, which is the larger promise made for micro-credentials.

Higher education: the Microcredentials Pilot

The Microcredentials Pilot in Higher Education is Australia's main public test of university-level micro-credentials. The Government committed $18.5 million: $2 million to design new micro-credentials and $16.5 million to subsidise delivery to up to 4,000 students, over 2023-24 to 2025-26. Funded courses must target occupations in shortage on Jobs and Skills Australia's priority list, sit in national priority fields (natural and physical sciences, IT, engineering, health, education and behavioural science), be between 0.25 and 0.49 of a full-time study load, provide credit towards a formal qualification, and show robust assessment and industry engagement (Pilot factsheet).

Pilot round	Announced	Providers funded	Courses funded
Round 1	11 June 2023	18 Table A providers	28
Round 2	29 August 2024	25 providers (17 Table A, 1 Table B, 7 non-university)	48

Source: Department of Education, Microcredentials Pilot in Higher Education program page.

The Accord's final report lists La Trobe University's Professional Certificate in Rural Nursing and Charles Sturt University's Fundamentals of Nuclear Science and Safety as the first two courses to begin delivery (p. 96). The Department states that an independent evaluation would commence in late 2025 and was scheduled for completion by mid-2026 to inform the Pilot's future. At September 2026, no evaluation findings had been published. That evaluation is the evidence to watch: the Pilot's design, with credit-bearing courses, industry partners and a cap of 4,000 subsidised places, makes it a test of a specific model rather than of micro-credentials in general.

What the Accord recommended

The Accord final report recommended that the Government establish "a comprehensive system of modular, stackable and transferable qualifications, including microcredentials" (Recommendation 5) and move towards funding a set of micro-credentials as Commonwealth supported places, initially in areas of employer demand and national priority (Recommendation 6). Recommendation 6 calls for new higher education accreditation arrangements for micro-credentials that provide credit, involve minimum volumes of learning and can be stacked into a full qualification, together with "micro-HELP" student contributions. The report suggests a minimum load of possibly one-sixteenth or one-twentieth of a full-time year to make stacking workable (p. 96). It also recommends that government funding focus on areas of acute need where private provision is underdeveloped (p. 96). These are recommendations, not findings about effectiveness.

The Accord also points to two overseas models. New Zealand's national qualifications authority accredits micro-credentials and assigns them credit points, and the United Kingdom government has trialled higher education short courses as part of a new student

finance product (p. 94). Both are attempts to give short courses a common currency, the same problem Australia's Framework set out to address.

Europe: what learners and employers think

Cedefop's multi-part study is among the most substantial international evidence on how micro-credentials work for the people who use them. Its 2023 report on added value for end users combined online surveys of employees, students and adult learners and unemployed people with a survey of employers, interviews, case studies and desk research. Response numbers vary by question, from 285 unemployed respondents to 730 across all individual groups, and 100 employers.

What European micro-credentials actually record

Cedefop's first report, published in 2022, mapped micro-credentials across European countries and surveyed VET providers and employer and employee organisations. It found that many credentials lacked the information users later said they needed.

Element included in the micro-credential, VET providers (n=87)	Share of providers
Date of issue	59%
Holder identified	55%
Title	54%
Awarding body	47%
Learning outcomes	44%
Linked to standards	33%
Workload in credits or duration	30%
Relationship to existing qualifications	24%

Source: Cedefop 2022, Microcredentials for labour market education and training: first look at mapping microcredentials, Tables 5 and 6, pp. 52 to 53.

Fewer than half of VET providers recorded learning outcomes, and only about a quarter stated how a credential related to existing qualifications. Providers' most common reasons for offering micro-credentials were to respond to learners' needs (55%) and employers' needs (54%), well ahead of securing extra funding (10%) (Table 14, p. 72, n=78). In other words, the credential is often designed for a specific buyer and a specific moment, which helps responsiveness but makes it hard for anyone else to read.

The end-user study

The 2023 report surveyed the people on the receiving end.

Cedefop 2023 survey finding	Share
Respondents who had not heard of the concept of micro-credentials	59%
Employers aware of the concept	67%
Unemployed respondents aware of the concept	31%
Students and adult learners agreeing to a large extent that micro-credentials will improve their job prospects (N=573)	53%
Unemployed respondents agreeing to a large extent (N=285)	39%
Employers rating micro-credentials (very)	44%

Cedefop 2023 survey finding	Share
important in recruitment (N=100)	
Employees preferring micro-credentials from accredited providers (N=384)	62%
Unemployed respondents with no opportunity to take short training leading to a micro-credential	47%

Source: Cedefop 2023, Microcredentials for labour market education and training: the added value for end users, pp. 35, 38, 49, 66 and 67.

Four findings stand out.

1. **Trust follows formal recognition.** Students and adult learners most often said a micro-credential is trustworthy when it is recognised and quality assured as part of formal education and training (42%) or comes from a credible provider (41%) (p. 38). Employers choosing a provider looked first for accreditation by a trusted industry body (56%), then by public bodies (45%).
2. **Expectations outrun experience.** Among unemployed respondents, 65% of those asked whether micro-credentials could help them stand out when applying for a job said yes, but among those asked about their actual experience only 36% said this had happened, 38.5% said it had not and 25.5% did not know (p. 66). Cedefop concludes that the labour market value of micro-credentials "is still uncertain for many users".
3. **The well-qualified benefit most.** Among employees, only 5 of 65 respondents without a tertiary qualification were encouraged into further study after a micro-credential (p. 73). The report links this to wider evidence that adults with higher education are the most likely to take part in organised learning.
4. **Assessment information is thin.** In Cedefop's mapping of retail and manufacturing certificates, information about assessment varied substantially, and where available, multiple-choice tests were favoured, even though employers value assessments that let people demonstrate skills (p. 14).

Cedefop's overall conclusion is cautious. It describes the field as fragmented, warns that online portals "do not constitute an effective outreach strategy" for wider groups (p. 9), and argues that a European or national blueprint could be "premature" while models are at an early stage and benefits for different users are not fully understood (p. 17). Its current research phase, running from 2025 to 2027, turns to micro-credentials outside formal systems, in specific sectors, and for disadvantaged learners.

Limits of the evidence

- **No impact evaluations yet.** None of these sources measures what a micro-credential adds to earnings or employment against a comparison group. NCVER's outcomes data describe self-reported results, and the Australian pilot's independent evaluation had not reported at September 2026.
- **Definitions differ.** Australia's Framework counts anything from one hour of assessed learning; the pilot funds courses of a quarter to half a year of study; NCVER counts skill sets, accredited courses and single units. Figures are not comparable across these categories.

- **Survey samples are small and self-selected.** Cedefop's online surveys drew a few hundred respondents per group across many countries, so its percentages show patterns of opinion rather than population estimates.
- **Compliance dominates VET counts.** Because first aid and responsible service of alcohol make up so much short-form activity, national totals say little about the career-focused micro-credentials at the centre of policy debate.
- **Policy, not proof.** The Accord's recommendations and the Framework's standards are design proposals. Whether stacking, credit and micro-HELP improve outcomes has yet to be shown.

What this means for your practice

The following points are our interpretation of the research, not recommendations made by the report authors.

1. **Start from a clear purpose.** Short courses work best when the outcome is well defined, as in licensing and compliance training. If you are designing a micro-credential for upskilling or career change, state the job task or capability it builds and how a learner or employer will know it was achieved.
2. **Make assessment visible and authentic.** Both the National Microcredentials Framework and Cedefop's users put assessment at the heart of trust. Publish how learners are assessed, and favour tasks where learners demonstrate the skill over recall tests alone.
3. **Publish the information employers look for.** Learning outcomes, volume of learning, assessment method, credit value and any industry recognition are the Framework's critical information requirements. A one-page course profile covering these makes a short course easier to compare and recognise.
4. **Build credit pathways before you market stacking.** The Accord's model depends on micro-credentials counting towards larger qualifications. Map skill sets and short courses to the units and qualifications they contribute to, and agree credit arrangements with partner providers in advance.
5. **Design with an industry partner.** Cedefop found employers trust providers that tailor training to their needs and use trainers with current industry knowledge. Involve employers in design and keep trainer currency up to date, especially in fast-moving fields.
6. **Do not assume short courses reach those most in need.** European evidence shows the already well-qualified gain most, and awareness is lowest among unemployed people. Pair short courses with guidance, foundation skills support and targeted outreach if they are meant to widen participation.
7. **Collect your own outcome data.** National data cannot yet show the labour market value of micro-credentials. Follow up learners after a short course to ask whether they used the skills, changed role or went on to further study, and use the results to improve the offer.

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TEACHWISE

Online Learning in VET, the Evidence: Completion, Satisfaction and What Good Online Delivery Looks Like

By Sukh Sandhu

Online delivery is now an ordinary part of vocational education and training. Even before the pandemic, about one in ten VET subjects in Australia was delivered fully online, and by 2021 more than four in ten subject enrolments involved some online component. The evidence on how well it works is more mixed than either its advocates or its critics tend to admit. Learners who finish online qualifications do about as well in the labour market as anyone else, but fewer of them finish. International meta-analysis finds that blended designs can beat face-to-face teaching, while large administrative studies find that many students, especially younger and less prepared ones, struggle in fully online courses. This article sets out what NCVER and international researchers have found, with the data, and what it means for trainers designing and supporting online learning.

At a glance

Report	Publisher	Year	Method	Sample
Online delivery of VET qualifications: current use and outcomes (Griffin and Mihelic)	NCVER	2019	National VET Provider Collection, Student Outcomes Survey, interviews	Total VET activity 2015 to 2017; 31 RTO staff interviews
VET student outcomes 2022	NCVER	2022	National Student Outcomes Survey	216,162 respondents
Delivery of VET: emerging trends in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Hume and Griffin)	NCVER	2022	Total VET activity, subject delivery mode	All subject enrolments, 2019 to 2021
The online delivery of VET during the COVID-19 pandemic: part 2	NCVER	2022	RTO survey with ASQA, case interviews	1,247 RTOs; 15 interviews

Report	Publisher	Year	Method	Sample
(Hume and Griffin)				
Effective teaching practices and student support services in online VET (Hume, Griffin and Andrahannadi)	NCVER	2023	Qualitative interviews	37 RTOs, eight qualifications
Evaluation of evidence-based practices in online learning (Means and colleagues)	US Department of Education	2009, revised 2010	Meta-analysis	50 effects from 45 studies (revised edition)
Adaptability to online learning (Xu and Jaggars)	Community College Research Center	2013	Administrative data, individual fixed effects	About 500,000 courses, 40,000+ students

How much VET is delivered online

Measuring online delivery is harder than it sounds. The national VET data record delivery mode at the subject level, not the qualification level, and the categories are broad. In the AVETMISS standard, "external" delivery means the student studies in their own time and place using materials provided online or by correspondence. NCVER uses this as its proxy for online learning, which means a course built on live video classes may be coded differently from a self-paced one, and some correspondence study may be counted as online.

With that caveat, the trend is clear. Griffin and Mihelic found that the share of government-funded VET subjects delivered predominantly online roughly doubled between 2010 and 2017, from 6% to 13%. At the qualification level, they estimated that 8.6% of all program commencements in total VET activity in 2017 were in courses delivered fully online, down from around 10% in 2015 and 2016. The fall was concentrated in fee-for-service diploma and higher qualifications, where online commencements dropped 72% between 2015 and 2017, from 62,877 to 17,713, a change the authors link to the reform of VET FEE-HELP. New South Wales (14.3% of total VET program commencements in 2017) and Queensland (10.4%) had the highest online shares.

The pandemic then changed the picture. Hume and Griffin's analysis of total VET activity shows how delivery mode shifted across all subject enrolments.

Delivery mode (share of subject enrolments)	2019	2020	2021
No online delivery	66.9%	60.1%	57.3%
Online only	10.6%	13.9%	13.4%
Online combined with another mode (blended)	22.5%	26.0%	29.2%

Source: Hume and Griffin 2022, Delivery of VET: emerging trends in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Figure 1 (Australia).

Two points stand out. Online-only delivery jumped in 2020 and then held steady rather than falling back. Blended delivery kept growing after the emergency had passed. That matches what RTOs said they intended. In NCVER's survey of 1,247 RTOs run with ASQA, 61.8% said they intended to use more blended learning in future and 22.1% said they were likely to permanently move more units or parts of qualifications online. Of RTOs that had delivered only face-to-face before the pandemic, about two thirds moved at least some training online.

The practical upshot is that the question for most RTOs is no longer whether to use online learning but how much, for which units and for which learners.

Completion: the persistent gap

The most consistent finding in the Australian data is that fewer learners finish qualifications delivered fully online. Griffin and Mihelic estimated projected completion rates for 2015 and 2016 using program-level data built by matching subjects through the Unique Student Identifier.

Measure	Online (electronic-based) programs	All programs
Projected completion rate, 2015 and 2016	Around 40%	Around 50%
Share of government-funded subjects online, 2010	6%	
Share of government-funded subjects online, 2017	13%	
Share of total VET program commencements fully online, 2017	8.6%	

Source: Griffin and Mihelic 2019, Online delivery of VET qualifications, Figure 7 and executive summary.

Subject withdrawal rates were also higher for online subjects in both years, which suggests that some of the completion gap arises from learners formally pulling out of units. The authors examined 17 qualifications across six areas (business administration, community services, property services, accounting, information technology and fitness). In every one, the projected completion rate for fully online delivery was lower than for other modes, sometimes only slightly. The report states that the completion rate "is never higher for online courses." The largest gaps were in higher-level qualifications, notably the Diploma of Community Services and the Diploma of Information Technology.

The important limit is that the data cannot say why. Griffin and Mihelic list several plausible explanations: the mode not suiting the learner, difficulty securing a required work placement, lack of a computer, software or reliable internet, poor-quality delivery, or enrolment with little intention to finish. Trainers interviewed for the study added another wrinkle. Some RTOs deliberately encourage disengaged online learners to withdraw after repeated contact attempts (one reported withdrawing students who had not engaged after

four months), which would inflate withdrawal figures without telling us anything about teaching quality.

> *Online VET in Australia has shown consistently lower completion rates than other delivery modes, but the national data cannot separate poor delivery from a mismatch between learner and mode.*

These figures come from 2015 and 2016, before the pandemic shift and before the growth of blended delivery. They are best read as a benchmark rather than a current measure.

Satisfaction and outcomes for those who finish

For learners who complete, the picture is much better. Griffin and Mihelic used the 2018 National Student Outcomes Survey, treating "external only" delivery as the proxy for online. Across all graduates, satisfaction was slightly but significantly lower for online completers on every measure, yet still high. The authors describe this as "not a strong differentiation" between online and other delivery.

The qualification-level results are more revealing. Online graduates in several qualifications were less satisfied with teaching but more likely to say they had achieved their main reason for training.

Qualification (2018 graduates)	Satisfied with teaching, online vs other modes	Achieved main reason, online vs other modes
Certificate III in Business Administration	4.3 points lower	5.1 points higher
Certificate IV in Community Services	8.6 points lower	9.1 points higher
Diploma of Accounting	6.4 points lower	7.5 points higher
Certificate IV in Accounting	No significant difference	15.1 points higher
Certificate III in Information, Digital Media and Technology	13.9 points lower	No significant difference
Certificate III in Fitness	20.2 points lower	No significant difference
Certificate IV in Fitness	17.7 points lower	6.2 points lower

Source: Griffin and Mihelic 2019, Table 7 and Table C1. Differences significant at the 0.05 level.

The fitness qualifications are the outliers, with lower satisfaction on almost every measure. The authors note that these involve the most physical activity of the qualifications examined, and that work placement is suggested rather than required in them. Online delivery appears to fit least well where the skill itself is physical and the course does not guarantee time in a real workplace.

Employment outcomes for online graduates were similar to, or slightly better than, those of other graduates. All three measures examined (improved employment status, employed after training among those not employed before, and relevance of training to the current job) were significantly higher for online graduates across all courses, though the differences were small. Across the individual qualifications, there was only one instance where an employment outcome was lower for online graduates. A caution applies here:

online learners may differ from classroom learners in age, work status and motivation, and the survey covers only those who finished.

Learners' own accounts, 2022

The pandemic made online learning near universal, and NCVER added questions on it to the National Student Outcomes Survey. In the 2022 survey, which covered students who completed training in 2021, 77.4% of qualification completers said they had undertaken some learning online. So had 66.6% of part-completers, people who started a qualification and left it.

Online learning experience, 2022 survey	Qualification completers	Qualification part-completers
Undertook learning online	77.4%	66.6%
Satisfied with teacher or trainer support during online learning	83.9%	74.6%
Satisfied with overall quality of online experience	83.1%	72.4%
Faced at least one challenge with online learning	37.6%	43.5%
Challenge: lack of face-to-face interaction with trainers	46.8%	48.7%
Challenge: lack of face-to-face interaction with peers	35.0%	35.0%
Challenge: missed workplace experience	20.4%	25.1%

Source: NCVER 2022, VET student outcomes 2022, page 8 and Figure 9. Challenge items are shares of those who faced at least one challenge.

The gap between completers and part-completers is roughly ten points on both satisfaction measures, which is consistent with the idea that a poor online experience and leaving go together, although the survey cannot show which comes first. The challenges learners name are mostly about people rather than technology: missing contact with trainers and peers ranks well above unreliable internet or lack of equipment.

What the international meta-analysis says

The best-known synthesis is the meta-analysis prepared for the US Department of Education by Barbara Means and colleagues at the Center for Technology in Learning. First released in 2009, it was revised in September 2010, and the revision changed one headline finding. The figures below are from the revised edition.

The team screened 1,132 abstracts and found 176 experimental or quasi-experimental studies published between 1996 and 2008 that measured learning objectively. Of these, 45 studies provided enough data for 50 independent effect sizes comparing online or blended conditions with face-to-face instruction. Most involved undergraduates, graduate students or adults in professional training; medicine and health care was the most common subject. Only seven effects came from school students.

Comparison	Mean effect size	Significance
All online or blended vs face-to-face (50 effects)	+0.20	$p < .001$

Comparison	Mean effect size	Significance
Blended vs face-to-face	+0.35	p < .001
Purely online vs face-to-face	+0.05	Not significant (p = .46)
Online instruction collaborative or instructor-directed	+0.25 and +0.39	Compared with +0.05 (not significant) for independent learning
Curriculum and instruction judged near identical	+0.13	Compared with +0.40 when they differed
Undergraduates	+0.30	p < .001
Graduate students and professionals	+0.10	p < .05

Source: Means et al. 2010 (revised edition), Evaluation of evidence-based practices in online learning, executive summary.

By convention an effect of 0.20 is small, so these are modest advantages, and the advantage came from blended designs: purely online instruction produced learning statistically equivalent to face-to-face teaching. The 2009 edition had reported a small significant advantage for purely online learning (+0.14); the revision did not. The authors are careful about what they mean. Online and face-to-face conditions usually differed in more than the medium: time on task, materials and teaching approach often changed too. In their words, the studies "do not demonstrate that online learning is superior as a medium." The advantage shrank where curriculum and teaching were held constant. Of 13 practice variables tested, only two significantly changed effectiveness: blending, and online instruction that was collaborative or instructor-directed rather than independent. Studies where online learners spent more time on task showed larger effects (+0.45 against +0.18), but that difference fell just short of significance. Adding more media or online quizzes did not appear to improve learning, while prompting learners to reflect and self-monitor did.

Two further limits matter for VET. The studies measured learning on tests, not course completion, and many did not report retention rates. And very few of them involved the kinds of practical, competency-based skills that dominate VET.

When students struggle: evidence from community colleges

Completion is where the US community college evidence becomes most relevant to VET. Di Xu and Shanna Smith Jaggars at Columbia University's Community College Research Center tracked 51,017 degree-seeking students who first enrolled in Washington State's 34 community and technical colleges in autumn 2004, following them for about five years across nearly 500,000 courses. Their method compared each student's performance in their own online courses with their own face-to-face courses, which removes stable personal differences such as motivation.

Average course persistence was 91.19% in online courses against 94.45% face-to-face. Among those who stayed to the end, average grades were 2.77 online and 2.98 face-to-face on a four-point scale. Every group of students did worse online, but some struggled more: males, younger students, Black students and students with lower prior grades. Older students were more likely to drop courses overall, but the online penalty was

smaller for them; the model-adjusted persistence rate online was 90% for younger and 91% for older students, against 95% and 94% face-to-face.

The study also found a peer effect. In courses where 75% or more of students had characteristics linked to online difficulty, the estimated online penalty was markedly larger than in courses where 25% or fewer did (for course persistence, nearly twice as large). The learning environment created by a cohort matters, not just individual readiness.

This is US college data from 2004 to 2009, mostly in academic subjects. Still, the pattern lines up closely with Australian VET: completion falls online, and it falls most for learners with the least prior success.

What good online VET looks like

NCVER has twice asked practitioners what good online delivery involves. Griffin and Mihelic's interviewees identified five attributes: a supportive provider ethos, learners with realistic expectations on enrolment, well-structured and engaging resources designed for online use, an accessible student support system, and skilled, empathetic trainers.

The 2023 study by Hume, Griffin and Andrahannadi went further, interviewing staff from 37 RTOs delivering eight case-study qualifications, from the Certificate II in Community Pharmacy to the Certificate III in Electrotechnology Electrician. Most providers named the same five features of good practice:

- simplicity, clarity and consistency in tasks, instructions and navigation
- varied and engaging learning material, built for online rather than copied from the classroom
- communication and engagement strategies that counter isolation
- flexibility
- student support that is proactive, individualised and responsive.

Two qualifications did not fit this pattern: the Certificate II in Skills for Work and Vocational Pathways and the Certificate III in Electrotechnology Electrician. Views on how far these could be delivered online were mixed, which the authors suggest may say something about foundation skills and trade qualifications more generally. NCVER's pandemic survey reached a similar conclusion from a different angle: RTOs considered face-to-face learning critical for foundation skills, found practical components hardest to move online, and worried about their duty of care when teaching emotionally difficult topics such as suicide risk or family violence online.

The 2023 report's overarching message is that good training is good training, whatever the mode, but that the same principles have to be implemented differently online.

Limits of the evidence

- **Definitions are blunt.** "External" delivery in national data does not distinguish live online classes from self-paced modules, and the Student Outcomes Survey asks about online learning in a different way again.
- **The completion data are dated.** The only national comparison of completion by mode uses 2015 and 2016 data, before the pandemic and the rise of blended delivery.

- **Selection is everywhere.** Online learners differ from classroom learners in age, work status and motivation, so raw comparisons mix the effect of the mode with the effect of who chooses it.
- **Survey outcomes cover survivors.** Satisfaction and employment results mostly describe completers. Those who left are least represented.
- **The meta-analysis is about test scores, not competence.** Few studies in Means and colleagues' synthesis involved practical skills, and most did not equalise time or materials.
- **The practice studies are qualitative.** NCVER's good-practice findings describe what providers believe works, not measured effects.

What this means for your practice

The points below are our interpretation of the evidence, not recommendations made by NCVER, the US Department of Education or the Community College Research Center.

1. **Default to blended where you can.** The strongest international effects came from blended designs, and Australian data show providers moving that way. Online components appear to work best when they add practice and interaction rather than replacing contact.
2. **Screen for fit before enrolment, not after.** Learners with lower prior achievement, weaker digital or language skills and younger learners do worse online. A frank pre-enrolment conversation about self-discipline, technology and placement requirements addresses a cause of non-completion that learners and trainers both name.
3. **Build human contact into the design.** The top challenges learners report are missing trainers and peers. Scheduled live sessions, prompt personal feedback and a named contact person target the problem directly.
4. **Make support proactive.** Do not wait for online learners to ask for help. Use log-in and submission data to spot disengagement early, and contact learners before they drift rather than after.
5. **Be honest about practical skills.** Where a unit depends on physical performance or workplace judgement, protect real practice time and workplace exposure. The fitness results suggest that learners notice when they are missing.
6. **Keep it simple and consistent.** Clear navigation, task-focused instructions and consistent unit structure reduce the friction that drives self-paced learners away.
7. **Measure your own completion by mode.** National averages hide wide variation. Compare completion and withdrawal for your online, blended and classroom cohorts in the same qualification, and record why learners leave.

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TEACHWISE

Work-Integrated Learning and Placements, What Research Says

By Sukh Sandhu

Few ideas in tertiary education enjoy wider support than learning in a real workplace. Placements are mandatory in nursing, teaching and early childhood education, common across VET, and increasingly promoted in university business and arts degrees. Students ask for more of them. Yet the hard evidence on outcomes is thinner and more qualified than the enthusiasm suggests. Some studies find clear benefits for school completion, job entry and job quality; others, using Australian national data, find effects that are small or hard to separate from the field a student is studying. This article brings together NCVER's research on work placements and workplace-based delivery in VET, the Universities Australia national census of work-integrated learning (WIL), and Australian and European studies of graduate outcomes, to show what the data support and what they do not.

At a glance

Report	Publisher	Year	Method	Sample
Work placements in VET courses: evidence from the cross-sectoral literature (Smith and Harris)	NCVER	2001	Literature and practice review	School, VET and university literature
Work-based education in VET (Osborne, Ackehurst, Chan and Polvere)	NCVER	2020	Literature summary	Australian and international studies
Prevalence and outcomes of workplace-based delivery in VET (Osborne)	NCVER	2021	Administrative data, logistic regression	23.6 million non-apprentice subject enrolments, 2019; Student Outcomes Survey 2020
Work integrated learning in universities: final report	Universities Australia	2019	Census of university WIL activity in 2017	39 universities; 451,263 students
Jackson and Collings, *Higher Education* 76	Springer	2018	Institutional data linked to national graduate survey	Two samples, 628 and 237 graduates

Report	Publisher	Year	Method	Sample
Jackson and Bridgstock, *Higher Education* 81	Springer	2021	Graduate survey	510 graduates, three universities
Silva and colleagues, *Higher Education* 72	Springer	2016	Programme-level analysis	Portuguese first-cycle degree programmes
VET student outcomes 2025 and *2022*	NCVER	2025 and 2022	National Student Outcomes Survey	National VET completers and part-completers

Defining the terms

Researchers use a tangle of overlapping labels. NCVER's 2020 summary uses "work-based education" for structured programs that include learning through work, including apprenticeships, traineeships, internships, cadetships and paid and unpaid placements. Universities Australia uses "work integrated learning" and, for its national census, required a clear link to a workplace or employer. It counted four types: placements (such as internships), projects designed with and for employers, fieldwork, and simulations such as moot courts. National VET data take a narrower, administrative view: AVETMISS records whether each subject was delivered internally, externally or in the workplace, where "workplace-based" includes work experience, field placement and structured workplace training.

The labels matter because evidence about one form does not always transfer to another. Apprenticeships, with a contract of employment and years in one workplace, are a different intervention from a two-week unpaid placement in a Certificate III, and both differ from a client project in a commerce degree.

How common is learning in the workplace?

In VET

Osborne's 2021 analysis gives a national count of workplace-based delivery outside apprenticeships and traineeships. In 2019, more than 5.5 million subjects across all VET involved some workplace-based training. Just over 74% of these, about 4.1 million, were not part of an apprenticeship or traineeship, and around 800,000 non-apprentice students experienced workplace-based delivery during the year.

Delivery mode, non-apprentice subjects, 2019	Enrolments ('000)	Share
Any workplace-based delivery	4,061.8	17.2%
Workplace-based only	963.6	4.1%
Internal, external and workplace-based	1,277.9	5.4%
External and workplace-based	940.1	4.0%
Internal and workplace-based	880.2	3.7%
No workplace-based delivery	19,531.2	82.8%
Total	23,593.0	100.0%

Source: Osborne 2021, Prevalence and outcomes of workplace-based delivery in VET, Table 1. Excludes apprenticeships, traineeships and recognition of prior learning.

Workplace delivery was strongly concentrated. On average 20.8% of subjects at Certificate III and above included it, against 4.8% at Certificate II and below. More than a fifth (21.2%) of government-funded subjects were at least partly workplace-based, compared with 15% of domestic fee-for-service subjects and only 6.3% of international fee-for-service subjects. Field of education was the strongest predictor: radiography and pharmacy increased the odds of workplace-based delivery more than twentyfold compared with business and management, while accountancy, biological sciences and behavioural science reduced them by a factor of four or more. Full-time students (27.4%) were more likely than part-time students (19.9%) to receive any workplace-based delivery.

In universities

Universities Australia's census counted all WIL activity in 2017 across the 39 comprehensive universities. In that year, 451,263 students had a WIL experience, 37.4% of all enrolled students. Of these, 104,140 had more than one, giving 555,403 activities. Placements were the largest type at 43% of activity, partly because they are mandatory for registration in professions such as teaching, medicine and nursing.

University WIL participation, 2017	Rate
All students	37.4%
Health	57.7%
Agriculture, Environmental and Related Studies	56.5%
Education	53.9%
Society and Culture	20.5%
International students	38.2%
Domestic students	37.1%
Indigenous students	31.1%
Non-Indigenous students	37.3%
Low socioeconomic status students	27.8%
High socioeconomic status students	48.6%

Source: Universities Australia 2019, Work integrated learning in universities: final report, pages 8, 13, 18 and 28.

The equity gap is the striking finding. Low SES students participated at little more than half the rate of high SES students, and the report found low SES participation was at least ten percentage points lower than for other students in every broad discipline. The report's explanation is financial: WIL placements are often unpaid and time-consuming, and anecdotal evidence suggests low SES students are less likely to take part if they must give up paid work. Regional and rural students also participated at lower rates than metropolitan students in every broad field. The census was produced under the 2015 National Strategy on Work Integrated Learning in University Education, developed by Universities Australia with the Australian Collaborative Education Network (ACEN), employer groups and government, and was designed as a baseline for measuring progress.

What learners say

When learners comment, they ask for more workplace learning, not less. Osborne searched about 55,800 valid free-text suggestions from qualification completers in the Student Outcomes Survey. Of the 1,418 comments that mentioned placements, internships, apprenticeships, traineeships or work experience, 614 asked for work-based learning to be introduced or increased. Only 19 suggested fewer placement hours. Critical comments generally asked for better organisation or support rather than removal.

Learners also feel the absence of workplace contact. In NCVER's 2022 survey, among qualification completers who faced challenges with online learning, 20.4% said they had missed the opportunity to get experience in a workplace; for part-completers the figure was 25.1%. Disruption to placements during the pandemic was widespread: 10.8% of qualification completers and 7.0% of part-completers reported a work placement delayed, and 4.7% and 5.6% respectively a placement cancelled.

Placements can also be a reason for leaving. In the 2025 survey, problems with the work placement were the main reason for discontinuing given by 5.1% of qualification part-completers. That is small beside personal reasons (29.5%) and a change in job situation (19.3%), but it is a reason entirely within the control of the provider and host.

Do placements improve outcomes? The evidence

NCVER's review of the literature

NCVER's 2020 summary concludes that work-based education "can lead to better employment outcomes for students." It reports benefits for learners in technical and employability skills, understanding of workplace culture, occupational identity and transitions into ongoing work. One striking figure it cites comes from the International Labour Organization's School-to-Work Transition Surveys (53 surveys across 30 developing countries), as summarised by Comyn and Brewer: on average across countries, the transition to employment took 1.9 months for those who had combined work and study, compared with 20.1 months for those whose training was entirely institution-based. It also notes evidence that paid internships are associated with better outcomes than unpaid ones.

The summary is careful to say that access to work-based education "does not guarantee completion," and it identifies real costs. Employers cite cost, including staff time, lost productivity and administration, as the most common reason to decline placements. Providers struggle to resource placement coordination. Students face transport costs, placements outside course hours, and sometimes discrimination in host workplaces.

The national data test

Osborne's 2021 study is the most direct test using Australian VET data. Using the 2020 Student Outcomes Survey, she modelled two outcomes for qualification completers, controlling for field of education, disability, Indigenous status, prior labour force status, apprenticeship or traineeship status, socioeconomic status and remoteness.

Factor (qualification completers, 2020)	Odds ratio, improved employment	Odds ratio, achieved main reason

Factor (qualification completers, 2020)	Odds ratio, improved employment	Odds ratio, achieved main reason
Any workplace-based delivery vs none	1.23	1.24
Apprenticeship or traineeship vs not	2.46	3.24
Electrical and electronic engineering vs business and management	1.62	0.74
Not employed before training vs employed	0.41	0.66

Source: Osborne 2021, Tables 7 and 8. Values above 1 indicate higher likelihood.

Workplace-based delivery was associated with slightly higher odds of both outcomes, but the author judged that "a value this size is unlikely to have a material effect." Her key message is that the analysis "did not identify a material impact on student outcomes." She is clear about why this may understate the true effect: workplace delivery is bundled with field and level of study, and many programs mandate it for every student, so there is often no comparison group. She concludes that only a randomised trial, where workplace delivery is the only difference between two versions of a program, could settle the question. Note too that the contracted forms of workplace learning, apprenticeships and traineeships, show much larger associations, although those learners also start with a job.

Evidence from school VET

The clearest Australian evidence of a placement effect comes from upper-secondary VET. Polidano and Tabasso, using PISA data linked to the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, compared students in classroom-based VET subjects with and without a short structured workplace component (about 15 days on average in a year-long subject), using propensity score matching. Students whose VET included workplace learning were about 9 percentage points more likely to complete school, about 5 points more likely to be employed in the first year after school, and those in full-time work earned around $33 a week more (in 2009 dollars). Classroom VET without a workplace component showed no significant effect on full-time employment. Our companion article on VET in schools covers this study in more detail.

University graduates

University studies give a more qualified answer. Jackson and Collings linked one Australian university's data on WIL and paid work in the final year to national graduate outcomes data, using two samples of 628 and 237 graduates. Their abstract reports that WIL participation "does not produce an increase in full-time employment rates," although there was some evidence it led to higher-quality, more relevant employment in the short and long term. Paid work during the final year, by contrast, was associated with higher full-time employment but had little effect on underemployment.

Jackson and Bridgstock surveyed 510 business and creative industries graduates from three Australian universities about which activities helped their employability. Graduates rated the activities more useful for gaining skills and experience than for building networks or securing jobs. Internships were seen as important, but internships arranged as an

extra-curricular activity were rated more highly than those delivered as part of the curriculum.

In Portugal, Silva and colleagues analysed a large-scale sample of first-cycle degree programmes and found that programmes including internships tended to have significantly better graduate employability, particularly in polytechnic and public institutions. Mandatory internships, and multiple shorter internships spread through the degree, were associated with lower graduate unemployment. This is a programme-level analysis, so it describes programmes rather than individual students and cannot rule out other differences between programmes that offer internships and those that do not.

What the pattern suggests

Read together, the studies point in a consistent direction. Workplace learning appears most valuable where it is structured, connected to the course, and linked to a real occupation and employer, and where it helps learners who otherwise lack labour market contacts. Its effect on simply getting a job is less certain than its effect on getting the right job. And much of what looks like a placement effect in raw data is entangled with what and where people study.

Quality: the long-standing concerns

Smith and Harris's 2001 review for NCVER remains useful because the problems it named still appear in later work. They found that literature on placements was mostly sector-specific, uncritical and "predominantly based on perceptual rather than empirical evidence." They argued that placements are heavily dependent on the calibre of the workplace mentor and the breadth of experience a workplace can offer, and they identified unresolved questions about purpose: is a placement for learning about the workplace or learning in it? Their list of needs for practitioners and policy reads like a current checklist:

- careful recruitment and retention of host employers
- close monitoring of the quality of the learning environment
- clear mutual expectations and responsibilities
- preparation before, support during and debriefing after placement
- constant dialogue with host employers
- funded time for providers to visit and support students.

NCVER's 2020 summary adds matching students to employers through interviews or short trials, preparatory workshops on workplace expectations, and regular three-way communication between provider, employer and student.

Limits of the evidence

- **Selection is the central problem.** Students who do placements differ from those who do not, and placements cluster in particular fields. Few studies can separate the placement from the person or the program.
- **The best Australian VET test found little effect.** Osborne's national modelling could control only for limited factors and often lacked comparison groups, so it neither confirms nor rules out a meaningful benefit.

- **Much of the positive literature is descriptive.** Many studies in NCVER's summary report perceived benefits from providers, employers or students rather than measured outcomes.
- **University studies are small or single-institution.** Jackson and Collings used samples of a few hundred from one university; Jackson and Bridgstock measured graduate perceptions.
- **The university census is dated.** Universities Australia's data describe 2017 activity and count participation, not quality or outcomes.
- **International figures may not transfer.** The ILO transition-time comparison draws on surveys in 30 developing countries with labour markets very different from Australia's.

What this means for your practice

The points below are our interpretation of the evidence, not recommendations from NCVER, Universities Australia or the study authors.

1. **Treat placement as structured learning, not time served.** The strongest effects come from workplace learning that is planned, linked to course content and assessed. Agree what the learner will practise and how the host will support it before day one.
2. **Invest in the host relationship.** Placement quality depends on the mentor and the range of work available. Recruit hosts carefully, brief supervisors, and stay in contact during the placement rather than only at sign-off.
3. **Prepare and debrief.** Workshops on workplace expectations before placement, and structured reflection afterwards, address issues researchers have raised for two decades.
4. **Watch for placement problems as an early-leaving risk.** One in twenty part-completers names the placement as their main reason for leaving. Ask learners how placements are going early, and act on problems quickly.
5. **Plan for equity.** Low SES, regional and international learners face cost, transport, language and networking barriers. Help find placements, consider timing that allows learners to keep paid work, and look for local employers within reach.
6. **Be clear about what placement can and cannot do.** Evidence is stronger for better-matched and better-quality jobs than for employment as such. Pair placements with career guidance and job-search support.
7. **Collect your own outcome data.** Where your programs offer optional placements, compare completion, satisfaction and employment for those who take them and those who do not, and track host quality over time.

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TEACHWISE

VET in Schools, Outcomes in the Data

By Sukh Sandhu

More Australian school students are doing vocational education and training than at any time since national records began. In 2025, 276,860 school-aged students undertook VET as part of their secondary schooling, and they completed a record 151,485 programs. What happens to them afterwards is a more complicated story. Linked census and longitudinal data show that students who do VET at school are more likely to be in full-time, permanent work and to complete an apprenticeship in their early twenties, but less likely to finish Year 12 or a bachelor's degree. Matched studies suggest VET in schools helps keep students at school, and that the benefits are greatest when the course includes real time in a workplace or a school-based apprenticeship. This article sets out what NCVER's annual collection, its linked-data studies and the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) tell us, with the figures.

At a glance

Report	Publisher	Year	Method	Sample
VET in Schools 2025	NCVER	Published 30 June 2026	National VET in Schools Collection	276,860 school-aged students, data to 31 December 2025
VET for secondary school students: post-school employment and further training destinations (Misko, Chew and Korbel)	NCVER	2020	VET in Schools Collection linked to Census; LSAY 2009 cohort	104,742 (2011 cohort); 170,011 (2006 cohort); 3,966 LSAY respondents
VET for secondary school students: a research synthesis (Circelli and Siekmann)	NCVER	2022	Research synthesis, Student Outcomes Survey 2021	Australian research and national data
Making it real: the benefits of workplace learning in upper-secondary VET courses	IZA, University of Melbourne	2013 (journal 2014)	Propensity score matching, PISA linked to LSAY 2003 and 2006	About 15,000 young people

Report	Publisher	Year	Method	Sample
(Polidano and Tabasso)				

What "VET in Schools" covers

VET in Schools, now often called VET for secondary school students, means nationally recognised VET undertaken as part of a senior secondary certificate. It is typically delivered from Year 10 to Year 12, sometimes from Year 9, and can be delivered by schools registered as RTOs, by TAFEs, by community providers or by private RTOs contracted to schools. It includes school-based apprenticeships and traineeships (SBATs), in which students start a paid, part-time apprenticeship while still at school.

The arrangements differ sharply by state and territory. Each school accreditation body decides how much VET counts towards its senior certificate. NCVER's 2022 synthesis notes that VET programs do not count towards an ATAR in Western Australia and Tasmania, though they can elsewhere. These differences make national comparisons difficult, and they shape who takes VET at school and why.

The programs carry two aims that do not always sit easily together, as both the 2020 and 2022 NCVER reports observe: keeping young people engaged in education, and giving them a direct pathway to work or further training.

Participation in 2025: a record year

NCVER's *VET in Schools 2025* shows growth on every headline measure.

School-aged students (19 and under)	2025	Change from 2024
Students	276,860	+11,005 (4.1%)
Program enrolments	412,840	+18,860 (4.8%)
Program completions	151,485	+9,180 (6.4%)
Subject load pass rate	86.3%	+0.3 points
Students in school-based apprenticeships or traineeships	19,825 (7.2%)	
Students attending government schools	60.3%	

Source: NCVER 2026, VET in Schools 2025, report text and Figures 3 and 4.

All three volume measures are at their highest since the collection began in 2006. Using ABS counts of secondary students aged 14 to 19, NCVER estimates a participation rate of 22.6% in 2025, up from 22.1% in 2024. The longer series shows that participation has been broadly flat for a decade, with recent growth only now returning it towards the 2015 level.

Year	VET in Schools students aged 14 to 19	Estimated participation rate
2015	254,940	24.0%
2017	240,225	22.5%
2019	233,905	21.8%

Year	VET in Schools students aged 14 to 19	Estimated participation rate
2021	249,885	22.2%
2023	251,270	21.4%
2024	265,820	22.1%
2025	276,820	22.6%

Source: NCVER 2026, VET in Schools 2025, Figure 1 (Australia).

Queensland has the highest participation rate and the largest student numbers, which NCVER links to the Queensland Certificate of Education introduced in 2008. Western Australia's rate has fallen since 2019 following changes to its certificate, and the ACT's numbers have declined year on year for a decade. Numbers rose in 2025 among females, Indigenous students, students with disability, and regional and remote students. The SBAT share, 7.2%, has stayed in the 7% to 9% range for a decade. Tasmania (10.9%) and South Australia (11.1%, up 3.2 points) had the highest SBAT shares.

What students study and complete

Hospitality, business, fitness and construction dominate. The Certificate II in Hospitality was the most enrolled program nationally in 2025 with 35,090 enrolments, followed by the Certificate III in Business (23,900) and the Certificate II in Skills for Work and Vocational Pathways (19,790). The Certificate II in Construction Pathways grew from 13,100 to 15,385 enrolments and was the top qualification in South Australia and Tasmania, and the Certificate III in Sport, Aquatics and Recreation rose from 7,985 to 12,960.

Completions are shifting up the qualification levels.

Completions by level	2015	2025
Certificate IV or higher	2,050	7,015
Certificate III	21,700	44,460
Certificate II	69,170	88,815
Certificate I	25,885	11,190

Source: NCVER 2026, VET in Schools 2025, Figure 8.

Certificate III completions have doubled since 2015, while Certificate I completions have fallen by more than half; a decade ago Certificate I completions exceeded Certificate III completions. Subject load pass rates, which NCVER weights by nominal hours, were 87.4% for Certificate III, 84.8% for Certificate II and 80.1% for Certificate I in 2025, and 97% for Certificate IV or higher. NCVER uses pass rates because many students take VET units for senior certificate credit rather than to complete a full qualification, so completion counts understate successful activity.

Short-term outcomes

The National Student Outcomes Survey began asking 15 to 19-year-olds whether their training was part of senior secondary schooling only recently. NCVER's 2022 synthesis reports the first results, from the 2021 survey of students who completed a qualification in 2020.

Qualification completers aged 15 to 19, 2021 survey	Training part of school	Training not part of school
Achieved main reason for training	84.4%	83.1%
Main reason: employment-related	42.8%	62.7%
Main reason: further study	33.3%	16.1%
Satisfied with training overall	90.8%	88.6%
Employed or in further study after training	76.0%	76.9%
Employed after training	60.1%	63.2%
Employed in same occupation as training course	8.0%	17.0%
Enrolled in further study after training	43.0%	38.3%

Source: Circelli and Siekmann 2022, VET for secondary school students: a research synthesis, Table 5, drawing on NCVER Student Outcomes Survey 2021.

About three quarters of school VET completers were working or studying six to twelve months later, a similar share to other young VET completers. But school VET students were far less likely to have trained for a job reason, and fewer than one in ten were working in the occupation their course was designed for. The synthesis links this to earlier research showing many students use school VET as a "taster" to test an interest rather than as a direct route into an occupation.

Five years on: linked census data

The most comprehensive Australian evidence on medium-term outcomes comes from NCVER's linked-data studies by Josie Misko and colleagues. The 2020 study linked the 2011 National VET in Schools Collection to the 2016 Census, and compared the results with an earlier linkage of 2006 VET in Schools data to the 2011 Census.

Five years after VET in Schools	2006 cohort	2011 cohort
Employed	79%	78%
Working only	56%	54%
Combining work and study	23%	24%
Studying only	9%	10%
Not working and not studying	13%	13%
Working in a trade (of those working)	23%	22%
Year 12 or higher attained	87%	94%
Cohort size	170,011	104,742

Source: Misko, Chew and Korbel 2020, Table 1.

Outcomes were stable across the two cohorts, except for a rise in Year 12 or higher attainment from 87% to 94%. Among those with a post-school qualification, 57% of the 2011 cohort held a Certificate III or IV as their highest, 18% a diploma and 17% a bachelor's degree or higher.

Employment varied by background. School-based apprentices and trainees did best, with 84% of the 2011 cohort employed five years later, against 77% of other VET in Schools students. Indigenous students (66% against 78%) and students who mainly spoke a language other than English at home (66% against 79%) were less likely to be employed.

Does the course lead to the job?

For most VET in Schools courses, the link between the intended occupation and the job held five years later was weak. The strongest links were in the trades and in a few service occupations, and school-based apprenticeships strengthened them markedly.

Intended occupation of VET in Schools course	Match rate with SBAT	Match rate without SBAT
Electrotechnology and telecommunications trades	66.9%	45.5%
Construction trades	64.1%	37.3%
Automotive and engineering trades	61.8%	35.1%
Food trades	45.6%	18.1%
Sales assistants and salespersons	45.6%	44.9%
Carers and aides	45.4%	31.5%
Hospitality workers	18.6%	13.5%

Source: Misko, Chew and Korbel 2020, Table 8 (2011 cohort). All differences statistically significant except sales assistants.

At the finest occupational level, 52% of those whose course targeted plumbing and 49% of those targeting carpentry and joinery were working in exactly that occupation five years later. The lowest match rate was for creative arts workers, at 2%.

Compared with students who did not do VET at school

Census data cannot show how similar students without school VET fared. For that comparison the 2020 study used the LSAY 2009 cohort, who were around 15 when first surveyed and 22 in 2016: 1,008 who had done VET at school and 2,958 who had not.

LSAY 2009 cohort at age 22 (2016)	Did VET at school	Did not do VET at school
Employed	86.6%	84.0%
Full-time employment	54.2%	36.9%
Permanent or ongoing employment	55.5%	45.8%
Completed Year 12	87.9%	95.1%
Completed an apprenticeship or traineeship	21.4%	7.9%
Completed VET studies	47.8%	23.6%
Completed a bachelor's degree or higher	12.9%	28.3%
Currently undertaking a bachelor's degree or higher	15.0%	29.4%

Source: Misko, Chew and Korbel 2020, Tables 3 and 17. All differences shown are statistically significant at 95% except employment.

There was no significant difference in the likelihood of being employed. The differences lie in the type of work and study. Former VET in Schools students were more likely to be in full-time, permanent jobs and to have finished an apprenticeship; their peers were much more likely to be at university, which partly explains why more of them were in part-time and casual work. VET in Schools students were also more likely to work as technicians and trades workers (18.1% against 7.7%) and as managers, and much less likely to be professionals (7.6% against 20.7%).

A caution runs through these comparisons. The groups differ before VET begins: 45.2% of the VET in Schools students in the LSAY sample also obtained an ATAR, and the authors found significant differences between those who did and those who did not. When the authors tried controlling for maths and reading achievement, they could not confirm statistically significant differences between the groups within achievement quartiles. These are descriptive comparisons, not estimates of what VET at school causes.

Estimating the effect: matched studies

Polidano and Tabasso attempted a closer causal estimate. They linked PISA test data to LSAY for the 2003 and 2006 cohorts, giving about 15,000 young people, of whom around 29% took at least one VET subject in upper-secondary school. Using propensity score matching to compare VET students with similar students who did not take VET, they estimated that:

- taking VET at school increased the chance of completing school by 14 percentage points on average
- it had no significant effect on overall enrolment in post-school study, but shifted the mix: about 5 percentage points fewer enrolled in higher education and more in post-school VET
- it improved the chance of full-time employment in the first year after school by 3 percentage points on average, but only VET with workplace learning showed a significant effect
- among classroom VET students, those whose course included workplace learning (about 15 days in a year-long subject) were about 9 points more likely to complete school and about 5 points more likely to be employed after school than those without it.

The authors also note that 37% of VET in Schools students in their sample intended to go to university, and caution that VET subjects may, for some, reduce the chances of university entry because they often do not count towards the ATAR and take time away from academic study. Matching on observed characteristics cannot rule out differences in unobserved ones, such as motivation, and the data are now two decades old.

> *The most consistent finding across the Australian studies is that VET at school changes the route young people take more than whether they end up in work.*

Quality concerns

NCVER's 2022 synthesis summarises a 2021 ASQA scoping study, prompted by stakeholder concern about VET delivered to secondary students. ASQA found non-compliance among these providers was no higher than in VET generally, but identified common problem areas: assessment, amount of training, ensuring students are properly informed, protected and supported, oversight of third-party arrangements, and trainer industry currency. The synthesis also reports the Joyce review's finding that many employers were not confident that school-delivered Certificate IIIs and some Certificate IIs gave graduates the skills the qualifications denote.

Limits of the evidence

- **Cohorts are old.** The best medium-term data follow students who did VET at school in 2006 and 2011, and the LSAY cohort first surveyed in 2009. The 2025 cohort studies a different mix of qualifications, at higher levels.
- **Comparison groups differ.** VET in Schools students are more likely to have lower achievement and parents without degrees, so raw outcome gaps mix programme effects with background.
- **The VET in Schools group is not uniform.** Students using VET towards an ATAR and students preparing for an apprenticeship have different goals and outcomes, but are often reported together.
- **Linked data miss non-respondents and lack controls.** The census linkage covers only students who responded to the census and has no comparison group.
- **The LSAY comparison is small.** About 1,000 VET in Schools students limits fine breakdowns.
- **Jurisdictions differ.** ATAR rules, SBAT uptake and delivery models vary by state, so national averages blur very different systems.

What this means for your practice

The points below are our interpretation of the evidence, not recommendations from NCVER or the study authors.

1. **Be clear with students about purpose.** VET at school works as engagement, as a taster and as a direct pathway, but these are different goals. Help each student decide which they are pursuing and choose units accordingly.
2. **Put real workplace time into courses.** The matched evidence suggests the benefits for school completion and early employment come mostly from VET that includes structured workplace learning. Even short, well-organised placements appear to matter.
3. **Promote school-based apprenticeships where employers are available.** SBATs show the strongest employment and occupation-match results, yet remain about 7% of VET in Schools students.
4. **Give honest ATAR advice.** Students aiming for university need to know how their state treats VET in ATAR calculations and how VET time interacts with their academic subjects.

5. **Watch delivery quality.** Assessment, training volume, third-party oversight and trainer currency are the areas ASQA flagged. School RTOs and their partners can audit themselves against these first.
6. **Follow up your own leavers.** National destination data are years old. A simple survey of your students six to twelve months after Year 12 will tell you more about your programs than any national average.
7. **Look beyond the job count.** Former VET in Schools students are as likely to be employed as their peers; the gains show up in full-time, permanent and trade work. Track job quality and further training, not only employment.

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