



## Hanging in there

### What makes a difference in the first year of an apprenticeship

YOUNG APPRENTICES who complete Year 12 and those who undertake relevant work experience and/or vocational education and training at school are more likely to continue beyond the first year of their apprenticeship than those who do not, according to a study published in the March 2008 edition of *Youth Studies Australia* (v.27, n.1, pp.36-42).

This study, conducted by Angela Hill and Leanne Dalley-Trim from the School of Education at James Cook University, sought to identify the reasons why some apprentices failed to continue their apprenticeships beyond the first year and the factors that encouraged others to continue. The study used data collected from 193 young people (45 female, 148 male) who commenced Australian Apprenticeships with a Group Training Organisation (GTO) in a regional centre in Queensland in 2005. Researchers constructed quantitative

**Apprentices who completed higher year levels and relevant training at school were more likely to continue in their apprenticeships than those who had not.**

profiles of apprentices from their recruitment files in order to analyse the characteristics of continuing and non-continuing apprentices. They then conducted qualitative interviews with six apprentices 'at high risk of non-continuation' to further investigate the factors leading to continuation or non-continuation. Interviews were also conducted with training provider representatives, host business representatives, school VET coordinators and GTO field officers.

Results indicated that apprentices who completed higher year levels at school and those who completed relevant training/work experience at school were more likely to continue in their apprenticeships than those



who had not, while apprentices employed in the construction industry were generally less likely to continue in their apprenticeships than those employed in other industries. Four key issues were identified as influencing apprentices' likelihood of continuation or non-continuation: apprentices' personal qualities and attributes, the nature of their work, the nature of their workplace, and the level of support they receive. To ensure that apprentices remain in their apprenticeships beyond the first year, the researchers recommend that apprentices receive adequate support from GTOs and employers 'within work sites and work-based structures', adequate 'personal and familial support networks' and have 'appropriate attitudes towards and expectations of their apprenticeship, their workplace and their work-based relationships'.

### EXTRACTS FROM YOUTH MONITOR

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#### Cigarette exposure affects academic performance

A retrospective study published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* in October 2007 indicates that teenagers exposed to secondhand cigarette smoke in the home face an increased likelihood of failing standardised academic achievement tests. The study, led by Dr Bradley Collins from the Health Behaviour Research Clinic at Temple University, found that teenagers' exposure to secondhand smoke predicted test failure even when controlling for factors such as gender, socio-economic status and prenatal exposure to cigarette smoke (*Age Education* section, 5/11/07, p.2).

#### Year 12 not for all students

Completing Year 12 may not be beneficial to all young people, and the broadening of school curricula to increase student retention rates may be counterproductive, according to Gary Marks, a researcher with the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and the Melbourne Institute. In a study published in the journal *School Effectiveness and School Improvement* in December 2007, Dr Marks found that social factors such as socioeconomic status and gender had more influence on a student's decision to leave school than the characteristics of schools themselves. Rather than directing resources into modifying school curricula to keep potential early leavers

# Abstracts from recent education-related youth studies

## Climbing over the rocks in the road to student engagement and learning in a challenging school in Australia

J. Smyth & L. Fasoli, *Educational Research*, v.49, n.3, 2007, pp.273-95.

An ethnographic methodology was used to investigate reforms instituted by a secondary school in the Northern Territory. This school had a high proportion of disadvantaged students and a 'negative history and reputation' involving behavioural problems and student disengagement. Reforms were centred on re-engaging students by 'inserting relationships into the processes of the school within a context of pursuing rigorous and productive learning'. Over a five-week period, embedded interviews were conducted with 14 teachers, classroom observational data were gathered from eight classrooms and a number of school activities, and focus groups were conducted with around 30 students in Years 9–12 (aged 13–16 years). Thematic data analysis indicated that the relational focus of the school's reforms allowed students to form more positive learning identities. The reforms' success lay in 'the ability of the school to recognise as insufficient the punitive approaches of the past and to choose instead to assert adult authority through the development of respectful relations which afforded students the relational power that they require to persist with schooling, against the odds'.

## The needs of students in Youth SAAP Services accommodation

C. Hillier & L. Cornell-March, *Parity*, v.20, n.7, 2007, pp.33-34.

Researchers from an Adelaide-based Youth Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (YSAAP) undertook an investigation of the educational and training needs of their clients, conducting qualitative interviews and surveys with 31 YSAAP service workers, 42 education and training providers and 26 YSAAP clients. Results indicated that 85% of young people surveyed were involved in some form of education or training when they accessed YSAAP services, the most common being the Job Placement, Employment and Training (JPET) program. However, many young people attending high school dropped out during their time as YSAAP clients. All groups surveyed recognised that young people in YSAAP services need specific and ongoing support to 'successfully access and maintain education and training', including financial assistance, access to flexible curricula and learning environments, and additional learning supports. While results suggest that the type of support homeless students need to remain in education 'may be achieved through a case management service linked to both education and accommodation', further research is needed to determine the efficacy of such a model.



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at school (e.g. by including vocational subjects), Dr Marks said that 'resources would be better directed by providing appropriate post-school education and training once [young people] have entered the workforce'. 'Post-school vocational education works best if it is closely tied to actual jobs in existing workplaces,' he said. Dr Tom Karmel, managing director of the National Council for Vocational Education Research, said figures indicate that vocational subjects did not improve school retention rates beyond Year 11, in part because students found employment through vocational course work placements (*Australian*, 26/11/07, p.14).

## Second-chance learners fail to finish

While vocational education and training (VET) courses are successful in providing early school leavers with a second chance at education, just 10% of early school leavers (aged 24 years and under) who enrol in certificate III or higher VET courses will complete these courses within four years of leaving school. These findings are contained in a study by Tom Karmel and Davina Woods of the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research. The study found that around 50% of young people who fail to complete high school participated in vocational education and training. 'For those who simply left the system prior to course completion, the failure to complete a qualification does not appear to be associated with the course being too difficult; rather, it appears to be more likely that the VET course was not what people expected, or that there was a lack of motivation or interest in continuing the course,' the report's authors said (*Australian Financial Review*, 23/01/08, p.10).

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