Entering industry

A case study of links between a school vocational program
and the building and construction industry

Anthea Taylor

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Executive summary

Few studies have tracked youth transition beyond the immediate post-school period or have looked at the longer-term outcomes of post-school programs. This study reports the findings of a case study investigating links between an industry-specific school vocational education and training (VET) program and subsequent work transitions to the building and construction industry. It provides important insights into the early career experiences of young people.

The program under consideration—the Family of Trades—is a one-year cross-sectoral school VET program auspiced by the building and construction industry in Western Australia. The program operated in schools in the south-east metropolitan region of Perth between 1999 and 2001. In this program, Year 11 students, drawn from up to seven schools (government and non-government) attended the local technical and further education (TAFE) campus for one day a week for one semester to receive trade instruction in four building and construction trades. In the second semester, 120 hours of structured work experience were undertaken in one of these trades.

The study population was drawn from a low-income region where high numbers of local students are considered to be at risk of not completing formal education. The region also shows generally low levels of qualifications and pockets of high unemployment.

The study employed a qualitative methodology which involved two rounds of open-ended interviews with 72 of the original 121 students who undertook the program while in Year 11 in either 1999 or 2000.

This study also draws on longitudinal data gathered by the author and colleagues over two evaluations of the school VET program. One of these includes an assessment of the work readiness and career decision-making among the 1999 group of students which was undertaken in 2000 for the Western Australian Department of Training.

In particular, the study examined the longer-term outcomes (three years post-school in some cases) and the relationships with industry in relation to:

✧ employment and/or apprenticeships and traineeship opportunities being realised

✧ entry, retention rates and early career experiences of those who exited school during, or at the end of the Year 11 program and those who elected to complete Year 12

✧ young people's assessments of their choice of occupation and involvement in the building industry

✧ perceptions of relationships between the industry-specific Year 11 VET program and early career opportunities and experiences

✧ the ways in which economic fluctuations in general, and the concurrent building and construction industry business cycles in particular, impact on the transition and early career experiences of these young people.

The building and construction industry itself poses particular challenges for youth. While it is characterised by a high number of apprentices, and apprenticeships are the sector's major avenue of recruitment, the industry also has a high number of workers without post-school qualifications. Moreover, the industry offers little opportunity for part-time work, and relies heavily on overtime. It is also experiencing difficulty retaining qualified tradespeople. Of immediate impact on employment in the sector are the changes the economy has recently undergone and the volatile and somewhat erratic cyclical nature of the industry.

The report identifies positive short- and longer-term outcomes of the Family of Trades program and clearly demonstrates that the program was instrumental in assisting career decision-making and entry to work.

The data presented in this report do not allow definitive links to be made between the school VET program and school-to-work transition. However, the findings suggest some tentative relationships between the two can be identified. That is, the young people in this study:

✧ acquired or consolidated an interest in the building and construction industry as a result of the program

✧ were provided with the opportunity to explore the industry's scope and employment potential

✧ were familiarised with the industry-related employment and training options

✧ were assisted with the establishment of an implicit network of industry-related contacts, and that these were utilised during and after the transition period

✧ found it relatively easy to move into and around the industry, continuing to utilise the Family of Trades, TAFE and peer contacts well into their early careers

✧ showed little understanding or interest in wider predictions about impending economic downfalls in the sector and tended to hold an optimistic opinion about their long-term future in their trade

✧ expressed high job satisfaction in the industry, and indeed, in the trades they had chosen

✧ expressed a sound understanding of what employers across the trades look for, and the attributes they require to maintain their employment in the industry

✧ generally enjoyed good relationships with management and supervisors.

Moreover, the majority of the respondents expressed confidence, enthusiasm and satisfaction over the transition process and early career experiences. They clearly saw the value of persevering with their training despite the challenges, and this is reflected in the high retention rate for these young people in apprenticeships.

Although not the only VET program many of these young people undertook while at school, the Family of Trades participants continue to acknowledge and refer to the program—both the TAFE and the work experience components—long after the experience.

1 Introduction

Overview

This study was conducted in the period June 2001–June 2002 and concerns the transition from initial education to working life. It draws on several previous studies undertaken by the author and a colleague with the same two cohorts of school vocational education and training (VET) students (see Koczberski & Taylor 1999; Taylor & Koczberski 2001a, 2001b; Taylor 2001). By the end of 2002, these young people (one female only) had been tracked for up to four years, from the beginning of Year 11 to the point at which some were completing apprenticeships. In the study reported here, indications of links between a particular industry-specific school VET program (Family of Trades), transition profiles and industry were investigated. While the study is focused on the highly diverse and fragmented building and construction industry, not all of the young people in this study have moved into building and construction employment.

Project aims

This study stands alone but draws on the longitudinal data and incorporates the findings of the cluster of related projects undertaken with the same population during 1999 and 2000. These previous projects investigated and evaluated the building and construction industry's 'Family of Trades', VET in Schools program and the career decision-making, work-readiness and early career experiences of groups of youths who undertook the program.

Complementing the findings of these two projects with the same two cohorts of young men who undertook the Family of Trades program during Year 11 in 1999 or in 2000, this study specifically investigated:

✧ youth employment and training retention and attrition

✧ relationships between industry conditions and fluctuations and youth school-to-employment and training transition and early career experiences

✧ links between industry-specific VET in Schools programs and employment and training profiles and experiences

✧ factors to be considered in the development of VET in Schools and other youth transition programs.

Research questions

In addressing these aims, the project sought to understand and explain:

✧ employment and/or apprenticeships and traineeship opportunities accruing for two cohorts of youths who undertook the Family of Trades Year 11 school VET program

- entry and retention rates and early career experiences of those who exited school during, or at the end of Year 11, and those who elected to complete Year 12

- youth assessments of their choice of occupation, and involvement in the building and construction industry in particular

- youth perceptions of any relationships between the industry-specific Year 11 VET in Schools program undertaken and their early career opportunities and experiences

- the manner in which economic fluctuations in general, and the concurrent building and construction industry business cycles in particular, might have impacted on the transition and early career experiences of youths in building and construction-related trades.

Respondents

In this project the study population was regarded as four groups at the school exit point (that is, Year 12 completion or school exit during, or at the end of Year 11). Thus, at the commencement of this project in July 2001, the four groups spread over the two cohorts were as follows:

- 1999 Year 11 cohort who were early secondary school exits and by 2001 potentially in their second or third years of post-school full- or part-time employment and/or training (code 99EE), n=15

- 1999 Year 11 cohort who went on to complete their secondary school Year 12 and were making the initial transition potentially to post-school employment and/or training in 2001 (code 99Yr12), n=14

- 2000 Year 11 cohort of early secondary school exits who were making their initial transition potentially to post-school employment and/or training in 2001 (code 00EE), n=26

- 2000 Year 11 cohort of secondary school completers who had just completed Year 12 (code 00Yr12), n=17.

In all, 65 students undertook the Family of Trades program in 1999 and 56 in 2000. For the purpose of this study attempts were made to contact 95 of these young people (see table 4, appendix 1). Seventy-two young people were located and distributed among the groups as shown above. However, in this report where data from previous projects are incorporated, the number of reported respondents can vary, depending on when the data were collected. This is generally indicated in data identified as collected prior to 2001. Mirroring the highly gendered nature of the industry itself, all but one of the students was male. In each of the cohorts, slightly over half left school either during, or at the end of the Year 11 program to take up employment and/or training opportunities.

Consent for interviewing and taping was obtained from respondents, and all were offered the opportunity to withdraw at any time. Four chose not to participate at various points during this study. However, a further nine excluded themselves by default by opting not to respond to telephone calls or being repeatedly unavailable (see table 4, appendix 1). In a number of these cases, parents supplied some basic information regarding employment and training locations and, where appropriate, data obtained from parents have been included. Of those youths who undertook the school VET program in either 1999 or 2000, some could not be located for this study (for example, no up-to-date home addresses or telephone contact numbers); some were excluded on the basis of significant gaps in the relevant longitudinal data (for example, had missed out on more than one of the preceding surveys), or because they had subsequently opted to orientate their upper secondary school studies toward academic courses.

Interviews

Each group was interviewed twice during the period August 2001 to June 2002. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the school group and telephone interviews were conducted with those who had left school. Face-to-face interviews had previously been conducted with the telephone interviewees for the related previous projects, and this group was, therefore, familiar with the researchers, the methodology and the wider ongoing project purpose.

As the circumstances of each group at any one time varied, and as various data had been gathered from each of the groups at different points during the preceding projects, different but parallel interview schedules were prepared for each round of interviewing. This enabled some existing data in hand to be extended and comparisons between the groups to be made. However, as indicated above, this meant that respondent totals can vary according to when the data were gathered. To assist integration and comparison of longitudinal data, some survey-type closed questions and items from instruments employed in previous projects were repeated. As far as possible, respondents' language, derived from the face-to-face open-ended interviews, was incorporated into the wording and expression of the closed questions, and opportunities were provided for elaboration and discussion of each item when administering the surveys.

The in-depth and predominantly open-ended interviews variously sought information on:

✧ current locations and/or anticipated ex-school destinations in relation to employment and training

✧ rationales and explanations for changes in aspirations and circumstances

✧ profiles of the transition from school

✧ rationales for career decisions made in the transition

✧ assessments of the schools' career preparation and the perceived efficacy of Year 12 completion

✧ assessments of the impact of the Family of Trades school VET program on individuals

✧ identification of role models, mentors, and assistance with and influences on the transition

✧ progress being made toward a training qualification

✧ accounts of early career experiences

✧ assessments of advantages and disadvantages of the transitions pathways undertaken

✧ retention and attrition factors and considerations

✧ youth assessments of good companies as well as employers' expectations

✧ perceptions of career satisfaction

✧ knowledge and assessments of and participation in the industry

✧ future plans.

Business data

In addition to the interview data, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data on various aspects of building and construction activity and Reserve Bank interest rates variations were employed. Furthermore, to gain a better understanding of business confidence in the industry, a content analysis survey of media headlines on topics related to the building and construction industry was undertaken for the period June 2001–2002. Headlines and leaders to articles and reports of more than three column inches were considered in the local daily newspaper, *The West Australian,*

for six days a week. Similarly, those in the main body of a national paper, *The Australian*, on Wednesdays and Saturdays over the period were also included. It was estimated that this would reflect a typical newspaper reading pattern for many Western Australians. (A consideration of the role played by the daily press in subcontracting in the building and construction sector has been raised in chapters 2 and 5).

Data management

The media articles surveyed were entered on a database, sorted according to topic and classified according to whether the tone of the heading and leader clearly presented the industry and conditions in the industry in a positive, negative or neutral light.

Both face-to-face and telephone interviews were taped (permission given) and field notes were taken during the interviews. Tapes were transcribed and analysed to generate categories which could be entered onto specific topic databases. Where responses to open-ended questions contain several ideas, these have generally been tallied separately to preserve the range and diversity of youth experience and reasoning. In addition, an existing database plotting the main details of each individual biography and demographic data was refined and maintained.

As most of the data were gathered through semi-structured open-ended interviews, not all respondents were asked identical questions. The interview transcripts have been searched for responses which could be grouped in response to key inquiry questions. However, clearly not all respondents supplied information on all topics, and the total number of respondents varies from topic to topic.

Although the early school exits and Year 12 school completers are from the same years' program cohorts, in terms of the analysis, the four groups have been treated separately. This has enabled a comparison between the transition process in relation to school completion and early school exit, and facilitated matching transition points with concurrent industry conditions.

Study limitations

One of the methodological issues associated with longitudinal studies is the respondent attrition which inevitably occurs, and this is particularly so in the case of adolescents such as the respondents for this study, most of whom did not have their own listed telephone numbers, and many of whom may not have the same name of the parent with whom they are residing. In these instances, every effort was made to locate participants associated with the earlier projects. In terms of respondent attrition resulting in the withdrawing of consent, or self-selected withdrawal, those who chose not to participate were often the young people who had not realised their post-school aspirations. As others have also noted (for example, Dwyer 1996), youth most at risk are notoriously hard to track. Nevertheless, six months after leaving school, more than one-third of the respondents had not fully realised their post-school aspirations and were in casual/part-time jobs, jobs without training or were unemployed and still wanted to continue to participate in this study (see table 6, appendix 1).

It is acknowledged that a similarly tracked comparative group of youths from the same schools who had not undertaken the Family of Trades VET program would have enriched the longer-term project. It is probable that this would have been accommodated in the study design had we known at the outset that the project would become a longitudinal series of studies.

It should also be noted that, in choosing a qualitative study such as this series of studies, sample numbers are necessarily sacrificed and width is traded for depth. This limits the capacity to generalise a study's findings. However, it could be argued that, given the shortage of qualitative studies in this field, the selection of this methodology meets a need and is an appropriate

approach to investigating the questions identified. Moreover, the researchers involved in this project would suggest that, irrespective of the size of the respondent base, the findings of an investigation such as this located in a particular context would, in any event have a limited capacity to generate useful generalisations, and that the aim of studies such as this is to elaborate and deepen our understanding of the various youth experiences of transition and early careers.

Study overview

For the young participants of this project the approach employed here basically elaborates the connections between their school VET course and their transition and early career experiences. The study has generated a great deal of qualitative thick description of youth transition, post-school training and early career activity for these young people. As a case study with a relatively small sample, it is not possible to draw definitive broad generalisations from these findings. However, as the study considers two cohorts of youth from various schools, all of whom undertook the same industry-specific school VET program over a period of time, it is possible to consider with some confidence how the findings might apply in other contexts, and suggest some of the longer-term implications of VET in Schools programs.

The study thus contributes to our understanding of the transition process in a number of ways. First, very little is qualitatively known about the longer-term consequences of school VET programs. Second, most of the destination studies only track youths in this manner for six months. This study however, draws on data gathered from tracking respondents for up to three years after leaving school. Third, few of the destination studies have collected comprehensive school-level data at an individual level. Fourth, approaches to investigating the entry to, and participation in the workforce generally and individual trades specifically, conventionally take a supply-and-demand human capital theory approach. Available employment and training places are considered in relation to the aggregated statistical profile of youth seeking and entering employment. As a qualitative case study, using the voice of young people for the research, and following two particular cohorts of youths from Year 11 into the workforce, this study takes a different approach, and therefore complements the gross statistical information as well as the broad-brush survey data.

Links between the school program, transition profiles and economic conditions over a longitudinal period are regarded as not straightforward or necessarily explicit. The interpretive approach of this study avoids the certainty of cause–effect relationships when investigating social phenomena. This is, therefore, not a correlational study, but rather a teasing-out of factors embedded in these youths' reported experiences and perceptions over time considered against a concurrent industry profile.

The following potential links with industry have been investigated:

✧ structural links between the school VET program and the industry

✧ family and network links with the industry

✧ longitudinal aspirations and destination profiles in relation to the industry

✧ influences on trade choice and entry to the industry

✧ youth knowledge of the industry and perceived career expectations

✧ early transition and career experiences

✧ the impact of concurrent industry-related business factors and confidence.

While the literature identifies young people most at risk with respect to transition and early career experience, it tells us little about either the profiles of the youth at risk or the experiences of those undertaking successful transitions. The building and construction industry literature,

and particularly that relating to skills shortages, indicates that, while presenting ease of access and a great many career opportunities to youth, particularly to boys, the sector poses a specific set of employment and training factors related to and arising from characteristics of the sector itself. Clearly, structural factors impact on youth employment, and young people remain highly vulnerable in industries characterised by extremes in business cycle fluctuations. Youth career opportunity in the building and construction industry depends on forward commitment to the three-to-four-year apprenticeship places which, in turn, depend on business confidence across the sector.

Report structure

After reviewing a selection of the relevant literature and outlining the study design in chapter 2, chapter 3 outlines the school VET program, the building and construction industry's Family of Trades, undertaken in Year 11 by the study participants. Chapter 4 locates the study population in an urban context. It also outlines various background data relating to the employment circumstances of the respondents and their families, and identifies these youths' Year 11 post-school aspirations matched with their subsequent destinations at the time of this study. Chapter 5 provides the industry backdrop to the study and traces conditions in the Western Australian building and construction industry over the period June 1999–June 2002. This mirrors the period in which the first cohort of the study population was undertaking the Family of Trades Year 11 program and some began looking for post-school employment and training positions in the industry.

Chapter 6 reports on career decision-making, trade choices, the influence of the school VET program and the transition strategies employed by the two cohorts of youths in the study. The following chapter examines the young people's understandings of the building and construction industry and employment and training within it. Early career experiences and job satisfaction in the industry, including retention and attrition issues, are examined in chapter 8.

The concluding chapter summarises and explores the links between the particular industry-specific school VET program, industry and early career outcomes.

2 Literature review

Overview

While no literature reflecting the scope of the topic investigated or study design has been located, an enormous body of literature is relevant to the study and a wide selection has been consulted. However, collating this in a conventional literature review within the space available is not possible. Instead, it was decided to provide an overview, primarily in terms of methodological focus, of a selection of published comment and critique along with studies in the field. A review of four areas of relevant literature in the spheres of transition and the youth labour market is provided after a brief examination of methodological considerations raised in the VET literature. The four specific areas selected concern:

✧ the relationship between the youth labour market and the economy

✧ industry-specific literature relating to the building and construction sector entry and training

✧ school VET

✧ destination studies.

Methodological issues

While there is a great deal of literature on youth transition, employment and industry requirements, writers have commented on what are variously described as 'perceived shortcomings' and 'a research vacuum' in VET research generally in Australia (for example, Falk 1998; Looker & Dwyer 1998; Selby-Smith 1998; Ryan 1998; Hall 1999; Wooden 1999a; Stevenson 2000).

With regard to VET program research, McDonald and Hayton (1998) called for a distinction to be made between *research* as opposed to program *evaluation*. They claim problems with both types, and in their assessment, much of the research on programs is under-theorised, while much of the program evaluation is superficially based on the returns of what they term 'happy sheets'. Indeed Malley et al. (2001, p.35) observed that most of the literature on school VET could be regarded as pronouncements, polemic or policy analysis rather than reports of empirically based research.

Much of the reported research in the field appears to be under-theorised and/or heavily reliant on a quantitative supply-and-demand approach in keeping with the predominant human capital focus, despite its shortcomings (see Killeen et al. 1999). While qualitative studies, or at least mixed-method studies, are becoming more common in the Australian literature (for example, Hannan, Ferguson & Pollock 1995; Dwyer, Harwood & Tyler 2001; Figgis et al. 2001; Smith & Green 2001; Smith & Wilson 2002), most involve broad surveys and questionnaires. Little fine-grained qualitative analysis, such as that in the longitudinal ethnographic genre (for example, see Dwyer, Harwood & Tyler 2001), has been found in either the training or the industry literature.

Although their study is not longitudinal, Figgis et al. (2001) employed what could be considered to be semi-ethnographic 'conversations' in the first phase of their investigation into enterprise training cultures. Dwyer, Harwood and Tyler (2001) also attempted to link what the authors termed 'objective and subjective findings' in a study employing longitudinal data to examine longer-term career outcomes. They argued (p.11) that this approach broadens an 'understanding of "significance" beyond the purely statistical and impersonal' allowing for variations in participants' meanings and significance, and that it helps understand how respondents themselves are assessing their situations. Their fine-grained semi-ethnographic longitudinal study appears to be one of the few Australian studies which has generated a wealth of thick description of the youth early career experience. Elsewhere Looker and Dwyer (1998) argue that the large-scale database quantitative types of study and the finer grained qualitative studies are both necessary. However, these authors point out, in relation to the former, that:

> Because these large-scale databases lent themselves to determination of verifiable correlations and established trends, there was a sense in which they tended to gloss over the diversity or contradictions that existed within the data, and told us little about the underlying personal reasons, causes and choices which had helped to constitute those trends. (Looker & Dwyer 1998, p.11)

Against this backdrop of theoretical and methodological concerns about research in the field, literature which draws on qualitative studies within the four identified areas relevant to this study is now considered.

Youth labour market/economy relationship

A healthy economy is first on a list of 'key ingredients characterising effective transition systems' recognised in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) thematic study, *From initial education to working life, making transition work—education and skills* (2000). The report states that a 'well functioning economy is perhaps the most fundamental factor to shape young people's transition from initial education to work' (p.13). It claims that, where productivity is increasing, and an efficient use of capital and investment in new technologies, management and organisational strategies is occurring, then jobs requiring less skill and qualifications will be replaced by the 'more interesting and skill-enhancing work that requires higher levels of education and training' (p.14). The report also points out that 'a healthy economy and low unemployment will not by themselves ensure that all types of transition outcomes will be effective' (p.14) and cites the United States in the 1990s as an example. Furthermore, the OECD notes that, while good transition outcomes for youth are to be expected under favourable economic conditions, this may not be sustainable with an economic downturn if the labour market is not 'youth friendly' and supportive 'institutional arrangements' are not already in place. In this regard, the report stresses that:

> … effective national institutions appear better able to support the transition of teenagers during times of economic difficulty than the transition of young adults, whose chances of being unemployed are more directly a function of overall labour market conditions than are those of teenagers. (OECD 2000, p.14)

A great deal of the reported research in this sphere is concerned with the impact of structural changes in the economy on the youth labour market and the need for better preparation of youth to fit into the new economy (for example, Lundberg 1998; Wooden 1998, 1999b; Marginson 2000a, 2000b). In the context of evidence of a link between the business cycle and sharp contractions of work-based entry-level provision, Lundberg (1998, pp.234–5) was critical of the market provision and policy response to meeting the resultant skill shortages in upward phases. He called for a 'focussed policy response' and a 'fully effective implementation of measures to secure work-based entry-level training against severe contractions, as recessions "bite"'.

Much of the literature has been concerned with labour market requirements in general and youth labour market entry-level requirements, particularly in the context of youth at risk. However, there is an increasing focus on what has been termed variously as a *skill shortage/shortfall* or *skills gap* and its link to the nation's economic productivity. For example, there is a widely reported skill shortage in the building and construction industry (NCVER 1998; Building and Construction Industry Working Group 2001; NCVER 2001a, 2001d; Webster et al. 2001) and there is reported industry concern to 'ensure … a skills base capable of sustaining growth in the sector'. Industry peak bodies claim that the latter requires, among other things, finding ways to attract and retain workers in the industry (Master Builders Association 2000, p.1).

Although peak industry bodies report a concern about skill shortage, Marginson (2000b) cites findings from Tegart et al. (1998) from a survey of various sectors of Australian industry which indicate that industry is concerned more about international and national competition which is shaping Australian industry than skill shortage. Nevertheless, as Hager, Crowley and Melville (2001, p.3) concluded from their study of the Australian building and construction industry: 'easily the most discussed skill formation issue in the industry is the perceived training shortfall'.

A sizeable body of the literature is critical of what is perceived to be an ill-defined and unexamined notion of skill and the claims of shortages and deficiencies. Stasz (1997), for example, suggests that most industry calls to meet the skill shortage presume that employers' perceptions are accurate. Drawing on the United States context, Stasz suggests that this may not be the case. She argues that the public discourse in this regard is very one-sided, with blame for the shortage being levelled at the individual or the school, when in reality, it is employers who often lack effective hiring strategies. White (1990, p.42) similarly notes that, while the notion of 'skill' in this context came to the fore in Australia following the 1987 Budget papers, it has never been adequately defined.

According to Hyland and Johnson (cited in Marginson 2000a, p.40) there are in fact no general skills, and they suggest, as White (1990) implies, that the rhetoric is merely a policy slogan. Wyn and White (2000, p.172) similarly interrogate the notion of skill in the sense it is being employed in public policy rhetoric. They observed that it is being redefined in abstract terms to refer to behaviours required to *fit* the so-called new workplace. They suggest that the discourse concerning a skill shortage/gap relates more to control than capacity. Lewis et al. (1998, p.33) similarly concluded that it was more to do with class, race and ethnicity, since the notion of skill shortage is frequently aligned with a consideration of groups, particularly youth, considered to be at greatest economic and employment risk.

The literature is inconclusive regarding the nature of the relationship between skill supply and economic productivity. However, changes to the Australian economy, and in particular, to manufacturing and primary industry, arguably impact on youth employment. Wooden (1999a, pp.1, 17) and others (for example, White 1990, p.4; Long, Carpenter & Hayden 1999, p.15) have argued that youth employment is clearly related to, and highly sensitive to, levels of economic activity, with a demand decline greater than other sectors of the labour force.

Building and construction sector literature overview

The state of the Australian building and construction industry particularly serves as an economic activity litmus test and these links have been documented extensively both by the industry itself (for example, BISShrapnel, the Master Builders' Association and the Housing Industry Association) and, using data variously gathered by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. There is also a wide discussion in the daily media of issues relating to building and construction industry activity. As would be expected, most of the published literature either reports on, or is derived from, the Australian Bureau of Statistics data. However, there is a body of qualitative data being

reported on a wide range of facets of the industry or embedded in surveys undertaken across sectors. Much of this has implications for the recruitment and on-the-job training of youth.

Love, Mandel and Li (1999) employed what they identified as an 'inductive and deductive approach' with a case study to examine problems associated with quality certification in the Australian construction industry. The study concluded that the industry was having difficulty becoming 'quality focused', resulting in a preponderance of sub-standard products and services which inevitably require re-work. The authors estimate that re-work costs as high as 12.4% are built into total project budgets. Quality assurance has become mandatory for organisations wishing to do business with government agencies and major private companies in Australia. Love and Li (2000) observed that most construction organisations have opted to undertake the motions of quality assurance certification for marketing purposes but there has been neither a significant change in practices nor a sustainable continuous quality improvement.

Hager, Crowley and Melville (2001) similarly found that reform of the building and construction industry has been patchy and difficult to implement across the sector due to its fragmentation. Their study drew on issues and themes generated through an industry forum and, in a later phase, interviews with middle and senior management in the building and construction industry. With regard to training and skilling within the sector, these authors observed that the industry has historically defined skills narrowly and mechanistically, and employers have traditionally seen the acquisition of industry-related skills as their responsibility to be acquired through on-site experience. Hager, Crowley and Melville (2001) also argue that increasing fragmentation has had an impact on training, and that it is now difficult for one employer to provide trainees with the required range of employment and training-related experiences.

The ministerial report, *Building brighter futures* (2001), prepared by the Building and Construction Industry Working Group, employed a mixed methodology, involving secondary statistical data from various agencies, surveys of perceptions and focus groups with employers and with apprentices. The group identified (p.3) business uncertainty and the small size of many businesses in the industry as reasons for many firms not taking on trainees, and it highlighted what it described as 'regular cycles of being too busy to afford to train and not being busy enough to afford to train' young workers.

As indicated above, a great deal of information on the building and construction industry is regularly reported in the press, and without doubt, informs business confidence at a local level. In one of the few ethnographic studies of the building and construction trades, Moore observed that bricklaying:

> … subbies pay close attention to all public announcements about trends in the building industry because such announcements help [them] understand the current amount of 'work around' and to anticipate the immediate future of building work.   (Moore 1991, p.82)

He went on to say that, in particular, this helps them prepare their quotes. With implications for the notion of business confidence in the industry, an important source of this current information according to Moore (1991, p.132) is the widely read local morning newspaper. This, he says, is a source of current industry-related information which is far more trusted than that from other sources which are often regarded with suspicion and seen to be in competition (p.158). With regard to recruitment among bricklaying subcontractors, Moore provides a fine-grained analysis of the way in which subcontractors rely substantially on personal networks to recruit workers. This presumably makes it more difficult for the young and inexperienced to enter unless they have personal contacts in the existing industry networks.

Another qualitative study which surveyed workplace culture also has implications for youth early career experiences in the industry. Smithers and Walker (2000) examined worker motivation on a Melbourne construction site. They concluded that long hours, workplace 'chaos', non-

recognition by management and aggressive management styles were significantly linked to workplace motivation.

In terms of youth recruitment to the industry, various industry-related reports (such as House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 1997; Building and Construction Industry Working Group 2001; Housing Industry Association 2002) identified a series of concerns relating to youth recruitment, employment and retention. Central to the issues these reports identify is the cyclical nature of the industry itself and the uncertainty this generates, and the reported skills shortage in the industry (for example, Building and Construction Industry Working Group 2001, p.21). These reports acknowledge that structural changes to the industry (that is, increasing subcontracting and privatisation of government activities) work against youth recruitment and training.

As indicated above however, the prevailing industry attitude is that youth training costs the industry substantially and produces a negative cash flow. Furthermore, part of this high cost is attributable to youth attrition. In addition, there is a limited pool of interested youth, some of whom have unrealistic expectations. The industry also believes that there is difficulty recruiting youth with adequate skills and attributes and/or levels of education, and that a wide perception of low occupational status impacts on recruitment and retention (for example, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 1997; Building and Construction Industry Working Group 2001). The Standing Committee report, *Youth employment: A working solution* (1997, p.17), noted that it had received much anecdotal evidence claiming that young people did not wish to work and/or were not interested in 'entry-level positions', and once in the trades generally lacked dedication and were dissatisfied. However, the report noted (p.17) that this perception was contradicted by the inquiry's own surveys of youth. The industry voice is similarly critical of the VET system and has recommended better recruiting at the school level, even at the primary school level, according to building contractors surveyed for *Building brighter futures* (Building and Construction Industry Working Group 2001, p.94).

The Western Australian Building and Construction Industry Training Board also identified perceptions of the industry by school-aged youth and their parents as one of the factors relating to industry recruitment, a situation investigated in a commissioned evaluation of the Family of Trades building and construction industry school VET program in 2000 (Taylor & Koczberski 2001b). Taylor and Koczberski (2001b, p.36) found that the majority of youth who were aspiring to work in the industry were attracted by a general interest in the industry or a specific trade and the 'physical nature of the work environment', particularly the opportunity to work outside. Few downsides to working in the industry were identified by these youths. However, among those mentioned were the fear of injury and the general physical demands of many trades. Safety concerns were also mentioned by several of the young people's parents interviewed for this study; however, three-quarters of the parents interviewed claimed that they had no reservations about their sons or daughters entering the building and construction industry on leaving school (2001b, p.50).

Central to the impetus for much of the recent training reform is industry's reported view that VET is poorly adapted to the youth labour market. Industry has been highly critical of both the technical and further education (TAFE) sector and schools, arguing that conventional approaches to training employees not only ignore industries' needs, but is out-of-date, inflexible, unreasonably confined to a focus on trade training, and has a 'preoccupation' with traditional trade boundaries (for example, see discussions in White 1990; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 1997; Wooden 1999a, p.1). This deficiency, it is argued, is a major contribution to youth unemployment (see review in Wooden 1999a, p.20) and, in particular, to the high youth attrition rates in training programs (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training 1997; Robinson 1998; Grey et al. 1999; Dumbrell 2000; Ray et al. 2000).

Industry has been forthright in demanding a forging of closer links between 'skills supply and demand' (Dumbrell 2000, p.22) and seeking a more active role in the preparation of young workers (White 1990, p.55). These criticisms from peak bodies such as the Australian Business Council, Confederation of Australian Industry and the Australian Council of Trade Unions, among others, have influenced the direction of major changes made to the profile of employment and training in Australia since the mid-1980s.

While Buchanan and Sullivan (1996) claim that much has been accomplished, particularly in terms of reform of the New South Wales construction industry, they reported that it was an industry forum's view that training reforms are being hampered by the widespread view of training as a separate and discrete 'realm of activity' (1996, p.2). These authors also noted (p.14) that the number of firms and employees involved is 'modest' and 'ad hoc', limited by the view that training is a cost to be minimised and often tied to industry improvements in equity and efficiency. They caution that:

> … a major challenge in the current situation will be to ensure that the potential for change is realised on the job. Codes of practice, best practice accreditation schemes and skills assessment systems will count for little unless they affect the operation of small businesses so prevalent in this industry. (Buchanan & Sullivan 1996, p.5)

The construction industry stands out from the national average with 81% of construction industry employers nationally indicating that they were satisfied to very satisfied with the VET system (NCVER 1999, p.6). However, across the board, it appears that industry does not strongly support the VET system as a means of addressing skills shortage. For example, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) survey of employers' views on VET (NCVER 1999, p.3) reported that more than half of the employers surveyed did not think it was cost-effective to recruit trained people rather than train on the job; up to three-quarters believed that skills acquired on the job were more useful than those obtained through formal education; and less than half of those employers without VET graduates believed that the VET system was providing graduates with skills appropriate to employers' needs. However, the figures for Western Australia (NCVER 1999, p.4) show a slightly different picture, with 82% of employers indicating that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the VET system; 70% either strongly agreeing or agreeing that the system was providing them with workers with the skills they required; and 74% agreeing that training pays for itself through increased productivity.

School VET issues arising from the literature

While the literature specifically on VET programs is prolific, there is relatively little on school VET programs. What there is has tended to be a documenting of case studies of particular program models (for example, ed. Golding 1995; Spark 1999). The comprehensive survey and critique undertaken by Malley et al. (2001) is an exception. Notwithstanding the Australian Council for Educational Research Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth (LSAY) tracking Year 10 cohorts from the late 1980s and early 1990s for up to seven years after leaving school (for example, Lamb & McKenzie 2001), there is widespread comment on the dearth of research considering the longer-term outcomes of school VET. Dumbrell (2000, pp.38–9), reviewing the literature on school VET, identified three major, but related deficiencies relating to research in this area:

✧ a lack of clarity of the purposes of school VET

✧ a lack of development of outcome measures

✧ the absence of a system for tracking school VET students to their labour market destinations.

In a recent survey and critique of VET in Australian schools, Malley et al. (2001) drew on interviews with policy-makers, reviews of policy documents, observations of VET programs and

a web-based chat forum. These authors concluded that, despite the establishment of a national agenda and a linking to nationally recognised qualification and skill frameworks, school VET suffered a series of 'weaknesses'. Among these were problems resulting from the complexity generated by the multiple objectives imposed by the various stakeholders (for example, different levels of government and various agencies), inappropriate models adopted at the school level and a 'problematic application of quality and benchmarking concepts' (p.7).

The literature both in Australia and elsewhere reports neither immediate nor longer-term outcomes of school VET with any certainty. While not referring specifically to school VET, Wooden (1999a) identifies 'low returns' on VET in terms of future earnings and employability and Webster et al. (2001) suggested that training might not impact on career prospects or necessarily improve productivity. In the United States, Lewis et al. (1998, p.287) also cite findings that vocational education students do no better in the labour market than those who have not undertaken school VET except when the labour market outcome is directly related to the VET training. Furthermore, they note that only about half of the school VET students manage to find employment in the areas of their training. However, they concluded that school VET could be beneficial when combined with academic work. Similarly, the Logitudinal Study of Australian Youth project (Ball & Lamb 1999) found that not all students moving into apprenticeships had undertaken school VET programs, and nor did all those who had studied relevant VET subjects at school move into post-school apprenticeships (see also Lamb, Long & Malley 1998). While Wooden (1999a) notes the lack of observable returns from school VET, he concluded (p.19) that, despite little evidence and studies of patchy quality, measurable benefits of labour market outcomes as a result of VET are suggested.

Various difficulties relating to the study of VET in schools and measurement of outcomes have been reported in the literature. One relates to the difficulty of obtaining and the lack of comparability of school data (for example, see comment in South East Metropolitan Area Consultative Committee 1999; Smith & Green 2001). Others concern the lack of robustness of many school VET programs and their short life span (Malley et al. 2001), the absence of an established system to track ex-school students over any length of time (Dumbrell 2000, p.38), the lack of usefulness of the National Schools Statistics Collection (NSSC) data (Teese & Watson 2001), and the difficulty in tracking early school exits (Dwyer 1996, p.9). A further issue relates to the need for greater sensitivity to the slightly more easily obtainable gross output measures (for example, Teese 2000; Marginson 2000b, p.76). While the Australian Council for Educational Research's Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth project has generated a great deal of gross statistical data and some qualitative assessments over an extended period of time, no published fine-grained Australian studies relating to school VET longer term outcomes have been located.

The industry has repeatedly called for stronger links with the school system and for greater articulation between the industry and the VET system in particular. School student workplace experience is one of the major ways this is being effected—either through basic short-term work experience, structured work experience or school-industry placements (Fullarton 1999, p.3). Of relevance to this study, however, is Fullarton's (1999, p.17) finding that only 3% of her sample undertook work experience in school–industry placements in building and construction. Furthermore, one of the weaknesses of the Australian school VET system identified by Malley et al. (2001, p.8) was a lack of employer participation in the system, and the conclusion that industry participation depended on local factors rather than those at a system level (p.43).

Overwhelmingly, studies report school students viewing the work experience component of school vocational studies favourably (for example, Pascoe 1996; Misko 1998; Anderson 2000; Lamb & McKenzie 2001). Misko conducted a large mail-out questionnaire and triangulated the perceptions of students (n=2285), school coordinators (n=170) and workplace supervisors (n=292). In terms of school VET outcomes, Misko (1998, p.93) found that very few of her respondents reported offers of full-time work, apprenticeships or traineeships as a direct result of work experience. However, 10% did report being offered part-time work and 20% were

offered further work experience. Nevertheless, she concluded that employers were using work experience as a recruitment avenue and that they particularly looked for personal attributes rather than hard skill mastery as the favoured 'essential skills' they required when employing youth.

In terms of school students' expectations of work experience, Misko (1998) and others (for example, Fullarton 1999, p.10) found that students reported positively that their various expectations were met. These were:

✧ gaining an understanding of and experience in a work environment

✧ finding out about occupational choices

✧ confirming occupational aspirations

✧ finding out about requisite skills for an occupation

✧ gaining experience in a workplace

✧ gaining a better understanding of their own potential

✧ achieving increased confidence in their ability.

Petherbridge (1997) in a United Kingdom study (n=24) of pre- and post-short-term work experience interviews, observations in the workplace and structured journals analysis, concluded that students and employers interpreted the experience differently. She found that the 'perceived' needs of employers were rarely satisfied and that there was limited transfer back of the learning afterwards. Similarly, in an Australian study, Smith and Wilson (2002), using students' self-reports, did not find that a substantial transfer back from work experience was reported.

In conclusion, few published studies have been found that use the youth voice in an attempt to understand how young people make sense of and negotiate the workplace experience, either as school students or as early career young workers. In the context of the building and construction industry, the literature raises a series of issues of relevance to this project which are concerned with recruitment and training and include perceptions of status and skill shortage. Importantly for the study reported here, within the industry literature (for example, Building and Construction Industry Working Group 2001) and its submissions to inquiries such as the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training (1997), there has been much discussion regarding the debilitating cost of training young people, the lack of government training incentives and the administrative burden of training on the job in small businesses and in a climate of business uncertainty. There has also been widespread comment regarding a youth disinterest in the trades and the low calibre of recruits to the industry. By contrast, much of the reported research on various aspects of the sector suggest that the industry is not without its own problems.

3 Family of Trades school VET program

Overview

This chapter describes the building and construction industry's Family of Trades Year 11 school VET program. It considers the program's aims and basic structure and briefly outlines the findings of the two program evaluations undertaken in consecutive years.

Program aims and structure

The Family of Trades VET in Schools building and construction industry program was a cross-sectoral vocational education and training project funded in 1999 by the South East Metropolitan Area Consultative Committee, and in 2000 and 2001, by the Building and Construction Industry Training Board. It involved industry, the South East Metropolitan College of TAFE and initially, five local government and non-government secondary schools in the south-east metropolitan corridor of Perth. A further two schools were added in 2001. The program targeted Year 11 students who were in general post-compulsory education VET streams, and/or a general building and construction school VET stream, and/or those who had shown some interest in the field.

During semester 1, students were provided with instruction in four building and construction-related trade-accredited modules of training at the local TAFE college. In 1999 these were bricklaying, carpentry, electrical, and painting and decorating. In 2000 electrical was replaced with solid plastering, and subsequently in 2001, a fifth trade, tiling, was added.

TAFE instruction (theory and practicum) in the trades was presented in four rotating blocks, each consisting of one day a week for five weeks. In semester 2, students undertook 120 hours of structured workplace learning (SWL) in one of the trades. Assessment provided industry-specific and Western Australian Curriculum Council competency outcomes. Combined, the TAFE instruction and structured workplace learning articulated with the Certificate I in General Construction.

Specifically, the Family of Trades VET program aimed to provide Year 11 students with useful experience and contacts in the building and construction industry and to recruit workers to the sector. It also sought to enable students to make informed choices of desired trades and fast-forward them into apprenticeships and thus, both increase these youths' employability and reduce attrition rates in trade training and apprenticeships.

Program evaluations (1999 and 2000)

In 1999 the Centre for Inclusive Education in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Western Australia was commissioned by the South East Metropolitan Area Consultative Committee (Koczberski & Taylor 1999; Taylor & Koczberski 2001a) and again in 2000 by the Building and Construction Industry Training Board (Taylor & Koczberski 2001b) to

evaluate the 2000 Family of Trades program. Both evaluation projects were fundamentally qualitative studies. They employed whole-group questionnaire-surveys and semi-structured, in-depth face-to-face and telephone interviews over the course of the program with key stakeholder groups (parents, students, VET coordinators and TAFE lecturers and work experience employers).

The 1999 evaluation aimed to assess the training approach and the reaction to the Family of Trades by young people, schools, employers and other stakeholders in the program with regard to: its management, the efficacy of the training methodology and curriculum, the degree to which the program met VET guidelines set down by the Western Australian Education Department, and the program outcomes. The report (Koczberski & Taylor 1999) found that the program was highly successful, particularly in relation to its management and to student outcomes. While 40% of the Year 11 students at the end of the program intended to return to school to complete Year 12, almost half (49.2%) the 65 students initially enrolled in the 1999 program had, by November of that year moved, or had arranged to move, into employment and/or training. Of the early 1999 exits from the program, 18.5% exited to enrol in pre-apprenticeships and 12.3% exited to jobs and/or apprenticeships. That is, 80% of the 25 early exits proceeded to employment and/or training.

The report concluded that:

> The program was beneficial in preparing students for the transition from school to employment/vocational education. By offering thematically connected training and work experience, the program helped students gain a better understanding of the trades and working environment, and a greater knowledge of and opportunity for further vocational training. Students also acquired transferable skills and confidence in their capabilities.
>
> (Koczberski & Taylor 1999, p.iii)

In 2000, in keeping with the industry funding agency's interests, particularly in training and industry retention, the evaluation focused more on evaluating the degree to which the program was able to meet industry needs. The 2000 evaluation concluded that the Family of Trades VET program was:

> … one of the very few models meeting the criteria identified for VET in Schools and structurally demonstrating many of the indicators of good practice. It is a cluster arrangement, cross-sectoral and a rare example in its region of an industry-specific program offering nationally recognised accreditation. The program model offers instruction in trades relevant to the industry. This instruction builds on student interest and prior knowledge and skills and the TAFE instruction is integrally linked to the Structured Workplace Learning component. (Taylor & Koczberski 2001b, p.111)

In 2000 a follow-up study funded by the Western Australian Department of Training and Employment (WADOTE) examined the career decision-making and work readiness of the 1999 cohort. Relevant data gathered during both the program evaluations and the follow-up study have been extended for this project.

Programs such as the Family of Trades operate within the context of a contracting youth employment market and an increasingly credentialed society. Of more immediate impact on the fortunes of the cohorts of youth in this study is the program's orientation toward a volatile industry renowned for its cyclical fluctuations.

4 Study population and context

Overview

This chapter outlines the urban context of the study population and provides an overview of family employment and the young people's own experience of the part-time/casual workforce. The basis for selection of and motivation for entering Family of Trades are identified. In addition, the career aspirations the youths held as Year 11 students on entering the Family of Trades and captured by the longitudinal data are presented against their immediate post-school destinations. The chapter concludes with an overview of the destinations of the study population at the commencement of the study.

In summary, the study population was drawn from a metropolitan region characterised generally by low income and low levels of qualification and not without social problems. However, the young people in this study were likely to come from backgrounds in which there was parental employment, and where 70% of the young people themselves held part-time/casual jobs while at school.

At the beginning of Year 11 (1999 or 2000) under half of the 1999 cohort who undertook the Family of Trades building and construction school VET program and under one-third of the 2000 Year 11 cohort aspired to work in the industry. Subsequently however, almost three-quarters of the study population entered the building and construction industry, or were in training in building and construction-related trades.

As school students, the majority of young people aspired to a post-school apprenticeship as their first choice, and generally those who left school before Year 12 and entered building and construction achieved this at a better rate than the Year 12 completers, with significant differences between the school completers and early exits in the 1999 cohort. However, within six months of leaving school, either at the completion of Year 12 or before, 94% of the youths had found employment and/or training positions and 37% of these were in apprenticeships.

For both cohorts, the reasons for some opting to complete secondary school (Year 12) rather than seek employment and/or training immediately after the Year 11 Family of Trades program were varied (Taylor 2001). However, for a significant percentage in both groups, it was a default position, in that many of the Year 12 completers had not decided on their career and the final year of school was being regarded as providing time to make a decision. For approximately two in each cohort, the decision involved a move away from the trades and a change in subjects, and achieving better grades to enable entry into non-trade-oriented post-secondary courses of study. Most of the school completers considered that Year 12 provided a good qualification and that it would be considered a competitive edge with employers, including those in the building and construction industry.

Study context

The young people who undertook the Family of Trades program in 1999 and 2000 were drawn from a cluster of suburbs designated the south-east metropolitan region of Perth. The region is a mix of old and new suburbs and there is a wide range of pockets of differing population densities, age and ethnicity. While there are several pockets of high income, generally the south-east metropolitan region is a low-income area with only 0–5% of families with an annual income over $40 000. Sections of the region have been undergoing a program of urban renewal, and adjacent new suburbs are being developed for housing and other projects (for example, a prison complex, relocated metropolitan markets). Nevertheless, despite the pockets of low income, the region is not a high public rental housing area.

Throughout most of the region, under 14% of the population hold tertiary qualifications, 14–20% hold trade qualifications with some pockets of high (20–24%) and some with very low (0–14%) trade qualification concentrations. Medium-to-high male unemployment is found across the area, again with some pockets of very high (30–61%) male unemployment. In 2000, it was estimated that this education cluster would have the third highest proportion of 'students-at-educational-risk' (Western Australia Education Department 1999, p.51). In terms of anti-social behaviour, at the time of this study the region contained the suburb with the highest rate of burglary in the state, and in 2001 it was targeted for special police attention.

Family employment profile

Notwithstanding the region's relatively high rate of male unemployment of up to 61%, the youths in this study reported that they came from families in which both parents were likely to be in employment. Among the 1999 cohort it was more likely that mothers were in paid work. In the 2000 sample however, more of the fathers (95.3%) were employed. Among the fathers there were postal workers, policemen, electricians, earthmoving contractors, factory workers, and contractors. Mothers' jobs tended to fall more into the retail, service and clerical categories (for example, receptionist, secretary, welfare worker, waitress, hairdresser).

Youth casual/part-time employment history

The young people constituting the two cohorts investigated here came not only from backgrounds where parents were employed, but approximately 70% of the youths while at school were already in the part-time/casual workforce. However, over 30% (34.5%) of the early school leavers in the study (that is, those exiting school prior to Year 12 completion) were moving for the first time into paid employment (see table 5, appendix 1).

The casual jobs held by these youths encompassed the casual youth work common to the age group; for example, kitchen hands in places such as McDonalds and Sizzlers, and shelf stackers and trolley boys in supermarkets. They also included paper rounds, a petrol pump attendant, a garden nursery hand, a butcher's boy and a car detailer.

Employment and training aspirations and destinations

Students entered the building and construction industry Family of Trades program in Year 11 for a variety of reasons, and not all students who undertook the program had aspirations to work in the building industry. While an expressed student interest in the industry's trades was the implied bottom line for entry to the program, some students were selected by their teachers because it

was considered that they might become interested in these trades or benefit from the program generally.

According to respondents interviewed in 2000 (Taylor & Koczberski 2001b, pp.22–3), the two most important reasons for enrolling in the program were interest in obtaining an apprenticeship (90%) and help in deciding what career field to pursue (84%). An interest in the building and construction industry was the program's main attraction for only 11% of the 1999 entering group; however, 48.2% of students enrolled in the 2000 program stated that they intended to seek work in the building and construction industry. Some of the study population entered the Year 11 program with goals already clarified and/or strong interest in unrelated areas such as mechanics and panel-beating; graphic arts was a career interest for a couple of students in each cohort.

In terms of their general post-school aspirations, only one youth indicated that he did not wish to enter employment and/or training immediately on leaving school. For the overwhelming majority, to find themselves unemployed after leaving school and 'sitting around home doing nothing' was tantamount to becoming 'a loser', and identified as the worst thing that could happen to them (Koczberski & Taylor 1999; Taylor & Koczberski 2001b; Taylor 2001). While at school, all were relatively confident that they 'would find something'; namely, that a post-school employment and/or training position would become available, and most were confident that it would be in the field of their choice or interest.

When the study population for this project was located in August 2001, 73% had left school, and 21% (the 1999 early exits) had been out of school for as long as one-and-a-half-to-two years. Over all groups, five students (6%) remained unemployed over the first six months post-school, while another 10% were in part-time/casual jobs for the time period. Almost 20% were in jobs without a training component. The majority however, in the first six months after leaving school were either in apprenticeships (37%) or pre-apprenticeships (23%) as shown in table 1. The employment, training and educational breakdown of each group in both cohorts making up the study population in the first six months after leaving school is shown in table 6 in appendix 1.

Table 1: **Comparison of post-school apprentice and pre-apprenticeship places taken up within six months of leaving school (summary)**

Post-school destinations (six months)	Pre-apprentices	Apprentices	Total
	% of group	% of group	*n*
A 1999 cohort early school exits (2000) *n=29*[1]	10.3	72.4	**24**
B 1999 cohort Year 12 completers (2001) *n=18*	38.9	5.5	**8**
C 2000 cohort early school exits (2001) *n=26*	30.8	23.1	**14**
D 2000 cohort Year 12 completers (2002) *n=14*	14.3	21.4[2]	**6**

Notes: [1] Data collected for previous project.
[2] One retail trainee not included here.

There were significant ex-school training-related destination and pathway differences between the school completers and the early exits in the 1999 cohort, both across the cohort and among those who entered building and construction (summarised in table 2).

Table 2: Comparison of post-school apprentice and pre-apprenticeship places in building and construction taken up within six months of leaving school

Post-school destinations (six months)	Pre-apprentices	Apprentices	Total
	% of group	% of group	*n*
A 1999 cohort early school exits (2000) *n=29*[1]	7.4	59.3	**18**
B 1999 cohort Year 12 completers (2001) *n=18*	37.5	6.3	**7**
C 2000 cohort early school exits (2001) *n=26*	24.0	24.0	**12**
D 2000 cohort Year 12 completers (2002) *n=14*	7.1	21.4	**4**

Note: [1] Data collected for previous project.

Aspiration data from previous projects indicated that, for many in pre-apprenticeships in the first six months after leaving school, first preference was for an apprenticeship. It appears that 1999 early school exits obtained apprenticeship places at a much higher rate than the school completers, and among the 2000 cohort, at a slightly higher rate. However, school completion per se may not be the critical factor, as this might reflect other differences between the school completers and early exits in each cohort. This is discussed in more detail below.

Moreover, the three young people in the 1999 cohort who aspired to an apprenticeship and did not find one within six months of leaving school, had still had not acquired one up to two years after leaving school. One of these remained working in the same job he acquired on leaving school in the field of his choice (carpentry) as a trade assistant. The other two apprentice aspirants were making do with part-time or casual work in unrelated fields but they reported that they were still watching for a possible apprenticeship place.

In relation to the trades entered by the early school exits who undertook the Family of Trades program in both 1999 and 2000, approximately 68% of these were in building and construction-related employment and/or training (table 7, appendix 1) by the end of the study. A total of 31 (72.1%) of the 1999 cohort ended up in trades and jobs associated with the building and construction industry. Compared with the early exits, among those who completed Year 12 after the Year 11 Family of Trades program, fewer to date had entered the industry (for example, 69% of the 1999 school completers).

The groups with the highest proportion entering the industry via training (as opposed to entering via full-time or casual/part-time employment without a training component) were the early school exits. Of the 1999 and 2000 cohorts in the industry, 78% and 72% of the early school exits respectively were in apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships or other full-time study in building and construction-related trades within the first six months of leaving school. This compares with 69% and 64% respectively of the Year 12 completers.

There is some evidence to suggest that the youths in this study perceived it to be easier to enter the industry, and particularly to obtain apprenticeships, immediately after the school VET program. As one respondent said, at the time they were 'more active to get into it … hyped-up' in building and construction. At that point they could readily draw on their TAFE and work experience contacts. Indeed, for approximately 30%, apprenticeship opportunities arose out of their Family of Trades TAFE component or work experience.

However, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions on this link because a form of self-selection appears to have been in operation. Some Year 12 completers believed that they would ultimately have a competitive advantage with high school graduation and were prepared to forego specific apprenticeship opportunities accruing directly from the Family of Trades program in order to complete Year 12. More returned to Year 12 because they had not yet made up their minds about the post-school employment and training pathway they would take or in what field. One or two in each cohort explicitly stated that they returned to school for Year 12 because their parents had insisted.

Thus, while the destinations of the early exits appear to be more explicit outcomes of the Family of Trades program, it is likely that they were the youths who were surer about their trade choices and post-school aspirations. More of the Year 12 completers were unsure about future options and many were procrastinating, not just at the end of Year 11 after Family of Trades, but a few still remained undecided about careers at the end of Year 12. What the program did for some of these young people was assist them to narrow the field by helping them decide what occupations they did not want to pursue.

Some in each cohort used the summer break between Years 11 and 12 to look for employment and training opportunities and returned to school if they were unsuccessful:

> Did you try for work after the Family of Trades in Year 11?
> … but I just couldn't find anything … I applied at the place where I did work experience at but they, didn't have enough business to take on an [electrical] apprentice.

And others who tried unsuccessfully to find employment in the break between Year 11 and Year 12 reported:

> ✧ I went to an agency, rang up and did an aptitude test.
>
> ✧ I left school but [there was] nothing around so returned [to school].
>
> ✧ I looked around, [there were] a few opportunities but [I] couldn't see myself doing it for long.

Among the Year 12 completers, 6% of the 1999 cohort and 27% of the 2000 cohort said they had looked for work and preferably an apprenticeship place at the end of Year 11. Students such as these particularly kept watch during Year 12 for opportunities and several left during the school year to move into pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships. Over 37% of the 1999 Year 12s and 18% of the 2000 cohort said that they had attempted to obtain an employment place during the final year of secondary school.

Mapping post-school aspiration

Compared with their stated aspirations at the commencement of Year 11, by the end of the program, both the 1999 and the 2000 cohorts moved towards deciding to complete Year 12 and toward the building and construction industry as a post-school destination—that is, these two trends were discernible in the data. Tables 8–10 in appendix 1 show destinations plotted against respondents' stated aspirations and intentions at the commencement of Year 11. While there was a doubling of those of the 1999 cohort and a 43% increase in the 2000 cohort who ended up in employment without a training component, this figure needs to be viewed with caution as those in jobs without a training component in all but two cases were there by default. That is, as noted above, most at the time of the data collection were still searching for an apprenticeship while employed in a job without a training component, and in the case of the Year 12 completers, the data were collected very soon after they had left school.

Nevertheless, almost twice as many youths in both cohorts ended up in the building and construction industry 12 to 18 months after leaving school compared with the percentage who had said at the outset of Year 11 and on entering the Family of Trades that they aspired at that time to enter the sector (see table 8, appendix 1). In the 1999 cohort there was a similar shift toward apprenticeships. Almost three times the number of 1999 Year 11 aspirants to an apprenticeship were in an apprenticeship within 12 to 18 months after leaving school. However, this was not the case with the 2000 cohort which showed a slight drop, in that fewer (25%) ended up in apprenticeships than the 30% aspiring in Year 11 to an apprenticeship.

For most of those about to leave school at the end of either Years 11 or 12, their first preference was to obtain an apprenticeship because they would be earning while they were training. In

stating their aspirations at the beginning of the Family of Trades program, few identified a pre-apprenticeship as a first choice, despite the fact that a pre-apprenticeship offers credit toward an apprenticeship, a fact of which many may not have been aware at the time. For example, there is some evidence from the early interview data at the beginning of the Family of Trades program (1999) that few knew about pre-apprenticeships and, of those who had a vague idea, many seemed to be avoiding consideration of a pre-apprenticeship viewing it as 'just more school'. By the same token, as shown in tables 9 and 10 in appendix 1, some of those indicating that their post-school aspiration was TAFE were probably referring to a pre-apprenticeship. By the end of Year 11 all of the Family of Trades students had reported a greater familiarity with training options, the TAFE system and the various trades, and were clearly considering a greater than anticipated range of post-school trade-oriented vocational training options, such as the apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship.

Of those who ended up in building and construction-related fields, not all held aspirations in that direction at the beginning of Year 11 (tables 9 and 10 in appendix 1). For example, of those in building and construction at the conclusion of this study, only 52% and 50% of the early exits in the 1999 and 2000 cohorts respectively had said at the beginning of Year 11 that they wished to enter the industry. It is also clear that the 1999 early exits were much more successful in achieving their aspirations, with 71% acquiring an apprenticeship place compared with 8.3% of the Year 12 completers in the cohort and one-third of the 2000 cohort (both groups).

Destination overview at study commencement

At the commencement of this study in June 2001, all of the 1999 cohort had left school and all but those of the 2000 cohort who had elected to complete the final year of secondary school, Year 12, were either in, or looking for, employment and/or training places.

5 Industry backdrop

Overview

This chapter considers the profile of the building and construction industry over the study period. It begins by briefly describing the structure of the industry and identifying characteristics impacting on young aspirants and recruits. Specific issues relating to recruitment and training, including the industry's concern with skill formation, are considered. Key business activity indicators over the study period are presented and the notion of business confidence and the role of the press in relation to the building and construction industry are considered.

The building and construction industry is here loosely defined to include any trades associated with construction projects, residential and non-residential building and renovation, maintenance and fitting-out (Australian Standard Classification of Occupations [ASCO] code 44). It includes three broad sectors, residential and non-residential building, and large civil engineering, and encompasses a great many trades and occupations. In addition to the central trades such as bricklaying, carpentry and joinery, and painting and decorating, occupations such as air-conditioning and fire alarm installation and servicing, and steel furniture-making and other occupations considered by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to be employing 'final finishes construction tradespersons' (NCVER 2001c) are included in this study under the umbrella of building and construction-related trades and occupations.

Two-thirds of the respondents in this study were entering and more were aspiring to enter a large and significant sector of the Australian economy encompassing a great many occupations, not all of which have trade recognition. Apprenticeships remain the industry's major recruitment avenue; however, the industry's ageing workforce is considered to be an issue. The industry has also expressed concern over the quality of new recruits and what it considers to be a lack of youth interest in its trades.

The cyclical nature of the industry is evident in both the Australian and Western Australian data over the study period (1999–2002) for building work undertaken and approved, housing finance commitments, interest rate fluctuations and job vacancy rates for Western Australia in particular. The first group to leave school did so at a time when conditions in the industry were favourable. However, the 1999 cohort who remained at school to complete Year 12 along with the subsequent cohort of early school exits attempted to enter the industry at a time of relative difficulty, with a downturn in building activity and building approvals reported. The final group to make the transition, those of the 2000 cohort who completed Year 12, entered at a time when the industry was beginning to experience more favourable conditions.

It is suggested here that the notion of business confidence, influenced as much by media speculation as by raw industry statistical data, is likely to impact on industry decision-making in relation to a forward commitment to recruiting workers, and particularly a forward commitment to training places.

Building and construction industry profile

Building and construction forms a substantial but highly diverse and fragmented sector within the Australian economy. It accounts for 7–10% of Australia's gross domestic product (Master Builders' Association 2000; Hager, Crowley & Melville 2001) employing 3.2% of the nation's workforce. It is by far the highest employer of tradespeople (NCVER 2001c, p.1), with 60% of the sector's employees being tradespeople and workers in jobs classified as trades, compared with only 13% of trade-associated employees in the total labour force (NCVER 2001b, 2001c). The sector's workforce is highly gendered (NCVER 1998, p.11) and young, with a majority of workers under 24 years of age (NCVER 2001c).

Recent changes to the industry have resulted in greater fragmentation, as it has become increasingly characterised by small contractors and subcontracting, making industry reform difficult to implement across the sector (Hager, Crowley & Melville 2001). Furthermore, Hager, Crowley and Melville argue, in the context of training and skilling within the sector, that the industry's employers have historically seen skilling as their responsibility to be undertaken on the job. However, there is acknowledgement that, with fragmentation and specialisation, it is increasingly difficult for an employer to provide trainees with the necessary breadth of skills for trade training.

The wide definition employed here recognises the potential for workers to move within the industry in what can be considered to be the somewhat peripheral trades and occupations. Steel furniture-making, for example, uses cabinet-making skills; fire alarm fitting and servicing uses electrical skills and so on. It also accounts for the particular employment profile of the building and construction industry which differs from that in other sectors in the high percentage of tradespersons involved in the sector. Overall, the three largest trades in terms of construction trade employment are carpentry and joinery (31.3%), plumbing (19.3%) and painting and decorating (14.3%) (NCVER 2001c).

Employment and training profile

While a high number of workers in the industry are in training (NCVER 2000a, p.2), there is a reported low level of qualifications across the sector (NCVER 2000a, p.13, 2001a, p.1) and the sector spends comparatively less than other sectors on training. Of relevance to this study is the fact that, despite the reported rise in apprenticeship places in the sector since 1997 (NCVER 2001c, p.1), a decline in job vacancies since 2000 has been reported (NCVER 2001d). This can be explained in part by the industry's tendency to rely on overtime as well as a lack of part-time jobs available in this industry (NCVER 1998, p.11), resulting in a relative lack of job growth even under boom conditions (NCVER 2000a, p.13).

Apprenticeships remain the main avenue for recruitment to the industry but increasingly other avenues are being used. These include a wider recognition of prior learning and an encouragement of the employment of older workers and those entering the industry via vocational education and training. In Western Australia, in particular, the pre-apprenticeship, usually associated with the TAFE sector, is a common route to an apprenticeship, with TAFE colleges to some extent acting as de facto employment brokers (NCVER 2001c, p.1). Whether recruiting apprentices directly from school, or from post-school further education, the sector remains highly dependent on the VET system for its labour supply (NCVER 2001c).

The Family of Trades was geared towards recruitment to this sector of the Australian economy, and it is into this industry that, to date, more than two-thirds of the 1999 and 2000 students have subsequently entered, either as trade assistants or apprentices, some via the pre-apprenticeship route.

Business activity profile over the study period

Any measurement of building activity is a complex amalgam of various factors, further complicated by time delays between measure and effect, and seasonal variations. However, for the purposes here, a basic profile of the building and construction industry activity can be gained by examining indicators such as the value of building work undertaken, the value of building work approved and housing finance committed, along with job vacancy rates.

While the study period generally corresponded to a variously reported decline in the building and construction industry, and in the value of building work undertaken (NCVER 2001d, p.1), it has been noted that there was also 'modest growth' in the industry (NCVER 2001c, p.1). In 2001, the NCVER reported an average annual growth rate of 2.5% in employment in the construction trades over the two-year period 2000–01 (NCVER 2001c, p.1). However, such growth has not been evenly spread across the sector. Bricklaying, insulation and floor finishing, for example, experienced a decline, while roof tiling, solid plastering, wall and floor tiling were among those trade areas to expand in the 2000–01 cycle (NCVER 2001c, p.1).

Nevertheless, overall for the period being considered in this study, there were steep variations both nationally and in Western Australia, in building and construction activity. This was indicated by Australian Bureau of Statistics' figures showing the value of building work undertaken, building work approved and by housing finance committed (figures 1, 2 and 3, appendix 1). As shown in the figures, plotting building and construction-related activity for the period under consideration, Western Australia generally mirrors the national building and construction industry business activity profile. This suggests a possible flow-on effect from specifically local events elsewhere, such as the building activity associated with the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

Of particular relevance to this study are the periods in which the bulk of the young respondents were looking for apprenticeships, primarily roughly in the four-month periods between November and March. The first batch of early school exits in the second half of 1999 and early 2000 was making the transition at a time when, in Western Australia, housing finance commitments were rising (figure 3, appendix 1), as was the value of building work being undertaken (figure 1, appendix 1). However, there was a slight decline in the value of building work being approved (figure 2, appendix 1) and, nationally a steep decline in the number of construction job vacancies (figure 5, appendix 1).

Both the 1999 Year 12 completers and the 2000 early school leavers were making the transition in the last part of 2000 and early 2001. By comparison with the industry's economic climate for the 1999 early school exits, building and construction activity both nationally and in Western Australia was halfway through a decline in the amount of building work being undertaken (figure 1, appendix 1), a fall in the value of building approvals (figure 2, appendix 1), and the depressant effects of a steady rise in interest rates over the previous six months (figure 4, appendix 1). Nevertheless, in Western Australia the value of housing finance commitments was more or less steady (figure 3, appendix 1) and the job vacancy rate for construction jobs nationally began to rise halfway through this period (figure 5, appendix 1).

The final group of youths considered in this study was the 2000 Family of Trades cohort who remained at school during 2001 to complete Year 12. By the time they began to make the transition at the end of 2001, the value of building work being undertaken in Western Australia and nationally, was reaching the end of an upward cycle which turned halfway through this period (figure 1). During this period, however, the value of building work approved was steady (figure 2), housing finance commitments had begun to improve substantially (figure 3) and construction job vacancies were steadily rising (figure 5). In addition, notwithstanding the uncertainty generated by interest rate fluctuations over the previous six months, the final group

to make the transition did so at a time when interest rates were steady and the effects of falling interest rates over the previous quarter were likely to be impacting on the industry.

Thus, on the surface, it was the two groups—the 1999 Year 12 completers and the 2000 early exits—who were likely to have found it most difficult to achieve their ambitions and move quickly into apprenticeships in the industry on leaving school.

Business confidence

In terms of the industry's capacity and willingness to forward-commit to training places, the notion of business confidence is critical. While no precise definition of 'business confidence' has been located, it is a term in wide use. It is generally understood to derive from and encompass a composite of current and projected economic activity combined with forward estimates and speculation, such as appears frequently in highly accessible media reports. The composite diffuse picture is deemed likely to create a business climate impinging on industry decision-making and ultimately on youth recruitment and training involvement.

Over the period under consideration in this study (1999–2002), it was widely reported that the industry was, or would be variously buoyed by events and conditions such as the Sydney Olympics, the introduction of the First Homebuyers' Allowance and a series of cuts in home lending interest rates. At the same time, the media widely reported the industry's perception of a negative impact from events such as the introduction of the goods and services tax (GST), the collapse of a major building project insurer, and a series of inquiries into practices in some sectors of the industry.

The consistent press speculation regarding changes in interest rates and subsequent variations over the period (figure 4, appendix 1) and periodic uncertainty regarding the future of the First Homebuyers' Scheme were also variously considered to have had some impact on business confidence, at least in the short term. Also concurrent with the study was a great deal of press reporting of negative aspects of the industry, such as ongoing occupational health and safety issues, the prevalence of unregistered builders, alleged widespread nepotism and allegations of union bullying across the sector. Much of this reporting was particularly related to the establishment and conduct of the Cole inquiry into the industry and associated union practices halfway through the study period.

Media headlines on topics related to the building and construction industry surveyed over the period June 2001–2002 reported variously on boom/bust predictions, the HIH building insurer collapse, the Cole Royal Commission, the First Homebuyers' Scheme, rates and taxes impacting on the industry, the goods and services tax and employment figures (see table 11, appendix 1). Of the 174 articles considered, 66% were classified as negative; that is, either critical of the industry or reporting on or predicting negative outcomes or consequences. Four of the articles (2.3%) were considered to be neutral, and the remaining 31.6% were classified as favourable (for example, 'Big redevelopment plans for Armadale' [Western Australia], 'Home loans up, home boom'). By far the most frequent topic in the media reports and comment over the period was the industry's business cycle (34.5%). The next most frequent category of reporting was that dealing with topics which impact on the public perception of the industry (17.8%) and many of these dealt with the Cole Royal Commission.

Such predictions and media reporting are likely to impact on local industry confidence and, in conjunction with local circumstances, become influential factors in employers' forward planning, including their assessments of the forthcoming availability of work and, thus, their predicted capacity to offer and sustain training places. With these factors in mind, the industry activity for the period under consideration in this study forms a context potentially impinging on the respondents' career opportunities.

6 Entering the industry

Overview

While chapter 4 considered destinations and matched these with stated early aspirations, aspects of entrance to the industry are considered here. Various links between the Family of Trades program, and the building and construction industry are identified.

At the outset the chapter considers the trade choice of the study population; this is followed by a discussion of the data relating to the impact of various factors, such as transition assistance, role models and mentors, and a consideration of the influence of the Family of Trades school VET program specifically. The discussion then moves to consider the data on the transition experience, first steps and strategies employed.

In summary, most of these young people reported that they were attracted to a particular trade or occupation because they enjoyed the work or had enjoyed the trade at school, and/or were familiar with the work. The fact that many believed they were also good at the work was also an attraction.

More than 80% of young people across both cohorts ended up in jobs or training in the building and construction industry within 12 to 18 months of leaving school. The largest numbers were in the carpentry trades (25.9%) and the electrical trades (19%). Plumbing (6.9%), painting and decorating (8.6%), and bricklaying and stonemasonry (5.2%) also attracted numbers. That is, almost two-thirds ended up in trades which had been included in the Family of Trades instruction.

Most of the youths in the study had encountered limited aspects of building and construction-related trades, such as woodwork and welding, at school. The TAFE component of the Family of Trades program introduced them to a wider group of trades, such as bricklaying, painting and decorating, and electrical (1999) or tiling (2000). Thus, at the end of the program they had acquired not only basic skills in a wider range of trades, but also had made some contacts in all of these trades at TAFE and in the industry in the fields in which they had undertaken their structured workplace experience. Twenty-one per cent of the youths reported that they had acquired their apprenticeship or training place through their Family of Trades structured workplace experience/employer.

Many of the young people with family and friends of the family in the building and construction industry also had contacts and varying degrees of additional information relating to some aspects of the industry on which to draw when making a career choice. Fifty-eight per cent of the youths reported family members involved with various aspects of the building and construction industry, most in electrical, carpentry or painting and decorating, a situation which is reflected in the youths' destinations. Twenty-six per cent reported that they had acquired their apprenticeship or training place with the help of either family or friends of the family, including neighbours.

Friendship networks also played some part, and 85% of the study population reported friends working in the industry, again in the trades reflecting the youths' own destinations, although there is mutual reporting occurring here.

Not only did the Family of Trades program provide or build on an implicit industry network for youth, it also familiarised them with many aspects of the industry and provided them with some of the language of the sector and particular trades—an important aspect of workplace enculturation. It also familiarised them with the post-secondary training culture, specifically the TAFE sector.

Trade choice

At the conclusion of this study, the two cohorts of the study population were spread among a diverse range of building and construction-related trades, not just those to which they were exposed in the TAFE component of the Family of Trades program or school industrial arts. Within six months of leaving school, the largest numbers had entered or were training in the carpentry trades (26%) and electrical trades (19%). Nine per cent were in painting and decorating and 7% in bricklaying and others were scattered among various building and construction-related trades and occupations (see table 12, appendix 1).

Throughout the series of interviews across the projects, interest in and enjoyment of the work was the main reason stated for the choice of particular trades to pursue. For example, when the data for those trying to enter or having recently entered building and construction-related employment and training in 2001 are examined (table 13 appendix 1), the most frequent (38%) reason for choice cited was attraction to and enjoyment of the work involved in a particular trade. Second most frequently cited among the three groups surveyed at this point was experience in the trade, principally obtained through work experience either through the school or TAFE. Knowing others in a field accounted for 10.3% of the reasons for attraction given.

Across both cohorts of the study population, seven of the youths were involved in elite sports which ranged from Australian Football League squad inclusion to body building, and included one competing internationally in his individual sport. These young men were each selecting a trade with an eye to how it might fit in the short and long term with the pursuit of their individual sporting interests. For some others, however, it was a case of whatever turned up, an indication that their trade choice was not entirely planned. At times, when asked what they were looking to do, their answers indicated that they were looking for 'anything in building and construction'.

For the following youth, information from the peer network was clearly one of the influences on his career decision-making as he shopped around for a trade to pursue:

> **Had you made up your mind by the end of Year 11 what you wanted to do when you left school?**
>
> No
>
> **What are you tossing up between?**
>
> Not painting. I really wanted to do the electrical [work experience] in the Family of Trades, then I changed it to plastering … 'my friend … is doing painting. He started off doing electrical and said that it was *really* hard. He went for it because they [electricians] get more money than painters, but … he said it was really hard so I just want to see how hard it was' …
>
> **So is it just the extra money that makes you a bit interested in electrical?**
>
> Pretty much.

So do you think you might try that?

I am not sure. I will see what other trades there are. It's a hard time to decide, there is just so much …

While these young people's first choices were overwhelmingly to gain an apprenticeship place, if this did not appear to be eventuating as they were leaving school or in the immediate post-school period, many opted for the full-time pre-apprenticeship, either at TAFE or with a private provider, depending on the trade. Many had also indicated in interviews during Year 11 that their parents would agree to their leaving school before completing Year 12 *if* they had 'something to go to' and the majority agreed with this strategy.

While at school, or about to leave school most—the Year 12s in particular—were optimistic. They believed that eventually 'something would turn up', and they were hoping that it would be sooner rather than later. However, most had back-up strategies of a sort. These may have involved a second choice of trade, particularly if they saw many of their peers vying for their first choice and thought the competition might be overwhelming. In addition, many also had a possible alternative employment and training route in mind should their first choice not eventuate in the immediate post-school future. While such back-up pathways were in their minds, few of the Year 12 students when interviewed at the end of Year 12 said they had moved toward securing a place or even registering an interest with a training provider while still at school.

Some were pinning their hopes on their work experience employers whom they suggested had signalled imminent apprenticeships and had advised them to keep in contact.

What made you make up your mind?

I did … plumbing and gas fitting for work-experience and that's what I want to do.

Really enjoy it?

Yeah. [elaborates] … I wanted to try it. I thought, … it'd be alright. It was good.

Is plumbing easy to get into?

I dunno. Depends. You've got to get out there and look for it, unless you know someone … Just speaking to family, like family friends and that, I found the company that I wanted work experience with. They didn't know anything about it. Just rang 'em up and they took us on for three weeks. And I was happy with it so …

So, would they offer you an apprenticeship place do you reckon?

Oh, there's a job. There's an apprenticeship in January. I've just got to wait until I finish school, and get my grades and that. [With] the same company … in January, one [an apprentice] finishes [then] … They said 'if that's what you want to do, then we'll talk about it at the end of the year'; if it's still there and that …

And are you keeping in contact?

Yeah, well I rang last week … to get a reference and that for TAFE, in case I don't find a job.

For another, his work experience employer offered him a carpentry apprenticeship on condition he completed Year 12: '[my employer] said "we'll definitely have you" and so I [did] it [Year 12] for that reason and I just wanted to do it anyway'.

Conditions in the building and construction industry in terms of the availability of advertised apprenticeship places and personal experiences of attempting to find work were clearly impacting on the entry and/or early careers of some respondents, but no respondents suggested industry conditions as a factor in their choice of trade. For example, in the context of discussions regarding choice of trade, there was little mention of the overall availability of work in a particular trade, no indication of the effect of the boom/bust cycle, the frequency of company

bankruptcies or the effect of specific collapses in the building insurance sector, all of which were receiving media attention at the time.

However, some did acknowledge, in the context of discussion of their choice of trades, that there would always be work available in a particular trade: 'There will always be work for electricians the way things are going', or 'Plumbers are always going to be needed'. And some did indicate an awareness of changes occurring in particular trades. For example, one youth was keen to work in the hand-crafted furniture trade. He rang around during the break between Year 11 and 12 and discovered most firms were machining. Very few firms were undertaking the hand tool work he was interested in, and those which were appeared to him to be small firms, probably unable or not willing to take on an apprentice. He subsequently amended his trade choice.

Transition assistance

When asked where they might look for assistance in making the transition or, for those who had made it, where they had sought assistance, it was clear that a variety of sources had been both anticipated and sourced (table 14, appendix 1). The help of work experience employers was identified most often (21%) in the responses across all groups in answer to the question: How did you get your apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship place? However, when combined, personal contact in the family (10.6%), together with friends of the family and neighbours (15.3%) accounted for the most frequent form of assistance identified in 30% of the responses. School VET coordinators, counsellors and teachers were cited in 13% of the responses, while 9% merely said they 'saw it advertised'.

Clearly the assistance could be overlapping as in the case when a VET coordinator places an advertisement on a notice board or draws individuals' attention to an advertised position. However, as indicated in table 14 in appendix 1, it is interesting to note that it is the early exits in both cohorts who made greater use of their Family of Trades, work experience employers and contacts to make the transition. The secondary school completers, on the other hand, leaving school a year after the Family of Trades were more likely to draw on the school VET coordinators' services. One could also surmise that the Year 11 Family of Trades experience of TAFE familiarised the school completers with the TAFE system and local campuses, thus facilitating their approach to TAFE to enrol the following year.

Known others in the industry

A significant number of youths drew on family members and/or friends of the family to assist their transition. Over half (57%, see table 3) of the study population reported having family members they knew working in building and construction-related trades, with 62% in both groups of early school exits more likely to have such familial contacts. These contacts were spread across a range of trades and occupations (table 15, appendix 1), and it is also likely that respondents were sometimes only considering relatively mainstream occupations within the building and construction industry category when asked about family in the industry. The most frequently cited trades and occupations in which the study population reported contacts were the carpentry trades (30%), the electrical trades (22%), closely followed by painting and decorating (20%), and bricklaying (17.6%).

Even if not explicitly using this avenue to access employment and training, having family members in the industry provided these young people with networks of potential contacts. It is also likely that they were provided with access to conversations which made familiar various occupational and workplace cultures. When asked about how the career choice decision was being made, one Year 12 said that his father had a couple of mates who were electricians and

'they seemed like good blokes' so he thought he would 'give that a go'. Another, when asked how he had come to consider gyprock as an area of interest, said that at a recent family funeral he had met a couple of previously unknown relatives who were in gyprock and they had spoken to him about it.

At no stage did any respondent mention advice received either explicitly or implicitly from family or family friends about the negative aspects of a particular trade or disadvantages of the industry. Even when discussing injuries sustained on the job by people they knew in the industry, these seemed to be regarded by respondents as rare and the result of bad luck or bad management and not a reason to avoid a trade.

In addition to family, the study group also increasingly had friends working in the industry. For example, 95% of the 1999 and 75% of the 2000 Year 12 completers said they had friends working in the industry. While the four groups of youths in the study were treated separately, it should be remembered that they were initially two year-cohorts, albeit from different schools. It is obvious that the Year 12 completers knew the early school exits from their own schools and they were highly likely to know also many from other schools who also undertook the Family of Trades program. Indeed, one of TAFE's strategies was to mix the school groups when creating the four trade classes in the Family of Trades program each year.

As indicated in table3, 86% of the study population claimed to have had mates in the building and construction industry in a variety of trades and occupations. Most frequently cited were friends in electrical (49%), carpentry (41%), painting and decorating (30%), with friends in bricklaying and plumbing cited in 26% of the responses. Although few of the youths said that they kept in contact with peers who had left school, the interview data from the Year 12 completers suggested that many had information regarding the fortunes of their early school exiting peers and that information regarding the trades was being passed between the youths, as illustrated in the quote cited above in which a youth chooses between electrical and plumbing.

When the youths in building and construction destinations are considered separately, the high percentages with friends and family in the industry can be seen clearly (see table 3). Across the cohorts, 57% said they had family and friends of the family working in the sector's trades and occupations and 86% said they had mates in the industry. The 1999 early exits in particular (90%) identified friends already working in building and construction.

Table 3:   Study population in building and construction with friends and family in the industry

Youth working and/or training in building & construction-related trades and occupations	1999 early school exits	1999 Year 12 completers	2000 early school exits	2000 Year 12 completers	Total
	n=20 %	*n*=12 %	*n*=18 %	*n*=8 %	*n*=58 %
Family in building & construction	50.0	66.6	66.6	37.5	**56.9**
Friends in building & construction	90.0	83.3	88.8	75.0	**86.2**

Basically these youths were well aware of the value of personal contacts. Note the response from one when asked how one went about obtaining an apprenticeship and/or job in the industry: 'You just have to get out there, unless you know someone'. When asked if building and construction generally, and bricklaying in particular, was a good industry to be in, another observed: 'It is if you are well connected'.

It was not just family and friends who were providing industry models and mentors. As discussed below, within the context of the Family of Trades program, the TAFE and work experience personnel encountered during the Year 11 VET program also provided students with

useful contacts in the industry and, as indicated above, many reported drawing on these to obtain advice and assistance in gaining apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeship places in particular.

Family of Trades springboard

Throughout the data generated in both this project and that examining the work-readiness and career decision-making of the 1999 cohort (Taylor 2001), the Family of Trades appears as a highly significant factor in career strategies and transition to employment and training. In particular, it was judged by the youths who undertook the program in 1999 and 2000 to have assisted with career choice, with their planning of vocational pathways and with their preparation for work. The early school exits in particular saw the program as helping them to make a career choice, become ready for work, and establish industry contacts. The Year 12 completers, although not moving directly into employment and training either during or at the completion of the Family of Trades program, also saw the program as assisting or likely to assist them find employment and training in the future.

For many of the school completers, however, the program was seen to be significant in deciding which trades they were *not* interested in pursuing. This is important when one of the fears these youths expressed concerned entering a trade only to find it was not for them, and that they would 'have to backtrack' and thus would have 'wasted time'.

Drawing on the data from the early open-ended and semi-structured discussions concerning youths' assessments of the Family of Trades program, a series of program-related issues were generated. The issues relating to the program outcomes can be grouped into five broad groups: social factors, career choice, career planning, industry knowledge and expectations, and work-readiness. All respondents were subsequently asked to rank items relating to these themes in terms of their considered importance. Table 16 in appendix 1 compares the rankings of both 'very important' and 'important' assigned by each of the four groups in the study population.

There was not a great deal of relative difference between the weighting either cohort gave to the items relating to the Family of Trades program. Two relatively minor differences between early exits in the two cohorts relate to confidence and career planning with respect to training. The 2000 early exits compared to the 1999 early exits were more likely to rate the program very highly in terms of its role in building their confidence to seek employment (92%) and assisting with the decision to undertake either a pre-apprenticeship or apprenticeship (92% and 83.3% respectively).

Overall, the early school exits were more emphatic regarding the efficacy and impact of aspects of the program on their lives. More than 80% of the school exits saw as important or very important, not only the opportunity to try out four trades, but also the vocational 'kick-start' they perceived the program to have given them. This was in terms of finding out about apprenticeships, about what employers look for, meeting people in the industry, helping make a career decision, preparation for work and even helping find work. While overall the 2000 cohort rated the program's confidence-building capacity more highly than the 1999 cohort, the Year 12 completers in both cohorts were less likely to see this as a very important or important program outcome. However, the 2000 Year 12 completers were less likely than the 1999 completers to see the program as assisting with career choice in terms of the type of work they wished to pursue (58.8% and 80% respectively).

The early exits in particular saw the direct link between the program and post-school initial destinations:

 ✧ Yeah, well, pretty much if I didn't do that program [Family of Trades] I wouldn't have done work experience so I probably wouldn't have the job that I have now.

- ✧ Like my boss that I did work experience with he sort of helped me get my apprenticeship. As well as me phoning up and asking about it he just like helped, pushed me a bit more to push into them a bit more to get it so which was good 'cos I got it. He was just saying, 'oh, you should ring 'em and find out' you know like, stuff like that. He encouraged me a bit more. He's a good friend so, you know, he was just giving me encouragement.

- ✧ [Family of Trades] helped me get to TAFE. Helped me out heaps, and how, what the workforce is like, what you've got to get prepared for [and] helps you [with what you] want to be when you grow up; what future you want.

It was widely considered that the program helped students make a discriminating trade choice; however, not always with the building and construction industry:

[The Family of Trades program] sort of, sort of gave me ideas that, oh, I only did it to actually get experience in the building trade, or get an idea of what it's like. I got an idea of what it is like and I didn't like it so I'm sort of not looking for a career in the building trades at the moment. The people I did work experience with told … me it was not a very good trade to get into. They were saying, like when it rains you don't get paid, they can't work and all sorts of stuff.

Would a different work experience site have made a difference?

Could be different 'cos my friend doesn't really complain.

The youths also reported the program's assistance in developing confidence:

Heaps actually. After being with them [TAFE and work experience] I felt I could go to someone [in building and construction] and be confident to help them out, especially if it was something like a trade. People like that are, they're like the same; they're looking for the same kinds of things [in a worker].

The program impact on career decision-making and planning was not confined to those interested in building and construction. Those with aspirations elsewhere (for example, automotive) also gained confidence and familiarity with the training system:

… one of the guys from the bricklaying was the one who helped me get through to the [auto] electrical actual place so I could apply for a pre-apprenticeship.

As reported in earlier related studies (for example, Koczberski & Taylor 1999), both parents and their sons reported that, for some, the program had positively influenced the boys' personal development. As one of the 2000 early school exits observed in the first round of interviews for this study:

Oh, [the Family of Trades program] sort of made me pull up my socks a bit 'cos I was, ah so to speak … like in with the wrong crowd. Like having to get up at 5 o'clock every morning, well you can't go out at night and run amuck like everyone else; you have to be inside getting your sleep and stuff. So it's like pulled me in line a lot 'cos I've got a lot of responsibilities 'cos I've got a car, and licence and stuff … it helped me decide what, what I didn't want to do … it was good to try other stuff out … because I guess if I didn't do all the other trades well I wouldn't know that I didn't like it or stuff like that.

In this context, bearing in mind that many of these youths appeared to be under-achieving at school, the program offered a chance for them to experience success and to develop a confidence they felt they could draw on.

The program also provided a familiarity with the TAFE and wider post-school vocational training system, and the students were able to make contacts at TAFE they could draw on for advice:

Because of, like doing Family of Trades you knew where everything is [at TAFE], how the day runs. It was heaps easier for me than other guys who haven't done Family of Trades.

When asked, with the benefit of hindsight to sum up what it was they liked most or found most useful about the Family of Trades, responses varied. Comments were in the main positive, with some unable to identify specifics: 'It was all good' or 'I liked it all'. In addition to the day a week away from school, many remembered positively the quality of instruction received and in particular, what they observed to be the more adult learning environment they had experienced at TAFE where many felt they had been treated with more respect than they received at school. Nearly all of the comments mentioned how valuable it had been to have an opportunity to try out four trades and the insight they had received into work in these fields.

When asked what, if anything, they had not liked about the program, most could think of nothing, although the earlier starts and longer hours than they were used to on school days were mentioned and several found the 'messiness' of the work with cement, concrete, lime, plaster, paint and metal shavings distasteful.

Getting off the mark

As indicated in chapter 5, as the groups made the transition from school, they encountered variable industry conditions potentially affecting their opportunities, at least in the short term. While a fall in reported job vacancies can indicate market buoyancy, it can also mean fewer immediate job opportunities for youth. As indicated in figure 5 in appendix 1, the 1999 early school exits were getting off the mark and making the transition at a time when there was a slight rise locally in the job vacancy rate but a steep decline nationally in the construction job vacancy. (No ABS construction job vacancy rate figures are available for Western Australia.) The final group to make the transition, the 2000 Family of Trades cohort who completed Year 12 and left school at the end of 2001, were the only group of the four to face both a locally rising job vacancy market and a steep rise in the availability of jobs in construction (figure 5, appendix 1).

The youths reported various degrees of difficulty in actually making the transition and made varying appraisals as to how straightforward it was to get off the mark.

> **How hard do you think it is for people to get apprenticeships … at the moment?**
>
> ✧ Oh, I think it's very hard actually 'cos there are so many group training schemes out at the moment, that if you don't get into one of those, unless you know someone, really it's quite hard. Like I was saying, I got in because I knew someone, and if you don't know anyone then it's a bit tough.
>
> ✧ Personally I think it's pretty hard, yeah. I think … because not a lot of employers are looking for apprentices now because, you know, you've gotta look after them and it's just like, yeah, it's hard to get apprenticeships.

And another:

> **Did the kids who did Family of Trades find it easy to go and get an apprenticeship?**
>
> One of my mates, he tried, he didn't want to come back to school, he tried but he applied for heaps of jobs and he ended up getting one that he did [Family of Trades] work experience with. But he tried [and] found it hard … They wanted people with a bit more experience, like a bit older and that.

Notwithstanding the direct assistance many said they had derived from the school VET program and its TAFE contacts, many, such as the following youth, knocked on doors and considered that luck played a large part in the job and training place hunting process:

> Oh, I went out to just, look for some, look for an apprenticeship, yeah. Just in my spare time I just went out to look at some businesses. Just asked them if they need any

apprentices or anything like that … [The one I got] was probably the second one I counted and I was lucky to get it.

For some, such as the following youth, the first steps did not work out. This youth found an employment and training position as a result of Family of Trades program, and when it did not work out for him he returned to use his program contacts, in effect, to start again:

Well, I did … this course at TAFE [Family of Trades] and … it had like four different trades in it. I left school, just as I was getting into the school holidays about half way through the year of Year 11, I found an apprenticeship for a plasterer and I did three months, like a trainee course, like, to see if I could do the apprenticeship and ended up getting out, getting out of it after three months … I wasn't too happy with the boss and just the, you know, the surroundings of who I was working with and the people I was working with.

… and one of [the Family of Trades] trades was plastering and so the bloke who taught me at TAFE/one of my mates was actually out there working with him so one of my mates asked me if I would go and work with him and [I] ended up … went out there and worked with him and that and, um, now I've just stuck to him for awhile.

Working well?

Yeah, it is, yeah. Going good. Yeah, I've been working for him for, um, since, oh, about December last year.

Others had some trouble finding placements as the following extracts from interviews with two of the 2000 early exits illustrate. The first youth is now working as a casual, fitting pool covers and hoping for an apprenticeship in tiling. The second is working as a full-time trolley collector but is still looking for 'anything in the building trade' and hopefully an apprenticeship:

I sent away … 22, I think, resumes. I sent away a resume and letter and everything to 22 tilers. I've only heard back from one. I actually got one letter back from one and another bloke rang and said he doesn't do tiling anymore but he passed me onto, he told me a name, I can't remember the bloke's name now, and he told me to ring him. So I gave him a ring but he was real arrogant and stuff, didn't really care, so he said, 'oh, nothin' going on mate, see ya' and I just hanged up.

And another:

Yeah, I'd done a Fast Track course [at TAFE] … and like, if I passed that course I was guaranteed an apprenticeship, but then they said there was a downturn in the industry or something so I didn't get the apprenticeship …

You don't see trolley collecting as a future?

No, no, I've been doing it for two-and-a-half years already and I'm sick of it already.

Transition routes employed

While some went directly from the Family of Trades into an apprenticeship place, others employed various transition routes. For example, the three groups seeking to make the transition during this study—that is, the 1999 Year 12 completers and the 2000 early exits at the beginning of 2001 and the 2000 Year 12 completers at the beginning of the following year—reported employing various routes. They looked for jobs preferably with apprenticeship places, applied for a few and, if unsuccessful, in the main enrolled in a pre-apprenticeship. In looking for work, more than half of the 1999 Year 12 completers said they used the newspaper, asked around, telephoned companies and/or sent off résumés. Several reported their mothers devoting a day to driving them around while they presented their credentials to any businesses they thought might be potential employers. For a few, this strategy paid off. For others, like the youth cited above

looking for a tiling apprenticeship who said his mother spent all one Sunday helping him type up his letters, the strategy was less than satisfactory.

Given that some tried unsuccessfully to find an apprenticeship place on leaving school and chose then to undertake a pre-apprenticeship (see discussion below), some of these avenues were again employed on completing the pre-apprenticeship.

Year 12

As indicated above, some believed that Year 12 completion made them 'a bit more' employable in the trades; others felt that Year 12 completion said something about their maturity but yet others regarded it as an indication that they were capable of seeing something to completion. Only one Year 12 student said that his parents were encouraging him to leave school prior to Year 12 to enter a trade but he had decided not to. There were no reports of the Family of Trades TAFE lecturers encouraging Year 12 completion, but several reports, such as that cited above, of work experience employers encouraging Year 12. However, there were also reports of these employers indirectly influencing non-school completion by offering, or at least discussing, imminent apprenticeships with these youths during or at the completion of the Year 11 program. Similarly in previous studies, some of the boys had reported a TAFE trade lecturer advising the group that if they 'saw an apprenticeship lying around, grab it'.

Pre-apprenticeship route

Overall, approximately one-quarter of each cohort on leaving school undertook a trade-based pre-apprenticeship (table 6, appendix 1). However, there were significant differences between the groups, with almost 40% of the 1999 Year 12 completers and 31% of the 2000 early school exits enrolling in an apprenticeship. For many, although not all, as indicated above, an apprenticeship was their first choice. The TAFE-based pre-apprenticeship was their second choice, principally because an income would be foregone for the year. Many reported that they had looked for an apprenticeship before taking up a pre-apprenticeship. It can be assumed that there were either not enough apprenticeship places available or, at the time of leaving school, in 2000 (that is, the 1999 completing Year 12s and the 2000 early school exits) the youths were not as adept at finding such places or received less assistance than the 1999 cohort.

The youths themselves were aware of the different opportunities the pre-apprenticeship offered. The following Year 12 completer from the 1999 cohort undertook a post-school pre-apprenticeship in refrigeration and air-conditioning and observed that luck, together with assistance from TAFE helped him obtain his apprenticeship place:

> **How did you get the apprenticeship?**
>
> Um, they actually rang me up. Yeah, one of the lecturers at TAFE gave my name to the company and then they rang me and go, 'Oh, just asking you if you want an interview'. And so yeah, I just got it through TAFE, or one of the lecturers.
>
> **Did many other people have that opportunity?**
>
> I was really like one of the [few] there weren't many people that got apprenticeships in our course this year, and … I dunno, I was like probably the last person out of the people who got an apprenticeship. It was just a bit of luck going my way.

When one group of pre-apprentices in the study population was interviewed more than halfway through their pre-apprenticeship, half said they would leave the pre-apprenticeship prior to completion and most of the remaining pre-apprentices said they might do so if they were offered an apprenticeship before they finished the year. At that stage of the year, however, most regarded the pre-apprenticeship as a good choice of pathway towards an apprenticeship and, apart from the disadvantages (mostly relating to income foregone), they saw various advantages.

Among the advantages perceived were the fast-tracking they would receive in an ensuing apprenticeship and the perception that it improved their chances to obtain an apprenticeship—often believing that employers preferred youths with a pre-apprenticeship. Moreover, they believed the opportunity the year gave to 'be sure about what trade to do' was beneficial in the long term. Most believed TAFE would assist them to find an apprenticeship on completion of their courses, through recommendations and by advertising, and putting them in touch with employers looking for apprentices and also by placing them in work experience positions where opportunities existed. In these ways the majority of the pre-apprentices interviewed saw the pre-apprenticeship as an instrumental bridge to the industry.

On balance, the majority who undertook pre-apprenticeships believed they had benefited but, like the following youth, ultimately saw obtaining an apprenticeship place after the pre-apprenticeship as dependent on a measure of individual effort:

> **What about the pre-app, did that help you?**
>
> Oh, yeah, they did a lot of things. They've helped my skills and taught me different things that I didn't know about. And … just like how to get a job and, you know, what employers look for in an employee and, yeah, stuff like that, yeah. It was good.
>
> **Did the TAFE coordinator or the pre-app coordinator give you many contacts?**
>
> Oh, they gave, they gave a few, like, um, they give … you know, genuine businesses and, they just asked us, like, the students if they want one, you know, call 'em up, you know, yeah. So, it was up to our own will if we want one or not.

Trade assistant route

Some who were unsuccessful in finding an apprenticeship, either directly on leaving school or after doing a pre-apprenticeship, accepted jobs with firms in the fields in which they were interested on the chance that the employer would eventually offer them an apprenticeship. In some instances, according to respondents, the arrangement was clearly a probationary or trial period with an expectation of a likely apprenticeship. A few were eventually offered an apprenticeship by this route. For others, an apprenticeship may well have been referred to in initial or subsequent discussion with employers, but it appeared in some instances to be largely wishful hoping on the part of the young worker. One mother repeatedly, over the two-year period we have spoken to her, expressed disappointment that her trade assistant son appeared too reticent to broach the subject of a possible apprenticeship in cabinet-making with his employer. Several indicated that, when it became apparent that an apprenticeship was not likely to be realised, they changed employment, and several subsequently acquired an apprenticeship while others found themselves no better off.

Other strategies

In terms of other routes considered as a means of achieving their aspirations, several, while still at school, said they had considered independently arranging strategic blocks of post-school work experience, hoping an apprenticeship offer might follow, or that it might assist them to settle on a field of interest. However, none saw their casual/part-time jobs as a route into a career. As one youth pointed out scathingly, 'They're not real jobs', and in most instances, these casual jobs were seen to be too isolated from the industry they wished to enter.

7 Understandings of the industry

Overview

In investigating the links between the Family of Trades program and the building and construction industry, this study considered what respondents actually knew and considered about the industries they were entering. The study was interested in understanding better the knowledge and opinions these young people had of the building and construction industry and, in particular, their perceptions of what employers look for, and the nature of their early career participation in the industry.

In this chapter the data on the youths' knowledge and judgements about aspects of the industry are presented. The chapter opens with a summary of related findings from one of the previous studies before the data for this project are discussed.

In summary, the majority of respondents were optimistic about their opportunities in the industry and their chosen trades in particular. While three-quarters believed their trade to be appropriate for them at the time, few made reference to longer-term career opportunities or working conditions. For this study respondents entering or already in early careers in the building and construction industry were questioned to determine their view of their trade. They were also asked their opinion of what constitutes a good workplace and a good company to work for. Overwhelmingly, they tended to collapse their understanding of a good trade with that of a good workplace.

With regard to what the industry was looking for in workers in general, and youth in particular, most of the young people in this study believed that employers were seeking attitudinal dispositions and work-related behaviours, such as punctuality, compliance and respect, and a hard worker.

Those working and training in the various trades and occupations, like those aspiring to enter them, continued to offer surprisingly few remarks about the industry as such. Their appraisals of their trade and the wider industry understandably appeared to remain based, in the main, on the circumstances they had observed or experienced directly, usually in one firm or when looking for jobs. Only two youths indicated union membership or union activity and only one of these was in the building and construction industry. None of the respondents referred to the industry-impacting factors which were receiving wide media attention during the study period, such as the impact of the goods and services tax, the introduction of first homebuyer's allowance or the collapse of building insurers. This is not to say, however, that these young people were not experiencing the effects of these factors, but that those wider issues were not being extrapolated to their own experience.

Knowledge of the industry

In the evaluation of the 2000 Family of Trades program it was reported that, apart from some of young people with close family in the industry, most appeared to have a very fragmented and

partial or thin knowledge of the industry in which they were undertaking instruction and work experience (Taylor & Koczberski 2001b, p.41). They cited isolated anecdotal information about the trades, sourcing this back to individual TAFE lecturers, the media and/or family and friends.

Their attraction to the building and construction-related trades was thus not strongly based on a knowledge of the industry, and few revealed an elementary knowledge of, or concern for, supply and demand in relation to the availability of work in a particular trade. As reported in the 2000 evaluation report, Taylor and Koczberski note:

> Some students had … [some] sense of the vocational and other opportunities available in the industry or in a particular trade—'you get to go all different places or payment, travel and a good life and I don't really know after that' …

> A notion of the opportunities available was particularly evident when students homed in on isolated and often anecdotal information regarding money: 'Well [names TAFE lecturer working in a trade] said he brings in like one and a half grand to two grand every week and that's only five days a week, sometimes six days a week. And that's another reason why I wanted to do it because it's pretty good money' …   (Taylor & Koczberski 2001b, p.37)

The report went on to note (p.39) that there was a hazy knowledge of any downsides to working in the industry, and these were usually derived from anecdotes of dire physical injury, or to a lesser extent, the challenging working conditions in some jobs.

Perceptions of employers' expectations

All groups in this study were asked at various times what they thought employers were searching for when they employed young workers. It was believed that responses to this question might give some indication of the ways in which these youths were perceiving the trades and the wider industry. Drawing on early interview data (1999) of young people undertaking the Family of Trades school VET program, a survey checklist was compiled for use with the 1999 cohort in the 2000 study relating to work-readiness. To provide comparative data, this survey was also employed with the 2000 cohort for this study.

All groups indicated a strong perception that employers would be looking for clusters of factors which could be regarded as character and work-related behaviours and attitudes. They perceived that employers would be valuing these clusters more than a young worker's overall job-related skill levels and competence and a great deal more so than personality, interpersonal factors and presentation (table 17, appendix 1).

There was not a great deal of difference between the groups in the relative weighting which these respondents attributed to the clusters of factors identified as those that employers might be looking for when employing youth (see table 17, appendix 1). Where the work-readiness project (2000) found some slight differences in some individual factors between the early school exits and the Year 12s in the 1999 cohort (for example, the early exits understandably showed a slightly greater understanding of the culture of work), these variations did not show in the 2000 cohort surveyed for this study.

In terms of work-related behaviours, respondents universally believed employers would seek a 'hard worker' who is 'always on time'. Three of the four groups also universally believed an employer would want a young worker who was prepared to ask if he didn't know something.

There was similar universal agreement that employers would look for a youth who was prepared 'to show respect' and two of the three groups universally thought someone who always 'did what he was told' would be viewed favourably by employers. While the cluster of work competence traits was not believed to be as important to employers as these character, attitudinal and work-

related behaviour traits, the youths in all groups universally agreed that, in the trades, an employer would want a worker with good hand skills.

The 1999 early exits were the most adamant that employers would not be concerned with references or school marks. The 2000 school leavers believed that an employer would not want to employ a youth who asked too many questions, maybe reflecting their involvement at the time in the culture of schools where the student who continually asks questions in class is often attributed 'nerd' status by the peer group.

Appraisal of the trade/industry

Overall, there was an optimism among these young workers. Among the early exits in both cohorts—most already in jobs during this study—the data regarding their knowledge and perceptions of their trades or occupation were understandably a great deal richer. For example, 72% (n=18) of the 2000 early exits agreed that their trade was a good trade to be in at the moment. Thirty per cent of both groups of early exits believed that there was plenty of work available in their trade.

Notwithstanding the rather thin knowledge of the wider industry, throughout the interview data from those in post-school employment and training, there were contextualised comments on the trade in which youths were working and/or training. In addition, many were specifically asked whether or not they thought the trade or occupation they were in and the wider industry were 'good' ones to be in at the moment. In response, most youths conflated the two questions and interpreted it as 'Is it a good job you are in at the moment?' Responses ranged from positive appraisals of the work (the variety of tasks, challenges, pay etc.) to general on-site interpersonal relationships and conditions and working environment.

Of all the responses across the four groups referring to appraisal of the fields in which these youths were working and training (n=65), only 13.8% made reference to career opportunities within the trade (for example, the variety of fields one can specialise in, an aspiration to work one's way up through a company, a field one is able to leave and return to etc.) and only 3.1% of all the responses referred to the general working conditions (for example, a 'safe' environment in which to work, a 'decent' place to work). These observations were rarely comments on the trade or wider industry per se but rather references to a particular worksite.

Overall, most of the youths across the four groups regarded their trades optimistically; however, some expressed reservations or negative comments about current conditions in sections of the industry, offering observations such as the following:

✧ There's not enough work at the moment and staff cuts have been made.

✧ It's slow at the moment but the whole industry is like that.

✧ It fluctuates.

✧ It's quiet here now.

✧ We're OK but others are going broke.

✧ I am OK but it's hard to enter [cabinet-making], especially for young blokes.

✧ [Apprentices receive] low pay.

Some of the pre-apprentices also indicated that they had some appreciation of the industry's current activity but were similarly generally optimistic.

✧ … building you know, stuff has gone down. They are starting to get a bit of metal in, but you know what I'm doing now, by the time I get out I should have plenty of work … by the end of next year there will be a boom, a boom like in housing.

- Business is pretty low. Like it'll pick up as more houses start getting built, so that's good … When it comes toward summer there'll be a bit more work 'cos it's winter at the moment and it's a bit cold, you know. Like people don't like outsides getting painted and that during winter and they save it all until the summer.

The negatives or reservations about a trade or occupation did not correspond to particular trades. That is, there were not some trades or occupations more than others which showed as being regarded more or less negatively, or with more or fewer reservations. Notwithstanding the small numbers, the reservations and negative comments were more likely to correspond to the position in which the respondent found himself. For example, among the 2000 early exits, the majority of the negative comments came from those in jobs without a training component and some of these jobs were casual.

There were isolated comments which moved beyond appraisal of the individual's workplace to regard the state of the wider industry, particularly with respect to observations regarding the quality of work and character of some in the industry. As one respondent said in relation to the payment of wages and award rates: 'In building there's a lot of shonkey money … money gets stuffed around', and another commented in an aside: 'There's quite a few tradesmen out there with no qualifications, you know'. And one respondent, who had been in the workforce for one of the longest periods of time, made the following observation about his trade: 'A lot of tradesmen out there are absolute crap … You don't want wankers working for ya'.

Several commented that, with increasing computerisation, there would be increasing work, for example for electricians:

Do you think it's a good industry to be in at the moment?

Electrician? … Ah yeah, yeah, for sure. Everyone needs an electrician.

How do you actually think the industry's running right now in terms of business?

I know that a lot of money's being turned over. But I think it's going alright … everyone seems to be, well, everyone seems to be busy and doing well.

Youth understandings of a 'good' company

It was believed that those training with private providers and moving between employers under the New Apprenticeship arrangement would be particularly well placed to make some comparisons regarding what might constitute a good company within the industry. However, again, for many, this question tended to be re-interpreted to be what might be considered to make a good worksite. Few seemed to hold well-developed views about the characteristics of a good company. However, embedded in respondents' observations of the workplace and trade were implicit assessments of their notions of a good company, such as the previous comment where a youth commented on the quality of workers one would want to employ. This young man went on to comment on company stability and the cost-effectiveness of taking on certain type of work:

… [There] probably isn't a 'safe' company in this business … Our company's pretty safe, I think, 'cos we just do kitchens not big massive units … You get ripped off, lose money yourself on that stuff.

All who were asked this question in some form or another attempted to answer it, and only one said he didn't know and left it at that. Most respondents were able to arrive at some features they believed characterised a good company/workplace. An example of the range of responses generated by this question can be seen in the summary of the 2000 early exits' perceptions of a good company contained in table 18 in appendix 1.

As might be expected for these young people, many comments with regard to what might make a good company concerned industrial conditions. Among the 2000 early school exits, for example, 20.3% of the comments regarding a company related to industry conditions, of which 9.4% comprised comments about pay. Of greater frequency, however, were observations about management, its perceived competence and leadership styles and, in particular, the way in which management related to workers (29.7%). Across the groups, many responses related to the management style and the notion of a 'good boss' and on-site interpersonal relationships: 'friendliness', being treated with 'respect', instructor patience and so on. One youth observed that one 'Can't ever tell. You need to try the company out', and another, 'The boss and the people working there make a good company'. When relations with management are added to a general concern with interpersonal relationships within a company, they account for almost 50% of the comments; for example, in those offered by the 2000 early exits. (Relationships with management and with the boss in particular are discussed further in the following chapter.)

Comments relating to company stability, reputation and industrial conditions imply an awareness that there are companies in the industry which are not producing quality products, looking after their workers or providing safe workplaces. An illustration of this can be seen in comments cited above relating to the quality of workers in the industry and in the following quote:

> Well when I had an interview, the boss said that once you'd done your apprenticeship here, I'd be able to get a job anywhere. 'Cause we've got the good name in the industry. So I guess that'll help down the track. But I don't really know why. He's got a bit of a name himself in the industry as being a hard person to work for.

Union membership as a facet of industry participation

As a aspect of industry participation and a possible indication of an awareness and understanding of issues affecting both the broader industry and individual trades, those who have been the longest in the industry were asked about union membership. Clearly the question was not relevant to some in the study (that is, they had not yet entered the workforce or were working in non-unionised occupations). Of those asked about unionism (n=15), several did not know what the interviewer was talking about:

> **Has anyone talked to you about unions?**
>
> What's that? I don't know anything about that.

Only two youths indicated union membership and only one of these was in building and construction. A further two said that the topic had been broached by other workers or the boss, and one specifically mentioned that it was pointed out to him very clearly on his appointment that he was entering a non-unionised company. Among those who had some understanding of union membership, the general feeling seemed to be as the following youth reasoned:

> I didn't think there was much need of an apprentice belonging to a union. I'll probably join [later]. They [the private training provider] pretty much look after me.

However, the one union member explained his membership thus:

> … well, a lot of the sites that I work on are 'no ticket, no start' so you really have to be up in the union. But also, just about all the other workers in your company are up with the union so, just, I dunno, more or less. Yeah, like, you know, because they, they are fighting, they're fighting for me, for me kinda thing. Also it's good to, like even if I can't really do much as an apprentice, I'm still paying fees, something towards them; but, if I had any problems, which I haven't yet, but if I did have problems with my boss or the site or anything like that, they'd come to your aid and help you out.

8 Early career experiences

Overview

Implicit in the early career experiences of the study population are issues relating to recruitment, training and the state of the industry, and by implication, the Family of Trades program. Focusing on the early career experiences of these youths, this chapter first considers employment and training retention and attrition rates, and then examines these figures to consider job satisfaction and challenges, perceptions of what it takes to retain a job and factors which might provoke withdrawal from employment and training.

As indicated in earlier chapters, interpersonal relationships, and particularly relationships with management, appear frequently in the data within the context of their perceptions of the industry generally and what they think constitutes a good trade and a good company in which to work. In this section, in relation to early career experiences, the notion of what makes a good boss is examined. This is particularly significant in the context of the building and construction industry. Reference was made earlier in the discussion of the literature to a concern over the quality of on-the-job training in the industry. Related to this are concerns regarding the number of unqualified tradesmen responsible for the training of new workers, and the impact this may be having on the industry.

In summary, retention in apprenticeships and training places, and in jobs without a training component has been generally high for the respondents in this study. However, most admitted that, at times, they had considered withdrawing and many reported having discussed their feelings with parents, employers and/or TAFE lecturers. They had worked with a number of TAFE lecturers during the Family of Trades program. Of the few who have exited from apprenticeships, three from the 1999 cohort and to date none from the 2000 cohort, one was to take up a position at the Australian Institute of Sport and the other two left for what appear to be understandable reasons. However, both of these regained an apprenticeship place. It was only an extreme situation which provoked them to withdraw from an apprenticeship once they had overcome the early doubts that many reported. Even the one or two individuals who were having second thoughts about their choice of trade intended to finish their training before embarking on a change of trade and retraining.

The young people in this study see the factors assisting them to maintain employment as relating primarily to job competence and productivity and their own work habits, particularly their punctuality (44.8% of responses). More than one-quarter (27.6%) of responses referred to what could be considered on-the-job demeanour and, specifically, respect for authority, which they regarded as important in helping to keep a job. The notion of respect recurred throughout the responses, both in regard to being treated with respect as young workers, and in regard to their need to show respect toward authority. In the notion of a good boss this was particularly salient.

Overall, the youths in this study regarded a good boss as one who not only respected workers and was fair, but who was a good communicator, able to explain clearly and provide clear feedback to young workers. A good boss in their opinion was also a person who did not lose his

temper when mistakes were made. In terms of appraisals of their own bosses, respondents were generally happy with the supervision and management they were receiving, with several identifying their own bosses as role models and friends. This particularly showed when some of the respondents identified their bosses as those from whom they sought advice when they were having doubts about continuing with an apprenticeship.

While some respondents identified worksite tensions, these were isolated and not clustered in any particular industry or trade. Those who reported that there were aspects of the job that were extremely boring after two years, such as sanding and lugging barrows of cement and plaster, reported also being given more responsible, interesting and challenging tasks as they entered the third and fourth years of their various apprenticeships. The majority of the respondents identified themselves as happy or very happy with their jobs. The youths in building and construction overwhelmingly rated themselves as very happy. Those who were less than happy, as well as some of those who rated themselves as merely happy, were almost all young people who had not yet found a position matching their aspirations.

Retention and attrition factors

At the end of the study period there had been three withdrawals from apprenticeships among the 1999 cohort, and two of these youths moved directly into trade assistant jobs. However, one of these resumed his apprenticeship with a new employer one year later. Another also resumed his apprenticeship with a new employer but subsequently left. The third apprentice left to move into a job without the possibility of a training component. All left initially within the first few of months of their placements and all cited difficulties with the boss as reasons for their leaving. A further trainee changed employers, again citing difficulties with the boss as the reason.

However, as indicated previously in relation to those in jobs without a training component, some left employers when it became evident that an apprenticeship was unlikely to be realised. In each case, in their own eyes, they were placing themselves in a better position to look for an apprenticeship.

Among the 2000 early exits, when interviewed towards the latter part of their first post-school year, the six who had acquired apprenticeship places at the beginning of the year had remained in them.

Given that attrition rates are estimated to be highest in the first year of apprenticeships and traineeships (Grey et al. 1999), highest for early school exits (Ray et al. 2000) and as high as 30% overall (Ray et al. 2000, p.3; NCVER 2000b), the Family of Trades cohorts have been remarkably stable in their vocational training positions. For example, the 1999 early school exits in apprenticeships had a 94.4% retention rate over a period of up to two-and-a-half years into their training. Numbers were too small or it is too early to see if this stability is also a feature of the other groups who undertook the Family of Trades program.

The 1999 early exits were again the group which has been able to supply the majority of the data on dealing with pressures which could lead to withdrawal from an apprenticeship. Of those in this group who were in apprenticeships, more than half admitted to considering withdrawal at some stage. In most cases this occurred early in the apprenticeship training when, by their own admission, they were not used to the hours or the work. Few said that they went as far as actually taking preliminary steps to withdraw, such as making inquiries about other jobs. The majority, however, explained that they had discussed the matter with their bosses, TAFE lecturers and/or with their parents. In several cases to date it was parents who gave stern admonitions about 'sticking with it'.

Among the 1999 early exits, there were three withdrawals from apprenticeships by the conclusion of this study (June 2002). Two of these were the same person who left one placement

and went to another and subsequently left that. This young carpentry and joinery apprentice was initially working in the roof carpentry area when he was injured. After an extended period of time on sick leave this quietly spoken and serious young man with strong religious convictions returned to work and was subsequently sacked. The circumstances are not known but in his mind the two events are linked.

He found another apprenticeship in his trade and, as he explained the situation, his brother noticed that he was not being paid at the appropriate rate or for the hours he was working. On his brother's advice he rang his employer to discuss the matter, whereupon, according to him, his employer informed him that he could not afford to keep him on and terminated his employment on the spot. This youth is now working with his father in another field and says that after the two experiences with apprenticeship places he thinks it is unlikely that he will seek another, despite having completed more than a year of carpentry and joinery training.

A second youth who withdrew from his apprenticeship was also sacked. He has no respect for the boss who demanded that he, a sixteen-year-old apprentice, work alone on a building site until 10.30 pm one night to finish a job. The situation was even more unacceptable because the youth said he had a social commitment arranged for the evening. He chose not to do what was asked of him and was sacked when he reported for work the following morning. This young man moved straight into a trade assistant job in a related industry and welcomed the higher wages. However, for almost a year he kept a watchful eye out for an apprenticeship in his original trade, stonemasonry. Eventually one arose and he was able to resume his apprenticeship.

It was not just the demands made on him and the subsequent sacking that fed his low opinion of the former employer but also the way in which his apprenticeship was managed. He reported that he, together with other apprentices on site in his original placement, had their apprenticeship progress held back because they were not permitted to begin the TAFE component, as the boss did not want 'all his employees off at TAFE for weeks on end'. Without the employers' version of events, such stories are of course incomplete. However, these are the ways in which youths are reporting early career experiences.

The majority of apprentices could not see themselves withdrawing, and when asked what might provoke them to leave their apprenticeships, most could only surmise that an offer of a great deal more money, an extended period of 'bad days', a severe injury or a 'really' bad boss might make them think about it. However, the offer of a training place in an elite sports squad was seen as a compelling lure by a few, some of whom were more than halfway through their trade training.

The general approach is summed up in the following quote from an interview with a second-year electrical apprentice:

Have you ever thought about chucking it in?

Um, not seriously. Some days you can't be bothered, but I dunno … unlike school you know that it's getting you somewhere. At school you're just sort of like, 'Where am I going?' But now, you should just stick it out. You know you're going to get to the goal at the end of the tunnel, that's different.

So, you never came close?

No. I'd have nothing else to do. I have a day off, I have like a day off like on the Easter weekend or something and I'm bored … and I want to go to work.

Would anything make you chuck it in?

Um, can't really see me do it, but, if I had a problem with someone or something I'm sure it would probably sort out … Maybe if I was just a, like a TA or just a worker, I would. But not in an apprenticeship, wouldn't do that. 'Cause otherwise the two years I've worked my

bum off for five bucks an hour has just gone to waste. So, no, no way … I was digging trenches for ten hours a day for most of my first year …

I just look at it as like I'm getting paid to get [my] qualifications. My sister's at uni, she has to pay 20 000 bucks to get her qualification and I'm getting paid to do mine. I just look at it that way.

Knowing how to keep a job

Youth understanding of the behaviours, dispositions and demeanours required and valued in the workplace give some indication of their awareness of the employer–employee relationship and of what is involved in 'becoming' a worker. Such understandings are part of work-readiness and early career considerations and clearly those who have held part-time/casual jobs are likely to have an advantage in this respect.

As indicated earlier, when groups were asked what they thought would help a young person retain a job, job competence and productivity were not considered by youth surveyed while still at school or recently having made the transition, to be the most important things employers looked for when employing youth. When three of the groups were asked specifically in open-ended interviews for this study, almost half of each of the three groups mentioned aspects related to the work (job competence, work habits, productivity and punctuality) as important factors assisting maintain employment:

- working together as a team
- consistently work hard
- gets the job done
- able to do anything the boss asks you to perform
- do everything right
- learn fast
- use commonsense
- leave the job neat and tidy
- be on time
- doesn't leave on the dot.

Job-related behaviour, demeanour and character (for example, respect for authority) were mentioned next most often, with comments such as the following:

- don't give cheek
- do what you are told
- don't be a smart ass
- listen to what [the boss/supervisor] tells you
- don't steal from the company
- don't bend the rules
- don't muck around.

Enthusiasm and willingness to undertake the various tasks required on the job made up the third cluster of most frequent comments: 'being interested in the job'; 'keen in the morning'; 'always helping out'; 'reliable'; 'doesn't complain' and; 'confident'.

Of the comments supplied by the three groups in interviews, a further cluster related specifically to the role played by interpersonal relationships in maintaining a job: 'showing respect'; 'getting along with other workers and the boss' and; 'generally being friendly'.

The 'good' workplace

Discussions regarding what constitutes a good workplace inevitably involved descriptions of their workplaces and revealed much about their early career experiences. Given that the majority of the study population was involved with building and construction trades and occupations, it is not surprising that concerns about safety were often mentioned in assessing a workplace, particularly as they settled into jobs. No one indicated that they were working in an unsafe environment. Nevertheless the concern remained:

> I haven't been on [a worksite] that's been that unsafe … nearly all of the ones that we've been on have been, like you know, pretty safe. You may have to wear a hard hat or something like that because you've got tilers on the roof and stuff like that. That's probably the only bad thing we've ever come against … where you go in and tilers are laying tile on the roof and you see a couple drop and stuff like that, so you don't want to be underneath them when they come through.

Linked also to safety in the minds of some was the notion of a 'hygienic' or 'sanitary' workplace:

> … gotta be clean worksite and so on, if you know what I mean … Like there's a lot of stuff you trip over. Builders get out and they carry heavy bits of timber and brickies leave like the straps and that on the ground and you just trip over. Pretty dangerous actually.

The safe workplace was also sometimes associated with good organisation: 'Everyone knows what they are doing, it's organised' and 'organisation, punctuality and efficiency'. Others saw good management on a worksite resulting in the delivery of 'plenty of work, plenty of hours' and 'overtime' as the mark of a good workplace. Having 'good tools' or 'the right tools for the job' were also mentioned as part of the picture of a good worksite.

A great many of the responses identified interpersonal relationships and good communication between those working on site and between workers and management as integral to a good workplace:

> **What do you think makes it a good workplace?**
>
> ✧ ah, just good environment, like all the guys are pretty, like friendly and easy to get on with
>
> ✧ working together as a team
>
> ✧ … communication and that, like everyone knows what they're on about and stuff like that … [a] friendly workplace.

Some were well aware of the workplace implications of conflict and the ongoing need for good communication and conflict resolution:

> So long as everyone gets along, it's a good working environment, you know. But if there's a little niggle between other people it could rub off on some other people.

And others when asked what might also constitute a bad workplace answered in the same vein:

> ✧ Um, people who keep things to themselves, I s'pose. Something happens and, um, say someone has a conflict with someone and then they don't say anything about it and it'll come up later and people get edgy about that.
>
> ✧ It's not a good environment if everyone bitches and you know argues and picks on you.

The feeling of vulnerability of the young worker showed through some of the ideas about what might make a worksite not so good to work on, as illustrated in the following quotes and that immediately above:

- … like, if all the guys just, I don't know they're hard to get on with, or they just tease you.

- Well, I s'pose the people there. Like where I am now, 'cos there's two other apprentices there, they really made me welcome, and I just feel real comfortable there now, talking to them and the other tradies.

- People that respect you. Don't have a go at you all the time. Just let you do your own thing. If you stuff up, then, yeah, have a go at 'em, but if you know what you're doing, just let them do their thing.

The 'good' boss

As many of the vignettes cited suggest, the relationship between young workers and management is a critical factor in early career experience. Given the numbers of workers without formal qualifications in the industry, the lack of training qualifications among employers and the industry's structure, the relationship between youth and on-site trainers is highly significant. It was also reasoned that generally the relationship with the boss and management is extremely important for young workers recently out of school. Their most recent experience of authority has been one of under-status as a child in the hierarchical and authoritarian school system. As noted above, both the evaluation reports of the Family of Trades Year 11 VET program students commented on how widely students reported their enjoyment of the more adult learning environment experienced on the one day a week at TAFE, and the way in which they considered they were treated in an adult manner by the TAFE lecturers—90% and 86.3% of the 1999 and 2000 cohorts respectively held this perception (Koczberski & Taylor 1999, p.37; Taylor & Koczberski 2001b, p.79). During interviews for the study reported here, issues such as the nature of relationships with bosses, youth conceptions of a good boss and the extent to which employers and supervisors appeared to be mentoring these young workers emerged as issues for exploration.

In the study data, as indicated above and in the previous chapter, many of the observations of what constituted a good company and good worksite related explicitly to leadership and management. For example, of the 74 ideas contained in responses on a good company (see table 18, appendix 1) given by the early school exits in the 2000 cohort (n=19), almost one-quarter (24.3%) of these specifically mentioned the boss—'The boss speaks nicely to you'. For some of the respondents, the mark of a good company to work for was one which allowed some negotiation of hours, one in which they were paid for the work done, a company which looked after its workers, or one which didn't turn out shoddy work, comments which, by implication, also say something about a company's leadership and management.

Generally, respondents regarded a good boss in terms of his interpersonal and management styles in relation to 'friendliness' and being treated with 'respect'. (The various specific mentions of the boss in the interview data have been extracted and are presented in table 20, appendix 1). Several extended responses appraising leadership are given below and illustrate the diversity and importance of the relationship with management for young workers.

What makes a good boss?

They are firm. They … they have a high standard of work, or high rate, or high standard, same thing. Um, you know, they teach, they teach you, they guide you in what's right, what's wrong, you know what's perfect, what's not. … the people that you work with are friendly and you get along with them 'cos if you don't get along with them, you know, it's pretty pointless, isn't it? You're going to be arguing, fightin' all the time and I'm lucky I've got a mob down there, they're all friendly. … the bosses are good, you know, they can also relate to you; they joke around. When they're, you know, serious, they're serious, everyone

does their work but they also have a period of time, you know, where they muck around with you. It's good, you know, like they can relate to you as well.

And another:

> **Is there anything you think could make it a bad place to work?**
>
> My boss maybe, if he was like a real say like hard man. Like he's really understanding and really easy to talk to and stuff, like easy to approach, [but if a boss was a] bit different than that … maybe it would be a bit harder.
>
> **Aside from his approachable nature, what makes him a good boss?**
>
> Just, I dunno, probably understands that, … like I'm not going to be like a genius now at refrigeration. And like he just, knows what I can sort of do and like if he underestimates what I can do, I can just tell him, 'I can do this', and then he'll say 'yeah, give it a go'.

Several comments referred to supervision and as one respondent noted, the good boss 'looked over the work'. Recognition and appreciation from management and the boss of work done by employees were also valued:

> Ah, yeah, [the boss] he's pretty good. … sometimes he's pretty hard to talk to 'cause he's really busy and he's always … busy and stuff … he sort of just keeps to himself. Yeah … Oh, at first like, when I first started, he never used to—like you'd walk past in the workshop and he'd never say hello or anything like that ... I didn't know if it was just me or what he was like. Like that went on for six months and then in September I get employee of the month and I'd hardly even spoken to him. So, I'm like '**** he must not mind me' … that was given to me in September and we haven't had one since … He gives you a gift voucher and a certificate and stuff … and like an apprentice has never got it before either. I just got a big shock, eh. Pretty happy … I dunno what I did … Yeah, kept out of his way.

The notion of the boss as a mentor and role model was embedded in many of the accounts of early career experiences. In the following extract, for example, a young electrical apprentice details how he is learning on the job all the time and modelling himself on his boss:

> I have learnt heaps of stuff, especially to do with wiring up, safety stuff like climbing ladders, protective gear, and other stuff, like look well presented, just like your boss and treat customers like the boss does, like take your boots off when you walk on their carpet, use your manners and clean up after yourself … I couldn't have learnt these things at school.

When asked to whom they might turn if they had a problem, several unambiguously nominated their bosses. There were also examples of the boss as a mate, regularly socialising with the young apprentice, such as having a game of golf from time to time. There was much mirth when we rang to interview one of the apprentices at home one evening and began asking questions about a good boss. The boss was apparently in the same room sharing a beer, which appeared to be a regular after-work occurrence. Clearly it depends on the size of the company and to some extent the age of the boss as to how much direct contact and socialising the young worker has with those in authority.

The notion of a 'grumpy' boss has similarly appeared throughout the data over three years beginning, in some instances, with some of the Family of Trades students' observations of their work experience employers and supervisors. One apprentice reflected:

> I've got a really grumpy boss. He's a shocker … I don't see him much.

Avoidance?

Yeah, that's it; that's what I do. I just keep out of his way … I just usually see the managers and don't see the boss.

And another:

The supervisor's he's, um, he's sort of seven foot and mean lookin' so he doesn't put off a good vibes kind of thing. When I went for my interview there he, um, scared us a bit … I dunno, oh he's such a big bloke—got the mo and the goatee happening.

While some observed that they rarely saw their bosses, or some like the respondents cited above, were not entirely positive about their bosses, the general impression from the data is that most felt their bosses were relatively easy to get on with, understanding and competent. Many were highly complimentary of their bosses' role as a mentor, role model and friend, with examples of young workers observing that their bosses were the 'best you could have', the 'best in the industry', or just 'wicked'.

Worksite tensions

In some of the accounts of the workplace and early career experiences, worksite tensions are referred to or implied. Like the cabinet-making apprentice's seemingly unfairly dismissal from two jobs, and the youth apparently expected to work late at night on his own on a building site, several others have had less than satisfactory experiences in the industry. These have occurred in their early career experiences of a job or work experience as pre-apprentices, or even during work experience as a school student in the Family of Trades, as the following extract from an interview with a 16-year-old Year 12 school student details:

… the work experience part [of the Family of Trades], I didn't like that too much. Sort of got a rough deal with my one. Like on the school holidays I had to … had bricklaying in [outer metropolitan suburb]. I had to go there for five days which was pretty … plus bricklayers have early starts. That was awful! And, … after the first day I was dead when I got home 'cos it was just so tiring! … I didn't actually do any bricklaying. They used me as a labourer and I was sort of, had a lot of problems with that person I had … The main guy I was with went to the eastern states and another one of the brickies was sick and there was only one left, and then there was a labourer and me. And then there was sort of like conflict that day and the only brickie got fired when the main guy came back. I finished at 9 o'clock [pm] 'cos that guy wouldn't work any more. It was very complicated!

What was the conflict about?

The labourer was complaining that the single brickie wasn't laying the bricks straight and that like they were crooked so they were saying he was like a weirdo and that. They were saying like that guy pays an old lady 20 bucks so he can sleep on the lawn, on her verandah, so I dunno, it's very weird. I wasn't there all week so I wouldn't know what happened.

How did you handle it?

Oh, I, I tried to stay out of it!

Did you succeed?

Ah, I kept away from that.

While reports of such experiences were isolated, references in the data to dysfunctional aspects of some worksites appeared from time to time. And even when hypothesising about what might make a company or a workplace not so good to be involved with, one had the feeling in some cases that respondents were drawing on real experience or at least hearsay.

Job satisfaction

Implicit in the data is the notion of job satisfaction, a useful concept for collating youth appraisals of their early career experience. Questions specifically designed to elicit assessments of job satisfaction asked respondents what they liked most and least about their jobs, and what aspects of their jobs they found most challenging. Some groups were asked to rate themselves in terms of how happy they thought they were with their current circumstance. Given the delayed workforce entry via pre-apprenticeships among the 1999 school completers and the 2000 early school exits, and the fact that the last group to leave school (2000 Year 12s) did so late in the study period, the bulk of the data on job satisfaction is derived from the 1999 early school exits who had been in the workplace the longest (12–18 months) by the conclusion of this study. Wherever possible and appropriate, these data have been augmented by specific comments from individuals from the other groups who have been in the workforce for some time.

In terms of what these young people liked most about their jobs, most often mentioned (47%) were aspects of the work itself—what they saw as its variety, the opportunity to work outside and move about between sites, and a series of identified specific work tasks (see table 21, appendix 1):

✧ do lots of different things on different sites

✧ probably enjoying hands-on stuff

✧ pretty exciting, doing different things all the time

✧ different stuff I'm doing like low volt lighting and audio

✧ just a new thing every day

✧ decorative finishes; cutting in and rolling-painting where the roller can't get

✧ working outdoors; always busy; not boring 'cos you're always doing stuff.

The second most frequently cited (27%) aspect of their jobs which appealed was the social environment and workplace relationships. Working 'with a good bunch of blokes' who were friendly, patient and welcoming was an important component of job satisfaction. Other comments in this category included aspects such as the following:

✧ really good guys to work with

✧ they don't fight—they get on good

✧ they include me in everything

✧ people you meet through it

✧ the guys I work with; couldn't find a better bunch

✧ I like the guy I'm working with; he's a good bloke; he treats me well

✧ good environment, there's pressure but it's OK.

The valuing of workplace relationships showed not only in the job satisfaction data but, as indicated in the context of discussions of various aspects of their entry into industry, was also an important component in their appraisals, for example, of companies and worksites. A significant percentage of responses (14%) also highlighted the personal development they experienced in a satisfying job, the chance to learn more, to solve problems, and to develop expertise in specific aspects of the job as time went on:

✧ they teach you heaps

✧ experience you get from it

✧ it's a challenge—making sure I do a good job and the boss tells you that.

Of those who were settled into trades and occupations which matched their aspirations, few could identify anything that they disliked about their jobs other than minor niggles about early

starts, low pay and, for some, the distance they had to travel to work (see table 22, appendix 1). While they welcomed overtime as an opportunity to supplement their wages, understandably for the age group, weekend work was not liked by several. As would normally be expected of any worker, on each worksite there were some tasks enjoyed less than others, particularly those which were painstaking and repetitive, such as sanding and trench digging. Some of the youths found the demanding heavy physical labour involved, for example in heaving rafters around a building site, to be demanding on young bodies. Pressure to work faster in cases where they saw standards being compromised, and putting up with criticism if a job was not up to scratch or when mistakes were made, were aspects of a job that some said they liked the least. Some of the respondents who had begun the off-site theory instruction component of their training claimed this also as an aspect the job they least liked. Significantly, however, 24% of the 1999 early school exits and 17% across the groups, even when probed, could think of nothing at all that they disliked about their work (see table 22, in appendix 1).

When youths were asked about what they considered to be the most challenging aspects of their jobs, in the main, the same issues arose: the challenge of working at the right speed, mastering new skills and keeping focused, particularly in the repetitive tasks (see table 23, appendix 1). Specific tasks they found difficult to get right at first, such as measuring precision and the reading of plans, were identified in 36% of the responses relating to the challenges of the job. One or two, well into their apprenticeships, reported that dealing with management was the most challenging, and indeed the least liked aspect of their job, and others, particularly those in painting and decorating, commented that too long on the one site can become a 'bit boring'.

While the generated questions were slightly different for the two groups of early school exits, they were essentially the same appraisal of their current satisfaction levels toward the end of the first post-school year. When these satisfaction appraisals are compared for the two groups (see table 24, appendix 1), they reflect the degree to which aspirations and expectations have been met. For example, 48% of the 2000 early exits said they were very happy with their present circumstances, and all of these youths were in apprenticeships or pre-apprenticeships. Of the 40% who rated themselves as merely happy, seven were in jobs without a training component, some of which were casual. When the building and construction factor is considered separately, 83% (n=10) of those rating themselves as very happy were in the building and construction industry as opposed to just three in the happy category. As one of the apprentice cabinet-makers said: 'I'm very happy, I really enjoy my work, I'm very enthused, I love gettin' up in the morning and going to my work. It's beautiful; it suits me to a tee'.

The reasons for the ratings of less than very happy did not just depend on whether or not a youth had a training place, as illustrated in the following extract from an interview with a young man working as a plaster's trade assistant who rated himself as 'just happy'. The quote says much about early career attitudes and decision-making strategies for those who were not settled and were having doubts about whether the field they were in would indeed provide them with an enjoyable career. It also illuminates the workplace experience for many who do not aspire to a qualification as an explicit goal. Implicit in the quote is also the frustration some can feel when, as a trade assistant, they see themselves carrying out the same sort of workplace tasks as an apprentice might be doing.

Any ambitions to do an apprenticeship in plastering?

… well I've been thinking about that for a while. I'm not really getting, like, I'm not really impressed with the job. I feel I need to do something different 'cos it's just not interesting me as much as it used to and, so, I'm thinking about doing another trade. I'm not really sure just yet. I'm just sticking with this trade until I've got things sorted out. … just not satisfied with the work.

In what way?

Like … I, I just go to work to *do* the work but I don't feel like, like I'm, I'm going to work, you know, to be *happy* at work. Like, people wake up in the morning, you know, 'bloody hell I don't want to go to work today' and all that, but I feel I want a job that I can wake up to and not say that, just go for it, just, just not even thinking about it.

What doesn't make you feel happy?

… not too sure really. I just, I don't know. I just find it interesting, other trades. Like I've tried out this trade and I've tried out three different other ones [Family of Trades]. I just haven't … I've stuck to this one for so long that I haven't got any, like, had any experience in the other trades, kind of thing, and so, I want to get out, you know, and try something different other than something in the building trade. Maybe, you know, mechanics or something like that so I'm not stuck in the building trade.

[Is it] because you're a labourer?

Well, he … treats us like apprentices, really. Like we're doing all the labouring still, but we do things that apprentices, normally … would do. Like say, for instance, … pushin' on walls and that. Like normal apprentices would be pushin' on the walls and the labourers would be out, you know, mixin' the mud, pushin' the barrows in, and stuff like that, but he'll let us go, you know, out on the mixer, push the barrows in and push on the walls. It's like labouring and learning at the same time kind of thing, and so it's working out alright, really.

This respondent displays an ambivalence towards his work. On the one hand, he has an appreciation that discrimination is not occuring between the trade assistants and the apprentices on site in terms of responsibilities and allocated tasks, thus providing the trade assistant with equivalent learning and experience-gaining opportunities. However, implied also is a sense of unfairness that this experience is not counting toward trade certification for the trade assistant.

Not all respondents experienced the trade assistant job as frustrating. One youth, for example, was strategically moving from time to time between his apprenticeship and a trade assistant position with the same firm because he said he had some debts to pay off and it was a way to earn a bit more money. He was confident that he could slip back into his apprenticship because the boss had told him: 'He would look after him'. He saw no diference in the type of work he did or responsibilities he was given as a building and construction industry trade assistant or apprentice in the same trade (stonemasonry) with the same firm.

In 2002, the 1999 early exits, most of whom had been in apprenticeships or jobs for up to three years, were reporting that they still felt challenged and were still learning new things and honing their skills every day. Many also reported being given increased responsibility with the allocation of more complicated tasks and the development of their own areas of special expertise. Indeed, one young apprentice had already won an employee of the year award, had finished his bricklaying apprenticeship and was off to work overseas. Confidence born of increasing expertise emerged in the job satisfaction data; one felt he was already 'up there with the best' because he had 'been taught by one of the best in the state' and another commented when asked to clarify what he liked about his job:

What sort of thing have you learnt on the job then?

All sorts really, just better ways of doing things. I've learnt, basically in the last six months I've learnt that I can pretty much build any of the cupboards that they've designed there. I'm ranked pretty highly up, and I get all the hard jobs with all the difficult things 'cause they know I can do it … I've learnt how to do that and it's good 'cause I put in my own ideas now. I can go in and I can say, you know, 'I think it would be better if we did it this way'. And I can alter my cupboards to do that you know, so I have my input as well. I'm not just doing what, you know, building them how they think they should be built. So I've

learnt a lot I think … I'm confident as I'm doing private jobs on the side. I shouldn't really say that should I? For friends and stuff.

Most of these young people have reported rewarding experiences with the building and construction industry in general, and specific trades and worksites in particular, and they were moving forward towards achieving their trade qualifications confidently, some with aspirations to go into business themselves or to complement their qualifications with further post-initial trade qualification training.

What is interesting about the data reported here is that they challenge the view of youth as unmotivated, unwilling to take on hard work, as holding unrealistic expectations of high remuneration and with little respect for authority. Such a view of young people does not sit with the picture painted by these data which generally have indicated that these youths feel similarly to one of the apprentices above who commented: 'I love gettin' up in the morning and going to my work. It's beautiful; it suits me to a tee'.

9 Conclusion

Introduction

In the context of an industry which comprises a substantial sector of the Australian economy, the longitudinal data reported here qualitatively link, in various ways, a particular school VET program to the destinations and early career experiences of a group of Western Australian youth. The links identified over a longitudinal period are not correlational or straightforward, but are two-way connections which have been elaborated from the experiences and perceptions reported by these young people and subsequently contextualised within a concurrent industry profile.

A fine-grained qualitative study such as this does not enable definitive broad generalisations. However, as the young people in this study all share a common school VET experience, it is possible to use these findings to elaborate on a number of the reported implications being drawn from gross statistical correlations between youth employment and industry conditions, and to consider some of the longer-term implications of the specific program under consideration here, and VET in Schools in general.

While a particular industry provides the context to this study, other less explicit connections have also been considered. These include identifying the young people's family and friendship connections with the industry, and the links between the school VET experience and the building and construction industry. The aspiration and destination patterns and the retention and attrition profiles of the youths have also been identified. The study sought the opinion of two cohorts of young people to determine their understanding of these links through their perceptions of the industry, of the transition process and through their early career experiences.

One of the important conclusions drawn from this study relates to the discrepancy between the literature and the results reported here. Various reports, such as the *Building brighter futures* (Building and Construction Industry Working Group 2001), identify a series of links between the building and construction industry and issues relating to youth recruitment, employment and retention. Central to the issues in these reports are the cyclical nature of the industry itself, the uncertainty consequently generated, and the reported skills shortage in the industry. The industry appears to be concerned to retain and retrain skilled workers rather than focus on youth recruitment.

Various industry-related reports admit that recent structural changes in the industry (that is, increasing subcontracting and privatisation of government activities) work against youth recruitment and training. However, the prevailing industry attitude is that youth training is extremely costly to industry, with factors such as youth attrition, lack of dedication and low standards of recruits, cited. The industry reports that there are low levels of youth attraction to the industry and an unwillingness to travel to worksites. The industry also claims that young people are disinclined to undertake physical and outside work, and that they unreasonably demand high financial remuneration.

In relation to links between recruitment to the industry and VET in general and school VET in particular, the industry paints a less than satisfactory picture, reporting that youth appear to be

unaware that they can commence building and construction-related training while still at school, that school skill training is inappropriately sequenced, and that schools and school students have little understanding of the industry. The industry continues to call for stronger links with the school system. The Housing Industry Association submission to the 2002 Standing Committee on Education and Training (2002, p.3), for example, claimed that students are not being exposed to the industry while at school. The submission noted a lack of articulation between the industry and school VET programs and between schools and TAFE institutes in most states in what it described (p.3) as 'a real stand-off in terms of the relationship between schools and the TAFE system'.

The data reported here contest most of these claims, particularly with respect to:

✧ recruitment and entry to the industry

✧ perceptions of the industry

✧ youth satisfaction with the industry

✧ the low calibre of recruits to the industry.

In concluding this report, in addition to a discussion of these aspects of links with the industry, the following are also considered:

✧ connections through industry-related mentors and role models

✧ the Family of Trades structural links with industry

✧ youth perceptions of the program's impact on transition and early careers.

Recruitment and entry to the industry

It is common wisdom supported by a great deal of correlational evidence that economic fluctuations impinged on the industry's level of youth employment and training during this period. However, although the numbers within each subgroup in this study are small, the overall data for this case study do not support this claim.

Of the youths who undertook the Family of Trades school VET program in this study, more than two-thirds (68%) of the study sample have entered the industry, despite industry fluctuations in the period under consideration.

Within six months of leaving school, 30% had obtained apprenticeships or at least jobs in the industry and 17% were in industry-related pre-apprenticeships. Seventy-one per cent of the early school exits and 63% of the school completers in each cohort ended up in employment and/or training in the industry within six months of leaving school. Only one of the apprentices reported losing his apprenticeship place due to lack of work, and that was, he said, when he raised an issue relating to his pay with his boss. However, two of the apprentices with group training schemes reported being moved to another employer due to a contraction of work. None of the youths working as trade assistants was retrenched during the period. Some, such as those in air-conditioning, commented on the seasonal nature of their work. However, most reported that their worksites were busy and more likely to be taking on large new contracts or having 'too much work' during the period considered here.

Nevertheless, 6.3% of the 1999 cohort who remained at school for Year 12 and 27.3% of the 2000 cohort who completed Year 12, when asked directly, were unsuccessful in finding jobs with or without training places at the end of Year 11, and 37.5% and 18.2% respectively continued to try during Year 12. Similarly, the interview data contain many stories of attempts to enter the industry by knocking on doors, ringing around and sending off letters and résumés, to which, in many instances, no responses were received. This indicates that, for a significant number, the

realisation of employment and training aspirations was not entirely straightforward over the period under consideration. However, this does not appear to be related to the data on the industry's business activity fluctuations.

Nor does there appear to be a relationship between the ease with which post-school employment and training places were obtained and the holding of part-time/casual jobs while at school. These casual jobs were in unrelated industries and the 30% who entered the workplace for the first time on leaving school found it no more or less difficult to find a career place than those who worked while at school.

In the context of the ease with which the young people in this study made the transition from school to employment and training, those attempting to make the transition from school into the building and construction sector were faced with varying industry cycles depending on when they were leaving school:

✧ The first group to leave school (the early school exits among the 1999 cohort) made the transition at a time when the industry was experiencing a favourable cycle. Those of the 1999 cohort who completed Year 12, together with those early school exits among the 2000 cohort who made the transition at the end of 2000 and in early 2001, however, did so at a time when the industry was experiencing relative difficulties, with a downturn in building activity and building approvals being reported. The final group, the 2000 cohort who completed Year 12, were attempting to enter the building and construction industry at a time when the industry appeared to be beginning to recover.

✧ Just over 20% of respondents stated that they had initially unsuccessfully looked for and/or applied for apprenticeships, and 14.8% and 29.6% of the Year 12 school completers indicated that they had attempted to find a place while still at school during or at the end of Years 11 and 12 respectively.

✧ In addition, there were frequent mentions in the interview data of individual trades being difficult to enter without contacts in the industry.

Respondents reported employing a variety of transition avenues and strategies:

✧ Forty-three per cent of the study population opted to complete Year 12, believing that ultimately it would offer a comparative advantage in locating an apprenticeship and/or employment.

✧ Twenty-six per cent of the study population indicated that they had received their apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship places through a family member or friend of the family. Just over 21% said that they had been assisted by their structured workplace employer, while only 12.9% cited the school VET coordinator or careers advisor as assisting them to find a post-school apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship place.

✧ The majority of respondents indicated that their first preference was for an apprenticeship and they used the pre-apprenticeship as a back-up if an apprenticeship place was not realised in the immediate post-school period.

At the conclusion of this study respondents were working and/or training in a variety of trades. Over two-thirds of the study population entered the building and construction sector post-school and of these:

✧ Nearly 76% (75.8%) were in what could be considered to be mainstream trades, while 17% were located in miscellaneous occupations associated with the sector.

✧ In terms of reasons for choice of trade, 62.8% of respondents surveyed cited enjoyment of the work as the main reason underpinning their choice; 42.8% cited work experience and familiarity with the work itself as motivation for selecting a trade or occupation to pursue.

✧ While only 17% of youths cited family and/or friends working in a trade as their reason for choosing a trade for themselves, 57.9% stated that they had family members and 85% said that they had friends working in the building and construction sector.

✧ Friends and family were reported to be working across a wide range of building and construction trades and occupations, with the largest numbers in mainstream trades such as electrical, carpentry, plumbing, plastering, and painting and decorating.

✧ Nearly 70% (69.6%) of those who undertook the Family of Trades program had undertaken part-time/casual work while at school but rarely were these jobs related to building and construction or the trades and occupations to which these youths moved after leaving school.

Although the numbers are small, the data here do tentatively confirm other findings that those who do not find an employment and/or training place within the first post-school year are most at risk of failing to meet their stated aspirations and that they tend to stop looking after about a year.

Attrition and retention

In relation to the high attrition rates reported widely in the industry, this study has shown apprentice retention rates to be 94.4% in what is widely considered to be the vulnerable first year. There was no change to the retention rate among the 1999 cohort in the second post-school year. Of those few who did leave apprenticeships, the reported circumstances appear to offer reasonable grounds for doing so and, in some cases, on the surface say more about employers than these young people themselves. The statistics reveal that, in all but two cases, these young men have regained their training places either with the same employer or with another, and one of those who has not done so has moved to pursue a career in elite-level sport. The youths in this study were adamant that only serious injury, a really bad boss or an offer of a substantial pay rise would make them consider leaving an apprenticeship, at least after the first year of training. This is not to say that all youths in the study saw their future as lying in the trade in which they were training.

Perceptions of the industry

The data here also contest reports that youth hold low perceptions of the industry and that these impact on both recruitment to, and the calibre of youth entering the industry. The data on reasons for trade choice, factors attracting the youths in this study to the industry and on their satisfaction with that choice do not indicate low perceptions of the industry. While some of these young people found some trades more attractive than others, this did not correlate with the degree of physical labour involved or with an inside/outside work dichotomy, nor did it specifically correlate with the public perception of trade status. In relation to favouring some trades over others, this was more likely to be due to lack of familiarity with the work, rumours of higher pay and of difficulty in the theory components of individual trades, or perceived peer competition in the field, which led them to reject some trades.

One would expect that, given the exposure to the building and construction industry provided by the Family of Trades program, students' supposed negative view of the industry would be evident in the aspiration/destination data. This did not occur. These data show clearly a shift towards building and construction by those who undertook the program. In the 1999 cohort, 48% held aspirations to enter the industry at the commencement of Year 11 and 72% of the cohort ended up in the industry. For the 2000 cohort, 30% held early Year 11 aspirations to enter the industry, and 63% subsequently moved into building and construction employment and/or training destinations.

Similarly, the negative aspects of the high-profile and prolonged media reports on the industry (for example, the predicted and reported impact of the introduction of the goods and services tax, the HIH collapse, and the ongoing interest rate fluctuations, together with the negative publicity associated with the Cole Royal Commission) were never raised by respondents who were still students or in their early career employment or training.

Regarding their perceptions of the industry and employment within it, the interview data suggest a reflective and realistic view of what employers might look for when employing youth and what might be required for a young person to maintain employment in the industry:

✧ All of the youths ranked showing respect, hard work, and punctuality as either very important or important attributes employers would look for. Between 90–100% of youths in the various study groups considered that an employer would also be seeking youths with good hand skills who were prepared to do what they were told, not afraid to ask questions and who were honest.

✧ In terms of being able to maintain a job within the industry, most youths believed that they would maintain their jobs if they were punctual, competent and productive in their jobs. They also rated highly respect for authority in the worksite, and character attributes, such as honesty, and attitudinal attributes, such as enthusiasm and willingness to pitch in and do what needs to be done.

The youths in this study felt that the Family of Trades school VET program familiarised them with the industry and the range of trades and training options available. However, there seemed not to be a great deal of interest in events and factors impacting on, or conditions in the wider industry beyond the individual worksite. For example:

✧ While some respondents referred to firms in competition with their employers which were experiencing difficulties or even going out of business, they were often hard-pressed to identify what they considered constituted a good company. Those who did provide extended interview data on the topic considered among other things, company stability, competent management and leadership, together with good industrial conditions, and good on-site interpersonal relations as key factors.

✧ There were two union members among the study population, one of whom was working in the building and construction sector.

Career satisfaction

Related to negative perceptions of the industry are the young workers' reported low levels of satisfaction with the work and employment context in building and construction. The data show this not to be the case among the youth tracked in this study. Of the 1999 early school exits in the study population, 93% rated themselves either happy or very happy with what they were doing and 88% of the 2000 early school leavers likewise. Three-quarters of respondents surveyed identified the work itself and/or the social environment and relationships as the main attraction to the job. Those who were not satisfied were, as to be expected, the few unemployed or those who, when interviewed, were still not settled in jobs or training places which matched their aspirations. The majority, while acknowledging that they worked hard for low wages and that they had good days and bad days, rated themselves as happy if not very happy with their jobs, and most were optimistic about their futures.

Overall, the youths who undertook the Family of Trades and subsequently entered employment and/or training in the industry were highly satisfied with their careers:

✧ Of those who entered apprenticeships, only three dropped out, one to pursue an internationally competitive sporting career. Each of the remaining two was dismissed under various circumstances but both resumed their apprenticeships with different employers. Both

have subsequently left a further time, one sacked a second time and the other opting for financial reasons to move in and out of the same apprenticeship place.

✧ Similarly, those in building and construction occupations without a training component have remained with their employment. While reporting disappointment not to have yet obtained an apprenticeship, they regard themselves as satisfied with their jobs.

✧ While most apprentices indicated that they had contemplated withdrawing from their apprenticeships, particularly in the early stages, very few had taken any steps toward effecting a withdrawal. However, many said that they had discussed the matter with family and/or employers.

✧ Beyond the first six months, the overwhelming majority suggested that only dire circumstances would provoke them to contemplate withdrawing from an apprenticeship at an advanced stage.

✧ Data from the early school exits in both cohorts indicate that over 90% rated themselves either very happy or happy with their jobs.

✧ The group longest in the workforce indicated a high level of job satisfaction, with most identifying the work itself as the most appealing part of the job, followed by the social environment and workplace relationships.

✧ Integral to the data on early careers and job satisfaction was the notion of a good boss. Many respondents spoke glowingly of their own bosses, some citing firm personal friendships between themselves and those in authority on the worksite. Integral to the notion of a good boss were interpersonal and management—and especially communication—styles and character. Job-related competence was not rated highly by the young workers.

Recruit quality

There is nothing in the data to suggest that the young people in this study were any less capable than the wider group of their state age cohort in school VET streams. Several in this study indicated that they had been advised to opt for the academic rather than the vocational education streams in their post-compulsory schooling. Some reported that the theoretical components of their trade training were challenging but the competency-based approach was welcome in that it provided them with the opportunity to re-sit assessment items if necessary. Several also reported regret that they had not taken maths more seriously while still at school. It has been the researchers' perception when administering paper-and-pencil surveys over the various projects associated with this study that some might have been struggling with literacy, but it appeared that this was a small minority across the two cohorts.

The data on the youth appraisals of aspects of their early career experiences, such as assessments of a good trade to be in, a good worksite and a good boss, do not suggest immaturity or incompetence. Rather the data here suggest reflective youth well able to appraise an employment-related situation and competent in negotiating as novices what is a complicated youth employment and training maze.

Mentors and role models

There is a great deal of evidence to show the influence of experience and career-related models over extended periods on career decision-making. Indeed, 17% of those surveyed stated categorically that one of the reasons behind choosing a particular trade was that they had family or knew someone in that trade. Almost 60% of the study population had friends and family involved in some aspect of the building and construction industry, and 85% reported friends working in the industry. There were several instances of youths hearing about available

employment and/or training places through mates, and family and family friends accounted for 26% of the transition avenues respondents cited as those which they adopted. In both cohorts these role models and mentors were spread across a wide range of occupations.

The school VET program itself widened this pool of industry contacts by introducing these youth to TAFE lecturers in various building and construction trades, most with concurrent or recent industry experience. It was TAFE, and the TAFE-organised Family of Trades work experience employers and subsequent industry contacts which accounted for over 30%, and possibly more, of the transition avenues cited by both Family of Trades cohorts. Only 13% cited the school VET coordinators and career advisors in this regard.

In terms of the program's capacity to provide more direct industry contact and networking opportunities, three-quarters or more (for example, 100% of the 2000 early school exits) of the study population claimed that, through the Year 11 VET program, they had been able to meet people in the industry, and over 85% claimed that, as a result of the program, they found out what builders do and what they look for in employing youth.

Program impact

The Family of Trades was for many, particularly those who remained at school to complete Year 12, not the only VET program they undertook while at school. However, it is the building and construction industry's Family of Trades rather than other school VET experiences which many of these youths cited and continue to cite well after leaving school. They acknowledged the program was instrumental in assisting their career decision-making, their entry to employment and training, and in some instances, their early career experiences. Over three-quarters of respondents across both cohorts considered the school VET program as instrumental in assisting them to find work. Both these results and the structural arrangements strategically linking school, TAFE and industry also seem to dispute, in this instance, the suggestions in the literature that school–TAFE–industry relationships and links are less than satisfactory, and that the outcomes of school VET in relation to the industry are unproductive and offer low returns (Wooden 1999a).

The program's structured work experience component established a direct link between the Family of Trades and industry. In addition, an important link between the program and industry can also be discerned in the funding arrangements over the three years it operated. During its first year of operation the Family of Trades was funded by the South East Metropolitan Area Consultative Committee representing local industry; in the second and third years it was directly funded by the Building and Construction Industry Training Board, which took an active role in the program's operation, particularly through the monthly meetings of the program steering committee which was comprised of the contributing schools' VET coordinators and the local TAFE college. The funding and the coordination structure of the program indicate a much closer link between industry and school VET, and schools and TAFE, than implied in some of the industry literature.

In assessing the outcomes of the program in terms of the recruiting assistance it offered to the building and construction industry, the study population identified and ranked a range of areas where they considered the Family of Trades had been efficacious:

✧ The groups within the study population variously (79–90%) ranked the program's assistance in helping them find out what builders do as either a very important or important aspect of the school VET program.

✧ Similarly, each group within the study population ranked very highly and highly the opportunity the program gave youth to meet people who worked or had worked in the trades

(group range 75–100%) and to find out what employers were looking for when they employed young people (group range (85–96%).

✧ The two groups of early school exits in particular were inclined to rank the program's role as very important or important (69% and 92% of each group) in their growth in confidence to approach building sites for work.

✧ Over 80% of the study population believed that the program would help them or had helped them to obtain a job and ranked this aspect of the school VET program as either very important or important.

With regard to the short- and longer-term impact of the Family of Trades school VET program, a range of variables was investigated.

Compared with respondents' stated aspirations at the commencement of Year 11, there was a marked shift towards the building and construction industry by the end of the program. This can be seen in respondents' ultimate employment and training related destinations:

✧ Thirty-nine per cent of the 106 young people who undertook the program in either 1999 or 2000 for whom there are data, aspired at the beginning of Year 11 to work in building and construction.

✧ Of the 87 youths accounted for in this study population, 67.8% were working and/or training in the building and construction industry within six months of leaving school.

✧ Of the 62 youths in this study who were working and/or training in the building and construction industry within 12 to 18 months after leaving school, only 58% had stated aspirations at the beginning of Year 11 to enter the sector post-school.

Similarly, there was a marked movement towards training aspirations (apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeships in the building construction industry) over the period of the program, with evidence that the program introduced these youth to, and familiarised them with post-secondary training options:

✧ Twenty-nine per cent of those who undertook the program stated at the beginning of Year 11 that they aspired to either an apprenticeship and/or a pre-apprenticeship. Within 12 to 18 months of leaving school, 50% of this data set (and over 60% of the study population) were enrolled in pre-apprenticeships or had already obtained apprenticeship places.

✧ The groups within the study population variously (96–80%) ranked the program's assistance in helping them find out about apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships as either very important or important.

✧ Groups variously (76–55%) ranked the program's assistance in helping them actually decide to look for an apprenticeship place after school as either very important or important. A similar situation prevailed for pre-apprenticeships.

Industry impact

There does not seem to be any explicit link in this case study between the building and construction sector's fluctuating business activity levels over the period under consideration and the overall recruitment and retention of these youths in the industry.

During the three-year period in which the study population was variously making the transition from school, over 70% of these youths were attempting to enter the sector. Over this time the industry went from relative buoyancy to a downturn, before beginning to recover towards the end of the study period in 2002. This is despite various acknowledged stimulants such as the introduction of the first homebuyers' grant, the Sydney Olympics and a period of falling interest rates during 2001. During the 1999–2002 period there were two significant drops in the number

of construction jobs available in Australia and only a slow rise in the availability of jobs in the period between. However, while some trades (for example, bricklaying) were reported to be experiencing a decline, others such as solid plastering, roof, floor and wall tiling reported a growth during the early part of the study period.

However, there does appear to be a link between business fluctuations and the transition routes taken by each of the groups. The 1999 school completers and the 2000 early school exits who made the transition at a time of an industry downturn were the most likely to undertake a pre-apprenticeship, despite a stated first preference for a post-school apprenticeship place. This suggests apprenticeship places in the sector were harder to acquire for these groups compared with the first group to make the transition a year earlier. These groups were also the most likely to move from school into employment positions without a training component, having similarly stated a first preference for a post-school apprenticeship place. (The numbers are too small and in some ways it is too early to consider the profile of the final group.)

The fairly consistent high-profile media reporting of business confidence, with dire predictions of a forthcoming slump in the sector over the period of the series of studies, seems not to have impacted on these youths' aspirations, employment opportunities or their confidence in the industry. The majority of those who aspired to jobs and training places in the industry found positions, some more immediately post-school than others. While some reported fluctuations in the supply of work in their trades and specific firms, the majority were highly confident that: 'There is plenty of work out there'. They believed that they would be retained in an employment position, primarily if they were competent, productive and punctual and with good work habits. For those few who had left apprenticeships or jobs, their ease of re-entry seems to confirm their optimism regarding available places across the sector.

While many were optimistic about the availability of work, they acknowledged that it could be hard to break into the industry, and particularly difficult to acquire apprenticeship places. Throughout the data there was a recognition of the value of networking. Family and friends as well as industry and industry-related contacts made during the Family of Trades program were utilised when making the transition to specific trades and occupations.

Conclusion

The young people in this study who undertook the industry-specific Year 11 Family of Trades VET in Schools program did so at a critical stage in their lives. At this point they needed not only to make important career decisions in relation to which industry and trade to pursue, but also to decide how and when to move into industry-specific vocational employment and training. Decisions such as these are too often being made with little knowledge of available choices, what to expect, or the implications of such decisions. Many young people at this stage of their lives have little or no direct experience of the industry and little if any experience of the full-time employment and training market. The degree to which both available VET training and early career experiences fit with their aspirations and expectations and provide them with positive experiences is therefore critical.

There is nothing to suggest unequivocally that these youths would have experienced the transition differently had they not undertaken the Family of Trades Year 11 VET program. However, there is evidence to suggest that, for the two cohorts of youths considered in this study, the program worked to:

✧ assist them to clarify and/or confirm their career aspirations

✧ provide them with the opportunity to explore the industry's employment potential

✧ familiarise them with the industry-related employment and training options

♢ assist them to establish an implicit network of industry-related contacts which were utilised during and after the transition period

♢ attract youth to the industry.

The youths in this study have continued to identify a strongly perceived link between the program and their own career decision-making, their networking and their developing understanding of what is involved in training and working in the building and construction-related trades, as well as trades in other industries. The data suggest that, given the particular type of preparation that the industry-based Family of Trades provided, the majority of these youths developed, or maybe refined, a career-related confidence and the attitudes and abilities which made them employable, and facilitated their entry to and retention in the industry's workforce, irrespective of the wider economic conditions being experienced by the sector at the time.

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Appendix 1

Table 4:   Study sample at August 2001

	Total attempted to contact	Unable to be contacted[1]	Contact made but unable to be interviewed[2]	Contacted but consent withheld[3]	Final study sample[4]
1999 FOT cohort					
A Early school exits	28	7	5	1	15
B Year 12 completers	18	0	4	0	14[5]
2000 FOT cohort					
C Early school exits	29	2	0	1	26
D Year 12 completers	20	1	0	2	17
Total	**95**	**10**	**9**	**4**	**72**

Notes: [1] Numbers changed, phone disconnected, family whereabouts unknown, repeated 'no answer'.
    [2] Some data supplied by parents in some cases. These have not been included in the summary here but information supplied by parents has been included in the data collations where appropriate.
    [3] Four withdrew consent during this project but permitted use of first round interview data and/or data supplied during prior projects.
    [4] One withheld consent to tape.
    [5] Two did not complete the full Year 12 but have been retained in this group to facilitate comparison with the earlier data on each cohort.

Table 5:   Part-time/casual employment while at school (all groups)

Group	Part-time/casual job while at school		Total
	n	*%*	*n*
A 1999 Early exits	18	62.1	**29**
B 1999 Year 12 completers	15	75.0	**20**
C 2000 Early exits	18	69.2	**26**
D 2000 Year 12 completers	13	76.5	**17**
Total	**64**	**69.6**	**92**

Note: Data for 1999 cohort and 2000 early exits derived from previous studies.

Table 6: Destinations within six months of leaving school

	Apprentices (including trainees)	Pre-apprentices	Other post-school full-time study	Working full-time (no training component)	Working part-time/ casual (no training component)	Unemployed	Total[1]
	%	%	%	%	%	%	n
1999 cohort							
A Early school exits	72.4	10.3	3.4	6.9	0	6.9	**29**
B Year 12 completers	5.5[2]	38.9	5.5	22.2	16.7	11.1	**18**
2000 cohort							
C Early school exits	23.1	30.8	0	30.8	11.5	3.8	**26**
D Year 12 completers	28.6	14.3	14.3	21.4	21.4	-	**14**
Total	**36.8**	**23.0**	**4.6**	**19.5**	**10.3**	**5.7**	87

Notes: [1] Totals vary from those shown in table 4 as data from previous projects have been included for groups A and B and some respondent attrition occurred in group D during this project.
[2] A further student acquired an apprenticeship in a building and construction-related field within six months of leaving school but remained only a short time before withdrawing.

Table 7: Employment and training in building and construction-related fields within six months of exiting school

	Apprentices (including trainees)		Pre-apprentices		Other full-time study		Working full time (no training component)		Working part time/casual (no training component)		Proportion of each group in building & construction-related fields		Total group including unempl'd
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
1999 cohort													
A Early school exits	16	59.3	2	7.4	1	3.7	2	7.4	0	0	21	77.8	**29**
B Year 12 completers	1	6.3	6	37.5	0	0	3	18.8	1	6.3	11	68.7	**18**
2000 cohort													
C Early school exits	6	24.0	6	24.0	0	0	3	12.0	3	12.0	18	72.0	**26**
D Year 12 completers	3	21.4	1	7.1	1	7.1	2	14.3	2	14.3	9	64.3	**14**
Total	**26**	**29.9**	**15**	**17.2**	**2**	**2.3**	**10**	**11.5**	**6**	**6.9**	**59**	**67.8**	87

Note: Total group number varies from study population totals as previous data for respondents not interviewed for this study have been included here.

Table 8: Year 11 stated aspirations compared with destinations within 12–18 months of leaving school

Year 11 aspiration profile[1]	1999 cohort		2000 cohort	
	Aspiration as stated at the start of Year 11 %	Actual post-Year 11 and post-school destination %	Aspiration as stated at the start of Year 11 %	Actual post-Year 11 and post-school destination %
Complete Year 12	40.0	42.0	33.0	39.5
Ultimately to work in building & construction	48.0	72.1	30.4	62.8
Unsure of field	18.0	-	30.4	-
Unspecified field	8.0	-	17.9	-
Post-school preference - apprenticeship[2]	13.8	46.8	29.5	25.0
- pre-apprentice	1.5	21.3	16.1	25.0
- job without training[2]	10.8	19.1	0	42.5
Unsure	21.5	-	21.4	-
Unemployed	-	8.5	-	2.5

Notes: [1] Aspiration data sources: Taylor (2001, pp.26, 37, 59); Taylor & Koczberski (2001b, pp.22, 25).
[2] It is likely that some students indicating that their post-school aspiration was a job were also anticipating an apprenticeship accompanying the job.

Table 9:   Building and construction destinations within 12–18 months on leaving school compared with Year 11 stated aspiration (1999 cohort)

Aspirations/destinations	1999 Early school exits		1999 Year 12 completers	
	Aspiration Feb/Mar Year 11 %	Destination n=23 %	Aspiration Feb/Mar Year 11 %	Destination n=12 %
Building & construction	52.2	100	75.0	100
- field unsure or unspecified	34.8		25.0	
- definitely not aspiring to B&C	4.3		-	
- no data on field	8.7		-	
- [Wanting to complete Year 12 first][1]	*nd*		*nd*	
- apprenticeship	47.8	70.8	75.0	8.3
- pre-apprenticeship	8.7	21.7[4]	0	58.3
- job[2]	21.7	16.7[5]	16.7	41.7[5]
- TAFE[3]	17.4	-	8.3	0
- no data on pathway	4.3	-	-	-

Notes: [1] No reliable data available for the 1999 cohort.
[2] It is likely that some students indicating that their post-school aspiration was a job were also anticipating an apprenticeship accompanying the job.
[3] Students specifying TAFE may have been meaning a pre-apprenticeship at TAFE.
[4] Five students undertook pre-apprenticeships on leaving school and exiting the Family of Trades and moved into the workforce with apprenticeships within 12–18 months on exiting school.
[5] One student acquired an apprenticeship but exited to a job and this has been recorded here under both apprenticeships and jobs.

Table 10: Building and construction industry destinations within 12–18 months on leaving school compared with Year 11 stated aspiration (2000 cohort)

Apirations/destinations	2000 early school exits		2000 Year 12 completers	
	Aspiration Feb/Mar Year 11	Destination n=18	Aspiration Feb/Mar Year 11	Destination n=9
	%	%	%	%
Building & construction	50.0	100	64.3	100
- field unsure or unspecified	44.4		-	
- definitely not aspiring to B&C	5.5		21.4	
- wanting to complete Year 12 first				
- apprenticeship	33.3	33.3	11.1	**33.3**
- pre-apprenticeship	33.3	33.3	11.1	**11.1**
- job[1]	-	33.3	-	**44.4**
- TAFE[2]	11.1	-	22.2	**22.2**
- no data on route/unsure	22.2	-	55.5	-

Notes: [1] It is likely that some students indicating that their post-school aspiration was a job were also anticipating an apprenticeship accompanying the job.

[2] Students specifying TAFE may have been meaning a pre-apprenticeship at TAFE.

Figure 1:   Value of building work undertaken Australia and Western Australia 1999–2002
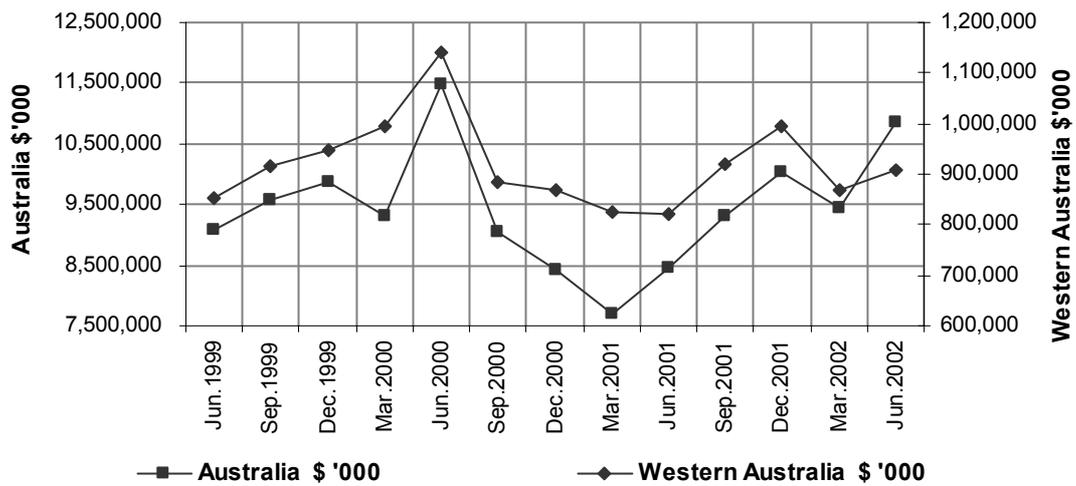
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001a, table 31a)

Figure 2:   Value of total building work approved Australia and Western Australia 1999–2002
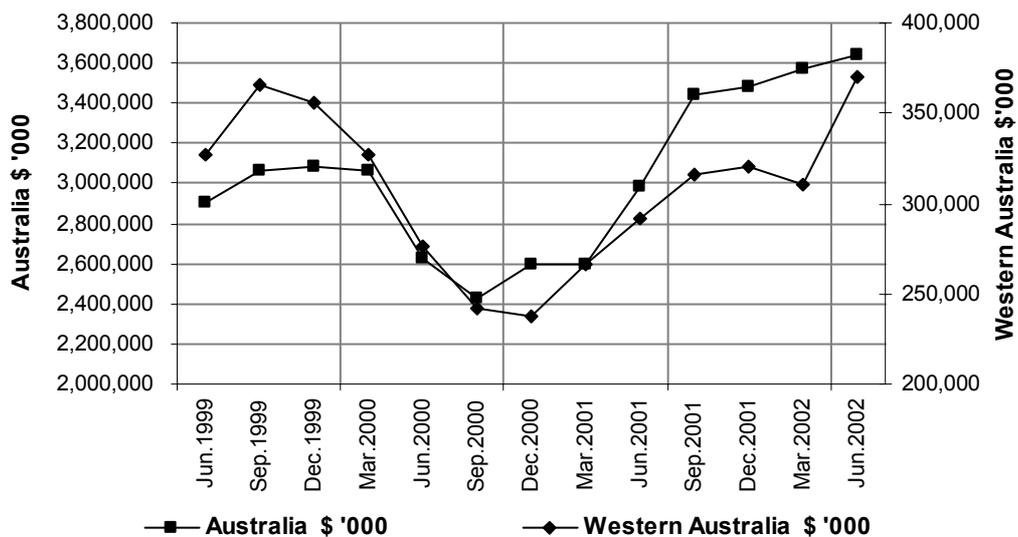
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001b, table 15)

Entering industry

Figure 3:   Housing finance commitments Australia and Western Australia 1999–2002
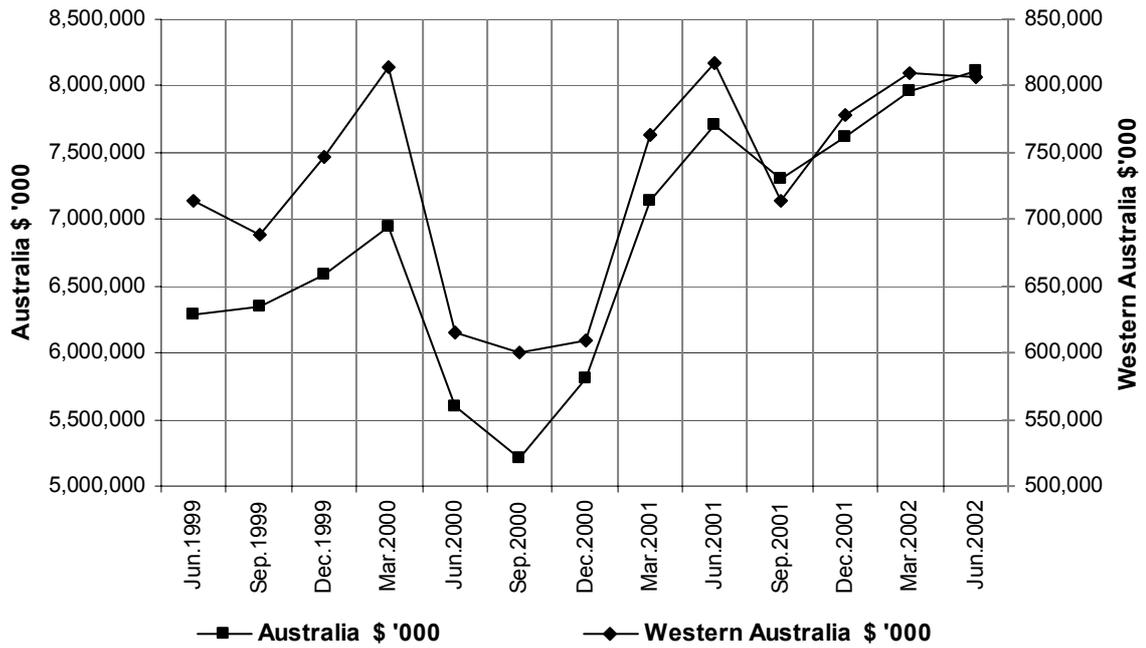
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001c, table 8b)

Figure 4:   Interest rates May 1999–June 2002
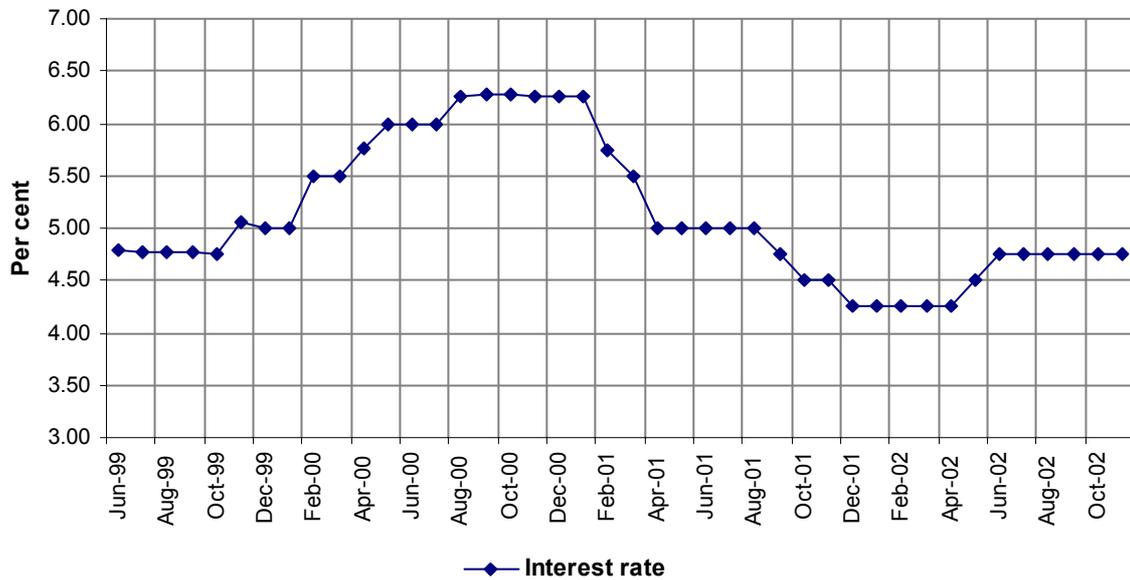
Source: Reserve Bank of Australia (2002)

Figure 5:   Job vacancy rates (%) and construction industry jobs May 1999–November 2001
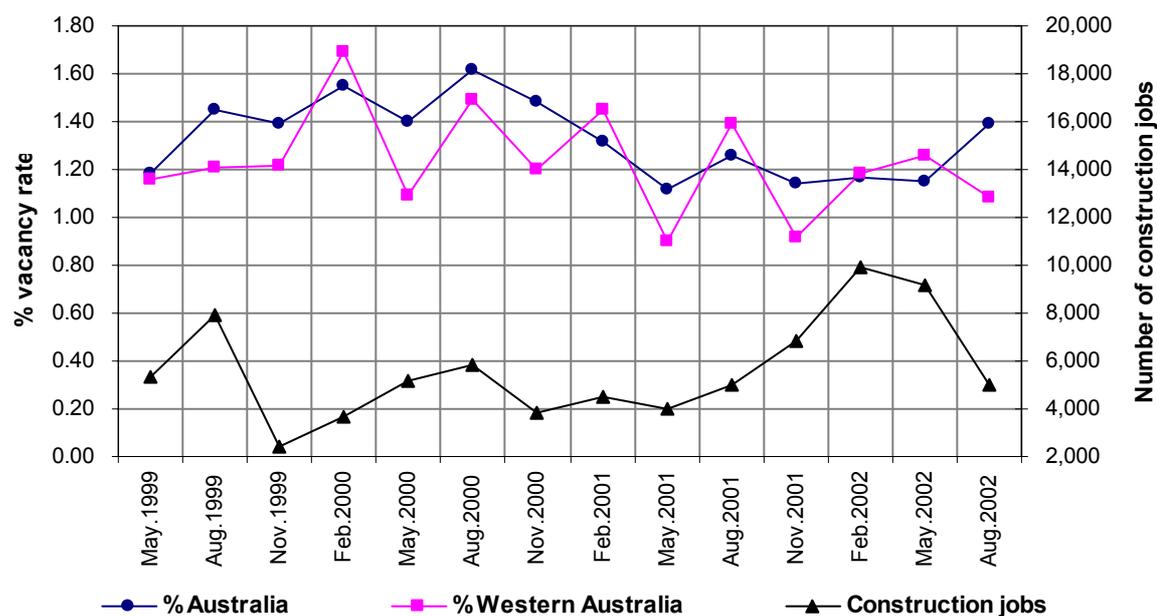
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001d, table 3)

Table 11:   Newspaper headline survey of building and construction industry-related articles June 2001–June 2002

Headlines	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total	%
Boom/bust indicators & reports	29	29	2	**60**	34.5
Factors impacting on public perceptions of the industry, including reporting on the Cole Royal Commission	1	29	1	**31**	17.8
Interest rates, levies & taxes	2	26	0	**28**	16.1
Insurance & indemnity issues, including HIH	4	15	0	**19**	10.9
Industry-related employment figures & predictions	10	8	0	**18**	10.3
First Home Buyers' Allowance	9	5	0	**14**	8.0
GST	0	3	1	**4**	2.3
Total	**55**	**115**	**4**	**174**	
Percentage	31.6	66.1	2.3		

Table 12: Building and construction-related trade locations of study population within six months of exiting school (all groups)

Trades	Total	
	n=58	%
Carpentry, joinery & cabinet making	15	25.9
Electrical & electrical engineering	11	19.0
Painting & decorating	5	8.6
Plumbing & gas fitting	4	6.9
Bricklaying & stonemasonry	3	5.2
Plastering	2	3.4
Refrigeration, airconditioning	2	3.4
Floor & wall tiling	1	1.7
Miscellaneous	11	20.4
- Floor & wall tiling		
- Steel furniture making		
- Carpet laying & floor finishing		
- Furniture polisher		
- Landscaping		
- Demolition		
- Hardware retail		
- Factory hand fencing		
- Fire alarm fitting		
- Spa cover fitter		
Building & construction trade *unspecified*	4	6.9

Table 13:   Reasons for choice of specific building and construction trades[1]

Reasons for trade choice[1]	*n*	%
Enjoy the work, enjoyed at school, enjoyed work experience in, have always enjoyed	22	37.9
Work experience, or have worked in	11	19.0
Know tradesmen in the field, family member in	6	10.3
Familiarity with the trade	4	6.9
Good at the work, good with hands	3	5.2
Variety of tasks the trade offers	2	3.4
Novelty, hadn't done it before	2	3.4
An opportunity arose	2	3.4
Other:	6	10.2
- Field offers further opportunities		
- To keep my parents happy		
- Interested in the work		
- Fits in with my lifestyle		
- Good money		
- The work is not too hard		
Total responses[2]	**58**	

Notes: [1] Longitudinal data not available in a compatible format for the 2000 Year 12 school completers.

[2] Some respondents identified more than one reason. These have been tallied separately.

Table 14:   Apprentices' and pre-apprentices' transition avenues[1]

How did you get your apprenticeship or pre-apprenticeship?[2]	1999[3] Early school exits	1999 Year 12 completers	2000 Early school exits	2000 Year 12 completers	Total	
	Responses n=23 %	Responses n=14 %	Responses n=30 %	Responses n=18 %	**n=85**	**%**
Through my SWL employer	30.4	-	20.0	27.8	**18**	**21.2**
Through a friend of the family, neighbours	13.0	21.4	13.3	16.7	**13**	**15.3**
Through the school VET co-ordinator, school careers counsellor or teacher	8.6	21.4	13.3	11.1	**11**	**12.9**
Through the family	13.0	7.1	16.7	-	**9**	**10.6**
I saw it advertised	13.0	7.1	3.3	16.7	**8**	**9.4**
TAFE contact	-	-	16.7	11.1	**7**	**8.2**
Through my part-time job	-	-	10.0	16.7	**6**	**7.0**
Just went to TAFE and enrolled	-	28.6	-	-	**4**	**4.7**
Word of mouth/friends	8.6	7.1	-	-	**3**	**3.5**
Through my pre-apprenticeship	8.6	-	-	-	**2**	**2.3**
Employment agency	-	-	6.7	-	**2**	**2.3**
Other:					**2**	**2.3**
- Through an industry contact	4.3	-	-	-		
- Rang around and sent off resumes	-	7.1	-	-		

Notes: [1] Where respondents identified more than one avenue, these have been tabulated separately.

[2] Data refer to transition to present position. They do not necessarily take account of attempts to find positions that were first choice.

[3] Data source: Taylor (2001, p.38).

Table 15: **Range of building and construction-related trades and occupations in which families of and friends of study population are involved**

Trades & occupations	Family members		Friends	
	n=51	%	*n*=74	%
Carpentry	15	29.4	30	40.5
Electrical	11	21.6	36	48.6
Painting /decorating	10	19.6	22	29.7
Bricklaying	9	17.6	19	25.7
Plasterer	6	11.8	7	9.5
Plumbing	5	9.8	19	25.7
Cabinet making	3	5.9	23	31.1
Ceiling & floor fitter	2	3.9	3	4.0
Roof/floor tiler	2	3.9	13	17.6
Welder	2	3.9	3	4.0
Other:	13	25.5	8	10.8
- Architect	1	2	1	1.4
- Boatbuilder	-	-		
- Boilermaker	-	-	-	-
- Concrete worker	-	-	-	-
- Fridge mechanic	-	-	-	-
- Gas fitter	-	-	-	-
- Glazier	-	-	-	-
- Gyprock worker	-	-	1	1.4
- Hardware retail	-	-	-	-
- Industrial cleaner	-	-	-	-
- Kitchen renovator	-	-	-	-
- Landscaper	1	2	1	1.4
- Sheet metal	-	-	-	-
- Steel furniture-maker	-	-		
- Stonemason	-		-	-
- Wall chaser	-	-	-	-
Builder, trade assistant, labourer *trade unspecified*	6	11.8	8	10.8
Total responses	**86**		**194**	

Note: Some respondents had several family members and friends in a variety of trades and occupations and often different respondents were citing the same 'mate' in a trade.

Table 16: Comparison of all groups' rating of 'very important' and 'important' factors concerning the Family of Trades VET program (April 2000 and August 2001)

The Family of Trades helped me ...	1999 early school exits	1999 Year 12 completers	2000 early school exits	2000 Year 12 completers
	Very important + important	Very important + important	Very important + important	Very important + important
	n=29	*n*=20	*n*=25	*n*=17
	%	%	%	%
01 Get a day off school	27.6	40.0	24.0	29.4
02 Get to meet other kids	65.5	50.0	80.0	35.3
03 Get to meet people who had worked in the trades	89.6	75.0	100.0	82.4
04 Try four different trades	100.0	100.0	96.0	88.2
05 Make up my mind what type of work I wanted to do	89.7	80.0	100.0	58.8
06 Make up my mind what type of work I *did not* want to do	89.3	75.0	100.0	76.5
07 Find out about apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships	82.2	80.0	96.0	88.2
08 Find out about what builders do on the job	79.3	90.0	92.0	88.2
09 Find out what employers look for when they give young people a job	89.7	85.0	96.0	94.1
10 Decide to stay at school to finish Year 12/leave school during or at the end of Year 11	55.1	30.0	66.7	47.0
11 Become confident enough to ask for a job on a building site	69.0	45.0	92.0	70.6
12 Decide to look for an apprenticeship/next year	75.9	55.0	92.0	58.8
13 Decide to enrol in a pre-apprenticeship/next year	60.7	45.0	83.3	47.1
14 Prepare me for work	89.7	75.0	96.0	76.4
15 Helped me/will help me in the future to get a job	86.2	85.0	84.0	88.2

Note: Data for the 1999 cohort adapted from Taylor (2001, pp.121–3).

Table 17:   Youth perceptions regarding employers' expectations (all groups)

Employers want a kid who …	1999 early school exits	1999 Year 12 completers	2000 early school exits	2000 Year 12 completers
	Very important + Important	Very important + Important	Very important + Important	Very important + Important
	n=29	*n*=20	*n*=25	*n*=17
	%	%	%	%
01 Shows respect	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
02 Has a sense of humour	55.2	45.0	72.0	64.7
03 Has good hand skills	100.0	95.0	100.0	100.0
04 Has good school marks	41.3	75.0	84.0	76.4
05 Is a hard worker	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
06 Is always on time	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
07 Does not take breaks on the job	82.7	65.0	80.0	88.2
08 Does not talk too much	55.1	25.0	56.0	70.5
09 Does what he is told	100.0	95.0	96.0	100.0
10 Does not ask too many questions	17.2	15.0	28.0	41.2
11 Does not give cheek	86.2	85.0	96.0	82.3
12 Does not muck about	93.1	85.0	100.0	94.1
13 Can take a joke	82.7	70.0	92.0	88.3
14 Learns the job really quickly	86.2	95.0	84.0	100.0
15 Has already worked on another job	34.4	65.0	48.0	82.4
16 Does not take sickies	96.6	85.0	84.0	76.5
17 Asks when he doesn't know something	100.0	100.0	96.0	100.0
18 Always tells the truth	100.0	90.0	100.0	100.0
19 Knows all about the tools	82.7	75.0	80.0	88.2
20 Will do all sorts of jobs	93.1	85.0	88.0	100.0
21 Does not complain	89.6	75.0	68.0	82.4
22 Is always neat and tidy	79.3	70.0	88.0	94.1
23 Wears good clothes	44.8	25.0	64.0	70.6
24 Has good references	79.3	85.0	92.0	94.1
25 Makes friends easily	79.3	65.0	84.0	82.3
26 Always cleans up around the job	96.5	90.0	92.0	100.0
27 Doesn't get too matey with the other blokes	41.3	20.0	28.0	58.9
28 Can work alone without supervision	96.6	95.0	92.0	94.1

Note: Data for 1999 cohort adapted from Taylor (2001, pp.114–5).

Table 18:   Youth perceptions of the characteristics of a good company (2000 early school exits)

Categories	2000 early school exits *n*=19	
	n	%
Management Competence, leadership characteristics and management style	22	29.7
Industrial conditions Employee conditions including job security and remuneration Working environment including safety	15	20.3
Workplace interpersonal relationships Friendly staff and teamwork	14	18.9
Company stability, reputation and business conduct Business activity, financial security, reputation, stability and organisation	13	17.6
Quality Product and worker quality	6	8.1
Workplace climate Work environment, staffing stability and social factors	4	5.4
Total comments	**74**	**100.0**

Table 19:   Youth perceptions of factors assisting maintain employment

Categories	1999 early school exits[1] *n*=29		2000 early school exits *n*=24		2000 Year 12 completers *n*=14	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
The work Job competence, productivity, work habits, including punctuality	35	46.0	43	42.1	13	44.8
Job-related demeanour and character Character attributes and respect for authority	20	26.3	25	24.5	8	27.6
Attitude Enthusiasm and willingness, cheerfulness	17	22.4	23	22.5	5	17.2
Interpersonal relations	4	5.3	11	10.8	3	10.3
Total responses	**76**		**102**		**29**	

Note: [1]1999 early school exits data adapted from Taylor (2001, p.118). No compatible data available for sufficient numbers in the 1999 Year 12 school completion group.

Table 20:   Youth perceptions of the good boss (summary)

Clusters of factors	Examples of responses	Total all groups (*n*=49)	
		n	*%*
Interpersonal style		**32**	**38.5**
- *General*	*Spends time with the workers; will joke around; speaks nicely to workers; keeps workers and customers happy*	*18*	*21.7*
- *Communication*	*Is not rude; easy to talk to; is understandable; doesn't beat around the bush*	*14*	*16.9*
Management style	Doesn't order [workers] about; is not a control freak; is prepared to make some compromises; is firm; looks over the work; not concerned with just going faster and faster	**28**	**33.7**
Character & personality	Doesn't cheat; is a learner himself; treats workers fairly; someone to look up to in that trade	**19**	**22.9**
Competence	Knows what he is doing; works quickly	**4**	**4.8**
Total responses		**83**	**100.0**

Table 21:   Most appealing aspects of work (1999 early school exits)

Liked most about the job (respondents *n*=39)[1]	Responses (*n*=62)
	%
The work e.g. its variety, hands on, outside work, specific work tasks	46.8
Social environment including interpersonal relationships	27.4
Personal development	14.5
Conditions e.g. being paid	8.1
General and unspecified	3.2

Note: [1]Data for 1999 early school exits adapted from Taylor (2001, p.104) included here. No data available for 2000 Year 12 completers.

Table 22:   Least enjoyed aspects of work (1999 early school exits)

Liked least about the job (respondents *n*=36)[1]	Responses (*n*=41)
	%
Conditions e.g. low pay, travelling, hours, early starts, weekend work, being a casual	36.6
Specific work tasks e.g. carting heavy loads; pen and paper work; repetititve tasks	26.8
Censure and pressure	12.2
Trying to master the job	2.4
Study component	2.4
Nothing	17.1
Unspecified	2.4

Note: [1]Data for 1999 early school exits included here adapted from Taylor (2001, p.105). No data available for 2000 Year 12 completers.

Table 23:   The challenges of work (1999 early school exits)

The hardest thing about the job (respondents *n=33*)[1]	Responses (*n*=33) %
Conditions e.g. pay; long hours; early starts; weekend work	36.4
Specific tasks that are either difficult to get right or require practice e.g. reading plans; measuring accurately; mental arithmetic; aspects of theory	36.4
Heavy work e.g. digging and lifting	15.1
Personal application e.g. remaining focussed; working at the speed required; mastering new skills; getting experience solving problems	12.0

Note: [1]Data for 1999 early school exits included here adapted Taylor (2001, p.106). No data available for 2000 Year 12 completers.

Table 24:   Early school exits' job satisfaction rating

	Very happy (*n*=29) %	Happy (*n*=19) %	Not very happy (*n*=5) %	Not at all happy (*n*=0) %
1999 early exits (Dec 2000)[1] How happy are you with the decision to leave school to enter the workforce when you did?	60.7	32.0	7.0	0
2000 early exits (Sept 2001) How happy are you with what you are doing at the moment?	48.0	40.0	12.0	0
Total	**54.7**	**35.8**	**9.4**	**0**

Note: [1]Data for 1999 early school exits included here adapted Taylor (2001, p.40). No data available for 2000 Year 12 completers.

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