Early Career Mobility Insights Paper

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SaCSA
Service and Creative Skills Australia

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Executive summary

Career pathways are central to addressing workforce attraction, retention and skills development across the arts, personal services, retail, tourism and hospitality sectors. However, there has been limited evidence on how learners move from training into work, how careers develop over time, and how these pathways differ across industries.

This report aims to address some of that gap by analysing Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA) data to examine employment outcomes, occupational mobility, workforce retention and early career pathways across SaCSA's sectors.

This paper is also intended to sit alongside SaCSA's Early Career Mobility Analysis, which allows users to explore the following at the qualification or occupation level:

- Qualification to occupation transitions, including those for various demographic cohorts
- Occupation to occupation transitions
- Employment and education histories of workers in higher skilled occupations

These findings strengthen the evidence base for workforce planning, training product development, policy development and career guidance across SaCSA's industries. .

The analysis is subject to several caveats related to the scope of the underlying datasets within PLIDA, the nature of longitudinal analysis and timing of the data. This analysis is designed to provide insights into the specific occupations people work in after completing qualifications, the entry pathways for new entrants to occupation, and the range of employment pathways associated with different qualifications and occupations. The limitations of the analysis are discussed in the Analysis Approach section and in the Limitations of Analysis section.

Key points

The analysis found that completing a Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualification is consistently associated with stronger employment outcomes.

Across all sectors, qualification completers were more likely than qualification non-completers to be employed following training and were almost twice as likely as qualification non-completers to enter the occupation their qualification was intended to support.

Arts qualifications displayed diverse and non-linear career pathways, reflecting the sector's high rates of portfolio careers and freelance work.

Personal services qualifications demonstrated the strongest alignment between training and intended occupations.[1]

Retail qualifications produced strong employment outcomes, with many learners moving into related customer service roles. However, progression to management occupations was weaker.

Both **tourism and hospitality** qualifications supported positive employment outcomes but were affected by lower medium-term occupational retention, mirroring findings in research suggesting this is a common driver of workforce shortages.

Learners with disability, First Nations learners, people with lower socioeconomic advantage and those who speak a language other than English at home experienced lower employment outcomes following training, indicating potential barriers or lack of efficacy of VET as a vehicle towards employment.

1 Due to insufficient sample sizes, equivalent analysis could not be undertaken for the SIF Funeral Services training package.

Overview & purpose

Career pathways sit at the intersection of many of the workforce challenges facing our industries, including attraction and retention, shortages, training package development, and career visibility. Career pathways were also a consistent theme across SaCSA's 2024 and 2025 Workforce Plans and Updates, which included issues such as a general lack of information and varied approaches to promoting career pathways, and stated research into career pathways as a future research focus.[2, 3]

There is existing material in this area, such as JSA Data on Occupation Mobility (DOM)[5] and Training to Occupation Pathways,[6] the Explore Career Pathways tool on Your Career[7] and My Future Career Bullseyes.[8] However, these tend have at least one of the following limitations:

- A lack of quantitative information regarding the strength or frequency of the presented pathways
- An unclear or limited longitudinal analysis window
- Limited capacity to identify and analyse multi-step or non-linear career pathways
- Limited industry or demographic-specific detail in pathways

In response, SaCSA is undertaking research to cover these gaps and increase objectivity and evidence-based understanding of how careers develop in their early stages across its sectors.

Box 1: Proportion of young workers in SaCSA's sectors

The sectors within SaCSA's remit are often the first point of entry into the workforce for young people, with 70% of employed people aged 20 and under working in at least one of SaCSA's sectors.[4]

This places SaCSA in a strong position to analyse early career mobility and pathways as its sectors represent a large proportion of people in their early careers.

Research objectives

This research aims to develop a stronger evidence base on career pathways, workforce mobility and training outcomes across SaCSA's industries. Specifically, the project seeks to:

- Understand the occupations VET learners enter following training, the extent to which employment outcomes align with their qualification, and how these are affected by completion status and demographic characteristics.
- Understand how careers evolve as people progress through their careers, including how long individuals remain in occupations and the occupations they transition to when changing roles.
- Understand the education, training and employment histories of workers in higher skilled occupations to provide insights into the pathways that lead to career advancement.

The full details of the methodology and how the data is constructed to achieve these objectives can be found in the Appendix.

This data provides the evidence base for SaCSA's Early Career Mobility Analysis and provides industry, government, educators and learners with insights to support career advice, workforce planning and training decisions. They will also help identify where training and employment outcomes are strong, and where further investigation may be needed to assess whether training products remain fit for purpose.

2 SaCSA, Workforce Planning Reports, 2024: https://sacsa.org.au/workforce-planning-reports-2024.
3 SaCSA, Workforce Planning Update, 2025: https://sacsa.org.au/workforce-plan-update-2025.
4 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Jobs and Income of Employed Persons, 2022-23: Extracted from Tablebuilder https://tablebuilder.abs.gov.au/webapi/jsf/tableView/tableView.xhtml.
5 JSA, Data on Occupation Mobility: Unpacking Workers Movements, January 2024: https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/publications/data-occupation-mobility-unpacking-workers-movements.
6 JSA, Training Occupation Pathways Dataset, June 2026: https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/training-occupation-pathways.
7 Your Career, Explore Career Pathways, October 2026: https://www.yourcareer.gov.au/career-pathways.
8 MyFuture, Bullseyes, October 2026: https://myfuture.edu.au/bullseyes.

Analysis approach

Selection of PLIDA as the data source

The analysis uses the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA) to explore employment and occupational pathways.

SaCSA developed the research methodology with input from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), which also undertook the data extraction from PLIDA on behalf of SaCSA.

PLIDA brings together longitudinal data from Australian government agencies, including tax records, vocational education and training (VET) enrolments and completions, and higher education (HE) enrolments. These linked records allow for analysis of employment outcomes over time following occupational entry or post-qualification.

PLIDA was selected because it provides detailed qualification and occupation data across a large population. This makes it possible to analyse outcomes for small occupations and qualifications with too few graduates to examine reliably using alternative datasets.

Other datasets offer advantages for measuring changes in occupation, but do not provide the same combination of population coverage, qualification detail and employment information. PLIDA offers the most suitable data source for the objectives of this research. Table 1 compares the datasets considered.

Table 1: Comparison of potential data sources

Data Source	Longitudinal data	Data for individual occupations	Data for individual qualifications	Large sample size	Unit record data[9]	Demographic data	Reliable occupation movements
Australian Census Longitudinal Dataset (ACLD)	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
Data on Occupation Mobility (DOM)	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA)	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
Participation, Job Search and Mobility (PJSM)	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Student Outcomes Survey (SOS)[10]	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗

9 Meaning a row representing a single person, rather than data that has already been aggregated.
10 Based on custom unit record data provided to SaCSA by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).

How to interpret the findings

The analysis provides insights into the occupations people work in after completing qualifications and the range of employment pathways associated with different qualifications and occupational entry pathways.

The findings are best used to understand broad patterns rather than measure precise rates of occupational movement or to track individual career journeys. This is because occupation information in PLIDA comes from tax records, where people may not update their occupation information when changing jobs, only the main occupation is captured, and some self-employed workers are not required to state their occupation if they earn their income solely through their business. As a result, the data is likely to understate occupational mobility and does not capture all employment activities. Evidence from comparisons between tax data and the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey supports the caution concerning updating of occupation data, showing that occupational mobility recorded in ATO data was less than half that reported in HILDA.[11]

Other factors are also important when interpreting the findings:

- Longitudinal observation periods: Earlier cohorts are required to allow sufficient time to observe employment outcomes, limiting the applicability of findings to more recent cohorts.
- COVID-19 impacts: The analysis includes periods affected by COVID-19 restrictions, which may have influenced employment and occupational mobility.
- Intended occupation mapping: The 'intended occupation' is based on qualification mappings from training.gov.au, which may not reflect individual career intentions.

Further technical details and limitations are provided in the Appendix and Limitations of Analysis sections.

For more recent data on similar topics, users may consider the following publicly available datasets:

- Data on Occupation Mobility[12,13]
- Graduate Outcomes Survey[14] and Graduate Outcomes Survey - Longitudinal[15]
- Participation, Job Search and Mobility[16]
- Student Outcomes Survey[17]
- VET National Data Asset (VNDA)[18]
- VET Qualification Completion Rates[19] and Apprentice and Trainee Completion Rates[20]

11 Economic Papers, Occupational Mobility in the ALife Data: How Reliable are Occupational Patterns from Administrative Australian Tax Records?, November 2022: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1759-3441.12369.

12 JSA, Data on Occupation Mobility: Unpacking Workers Movements, January 2024: https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/publications/data-occupation-mobility-unpacking-workers-movements.

13 JSA, Fewer moves, bigger changes. Occupation mobility and learning across life stages, October 2026: https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/publications/fewer-moves-bigger-changes-occupation-mobility-and-learning-across-life-stages.

14 Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT), Graduate Outcomes Survey, 2025: https://www.qilt.edu.au/surveys/graduate-outcomes-survey-(gos).

15 QILT, Graduate Outcomes Survey - Longitudinal, 2026: https://www.qilt.edu.au/surveys/graduate-outcomes-survey---longitudinal-(gos-l)

16 ABS, Participation, Job Search and Mobility (PJSM), February 2026: https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/participation-job-search-and-mobility-australia/latest-release.

17 NCVER, Student Outcomes Survey, 2025 (2024 qualification completers and part-completers): https://www.ncver.edu.au/databuilder#/collection/sos/vet-student-outcomes/latest.

18 JSA, VET National Data Asset (VNDA), June 2026 (2020-21 qualification completers): https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/vet-national-data-asset.

19 NCVER, VET Qualification Completion rates, 2025: https://www.ncver.edu.au/databuilder#/collection/vet_cr.

20 NCVER, Apprentice & trainee completion rates, 2025: https://www.ncver.edu.au/databuilder#/collection/app_cr.

Insights

The below outlines the headline insights generated from this data. For a more in-depth view on particular qualifications and occupations, please see the Early Career Mobility Analysis on the SaCSA website.

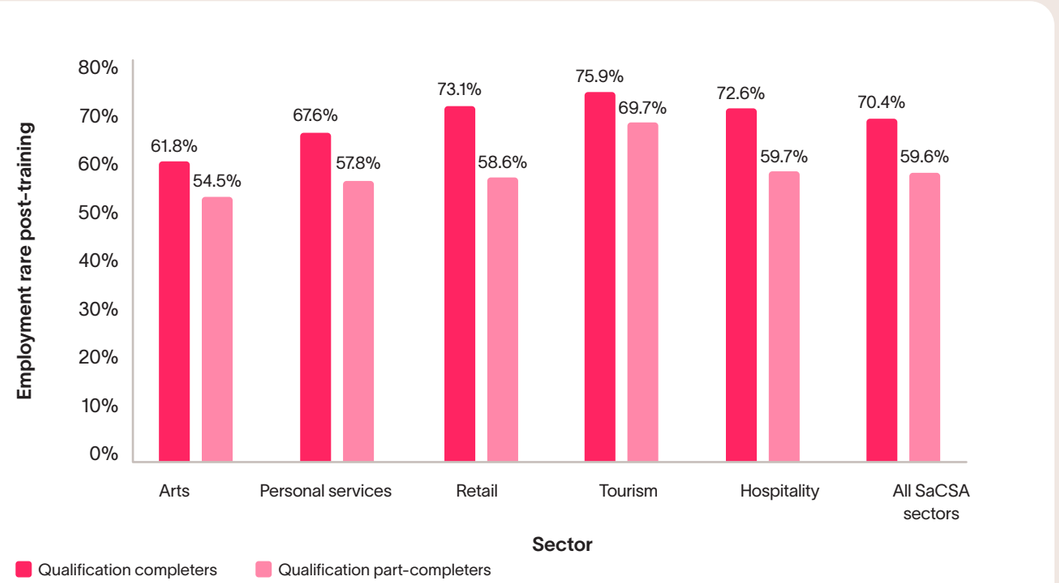
Overall employment outcomes

Box 2: Proportion employed after training

Analysis of VET qualifications examined across SaCSA's training packages indicates a clear employment advantage[21] associated with qualification completion. Among learners who completed their qualification, 70.4% were employed in the year[22] after training, compared with 59.6% of part-completers (see Figure 1).

This is below post-training employment across all VET training package qualifications, with the latest Student Outcomes Survey data showing that 76.9% of completers and 71.3% of part-completers are employed after training.[23]

Figure 1: Employment rate one year post-training, by sector



Source: ABS, Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), 2016 to 2018 qualification completers and part-completers, Income Tax Return (ITR) and Total VET Activity data, ABS DataLab. Findings based on use of PLIDA data.

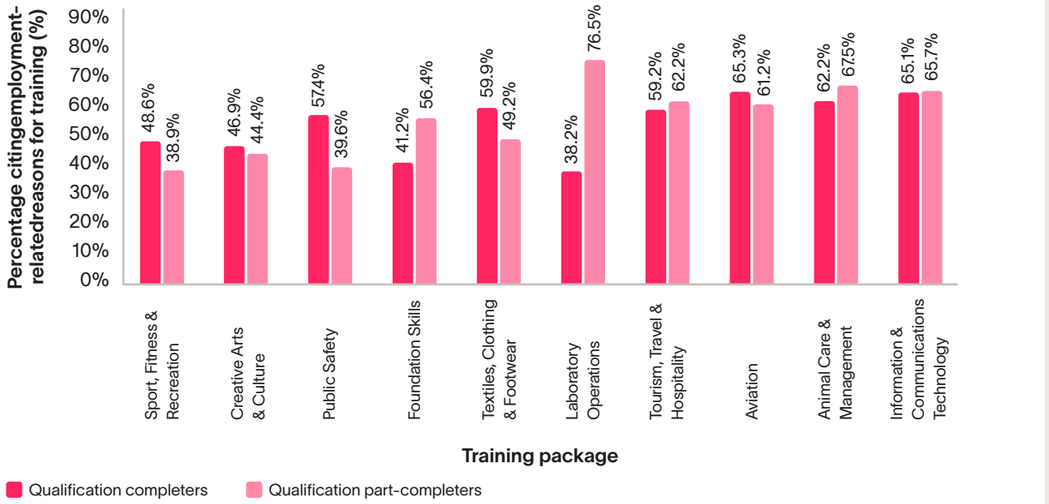
21 Defined as the difference in employment rates for completers compared with non-completers.

22 All outcomes in this analysis are based on financial years, as that is what is available in the ATO ITR dataset.

23 NCVER, Student Outcomes Survey, 2025: Extracted from Databuilder https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/databuilder. Population analysed included qualification completers and non-completers. Data was available from 2021 to 2025 and employment rates for both completers and non-completers were consistently above 70%.

However, this can partly be explained by the nature of the training packages managed by SaCSA. Students in the CUA Creative Arts and Culture and SIT Tourism, Travel and Hospitality training packages are among the bottom 10 packages to cite employment-related reasons as their motivation for undertaking training (see Figure 2).[24] As a result, lower employment rates post-training may not necessarily indicate poor qualification performance.

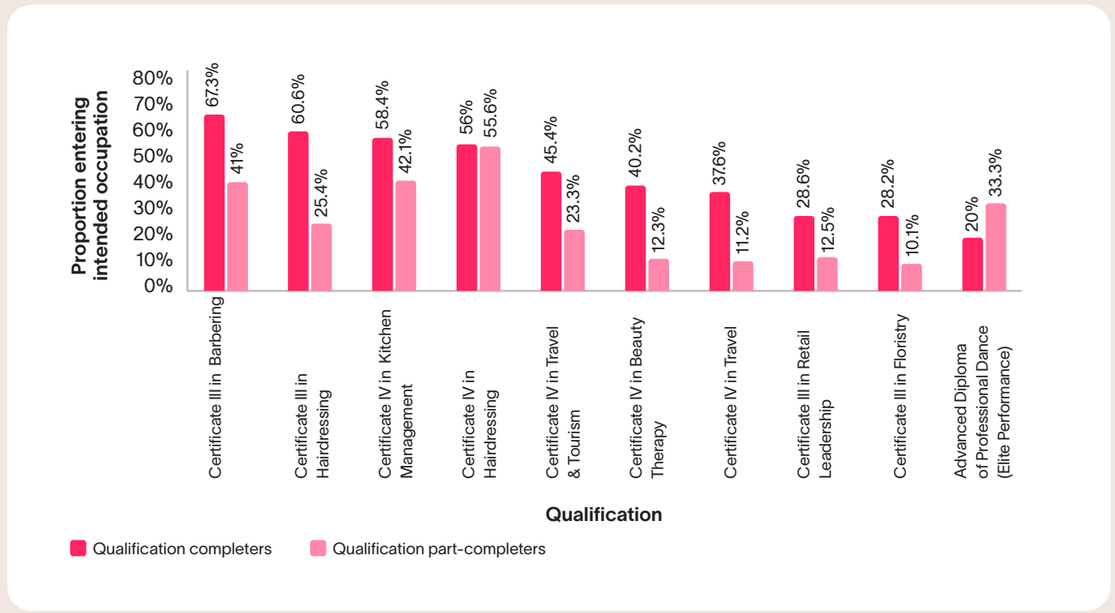
Figure 2: VET training packages with the lowest proportions of students citing employment-related reasons for undertaking training



National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), Student Outcomes Survey, 2025 (2024 qualification completers and part-completers). The sort order is based on the average of completers and part-completers.

Employment outcomes were also analysed by considering alignment between VET training and post-training employment occupation. Across all qualifications analysed, around 10% of learners entered the occupation that the qualification was intended to support in the year after training.[25] Completers were more likely to enter the intended occupation (13% of completers compared with 7% of part-completers). Figure 3 below shows the top qualifications for entering the intended occupation.

Figure 3: Top 10 SaCSA qualifications for learners entering the intended occupation one year post-training



Source: ABS, Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), 2016 to 2018 qualification completers and part-completers, Income Tax Return (ITR) and Total VET Activity data, ABS DataLab. Findings based on use of PLIDA data.

The indicator 'intended occupation' is a conservative measure of whether students enter a relevant occupation, because it is derived from a one-to-one mapping between occupation and qualification, whereas qualifications can have multiple related occupations.[26] In addition, the mapped occupation is not always the one SaCSA would consider the most appropriate. For example, the Certificate III in Commercial Cookery lists cook as the intended occupation. However, PLIDA data shows chef was the more common first occupation (52% of completers), compared with cook (12% of completers).[27]

The likelihood of entering the intended occupation generally increases with qualification level up to Certificate IV, with 1% of completers and 0.4% of part-completers entering the intended occupation at the Certificate I level, compared with 33% of completers and 13% of part-completers at the Certificate IV level.

This generally reflects the fact that higher qualifications are more likely to be studied for employment-related reasons, meaning there is a greater intention to join the intended occupation.[28] However, the Diploma and Advanced Diploma figures are much lower, with only 3% of completers and 1% of part-completers entering the intended occupation at the diploma level, and only 1% of both completers and part-completers entering the intended occupation at the advanced diploma level (see Figure 4). This may reflect the limitations of the intended occupation on training.gov.au and the fact that some pathways may require more than one year post-training to attain especially for the higher-level occupations these qualifications are intended for.

24 NCVER, Student Outcomes Survey, 2025: Extracted from Databuilder https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/databuilder. Population analysed included qualification completers and non-completers. Employment-related reasons include 'to get a job', 'to try for a different career', and 'to develop or start my own business'.

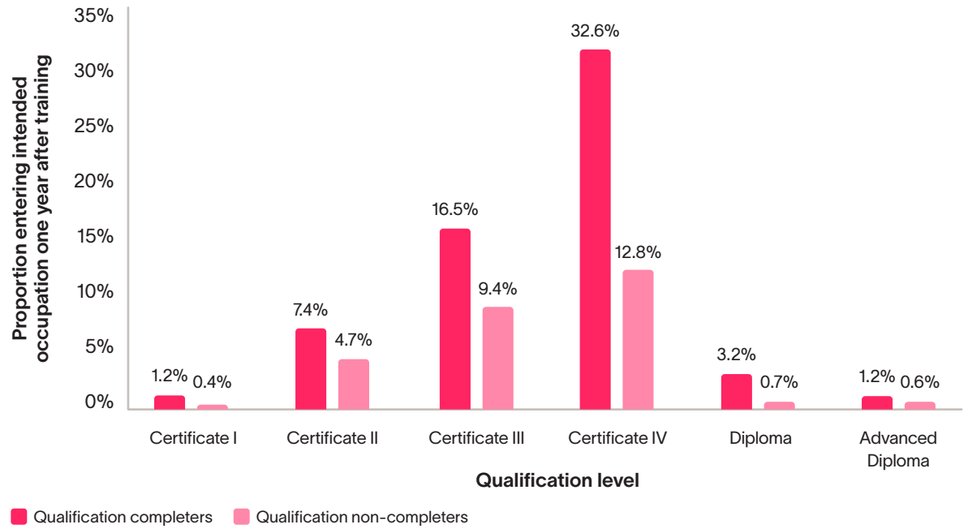
25 See 'Intended Occupation' in Derived Quantities for more detail on this indicator.

26 This limitation has been recently recognized and addressed by Jobs and Skills Australia, who now provide a more detailed Training Occupation Pathways Dataset that identifies a range of relevant occupations for each qualification (https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/training-occupation-pathways)

27 Occupation in ATO ITR data is self-reported and may reflect the lack of a clear delineation of roles in terms of qualifications and experience required by industry in some cases such as chef and cook.

28 NCVER, VET student outcomes, 2025 (2024 completers and part-completers): https://www.ncver.edu.au/databuilder#/collection/sos/vet-student-outcomes/latest.

Figure 4: Proportion entering intended occupation one year post-training after VET training by qualification level



Source: ABS, Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), 2016 to 2018 qualification completers and part-completers, Income Tax Return (ITR) and Total VET Activity data, ABS DataLab. Findings based on use of PLIDA data.

However, it remains unclear to what extent the observed employment outcomes advantage from completion is attributable to qualification completion rather than other factors, such as interpersonal skills, workplace commitment, prior education or experience. In any case, research shows that partial completers still show an improvement in employment and income, and reduction in dependence on income support compared to before training,[29] suggesting that education provides measurable employment-related benefits even when a qualification is not completed.[30]

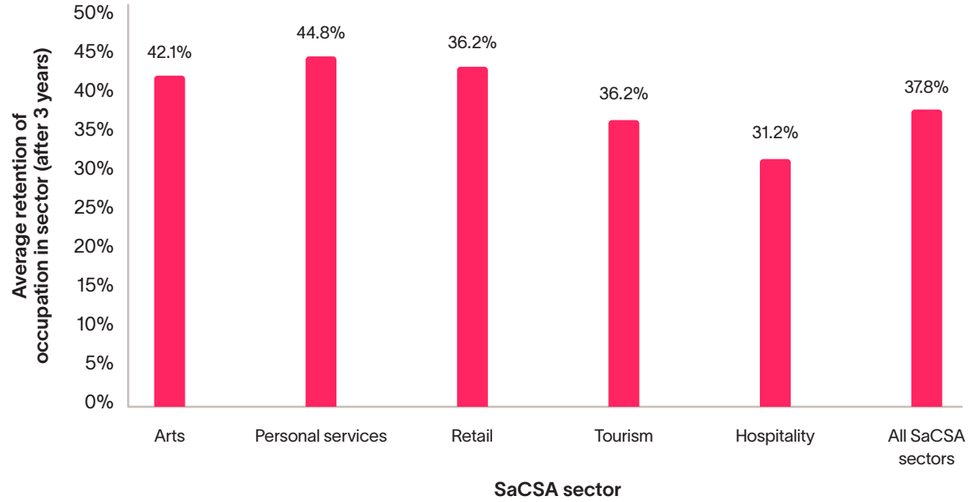
Mobility and retention

There is a high level of mobility across occupations in the years after entering a new occupation, regardless of having prior VET training or not. Overall, about 38% of people remain in their first occupation by the third year after joining, with 47.5% moving to a different occupation and 14.5% having unknown employment status (see Figure 5).

"Unknown employment" is a term for where no occupation is recorded. The reason this is classed as unknown is because this can be for a range of reasons, including becoming unemployed, exiting the labour market for other reasons such as further study and childbearing, and self-employment as a sole trader since occupation is only recorded against salary and wage income, not business income.[31] Some of this "unknown employment" group will reflect the unusual labour market conditions for these cohorts, as the 2018-2023 window for tracking employment outcomes covers COVID-19 which led to temporarily increased unemployment across several SaCSA sectors.

The proportion of learners who had unknown employment recorded after three years varies by sector and is highest in the arts and personal services sectors.

Figure 5: Average retention over 3 years, by sector



Source: ABS, Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), 2018-19 and 2019-20 new workers in occupation, Income Tax Return (ITR) and Total VET Activity data, ABS DataLab. Findings based on use of PLIDA data.

29 JSA, Partial VET completion: Insights on outcomes and pathways, July 2026: https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/vet-national-data-asset/partial-vet-completion.

30 This does not preclude other benefits of training including psychological or personal edification.

31 ATO, Salary and wage occupation codes, May 2026: https://www.ato.gov.au/forms-and-instructions/salary-and-wage-occupation-codes.

In terms of specific occupations, entry level roles do exhibit some movement to higher skill level occupations, although they are just as likely to move into other sectors. Analysis of higher skill level occupations shows that previous employment often came from within the sector, but there was often no clear pattern regarding prior occupations. This indicates that experience is a more significant factor for advancement in SaCSA's sectors than a specific occupational pathway.

Workers in smaller occupations were less likely to move to a different occupation after three years, consistent with findings from Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA), which showed lower rates of movement both into and out of smaller occupations.[32] However, workers in these occupations were more likely to have an unknown employment status after three years. This may reflect the effects of COVID-19, as many smaller occupations are concentrated in the arts, personal services and tourism sectors, which were heavily affected by pandemic restrictions. JSA also noted that smaller occupations often have specialised skills, which may make it more difficult for workers to transition to other occupations, leaving either moving for a likely pay cut, unemployment or self-employment as common remaining options.[33]

Demographic analysis

Box 3: Employment of demographic groups post-training

Analysis of employment outcomes by demographic characteristics suggests that some groups experience lower rates of employment following VET training, even when accounting for qualification completion status. This indicates that VET training is not as effective a vehicle to employment and may indicate barriers to employment.

People with disability represented 7.5% of qualification completers across all qualifications analysed but accounted for only 5.2% of those employed after completion. Similarly, people from First Nations background represented 4.0% of completers but only 3.0% of those employed after completion.

Individuals in the lowest socioeconomic quintile accounted for approximately 18.5% of qualification completers but only around 16.5% of those employed after completion. Likewise, learners who spoke a language other than English at home represented 20.5% of completers but only 18.0% of those employed after completion.

In contrast, analysis by age, international student status, gender and remoteness did not identify any apparent employment disadvantage once qualification completion status was considered.

32 JSA, Data on Occupation Mobility: Unpacking Workers Movements, January 2024: https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/publications/data-occupation-mobility-unpacking-workers-movements.

33 JSA, Data on Occupation Mobility: Unpacking Workers Movements, January 2024: https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/publications/data-occupation-mobility-unpacking-workers-movements.

Employed after training

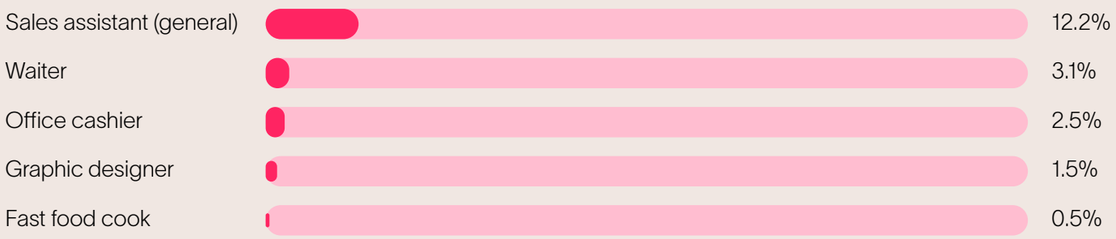
61.8% Completers

54.5% Part-completers

Joined intended occupation

1%
Following training

Top occupations one year after training



Average remaining in year 1 occupation by year 4

42.1%

Learner background

25.5%
Prior education: VET

28.8%
Prior education: Higher education

68.9%
Prior employment

Overall employment outcomes

The arts sector recorded the lowest employment outcomes of all sectors analysed. 61.8% of qualification completers were employed after training, compared with 54.5% of part-completers, representing an employment premium from completion of 7.3%, the second lowest of all SaCSA's sectors.

The proportion of learners entering the intended occupation of their qualification was also the lowest of all sectors, with only 1% of both completers and part-completers across analysed qualifications doing so. These findings are mirrored in research on student outcomes in higher education. The Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) finds Higher Education creative arts undergraduates have the second lowest employment rate of all study areas.[34] Higher education graduates also have relatively low rates of occupational alignment, with the most common occupation group post-study being sales assistants and salespersons (11% of graduates).[35] Jobs and Skills Australia notes this may be a function of how creative professions are split across occupations, resulting in smaller percentages in any individual occupation.[36]

Several factors may contribute to this low employment and occupational alignment. The simplest reason would be that employment post-training is measured only one year after completion. Longitudinal analysis of higher education employment outcomes shows a large difference in full-time employment between the short and medium term,[37] which may well be the case for VET outcomes as well.

Many arts workers hold multiple jobs. For example, around 17.9% of jobs in arts education were secondary jobs, followed by 15.6% of jobs in film and television activities and 15.3% in digital games development.[38] Additionally, around 330,000 people engaged in volunteering activities with arts and heritage organisations during the 12 months to 2025.[39]

A significant proportion of arts workers report their income as business income, with around 14% of higher education music and fine arts graduates reporting business income only, while a further 17% of fine arts graduates and 25% of music graduates reported both employee and business income five years post-completion.[40] This may also contribute to low apparent employment.

The CUA Creative Arts and Culture training package has one of the lowest proportions of learners undertaking training for employment-related reasons, with only 46.9% of completers and 44.4% of part-completers citing this motivation, while 27.1% of completers and 34.5% of part-completers cited personal reasons, the second highest of all training packages.[41] This suggests that many learners are pursuing arts qualifications for personal interest, creative development or complementary skills, or to pursue further study in the field, which may contribute to low employment and occupational alignment outcomes. This is also supported by the fact that high proportions of completers in arts VET qualifications go on to higher education,[42] which may also delay employment.

These reasons indicate that occupational alignment as measured from tax data is useful, but should not be used as an indicator for prioritisation of resources given its limitations and demonstrates that value can be gained from education outside of employment.

34 Graduate Outcomes Survey 2025, Domestic Results 2025 – Graduate outcomes by 21 study areas, 2025: https://www.qilt.edu.au/surveys/Data-Visualisation/gos. Data covers domestic undergraduates only and is collected 4-6 months after study completion.

35 JSA, Higher Education Outcomes, Exploring Administrative Data, Nov 2025: https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/publications/higher-education-outcomes-exploring-administrative-data. Pp 10.

36 Compared to any other field of education, graduates of creative arts qualifications have the lowest concentration of graduates working in any single occupation. Instead, graduates are widely distributed across 177 different occupations.

37 QILT, Graduate Outcomes Survey – Longitudinal, 2025: https://www.qilt.edu.au/surveys/Data-Visualisation/gos-l.

38 BCARR, Measuring Australia's Cultural and Creative Workforce, 2008–09 to 2023–24, December 2025: https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/measuring-australias-cultural-and-creative-workforce-2008-09-to-2023-24-december2025.pdf. Calculated by taking the number of secondary jobs and dividing it by the total (main plus secondary) jobs.

39 ABS, General Social Survey, 2025: https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/latest-release.

40 JSA, Higher Education Outcomes – Exploring Administrative Data, November 2025: https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/publications/higher-education-outcomes-exploring-administrative-data.

41 NCVER, Student Outcomes Survey, 2025: Extracted from Databuilder https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/databuilder. Population analysed included qualification completers and non-completers.

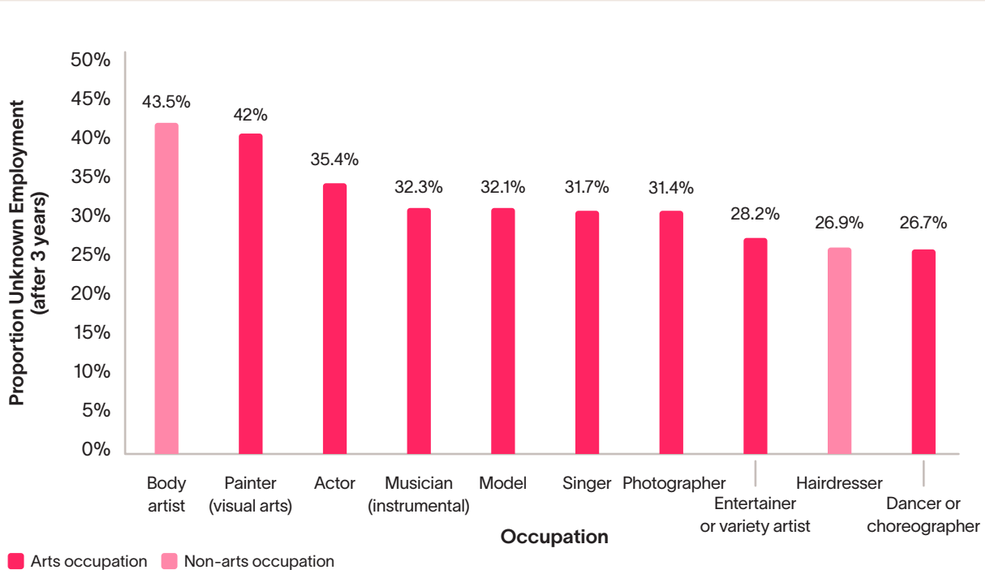
42 JSA, VET Graduate Outcomes 2019-20 qualification completers, June 2026: https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/vet-national-data-asset/dashboard/2019-20.

Mobility and retention

Analysis of occupational mobility and retention from PLIDA data indicates that arts graduates experience middling occupational retention and diverse career pathways. Overall, 42% of those whose first occupation could be identified remained in the same occupation after three years. Conservator recorded the highest retention rate at 60%, while the lowest was for motion picture projectionist, at 20%. Unlike other sectors, many arts occupations did not demonstrate clearly defined progression pathways. Instead, workers commonly transitioned across a broad range of occupations both within and beyond the arts sector, which reflects findings found during the Creative Workforce Scoping Study that noted such issues as a lack of visible career pathways and roadmaps and barriers to progression, resulting in attrition and a 'missing middle'.[43] Some occupations such as graphic designer and film and video editor exhibited movement more often occurring between adjacent creative professions than along structured career pathways.

Long-term employment outcomes for several arts occupations were notably weaker than the average of all occupations analysed. Of the ten occupations with the highest rates of unknown employment three years after entering their first occupation, eight were arts occupations (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Proportion with unknown employment status 3 years after entering initial occupation, top 10



Source: ABS, Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA), 2018-19 and 2019-20 new workers in occupation, Income Tax Return (ITR) and Total VET Activity data, ABS DataLab. Findings based on use of PLIDA data.

These outcomes are consistent with the project-based, freelance and portfolio nature of employment across much of the arts sector. Around 31% of workers in the arts sector are non-employee workers (such as independent contractors or business operators),[44] and a further 18% are casual employees.[45]

Research undertaken by Creative Australia found that approximately 55% of artists who experienced unemployment from 2017 to 2022 attributed it to COVID-19.[46] Therefore, some of the elevated unknown employment rates observed may reflect the precarious nature of employment in the sector and the difficult labour market conditions experienced during the pandemic.

Pathways into key occupations

Analysis of pathways into key arts occupations suggests that entry is supported by both vocational and higher education but is less dependent on following a clearly defined employment pathway. Across the occupations analysed, between 9% and 44% had undertaken recent VET training, while relatively high proportions had also undertaken recent higher education (9% to 54%). Details for individual occupations can be found in the SaCSA Early Career Mobility Analysis.

43 Creative Australia and SaCSA, Creative Workforce Scoping Study, March 2025: https://creative.gov.au/research/creative-workforce-scoping-study.

44 ABS, Characteristics of Employment, August 2025: Extracted from Tablebuilder. Scope of the arts sector was according to the ANZSIC industries in SaCSA's remit.Census 2021 data was used to apportion ANZSIC groups to ANZSIC classes to match with this remit.

45 ABS, Participation, Job Search and Mobility, February 2026: Extracted from Tablebuilder. Scope of the arts sector was according to the ANZSIC industries in SaCSA's remit. Census 2021 data was used to apportion ANZSIC groups to ANZSIC classes to match with this remit. Casual definition is an employee without paid leave entitlements.

46 Creative Australia, Artists as Workers: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia, May 2024: https://creative.gov.au/sites/creative-australia/files/documents/2025-03/Artists-as-Workers-An-Economic-Study-of-Professional-Artists-in-Australia-2%20%281%29.pdf.

Employed after training

67.6% Completers

57.8% Part-completers

Joined intended occupation

SFL

27% Completers

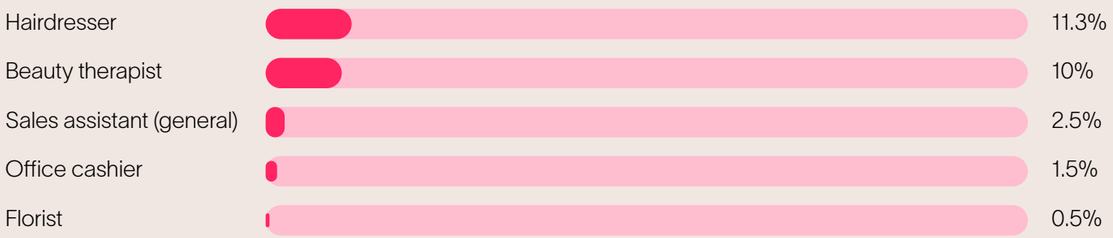
9% Part-completers

SHB

17% Completers

9% Part-completers

Top Occupations One Year After Training



Average remaining in occupation by year 4

44.8%

Learner background

45%
Prior education: VET

9.5%
Prior education: Higher education

58.7%
Prior employment

Overall employment outcomes

The personal services sector was second lowest in employment outcomes of all sectors analysed. 67.6% of qualification completers were employed after training, compared with 57.8% of part-completers, yielding an employment premium for completion of 9.8%. Across the qualifications analysed, 27% of completers in the SFL Floristry training package entered the intended occupation, compared with 9% of part-completers. Within the SHB Hairdressing and Beauty Services training package, 17% of completers entered the intended occupation compared with 9% of part-completers.

Personal services qualifications recorded some of the strongest intended occupation outcomes across all qualifications analysed. The top two qualifications were Certificate III in Barbering and the Certificate III in Hairdressing, with 67% of completers and 41% of part-completers of completers in the Certificate III in Barbering and 61% of completers and 25% of part-completers in the Certificate III in Hairdressing being hairdressers.

The Certificate IV in Hairdressing, with 56% of both completers and part-completers being hairdressers, was fourth in terms of proportion entering the intended occupation. Additionally, the Certificate IV in Beauty Therapy demonstrated strong outcomes, with 40% of completers and 12% of part-completers being beauty therapists.

It is important to note that occupation mapping does not always fully reflect industry practice. For example, stakeholder feedback suggests the Diploma of Beauty Therapy is used as a pathway into a beauty therapist, although it is mapped to the occupation hair or beauty salon manager.[47] Consistent with this feedback, 38% of completers and 12% of part-completers became beauty therapists.

47 Training.gov.au, SHB50121 Diploma of Beauty Therapy, December 2021: https://training.gov.au/training/details/SHB50121/summary.

Mobility and retention

Analysis of occupational mobility and retention suggests that personal services workers are more likely to remain in their occupation. Overall, 45% remained in the same occupation three years after entering their first occupation, the highest of all SaCSA's sectors. Retention was highest for funeral directors, with 57% remaining in the occupation by year 4, followed by hairdressers at 47%, beauty therapists at 46.5%, hair or beauty salon managers and florists at 42%. Sex worker or escort had the lowest retention at 14% after three years.

Progression into management roles was uncommon, though not entirely unexpected given the three-year timeframe. Only 1.4% of hairdressers and 1.7% of beauty therapists had transitioned into hair or beauty salon manager roles after three years. The most common transitions for hair and beauty salon managers were to hairdresser with 6.3% and beauty therapist with 4.6%, alongside smaller movements into senior management roles such as chief executive or managing director (2.5%) and corporate general manager (1.7%). Florists recorded weaker outcomes, with 42% remaining in the occupation and 24% with unknown employment status after three years, while the remainder were dispersed across other occupations. Funeral directors showed greater occupational stability, with 57% remaining in the occupation, although no clear occupation pathway was evident for those who moved.

Overall, these findings suggest that many personal services workers remain in their occupation, but progression into management is relatively uncommon within the first three years.

Some personal services occupations have high rates of unknown employment three years after initial employment. Body artists recorded the highest unknown employment rate at 43% after three years, while hairdressers recorded an unknown employment rate of 27%. Hair or beauty salon managers (25%) and florists (24%) also recorded high unknown employment rates, ranking 13th and 16th respectively. These outcomes should be interpreted both in light of COVID-19 restrictions which affected many personal services businesses during this period, and high proportions of self-employment.

Pathways into key occupations

Analysis of pathways into key personal services occupations shows that VET plays an important role, although the clarity of pathways varies by occupation. Across the occupations analysed, between 20% and 57% had undertaken recent VET training, while relatively lower proportions had also undertaken recent higher education (3% to 33%). Hair, beauty and floristry occupations exhibited clear training and occupation pathways, with hairdressing and barbering being the strongest of all SaCSA's sectors, although prior employment revealed strong occupational pathways for hairdressing and barbering but not for beauty or floristry. Funeral services did not have clear training or employment pathways, although prior employment was high, suggesting that entry into senior funeral services roles may rely more heavily on prior work experience, informal progression or employer-led training as opposed to VET training.

Employed after training

73.1% Completers

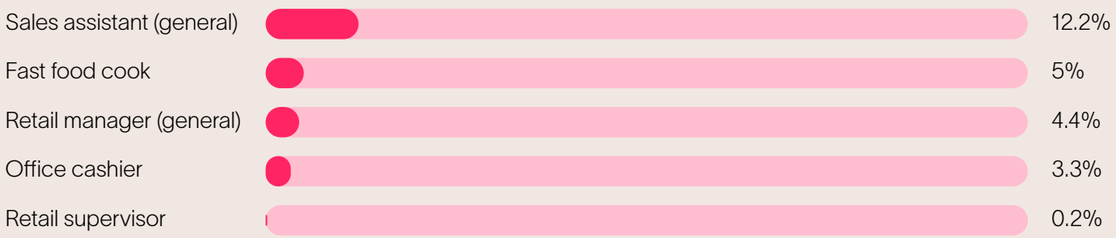
58.6% Part-completers

Joined intended occupation

14% Completers

10% Part-completers

Top occupations one year after training



Average remaining in occupation by year 4

43.3%

Learner background

32.2%
Prior education: VET

13.5%
Prior education: Higher education

50%
Prior employment

Overall employment outcomes

The retail sector recorded strong employment outcomes following training. Among qualification completers, 73.1% were employed after training, compared with 58.6% of part-completers, the second highest among SaCSA's sectors, with an employment premium for completion of 14.5%, the largest across all SaCSA's sectors.

Qualification completion was also associated with stronger alignment between training and employment. Within the SIR – Retail Services training package, 14% of completers entered the intended occupation associated with their qualification, compared with 10% of part-completers. The Diploma of Retail Leadership recorded the strongest occupational alignment, with 29% of completers and 13% of part-completers becoming retail managers. The Certificate III in Retail also demonstrated comparatively strong outcomes, with 14% of completers and 11% of part-completers becoming sales assistants.

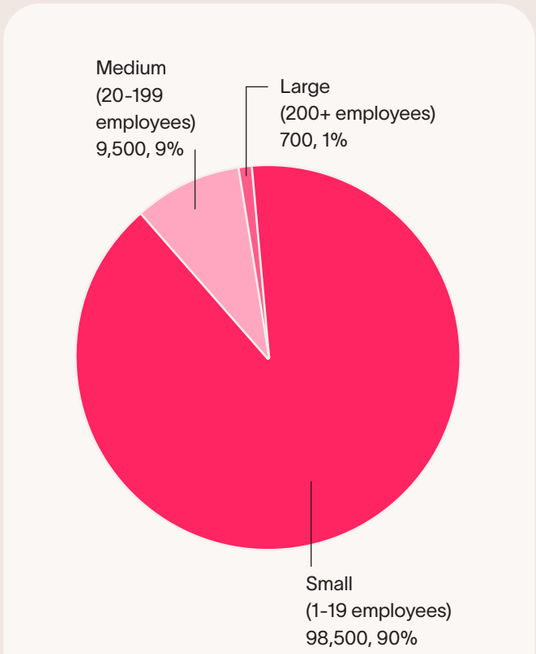
Mobility and retention

Overall, 43% of workers remained in the same occupation after three years, although retention varied across occupations. Sales representative (medical and pharmaceutical products) recorded the highest retention rate, with 64% remaining in the occupation after three years, followed by retail pharmacists at 63%. Door-to-door salesperson had the lowest retention rate at only 13% after three years, which may reflect a high physical and emotional toll and with fewer people available at home to sell to.

Evidence of upward mobility was limited given the three year timeframe. After three years, only 2% of sales assistants had progressed to retail manager, while 6% of retail supervisors had become retail managers. Similarly, only 5% and 1% of pharmacy sales assistants became retail pharmacists and pharmacy technicians respectively. Progression from sales assistant to retail supervisor was even less common at just 0.4%.[48] Movement was spread across many occupations rather than following defined career pathways, with sales assistants and pharmacy sales assistants dispersing across 590 and 120 different occupations respectively.

These findings are consistent with the structure of the retail industry, where more than 90% of employing businesses have fewer than 20 employees (see Figure 7).[49] The predominance of small businesses and flat organisational structures may limit opportunities for promotion into management positions,[50] contributing to the observed limited upward mobility and dispersed occupational transitions.

Figure 7: Number of retail sector employing businesses, by business size



Source: ABS, Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits, June 2025

Pathways into key occupations

Analysis of pathways into key retail occupations suggests that entry is more strongly associated with prior employment experience than recent formal training. Across the occupations analysed, between 24% and 57% had undertaken recent VET training, while relatively lower proportions had also undertaken recent higher education (8% to 35%). Previous employment revealed some occupational pathways into higher roles, with a moderate number (but not the majority) of entrants coming from more junior roles. Community pharmacy had lower rates of prior employment and evidence of difficulty for advancement in some roles. Details for individual occupations can be found in the SaCSA Early Career Mobility Analysis.

48 This may reflect the flat structure of the retail sector or a lack of delineation between Retail Supervisor and Retail Manager among workers as occupation is self-reported.

49 ABS, Counts of Australian Businesses, including Entries and Exits, June 2025: https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/business-indicators/counts-australian-businesses-including-entries-and-exits/latest-release.

50 Strategic Management Journal, The effect of flatter hierarchy on applicant pool gender diversity: Evidence from experiments, February 2024: https://sms.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/smj.3590#:~:text=We%20find%20that%20featuring%20a,decreases%20women's%20representation%20within%20it.

Employed after training

75.9% Completers

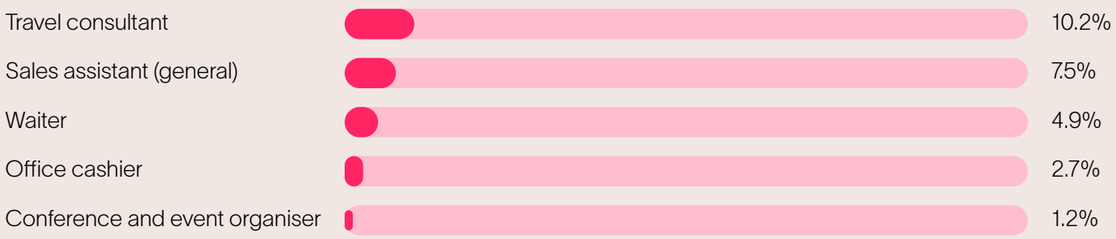
69.7% Part-completers

Joined intended occupation

14% Completers

6% Part-completers

Top occupations one year after training



Average remaining in occupation by year 4

36.2%

Learner background

34.5%
Prior education: VET

20.8%
Prior education: Higher education

77.4%
Prior employment

Overall employment outcomes

The Tourism sector recorded the highest overall employment rates post-training of all sectors analysed. Among qualification completers, 75.9% were employed after training, compared with 69.7% of part-completers. However, the employment premium associated with qualification completion was only 6.2%, the smallest of all sectors. This suggests that employment prospects are generally strong within tourism, and partial completion is still comparatively valuable, since qualification completion has a smaller influence on employment outcomes than in other sectors.

As with other sectors, qualification completion was associated with stronger alignment between training and post-training occupation. Overall, 14% of completers entered the intended occupation associated with their qualification, compared with 6% of part-completers. This was highest for the Certificate IV in Travel and Tourism, with 45% of completers and 23% of part-completers becoming travel consultants, followed by the Certificate III in Travel, where 38% of completers and 11% of part-completers became travel consultants.

Mobility and retention

Despite strong employment outcomes, retention within key tourism occupations was relatively low overall, with around 36% of people remaining in their occupation after the following three years. Only 26% of tour guides remained in the occupation three years after entering their first occupation, with almost one quarter with unknown employment and the remainder dispersed across a wide range of occupations. Similarly, only 27% of travel consultants remained in the occupation after three years, with many moving into unrelated and less tourism-specific occupations such as sales assistant and general clerk. This suggests retention challenges and limited evidence of clearly defined career pathways within these occupations. Retention was somewhat higher for travel agency managers, with 41% remaining in the occupation after three years. There was also some evidence of upward mobility, with small proportions of 3% each progressing to corporate general manager, customer service manager and office manager roles.

Pathways into key occupations

Analysis of pathways into key tourism occupations indicates that the clarity of education and employment pathways varies considerably across occupations. Across the occupations analysed, between 33% and 47% had undertaken recent VET training, while relatively lower proportions (8% to 24%) had undertaken recent higher education. For management positions, there is a clear occupational pathway, whereas for more junior roles the pathway is much less clear, although there are high rates of prior employment. Details for individual occupations can be found in the SaCSA Early Career Mobility Analysis.

Employed after training

72.6% Completers

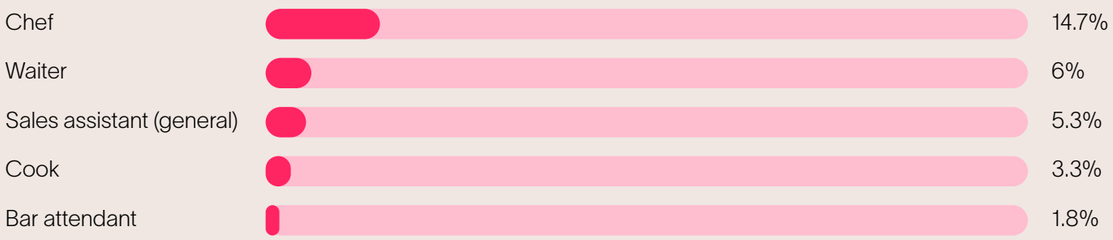
59.7% Part-completers

Joined intended occupation

16% Completers

8% Part-completers

Top occupations one year after training



Average remaining in occupation by year 4

31.2 %

Learner background

30.1%
Prior education: VET

8.6%
Prior education: Higher education

36.5%
Prior employment

Overall employment outcomes

The hospitality sector recorded stronger employment outcomes following training than most other sectors. Among qualification completers, 72.6% were employed after training compared with 59.7% of part-completers, representing an employment premium for completion of 12.9%, the second largest of all sectors analysed.

Hospitality qualifications also demonstrated strong alignment between training and intended occupations. Overall, 16% of completers entered the intended occupation associated with their qualification, compared with 8% of part-completers. The Certificate IV in Kitchen Management recorded particularly strong outcomes, with 58% of completers and 42% of part-completers becoming chefs. Other qualifications with high occupational alignment included the Certificate III in Hospitality, with 19% of completers and 12% of part-completers entering the hospitality workers occupation group, the Certificate IV in Patisserie at 17% and 5% for completers and part-completers respectively becoming pastrycooks, and the Certificate III in Commercial Cookery at 12% and 9% for completers and part-completers respectively becoming cooks. The figures for the Certificate III in Commercial Cookery understate the alignment, because they do not include learners who became chefs. When both chef and cook are considered together, the proportion increases to 64% of completers and 39.5% of part-completers, indicating a strong alignment between training and related occupations.

Mobility and retention

Overall, the average retention rate across all occupations analysed in the hospitality sector was 31%, the lowest of all sectors analysed. This is consistent with previous workforce planning research identifying retention as a significant challenge for the hospitality industry, and the high casualisation rate across the sector.[51] Retention varied across occupations, with 53% of chefs remaining in the occupation after three years, compared with 44% of hotel or motel managers, 41% of café or restaurant managers, 29% of cooks and 27% of waiters. The two occupations with lowest retention rates were cash van salesperson and domestic housekeeper at 21% and 22% respectively.

Analysis of career progression indicates evidence of occupational mobility, particularly within kitchen occupations. After three years, 18% of cooks had progressed to chef roles, while 6% of kitchenhands had become chefs and 3% had become cooks. However, progression into management positions was even less common. Only 1.2% of chefs, 1% of cooks and 1.4% of waiters became café or restaurant managers after three years. In accommodation, only around 3% of hotel or motel receptionists and 4% of hotel service managers became hotel or motel managers within the following three years.

Pathways into key occupations

Analysis of pathways into key hospitality occupations suggests entry-level occupations generally did not have pathways based on prior education or employment, which is expected given by definition entry-level roles do not require prior experience. Technical occupations have relatively well-defined training pathways, while management occupations rely more heavily on prior industry experience. Across the occupations analysed, between 22% and 47% of workers had undertaken recent VET training, while relatively lower proportions had also undertaken recent higher education (3% to 26%). Similarly, occupation pathways also show that management roles are filled from a range of operational occupations rather than a single defined pathway. Details for individual occupations can be found in the SaCSA Early Career Mobility Analysis.

51 SaCSA, Tourism, Travel and Hospitality Workforce Plan Update, 2025: https://cms.sacsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/SaCSA-Tourism-Travel-and-Hospitality-Workforce-Plan-Update-2025.pdf, pgs. 56, 68.

Next steps / future research

Future research will continue to deepen understanding of workforce pathways and opportunities across the sector in line with the need for greater information articulated in previous Workforce Plans, and the fact that this work by no means satisfies the entire information and data need for decision makers. This includes progressing the Scoping Service Sector Futures: Career Journey Mapping and Scoping Creative Futures: Career Journey Mapping projects to provide greater visibility of career pathways and progression opportunities, which will include interviews of workers to capture lived experiences, identify emerging challenges, and provide richer insights that complement existing quantitative data.

In addition, future research will examine two areas. The first is qualification-to-qualification pathways to better understand how learners progress through education and training, to identify opportunities to strengthen career development and learning outcomes. The second is an alternative measure of occupational alignment extending beyond the Intended Occupation to include all sector-specific occupations. For example, the proportion of CUA Creative Arts and Culture Training Package completers and part-completers who enter an arts occupation. Findings from further research will be added to the Early Career Mobility Analysis as they become available.

Appendix

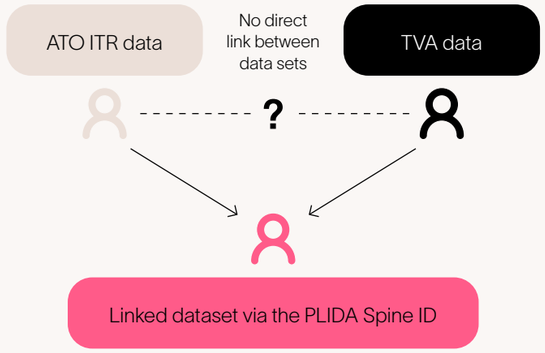
Person level integrated data asset (PLIDA)

The ABS's Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA) is a national linked dataset that combines information from multiple Australian Government agencies to provide a comprehensive picture of education, employment and life outcomes over time.

PLIDA brings combines data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Australian Taxation Office (ATO), Department of Education, Department of Health and Aged Care, Department of Social Services (DSS), Services Australia (SA), Department of Home Affairs (DoHA) and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), among others. The data across these agencies is linked through the Person Linkage Spine, which is a unique identifier constructed by a combination of datasets to cover all Australian residents (see Figure A1).

The combination of linked administrative data and longitudinal analysis makes PLIDA a powerful resource for workforce planning and policy research, providing insights that are not possible through survey data alone. The key datasets used in this analysis were the NCVER Total VET Activity (TVA), ATO Individual Income Tax data (ATO ITR), and DEWR Higher Education Student Data Collection (HESDC).

Figure A1: Structure of PLIDA



Administrative data

Administrative data is information collected as part of the operation of private or government programs and services. Rather than being collected at one time specifically for research, it is generated through everyday activities such as studying, working, paying tax, receiving government payments or interacting with government services. For private businesses it may be bank records, insurance claim history, or any other service.

Because administrative data is collected for large numbers of people across Australia, it provides broad population coverage and supports detailed analysis with a lesser concern for sample size, which is a weakness of surveys. In the context of this project, PLIDA covers the entire Australian resident population, enabling analysis of occupations, industries and disadvantaged groups through tax, education and demographic data.

Longitudinal data

Longitudinal data tracks the same sample of people, businesses or groups over time. This contrasts with repeated cross-sectional data, which takes successive samples of a different group of individuals from the same population across multiple points in time.

For example, in a monthly survey of 100 people in a group of 10,000, a repeated cross-sectional survey would find 100 different people from that 10,000 each month to interview, but a longitudinal survey would interview the same 100 people every month to identify any changes with each individual.

Longitudinal data has several advantages over repeated cross-sectional data. Longitudinal data allows for the measurement of transitions over time for a specific group, enables the measurement of the timing and duration of events. In the context of this project, this helps identify career pathways, occupational transitions and workforce retention patterns that cannot be observed using point in time data.

Methodology

The analysis was conducted over three stages and used combined NCVER Total VET Activity (TVA), ATO Individual Income Tax data (ATO ITR), and DEWR Higher Education Student Data Collection (HESDC) data from PLIDA.

Stage 1: Qualification completer and part-completer outcomes

The first stage examined the employment outcomes of qualification completers and part-completers (Figure A2). Learners who completed or discontinued training between 2016 and 2018 were identified and their employment outcomes were analysed one year after completion or non-completion (that being 2017-18 to 2019-20, depending on the final education year). Subsequent analysis tracked workforce retention (Figure A3) and occupational mobility over two, three and four years (that being anywhere from the period 2018-19 to 2020-21 to the period 2020-21 to 2022-23 depending on the final education year) to understand how career pathways evolve as people progress through their careers.

Additionally, analysis of the demographic profiles of commencing students on completion, non-completion and employment in any occupation post-training is also provided. It includes gender, Indigenous status, disability status, language other than English (LOTE) spoken at home, age groups, SEIFA (Socio-Economic Index for Areas, a measure of socioeconomic disadvantage), remoteness (of where the student lives) and international status.

Figure A2: Employment outcome analysis example for SIT10222 Certificate I in Hospitality

Between 2026 and 2018, among students who completed or partially completed **SIT10222 Certificate I in Hospitality**

7,160 (55.2%)
Completers

1st FY

3,270 **completers** (45.7%) were employed. 410 (12.5%) of these were employed as a sales assistant (general) (ANZSCO 621111).

5,810 (44.8%)
Part-completers

1st FY

1,960 (33.7%) of **part-completers** were employed. 170 (8.7%) of these were employed as sales assistant (general) (ANZSCO 621111).

Figure A3: Retention analysis for SIT10222 Certificate I in Hospitality

Among **completers**, for **410** employed as **sales assistant (general)** in 1st FY, the retention count is as follows

- **2nd FY** 310 (75.6%)
- **3rd FY** 230 (56.1%)
- **4th FY** 170 (41.5%)

Among **part-completers**, for **170** Employed as **sales assistant (general)** in 1st FY, the retention count is as follows

- **2nd FY** 120 (70.6%)
- **3rd FY** 100 (58.8%)
- **4th FY** 80 (47.1%)

Stage 2: Occupational mobility for new workers

The second stage focused on workforce mobility within priority occupations. This analysis examined 'new workers', defined as workers with no recorded employment in the analysed occupation for the eight years prior to the 2018-19 and 2019-20 financial years as explained in Figure A4.[52] Their retention rates and transitions to other occupations (Figure A5) were then analysed over the following three years.

Figure A4: Explaining how new workers are captured, example sales assistant

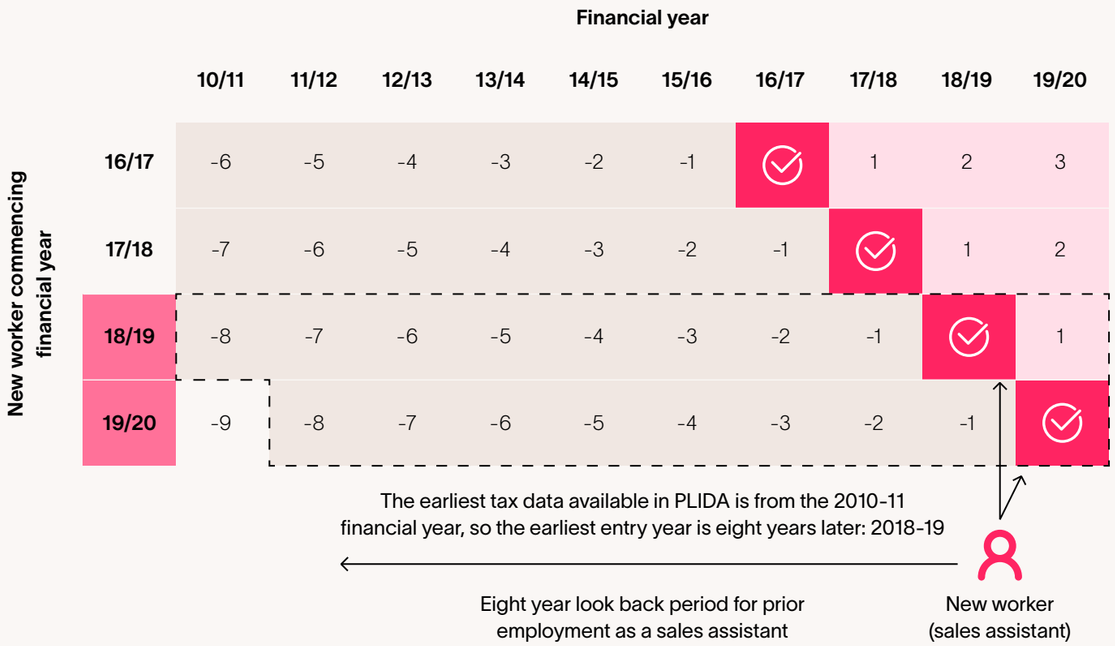


Figure A5: Occupational mobility analysis for sales assistant

1st FY

Between the 2018-19 and 2019-20 financial years, **160,290 were employed** as a **sales assistant** (ANZSCO 621111), being in that occupation for the first time

Mobility to general clerk (ANZSCO 531111)

By
- **2nd FY** Count: 910 (0.6%)
- **3rd FY** Count: 1,790 (1.1%)
- **4th FY** Count: 2,570 (1.6%)

Average time to mobility: 1.94 years

Mobility to retail manager (general) (ANZSCO 142111)

By
- **2nd FY** Count: 960 (0.6%)
- **3rd FY** Count: 1,940 (1.2%)
- **4th FY** Count: 2,830 (1.8%)

Average time to mobility: 1.97 years

52 "New workers" may have had employment before, but not in the particular occupation analysed, at least over the past eight years.

Stage 3: Pathways into priority occupations

The third stage examined pathways into higher-skilled occupations. Using cohorts of 'new workers' entering employment during the 2021-22 and 2022-23 financial years and no employment in the occupation eight years prior,[53] the analysis explored both recent education and employment histories.

Education records were examined for up to three and a half years prior to entry into the occupation (Figure A6), while employment histories were examined for up to four years (Figure A7). This enabled the identification of common education and employment pathways, including qualifications and occupations that frequently preceded entry into higher-skilled roles.

Figure A6: Recent training analysis for hairdressers

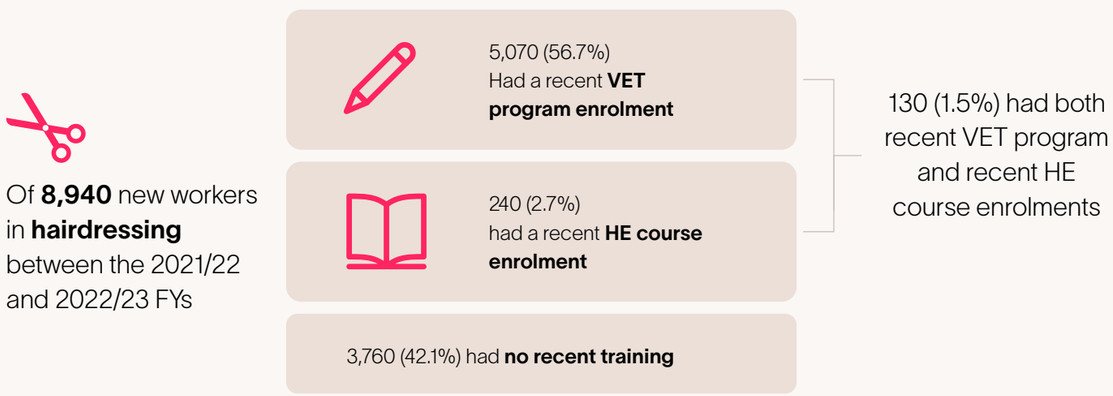


Figure A7: Key occupational pathways analysis for hairdressers



53 "New workers" may have had employment before, but not in the particular occupation analysed over the past eight years.

Limitations of analysis

The ABS has rules on all outputs before datasets such as PLIDA can be accessed outside the DataLab secure environment. These rules include:[54, 55]

The Rule of 10 – every value or statistic must be constructed with 10 or more people.

Additionally, every VET cell or statistic must consist of five or more registered training organisations (RTOs).

Dominance – any value or statistic must be constructed such that:

- The largest contributor cannot account for more than 50% of the total counts
- The top two contributors cannot account for more than 67% of the total counts.

The main source of occupation data in PLIDA is ATO tax data, which has the following additional limitations:

- The latest available tax data in PLIDA at the time of this study was from the 2022-23 financial year. This is because ATO waits around 15 months after financial year end to ensure everyone has lodged their return, and around another 9 months to collate and publish the data.
- Tax data may underestimate the proportion of occupational movement and inaccurately estimate the distribution of occupational pathways since occupation in tax data is self-reported, which may lead individuals to leave their occupation on their tax form the same even if they have moved occupations.
- Another consequence of occupation being self-reported is that it may introduce inaccuracies as people may not know what occupation best describes them.
- Data is limited by how far back tax data in PLIDA goes (2010-11 financial year).
- The above limits the forward-looking to four years after completion. This will slowly be addressed over time as more years of tax data gets added to PLIDA by data custodians.
- As tax data is based on financial years, short-term movements to another occupation or out of employment back to the original occupation may not be captured.
- Occupations are based on income derived from salaries or wages, thus excluding unpaid volunteering work or work through owning a business or as a sole trader.
- Tax data will not capture the occupation of people who did not report their income, such as those working cash in hand or who are extremely delayed in submitting tax returns.
- The tax data is based on the ANZSCO classification, which is limited to the occupations listed and does not include the new occupations added as part of the new occupation classification system OSCA. SaCSA has attempted to address this limitation by contributing to the development of OSCA, which can be found here.

54 Australian Bureau of Statistics, DataLab Clearance, November 2021: https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/microdata-tablebuilder/datalab/datalab-clearance.

55 Australian Bureau of Statistics, DataLab Safe Researcher Training, November 2021: https://www.abs.gov.au/system/files/documents/bec1cc42a3e20dd01d9748b621f8b8b7/DataLab%20Safe%20Researcher%20Virtual%20Training_Pt3_Safe%20Outputs_JAN%202024.pdf.

Education data has the following limitations:

- The earliest PLIDA education data available is from 2015.
- The TVA dataset does not include non-nationally recognised training, which is training that cannot be found on training.gov.au. This includes locally organised programs or skill sets or non-accredited modules.[56]
- It is not possible to see the specific higher education course that was studied by each learner.
- Tax data is based on financial years while education data is based on calendar years. This difference in reporting periods means that employment history can be assessed over four years, but the education history look-back period is limited to 3.5 years.
  → Higher education data is available annually, without sufficient detail to determine whether a qualification was completed before or after 30 June. As a result, the most recent calendar year of higher education data is excluded to avoid incorrectly identifying qualifications completed after a worker commenced employment. This creates a six-month gap between the latest higher education data included in the analysis and the commencement of employment for a 'new worker'.

There are also some methodological limitations, which include:

- The use of longitudinal data forces the analysis to rely on earlier cohorts. This is to ensure enough time to elapse to the most recent year of tax data (2022-23) to observe the desired number of years of occupational movement.
- Since movements between occupations beyond three years cannot be observed, the average time to shift occupations will reflect the average time within the 3-year period and therefore will likely be an underestimate.
- The 'intended occupation' is based on the training.gov.au mapping of each qualification to an occupation, which may not reflect the intended occupation of each learner.
- NCVER defines a 'new worker' as someone with no employment history in the specific occupation in the previous eight years, but that definition can still include workers who have a long-term gap i.e. someone who left an occupation more than eight years ago but then came back to it.
- Certain progression within an occupation, such as pay rises, increased responsibilities, or becoming an owner-manager is not captured in this data.
- Employment is based on the main job of the individual and does not include any secondary jobs they may hold.
- The combination of years where education and tax data is available in PLIDA, and the length of the forward-looking period, overlaps the retention and COVID-19 impacted mobility analysis window. This may result in lower than usual occupational retention.
- Education or employment outside of Australia is not covered in this data.

56 NCVER, What are nationally recognised training and non-nationally recognised training?, October 2026: https://www.ncver.edu.au/sites/default/files/ncver-documents/Fact-sheet-What-are-nationally-recognised-training-and-non-nationally-recognised-training.pdf.

Derived quantities

Intended occupation

- The training.gov.au qualification-occupation mapping can change when qualifications are updated/superseded. To account for this, the qualification pathways (stage 1) are based on 2018 mapping. For the backwards occupation focus (stage 3), the analysis is based on 2023 mapping.

Unknown employment and unspecified occupation movement

The number of workers who change into an unspecified occupation and the number who gain an unknown employment status can be derived from the retention and mobility data.

- The number of workers moving occupations other than the occupations specified is determined by the number moving occupations (regardless of what occupation they moved to) minus the sum moving to specific occupations listed.
- The number of workers with an unknown employment status is determined by taking the number in a specific occupation in year 1 and subtracting both the remaining number in the occupation and the cumulative number of workers who have changed occupations.

Exclusive study

The analysis on the website also reports the number of new workers who studied VET or Higher Education exclusively. Because the reported VET and Higher Education counts each include individuals who undertook both types of study, the exclusive counts were calculated by subtracting the number who studied both from each total.

N(VET only) = N(VET) - N(Both VET and Higher Education)

N(Higher Education only) = N(Higher Education) - N(Both VET and Higher Education)

Note on PLIDA data

The results of these studies are based, in part, on data supplied to the ABS under the Taxation Administration Act 1953, A New Tax System (Australian Business Number) Act 1999, Australian Border Force Act 2015, Social Security (Administration) Act 1999, A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999, Paid Parental Leave Act 2010 and/or the Student Assistance Act 1973. Such data may only used for the purpose of administering the Census and Statistics Act 1905 or performance of functions of the ABS as set out in section 6 of the Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975. No individual information collected under the Census and Statistics Act 1905 is provided back to custodians for administrative or regulatory purposes. Any discussion of data limitations or weaknesses is in the context of using the data for statistical purposes and is not related to the ability of the data to support the Australian Taxation Office, Australian Business Register, Department of Social Services and/or Department of Home Affairs' core operational requirements.

Legislative requirements to ensure privacy and secrecy of these data have been followed. For access to PLIDA and/or BLADE data under Section 16A of the ABS Act 1975 or enabled by section 15 of the Census and Statistics (Information Release and Access) Determination 2018, source data are de-identified and so data about specific individuals has not been viewed in conducting this analysis. In accordance with the Census and Statistics Act 1905, results have been treated where necessary to ensure that they are not likely to enable identification of a particular person or organisation.



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