

Summary

Learning, life and work: Understanding non-completion of industry qualifications

Introduction

This project explored the reasons why some industry trainees do not complete their qualification, from the perspective of the trainee. It was undertaken between November 2014 and May 2015, using non-completion data from 10 industry training organisations (ITOs) and qualitative interviews with 114 trainees across seven ITOs.

What's the issue?

In 2014 there were nearly 140,000 trainees and apprentices involved in workplace learning through ITOs. While 42% of learners successfully completed qualificationsⁱ, many more made purposeful progress towards qualification completion before they withdrew. These rates are broadly comparable to qualification completion rates from other parts of the tertiary education sector for part-time studentsⁱⁱ, and within the Australian vocational education and training sector.

What's unique about industry training?

Industry trainees' learning and assessment occurs in the workplace, in off-job settings and in their own time. They work towards qualifications within the context of their *employment* (e.g. managing workplace relationships, on-job training, pay and working conditions, employers' attitude to training), the *system* (e.g. ITO training and assessment, the labour market, economic climate), and their *personal* or family circumstances (e.g. child-care, bereavement, relationship stress, health issues). A significant portion of a trainee's time outside of work is required in working towards a qualification. This means that their personal circumstances play a big part in whether they achieve completion. We have come to consider this as the 'trainee burden'. We believe that this aspect of industry training is currently underestimated.

What we found

Why do trainees withdraw from their training?

Trainees were asked to provide up to three reasons. For most of them, it was the interplay of factors from each category (*employment, system* and *personal*), with one of these (often personal circumstances) acting as a tipping point that resulted in trainees withdrawing from their training.

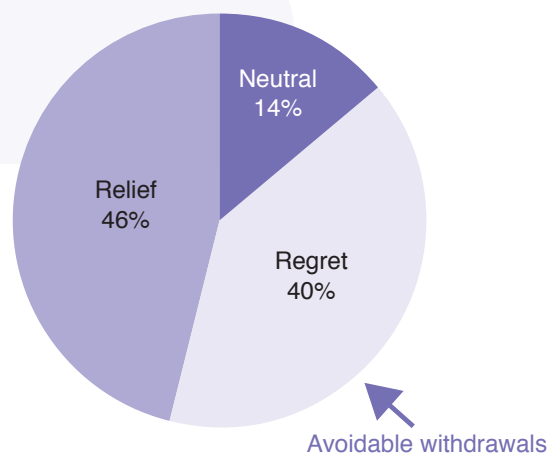
The identified reasons were:

- Having time to undertake the bookwork was identified as a primary area of difficulty – i.e. finding the time in work, outside of work, and accessing help with the content itself
- Didn't get on with people at work
- Lost job
- Not paid enough
- Found the training too hard
- Training materials/ITO support
- Family commitments
- Employer/work related
- Didn't get the right sort of training
- Not enough support
- Personal circumstances.

How do trainees feel about not completing their qualification?

Trainees were also asked to talk about how they felt about giving up their training. The trainees were then categorised on a 'regret to relief' continuum. For 40% of them there was a sense of regret, 46% felt relief and 14% were neutral. The research concluded that there are a proportion of withdrawals that are unavoidable (e.g. in industries where there is low pay and/or high employment churn, if trainees don't like the work or their workmates, or want to try something new). It was also concluded that there are a proportion of 'avoidable withdrawals'; particularly where trainees expressed regret at not being able to complete (the 40% mentioned above).

How trainees felt about their non-completion



Trainees were asked – What do you think would have helped you to complete your qualification?

Trainees were invited to make an overall comment about what would have helped them to complete the qualifications. The suggestions put forward fell into either the *employment* or *system* categories, with only a small portion indicating that a change in their *personal* circumstances would have made a difference.

Employment

- More on-the-job opportunities to learn and be assessed
- More time and a structured approach to training
- More engagement and encouragement from employers with training
- More understanding from employers about what it takes to learn at work
- Experts to work alongside trainees
- Closer supervision or mentoring.

System

- More support from the ITO
- More information about assessments, access to resources
- Materials relevant to the job
- Improved or more off-job provision.

Conclusion

Talking to the trainees about why they withdrew and what they think could have helped did not uncover any unknown barriers to completion, or suggest any interventions that constitute a 'magic bullet' to address the issue. It did, however, show that the perception amongst those trainees is that more could have been done to support them. Their reasons for non-completion and their suggestions for improvement provide valuable insights into the types of interventions that could be put into place or strengthened to aid qualification completion.

What's next?

In 2017, and based on this study, we will seek feedback from ITOs and employers to identify targets for qualification completions and to elicit ideas to improve completion rates.

i Tertiary Sector Performance Analysis, Ministry of Education, 2015. Profile and Trends 2014: New Zealand's Workplace-based Learners [Part 3 of 5].

ii Qualification completion rates for domestic and international students by qualification level, full- or part-time and year of study 2005-2014 (Education Counts website). www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/tertiary-education/retention_and_achievement

Further information

This summary and the full report can be downloaded at <https://akoatearora.ac.nz/non-completers-industry-training>

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