



DEFERRING A UNIVERSITY OFFER IN REGIONAL VICTORIA

FINAL REPORT

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JUNE 2014



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ISBN: 978-1-875261-20-8

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Published June 2014

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PDF versions can be downloaded from www.yacvic.org.au

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This publication has been made possible by funds provided by the Victorian Government.

Deferring a University Offer in Regional Victoria is a longitudinal study involving the Local Learning Employment Networks (LLENs), The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and The Education Policy and Leadership Unit, Melbourne Graduate School Of Education, University of Melbourne. Copies of the earlier publications from this study can be obtained through YACVic. The project partners would like to thank the young people who have participated in this study since 2007.

Acknowledgment:

YACVic, the LLENs and the authors gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Dr Trish Corrie of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in supplying data on metropolitan and non-metropolitan deferral rates.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report synthesises the findings of the deferral reports from the last five years and also reports on the final phase of the project which sought to identify the barriers preventing deferrers from taking up their offer, including financial and distance-related barriers, experiences relating to the transition to work and study and the support received to date from school, government and non-government organisations.

OUTCOMES FROM PREVIOUS DEFERRAL REPORTS

The research from the four previous deferral reports reveals that:

- ▶ Young people from non-metropolitan areas defer their university offer at twice the rate of their metropolitan counterparts.
- ▶ Nearly 40% of deferrers fail to take up the offer after a year of deferment. All of these young people have successfully qualified at Y12 and have received an offer from a university but have not been able to take up the offer.
- ▶ The overall proportion of non-metropolitan students who continue to university remains lower than for those from Melbourne.
- ▶ Financial stresses and travel related factors seem to be the biggest barriers to taking up their place at university, particularly in the first year out of school.

The research from the four previous deferral reports reveals that over sixty percent of young people who deferred their university offer subsequently commenced and continued university study.

Of the remaining deferrers, between 10.8 - 16.1 percent participated in vocational education and training (including apprenticeships and traineeships); between 10.5 - 12.7 percent were working full time; and a small but sizable proportion of deferrers, ranging from 6.3 - 10.2 percent could be classified as "at risk", reporting destinations of part-time employment, unemployment or "inactive" status.

Young people from non-metropolitan areas defer their university offer at twice the rate of their metropolitan counterparts. Non-metropolitan deferrers are more likely to take up a place at university in their second year out of school, and continue their study in their third year, than their metropolitan counterparts.

However, it is important to keep in mind that the deferral rate for non-metropolitan students remains significantly higher than that of metropolitan students, and that the



overall proportion of regional students who go to university is still lower than for those from Melbourne (Polesel et al. 2012).

Overall, the findings from these four deferral studies suggest that non-metropolitan deferrers are in need of the greatest support in their first two years out of school, when financial pressures and travel barriers are felt most keenly. While their rates of university take-up and continuation are strong in later years, there is a case for more effective structures of initial support both to prevent deferral in the first place and to assist those who do defer in taking up their university offer sooner.

WHAT DO THE PREVIOUS REPORTS TELL US? 2006 – 2012

The research from the four deferral projects (see Table 1) tells us that over sixty percent of those who deferred their university offer subsequently commenced and continued university study (ranging from 61.0 percent of “cohort 2” in 2011, to 70.0 percent of “cohort 1” in 2010).

Table 1: Main destinations 2008 - 2012

	Cohort 1 Completed Year 12 at the end of 2006 (non-metropolitan only)						Cohort 2 Completed Year 12 at the end of 2009 (non-metropolitan and metropolitan)			
	2008 Destination		2009 Destination		2010 Destination		2011 Destination		2012 Destination	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
University (degree level)	563	69.9	553	68.7	565	70.0	1564	61.0	1214	63.2
VET	75	9.3	57	7.0	40	5.0	303	11.8	214	11.1
Apprenticeship	10	1.2	26	3.2	26	3.3	51	2.0	60	3.1
Traineeship	15	1.9	32	4.0	20	2.5	59	2.3	33	1.7
Employed FT	92	11.4	85	10.5	102	12.7	326	12.7	242	12.6
Employed PT	39	4.8	32	4.0	43	5.3	189	7.3	124	6.5
Unemployed	8	1.0	12	1.5	9	1.1	48	1.9	23	1.2
Inactive	4	0.5	9	1.1	2	0.2	26	1.0	11	0.6
Missing (excluded from analyses)							1		1	
Total (included in analyses)	806	100.0	806	100.0	806	100.0	2566	100	1922	100

Of the remaining deferrers:

- ▶ between 10.8 percent (“cohort 1” in 2010) and 16.1 percent (“cohort 2” in 2011) participated in vocational education and training (including apprenticeships and traineeships);
- ▶ between 10.5 percent (“cohort 1” in 2009) and 12.7 percent (“cohort 1” in 2010 and “cohort 2” in 2011) were working full time; and
- ▶ a small but sizable proportion of deferrers, ranging from 6.3 percent (“cohort 1” in 2008) and 10.2 percent (“cohort 2” in 2011) could be classified as “at risk”, reporting destinations of part-time employment, unemployment or “inactive” status.

The research from the four deferral reports demonstrates that young people from non-metropolitan areas defer their university offer at twice the rate of their metropolitan counterparts. Non-metropolitan deferrers are more likely to take up a place at university in their second year out of school, and continue their study in their third year, than their metropolitan counterparts. However, it is important to keep in mind that the deferral rate for non-metropolitan students remains significantly higher than that of metropolitan students, and that the overall proportion of non-metropolitan students who continue to university remains lower than for those from Melbourne (Polesel et al. 2012).

Metropolitan and non-metropolitan deferrers who took up a university offer in 2011 also differed in the universities they entered. Almost 40 percent of the non-metropolitan deferrers commenced at a university located in a regional area, compared to 5.4 percent of the metropolitan deferrers. This suggests that factors such as university location, the travel involved and a desire to stay at home are more likely to affect non-metropolitan students. It may also be the case that their study pathways are partially determined by the location of their preferred study options.

The research also found that the majority of university students were working. However, there are large differences between students from metropolitan and non-metropolitan regions in their likelihood of working and in the number of hours worked. Non-metropolitan students are much more likely not to be working at all – 48.6 percent in 2011, compared with 27.9 percent of metropolitan students.

Approximately two-thirds of the students did not receive Youth Allowance. However, non-metropolitan deferrers were much more likely to be Youth Allowance recipients (51.4 percent). Furthermore, those from non-metropolitan location who received Youth Allowance were more likely to study at university in their third year out of school (84 percent) comparing with only 68.9 percent of university students from metropolitan location who receive Youth Allowance. This is important as it is indicative of the importance of assisted independence while studying, particularly for the non-metropolitan students, who are more likely to be living away from home.

Overall, the findings from these studies suggest that non-metropolitan deferrers are in need of the greatest support in their first two years out of school, when financial pressures and travel barriers are felt most keenly. While their rates of university take-up and continuation are strong in later years, there is a case for more effective structures of initial support both to prevent deferral in the first place and to assist those who do defer in taking up their university offer sooner.

WHAT DOES THIS FINAL PHASE OF RESEARCH TELL US?

The final phase of the project aimed to examine in detail the experiences of deferrers from regional Victoria in order to provide profiles of deferrers, including their reasons for not taking up university, the financial and distance-related barriers, experiences relating to their transitions to work and study and the support received to date.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THIS FINAL PHASE OF RESEARCH

The final phase of the project, conducted in late 2013, explored the transition experiences of 28 non-metropolitan deferrers through the administration of a questionnaire, the conduct of focus groups with non-metropolitan based and metropolitan based deferrers from non-metropolitan Victoria, some of whom had taken up university studies and others who had not, and interviews with non-metropolitan deferrers who had not taken up their university offer.

The main reasons given by non-metropolitan deferrers for deferring their university offer included “to take a gap year” (for the purpose of work, study or travel), and financial considerations. The majority of respondents commenced university studies subsequent to their initial decision to defer, and were studying at the time of the research. Almost all respondents were satisfied with their study choices. Just over half received Youth Allowance. 79 percent were employed (65 percent part time; 26 percent full time), and a number received other financial support.

The majority of respondents reported being “very satisfied” (19 percent) or “satisfied” (69 percent) with how well school prepared them for work, with similar proportions “very satisfied” (24 percent) or “satisfied” (60 percent) with how well school prepared them for further study. In terms of education and training options, most respondents were either “very satisfied” (31 percent) or “satisfied” (69 percent) with their options. Similarly, most questionnaire respondents were “very satisfied” (22 percent) or “satisfied” (59 percent) with their work options. In terms of life in general, the majority (52 percent) were “very satisfied”, and almost all others (44 percent) were “satisfied”.

A not insubstantial proportion (25 percent) questionnaire respondents reported that “things had not worked out for them since leaving school.

The majority of questionnaire respondents (75 percent) reported that since leaving school, “things had worked out for them”. However, many (25 percent) reported that this was not the case, and it is this latter group that represents the “at risk” young people dissatisfied with the education, training and employment transitions since completing Year 12.

Gap year

Many respondents took a gap year after completing Year 12, before taking up their university offer, commencing other post-school education and training options, or taking up employment. In some instances, respondents approached the gap year as an opportunity to establish themselves financially. Many respondents combined both employment and travel during their gap year. For others, the gap year represented a transition into post-school employment and training. Some Year 12 completers viewed the gap year as an opportunity to “recover” from Year 12 studies. For others, the gap year provided an opportunity to make decisions regarding further education and training opportunities. Some respondents found that the gap year prepared them well to take up their university offer.

Rural loadings

Some respondents acknowledged the benefits of living in a non-metropolitan Victorian location in terms of university entrance requirements. For example, most universities offer special entry schemes for applicants from rural backgrounds, which qualify for admission with an ATAR that is below the normal entry standard for their course of choice.



Financial considerations including relocation

For many, financial considerations played an important role in determining their post-school education, training and employment choices, and realising those plans. Many respondents deferred their university offer to earn money and establish their financial independence. Costs associated with university participation, principally including accommodation, course costs and books, represent a key barrier to taking up a university offer. Participants who did not take up their university offer noted the course costs as a key barrier. For some, residential accommodation supported their transition to university. Transport represents a barrier both in terms of time, and money.

For many respondents, government financial support was essential for them to take up their university offer. Many respondents found the process of demonstrating eligibility for government financial support frustrating. The eligibility criteria for government financial support (for example, requirements relating to the gap year, and length of time in work) influences the choices young people make as they transition from school (for example, to take a gap year, to take employment, or to start study). Some respondents, particularly those that did not take up their university offer, experienced difficulties gaining government financial support, which influenced their decision to defer. Financial support in the form of scholarships also plays an important role in supporting young people's decision to take up a university offer. Some respondents recommended that young people be given additional guidance in completing the Youth Allowance application. Some respondents found the pressure of juggling employment and study challenging.

There were exceptions, with some non-metropolitan deferrers now based in metropolitan Melbourne suggesting that the transition to Melbourne was straightforward. This included some non-metropolitan deferrers who moved to Melbourne but did not pursue university studies.

Future university study including guidance about options

Respondents who had not taken up their university offer were divided in terms of whether they would pursue university studies in the future. Financial stress and program choice represented barriers for many of them. Many respondents who had not taken up their university

offer reported considering taking up university studies at a later stage when they reach some financial security. Also, many respondents were unclear about their study course preferences. Guidance regarding choice was identified by a number of respondents who had not transitioned to university study.

Family expectations and support

Family experience and expectations influenced respondents in terms of their decisions to take up university studies or other options, and secure government financial support. Many interviewees revealed that their parents were comprehensively involved in all aspects of decision-making regarding university study and were helping them to apply for financial support.

Career guidance

The respondents' experiences with school-based career guidance varied. At least one respondent recommended gender-inclusive guidance. For many respondents who chose not to pursue university studies, clarity in terms of career and program choice direction appeared to be key determinants.

Bridging courses

For some respondents, the transition to university was eased by bridging courses.

School encouragement to apply for university education

Many respondents reported that schools strongly encouraged them to apply for university study, regardless of the students' intention or interest, primarily to maximise students' post-school options. Indeed many of the respondents who received and then deferred their university offer did not intend to pursue university studies or were no longer interested in the specific program they initially applied to undertake. Based on their concerns regarding financial barriers, it is possible some of these young people were influenced by financial barriers. Some respondents recommended that, in addition to encouragement, schools provide information regarding finances and accommodation.

Health and motivation

At least a few respondents were not in a position to take up their university offer due to ill health, or lack of motivation to undertake university study. Identity influenced some young people's decisions.

Regional universities

Some respondents would prefer to pursue post-school options in the country, as opposed to relocating to metropolitan cities. For others, the range of program offerings in regional universities was problematic. At least a few respondents questioned the quality of programs offered by regional universities. Some respondents reported that the local regional university had limited program offerings, and this influenced their decision to defer or study at a metropolitan-based university.

Community

Many respondents commented on the importance of their home community. The sense of community in non-metropolitan areas, and the prospect of losing this by moving to metropolitan areas to pursue university studies, influenced some respondents. For others, establishing a new community was identified as important.

Pressure at school

At least a few respondents noted the pressures Year 12 students faced.

Learning styles and preference for employment

Respondents who did not transition to university or complete university identified issues regarding learning styles (for example, preference for doing "hands-on things"). The respondents noted the change in learning environment from school, to university. In a few instances, the respondents noted a clear preference for employment and vocational training over university studies.

Overall satisfaction

Overall, almost all respondents reported being satisfied. For some, happiness increased as they adapted to their post-school environment. Many of the respondents who did not take up their university offer were also satisfied overall. A few respondents who commenced university but dropped out of study regretted their decision.

OVERALL SUMMARY

The challenges faced by non-metropolitan young people as they make the transition from Year 12 are significant. Additional barriers to successful take up of university offer often prevent young people based in regional areas accessing or even aspiring to higher education. These barriers are predominantly associated with both the financial and social capacity of the young person and their family to support relocation.

Young people from regional areas, while equally capable, are more likely as a result of increased deferral rates, to take a longer time to qualify.

Additional financial and social support and advice to young people from regional areas in both preparing for relocation in order to participate in higher education and in the initial year or so of university would benefit all young people including deferrers to qualify in minimum time.

While some young people who initially defer their university offer overcome the additional barriers and challenges and pursue university studies in metropolitan locations, or regional universities, they are more likely to take a longer period to complete their studies and more likely to be required to incur significantly more expenses if forced to relocate from regional areas.

Others accept (or are happy to pursue) alternative education, training and employment opportunities either in their home communities, or metropolitan Melbourne. A small number of respondents were not satisfied, including several who would like to pursue university studies but lacked clarity regarding direction, or motivation. Overall, the research demonstrates the resilience of these young people who had initially deferred their university offer in facing and overcoming the many challenges associated with making the transition to post-school education, training and employment outcomes.

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below arise from the six-year program of research on students who defer a university offer in regional Victoria, as well as from the recommendations of the working group, which includes the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and the representatives of regional Local Learning and Employment Networks. They are designed to improve educational outcomes and transitions of young people from regional Victoria.

1. Young people from regional Victoria are in need of the greatest support (course and career guidance, social and financial support) in their first two years out of school. This is when financial pressures and travel barriers are felt most keenly. There is a case for more effective structures of initial support both to prevent deferral in the first place and to assist those who do defer.
2. There is a clear need among these young people for assisted independence while studying.
3. Continuous post-school education and career guidance is important, both during and after secondary education.
4. Additional support and advice to young people from regional areas in both preparing for relocation in order to participate in higher education and in the initial year of university would assist all young people, including deferrers, to complete their degree in a timely manner.
5. There is a need for affordable accommodation for young people from the country near their chosen educational institution, such as subsidised access to university residential colleges or dedicated college-type accommodation, both of which represent the supportive environment required by very young first year university students resettling in the city from regional Victoria.



INTRODUCTION

The *Deferring a University Offer in Regional Victoria – Final Report* was commissioned by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, and supported by a number of non-metropolitan, Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs).

This report synthesises the findings of the deferral reports from the last five years and also reports on the final phase of the project which sought to identify the barriers preventing deferrers from taking up their offer, including financial and distance-related barriers, experiences of the transition to work and study and the support received to date.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

Previous studies from this series include the following:

- ▶ *Deferring a University Offer in Regional Victoria* (Polesel, 2009) - A 2008-2009 longitudinal study of non-metropolitan Year 12 completers who completed at the end of 2006, and deferred in 2007 ("cohort 1");
- ▶ *Deferring a University Offer in Regional Victoria The 2006 Year 12 Graduates Four Years Out* (Polesel, O'Hanlon, Clarke January 2011) - A 2010 longitudinal study of non-metropolitan Year 12 completers who completed at the end of 2006, and deferred in 2007 ("cohort 1");
- ▶ *Deferring a University Offer in Regional Victoria* (Polesel, Klatt and O'Hanlon March 2012) - A 2011 longitudinal study of non-metropolitan and metropolitan Year 12 completers who completed at the end of 2009, and deferred in 2010 ("cohort 2");
- ▶ *Deferring a University Offer in Victoria 2009 Year 12 Graduates – Three Years Out* (Klatt and Polesel, April 2013) - A 2012 longitudinal study of non-metropolitan and metropolitan Year 12 completers who completed at the end of 2009, and deferred in 2010 ("cohort 2").

AIM OF THE FINAL PHASE OF THE PROJECT

This project aims to explore the longer-term education, training and employment destinations of three cohorts of Year 12 completers in Victoria who self-identified as having deferred a university offer. It aims to identify the barriers preventing deferrers from taking up their university offer, including financial and distance-related barriers, the nature of the transition to work and study and the support received to date.

Methodology

This study involved focus groups and interviews with non-metropolitan deferrers, complemented by quantitative data gathered through the administration of a questionnaire.

Researchers contacted over 1,000 young people from three cohorts of Year 12 completers in Victoria who had self-identified as having deferred a place at university. The deferrers were invited to participate in a focus group in regional Victorian or metropolitan Melbourne locations or participate in a telephone interview, and complete a questionnaire.

The researchers experienced extreme difficulty contacting and securing agreement from this particular group, as many of them had employment commitments that prohibited their involvement.

In total, 28 young people participated in focus groups and individual interviews conducted in Ballarat, Melbourne, Shepparton, Traralgon, including 15 who had taken up a university place and 13 who had not. In total, 27 participants completed questionnaires (18 who had taken up a university offer; 9 who had not).

Participants were recruited from three cohorts:

- ▶ non-metropolitan Year 12 completers who completed at the end of 2006 and deferred in 2007 ("cohort 1");
- ▶ non-metropolitan and metropolitan Year 12 completers who completed at the end of 2009 and deferred in 2010 ("cohort 2"); and
- ▶ non-metropolitan and metropolitan Year 12 completers who completed at the end of 2011 and deferred in 2012 ("cohort 3").

LITERATURE

There is now some research available regarding transitions of young people from school, to post-school education, training and employment. Previous studies suggest that financial barriers are prominent amongst reasons given by young people for deferring a university offer, particularly for those in regional Victoria (Teese et al., 2007:57).

The phenomenon of "regional disadvantage" has been identified in terms of differential curriculum provision and trade training facility access (Parliament of Victoria 2006).

Rural and remote students who relocate away from home to attend university require additional support (Australian Vice Chancellors Committee 2007) and face higher university study costs than their metropolitan counterparts (Parliament of Victoria 2006).

Concurrently, the higher per-student costs associated with university education in non-metropolitan settings limits provision in these communities (University of Ballarat 2007, LaTrobe University 2006), exacerbating the already lower participation rates (Stevenson et al. 1999; Marks et al 2000), and qualification rates (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008) of rural and regional students.

There is a disparity between metropolitan and non-metropolitan Year 12 school completers in terms of their decision to defer a university offer (15.7 per cent non-metropolitan, compared to 6.4 per cent metropolitan Year 12 completers), and this gap is growing (see Polesel, 2009; Department of Education Training and the Arts 2007).



FINDINGS FROM OUR PREVIOUS RESEARCH

DEFERRING A UNIVERSITY OFFER IN REGIONAL VICTORIA (POLESEL, 2009)

A 2008-2009 longitudinal study of non-metropolitan Year 12 completers who completed at the end of 2006, and deferred in 2007 ("cohort 1")

The first research project in this series - Deferring a University Offer in Regional Victoria - was commissioned by a number of non-metropolitan, Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) and the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) in 2008.

The project involved a longitudinal study of Year 12 school completers from regional Victoria. This first cohort ("cohort 1") of non-metropolitan Victorian young people completed Year 12 at the end of 2006 and deferred their university offer in 2007. This cohort was recruited during the 2007 On Track survey (Teese, Clarke & Polese 2007) of school leavers from non-metropolitan Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs), and surveyed in April/May 2008 and April 2009 to determine their post-school destinations and pathways.¹

The first Deferring a University Offer in Regional Victoria research project revealed increasing regional disadvantage, evidenced by the pattern of rising rates of university offer deferral amongst regional school completers. University cost-related factors and financial barriers were prominent in the reasons given by this cohort of young people for deferring. The study also demonstrated the greater economic vulnerability of non-metropolitan deferrers, who were much more likely to be from a low socio-economic status (SES) background than deferrers generally across Victoria.

The study revealed that the majority of Year 12 school completers who had initially deferred their university offer in 2007 had subsequently commenced university (69.6 per

cent in 2008; 68.7 per cent in 2009), entered vocational education and training (9.3 per cent; 7 per cent) primarily at Certificate IV level or above, or commenced traineeships or apprenticeships (3.1 per cent; 7.2 per cent). As such, despite having deferred their 2007 university offer, over 80 per cent were subsequently participating in some form of post school education or training. The remainder was working (16.3 per cent; 14.5 per cent). Only a very small group (1.0 per cent; 1.5 per cent) was unemployed, while an even smaller group (0.5 per cent; 1.1 per cent) was classified as inactive.²

The study revealed that, of those young people in education or training, most were satisfied with their post school study choice and the preparation provided by their school. Those who were working (both full-time and part-time) also showed high levels of satisfaction with aspects of their work, and were also satisfied, though to a lesser extent, with the preparation provided by their school. However, they were likely to be working in low paid positions requiring no qualifications and offering little on-the-job training. Overall, a general question on the respondents' satisfaction with "life in general" at the time of the survey elicited very positive responses (96.6 per cent in 2008; 96.2 per cent in 2009).

Despite these mainly positive outcomes, the research suggests that some deferrers in non-metropolitan Victoria are less likely to take up a university offer than others. This includes those with a low achievement profile, and those from a low SES background. Financial barriers were prominent among reasons given by young people for not having commenced education or training.

Finally, university students working long hours in 2008 were more likely to have dropped out of their university course, confirming the strong relationship between working long hours and discontinuation of studies.

¹ For the purposes of the survey, the sample was defined as consisting of Year 12 school completers who: identified as deferrers when contacted during the 2007 On Track survey; attended a school located in one of the 14 LLENs participating in the study; and agreed to be contacted as part of the longitudinal deferral study.

² In this research, "inactive" was defined as neither in education or training, nor working, nor seeking work.

DEFERRING A UNIVERSITY OFFER IN REGIONAL VICTORIA THE 2006 YEAR 12 GRADUATES FOUR YEARS OUT (POLESEL, O'HANLON, CLARKE JANUARY 2011)

A 2010 longitudinal study of non-metropolitan Year 12 completers who completed at the end of 2006, and deferred in 2007 ("cohort 1")

The second research project - Deferring a University Offer in Regional Victoria - was based on research commissioned by the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (DIIRD) on behalf of a number of non-metropolitan, Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) and the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic).

The second project extended the initial longitudinal study and surveyed young people from non-metropolitan Victoria who had completed Year 12 at the end of 2006 and deferred their university offer in 2007 ("cohort 1"). The researchers re-contacted this cohort in 2010 to explore their transition experiences over the four year period 2007-2010. The second research project also involved an analysis of Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) graduate destination tracking data.

The study confirmed the greater propensity for school completers from non-metropolitan Victoria to defer their university offer compared with school completers from metropolitan Melbourne. The rate of deferral amongst non-metropolitan young people has been consistently higher than that of their metropolitan Melbourne counterparts. Deferrers in the project sample were heavily concentrated in the two lowest SES categories, with many in the lowest SES quartile, suggesting that non-metropolitan deferrers are more likely to come from a lower SES background than their metropolitan Melbourne counterparts.

Responses provided by those that had completed Year 12 at the end of 2006 in 2010 reveal a similar picture to that uncovered in 2008 and 2009.

Overall, the proportion of non-metropolitan deferrers in education or training was lower than 2009 (80.7 per cent), however a higher proportion were working, and very few reported being unemployed or inactive. In 2010, approximately nine in 10 (89.5 per cent) who commenced university in 2008 were still at university.

A small number (1.4 per cent) of non-metropolitan deferrers reported they had completed their course within two and a half years of commencement. A further 9.1 per cent had discontinued their course.

Of those in education or training, most non-metropolitan deferrers reported being satisfied with their study and training options since leaving school. Amongst those not in education or training, levels of satisfaction varied; they were highest among apprentices, almost as high amongst those working (both full-time and part-time), lower for trainees and lowest for those who were unemployed. The comparatively large number of non-metropolitan young people identifying overall positive experiences points to the resilience of this cohort. The minority of non-metropolitan deferrers who had negative experiences attributed these to unexpected or changing plans, or poor course selection. A small number of respondents identified employment-related issues.

However, the study found that approximately three out of ten deferrers surveyed from non-metropolitan Victoria did not subsequently commence university, or having commenced, remain at university. As the academic profile of non-metropolitan deferrers is at least as strong as that of their metropolitan peers, this non-participation rate can not be attributed to low achievement.

For non-metropolitan students in Victoria, the higher university offer deferral rate, coupled with lower school completion and university application rates evidences the cumulative and enduring disadvantage among non-metropolitan school completers. Financial barriers were prominent amongst factors for non-metropolitan deferrers, however this factor declined in importance over time suggesting that the period following school completion is the point at which young people need the greatest financial support.

The high proportion of non-metropolitan deferrers in education, training or full-time work four years after completing school is a very positive sign. Relatively few (6.6 per cent) were situated in what might be classified as an at-risk destination (working part-time; unemployed or inactive). The high proportion of non-metropolitan respondents who indicated that their post-school trajectory had worked out in a positive way also suggests positive transitions for a majority of non-metropolitan deferrers.

DEFERRING A UNIVERSITY OFFER IN REGIONAL VICTORIA (POLESEL, KLATT AND O'HANLON MARCH 2012)

A 2011 longitudinal study of non-metropolitan and metropolitan Year 12 completers who completed at the end of 2009, and deferred in 2010 ("cohort 2")

The third research project - Deferring a University Offer in Regional Victoria - was based on the research originally commissioned by the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (DIIRD). This project was funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), and supported by a number of non-metropolitan, Victorian Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) and the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic).

The third project involved the recruitment of a second cohort ("cohort 2"), and administration of a survey of metropolitan and non-metropolitan young people who had completed Year 12 at the end of 2009 and deferred their university offer in 2010. This study allowed both:

- ▶ comparison between two cohorts ("cohort 1"; "cohort 2"); and
- ▶ comparison between responses from metropolitan and non-metropolitan deferrers (for "cohort 2").

The study aimed to determine the proportion of deferrers who subsequently commenced university, and explored the barriers for the remainder who did not.

The report examined the extent to which university deferral constitutes a disadvantage for young people living in metropolitan and non-metropolitan Victoria, contextualised by higher rates of deferral amongst non-metropolitan school completers (see Department of Education Training and the Arts 2007).

The study revealed a range of destination outcomes: the majority of Year 12 school completers who had initially deferred their university offer in 2009 had subsequently commenced and were attending university (61.0 per cent), or entered vocational education and training (11.8 per cent), or commenced traineeships or apprenticeships (4.3 per cent). Of the remainder, most were working (20.0 per cent). Only a very small group (1.9 per cent) were looking for work, while an even smaller group (1.0 per cent) were classed as inactive.³

Female respondents were more likely to commence university; males respondents were more likely to enter an apprenticeship or be in the labour market without further education and training. Gender differences were more marked in terms of the labour market destinations of the non-metropolitan cohort. The study revealed a clear social pattern: while 54.5 per cent of deferrers in the lowest SES quartile took up a university offer, the proportion increased steadily alongside SES, reaching a peak of 63.9 per cent for respondents from the highest SES quartile. Conversely, the transition rates for both metropolitan and non-metropolitan school completers to other destinations, especially the labour market, tended to rise as SES falls. For school completers from metropolitan Melbourne, the rate of transition to university rose as SES rose, while for non-metropolitan school completers, it remained very similar across the four different SES categories.

While the rate of transition to university for non-metropolitan school completers was not strongly influenced by SES, other factors, such as financial and distance-related barriers, may be influential. Non-metropolitan school completers were four times more likely to report they did not take up their studies because they had been waiting to qualify for government income support (that is, Youth Allowance).

³ In this research, "inactive" is defined as neither in education or training, nor working, nor seeking work.

The majority of the deferrers surveyed did not receive government income support; however, non-metropolitan deferrers were much more likely to be Youth Allowance recipients (32.2 per cent) compared with metropolitan deferrers (13.3 per cent).

Metropolitan and non-metropolitan deferrers who commenced university in 2011 also differed with respect to the universities they entered. Nearly half of the deferrers from the non-metropolitan area (almost 40 per cent) commenced at universities located in regional areas. The universities with the biggest differences in intake of metropolitan and non-metropolitan students were Monash University, RMIT University and Deakin University, with Monash almost three times more likely to be a destination for metropolitan deferrers. School completers commencing VET from both metropolitan and non-metropolitan cohorts were more likely to attend metropolitan-based VET institutions.

The majority of university students (62.4 per cent) were working. However, there are large differences between students from metropolitan and non-metropolitan regions in terms of their likelihood of working and number of hours worked. Non-metropolitan university students were much more likely not to be working at all (48.6 per cent), compared with 27.9 per cent of metropolitan students.

Relatively small proportions of both metropolitan and non-metropolitan respondents entered apprenticeships and traineeships; however metropolitan respondents were slightly more likely to enter apprenticeships while non-metropolitan respondents were slightly more likely to enter traineeships.

A majority of the deferrers (over 90 per cent) in study or training reported being satisfied with the way “things have worked out” since leaving school, and there appeared to be little difference between non-metropolitan and metropolitan participants. However, satisfaction levels amongst those respondents who had entered the labour market without any further education or training were somewhat lower (75 per cent metropolitan; 76.4 non-metropolitan).

DEFERRING A UNIVERSITY OFFER IN VICTORIA 2009 YEAR 12 GRADUATES – THREE YEARS OUT (KLATT AND POLESEL, APRIL 2013)

A 2012 longitudinal study of non-metropolitan and metropolitan Year 12 completers who completed at the end of 2009, and deferred in 2010 (“cohort 2”)

The fourth research project - Deferring a University Offer in Victoria – was based on research commissioned by the Regional LLENs and the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria. The project compared the main activities of 2009 Victorian school completers in their second year out of school (2011) and in their third year out of school (2012).

In 2011, 77.1 per cent of all Year 12 school completers who deferred their university offer were participating in some form of recognised education or training, with 61.0 per cent attending university. The activities of this group in 2012 were not dissimilar. The proportion in education or training was moderately higher than in the previous year (2010) – 79.1 per cent with a slight increase in the proportion at university (63.2 per cent). The majority of those studying at university in 2011 reported being at university in 2012. Of those that no longer remained at university, most had progressed to full-time or part-time work. 25.0 per cent of those unemployed and 25.0 per cent of those working part-time in 2011 progressed to university in 2012, as did 23.3 per cent of those employed full-time in 2011.

The fourth research project found that non-metropolitan deferrers (91.7 per cent) were more likely to continue their studies in university in their third year out of school than their metropolitan counterparts (88.2 per cent). Concurrently, they were less likely to leave university for full-time or part-time work.

School completers who deferred their university offer from metropolitan Melbourne were more likely to be in VET than their non-metropolitan counterparts. 34.8 per cent of metropolitan school completers undertaking entry level VET in 2011 continued at entry level in 2012, with the remainder mostly progressing to employment (43.3 per cent). In contrast, the non-metropolitan deferrers studying entry-level VET in 2011 were most likely to progress to advanced VET courses (22.2 per cent) or to university

(27.8 per cent) with only 22.3 per cent progressing to employment and 16.7 per cent continuing study at entry level. Metropolitan deferrers were slightly more likely to be apprentices than trainees than non-metropolitan deferrers.

While approximately two-thirds of respondents did not receive Youth Allowance, non-metropolitan deferrers were much more likely to be Youth Allowance recipients (51.4 per cent).

The most common reasons for not taking up study were cited as "found something else" (38.4 per cent) or "don't feel ready for more study at the moment" (16.8 per cent). 47.7 per cent of all non-metropolitan deferrers surveyed in 2012 had to relocate to commence their study, compared with only 13.3 per cent of metropolitan deferrers.

The satisfaction levels of both groups were very high, with non-metropolitan deferrers slightly higher (86.6 per cent) than their metropolitan counterparts (82.3 per cent). University students expressed very high levels of satisfaction (95.9 per cent non-metropolitan; 96.1 per cent metropolitan). Year 12 completers who progressed to non-university destinations in 2012 were less satisfied with their education options than those who commenced university. From the metropolitan area, 13.2 per cent of deferrers with non-university destinations were dissatisfied, compared with 7.8 per cent of university students, while in the non-metropolitan area, 10.8 per cent were dissatisfied, compared with 5.7 per cent of the university students.

High proportions of young people from metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas three years out of school were in education, training or full-time work, although approximately four in ten metropolitan deferrers and three in ten non-metropolitan deferrers were not in university in 2012.

The proportion in education or training was moderately higher than in the second year out of school (79.1%). Most of those in university in 2011 were still there (89.9 %) and many of those who were not in university in 2011 started a university course in 2012.

There is a persistent pattern in the deferral rate that shows that young people from non-metropolitan regions defer university study at twice the rate of their metropolitan counterparts. This study confirmed that in their second year out of school approximately two-thirds of those who deferred university entry take up university study.

The findings of this research showed that deferrers from non-metropolitan Victoria were more likely to take up a university offer in their second year out of school, and continue their study in their third year, than their metropolitan counterparts. However, the deferral rate for non-metropolitan students remained significantly higher, and the proportion of non-metropolitan students continuing to university remained lower than their metropolitan counterparts.

The results of this project also suggested that non-metropolitan deferrers are in need of the greatest support in their first two years out of school, when financial pressures and travel barriers are felt most keenly. While their rates of university take-up and continuation are strong in later years, there is a case for more effective structures of initial support both to prevent deferral in the first place and to assist those who do defer in taking up their university offer sooner.



WHAT DOES THIS FINAL PHASE OF RESEARCH TELL US?

The final phase of the project aimed to examine in detail the experiences of deferrers from regional Victoria in order to provide profiles of deferrers, including their reasons for not taking up university, the financial and distance-related barriers, experiences relating to their transitions to work and study and the support received to date.

QUESTIONNAIRE FINDINGS

The final phase of the project explored transitions of non-metropolitan deferrers from the three cohorts, including those who remained in non-metropolitan areas, and those who had moved to metropolitan areas.

The questionnaire respondents (n=27) indicated that their main reasons for deferring their university offer included “to travel or take a gap year” (6), “difficulty to support yourself” (3), financial considerations (6) and “only managed to get into a fee-paying course” (2) (see Table 2).

Overall, the majority of respondents had commenced university subsequent to their initial decision to defer, and were studying at the time of the research (15 respondents; 75 per cent), principally at Latrobe University (five) and Monash University (four) (see Table 3). Almost all questionnaire respondents were satisfied with their study choices (95 per cent).

Only 57 per cent of questionnaire respondents were receiving Youth Allowance to support their studies. Less than half (41 per cent) had plans to enter an apprenticeship, traineeship, or full-time or part-time study in the following year. 79 per cent were employed (65 per cent part-time; 26 per cent full time), and some (22 per cent) were holding more than one job. A number received other financial support, including Centrelink (45 per cent), support from parents/family (35 per cent), support from a partner (10 per cent) or other (10 per cent).



Table 2: Main reasons for deferring university offer (n=19)

Main reason for deferring university offer	#
You wanted to travel or take a gap year	6
It would have been difficult to support yourself	3
Financial pressure on your family	2
The costs of study are a barrier	2
It's not worth building up a HECS debt	2
You only managed to get into a fee-paying course	2
You don't feel ready for more study at the moment	1
You were unsure whether you would be able to cope with the work	1
You have or are about to become a full-time parent	1
You have found something else	1

Note: 8 questionnaire respondents did not answer this question.

Table 3: Current study arrangements (n=20)

Type of study	#
University	15
TAFE	3
A Private Training College	1
An Adult and Community Education provider	0
Other	1

Note: 7 questionnaire respondents did not answer this question.

The majority of questionnaire respondents (79 per cent) responded that the job they have is not 'the type of job [they] would like as a career', although the majority were either 'very satisfied' (25 per cent) or 'fairly satisfied' (62.5 per cent) with their current job.

In terms of difficulties finding employment, questionnaire respondents reported difficulties as follows: 'aren't enough

jobs available' (27 per cent); 'not enough job experience' (18 per cent); 'not enough or appropriate skills or training' (14 per cent); 'not enough or appropriate qualifications' (14 per cent); 'need to move away from home' (10 per cent); 'problems with transport' (10 per cent); 'a health problem or disability' (6 per cent).

Table 4: Satisfaction levels (n = 27)

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	No response
How well school prepared you for work	5	18	3	0	1
How well school prepared you for further study	6	15	4	0	2
Your education and training options	8	18	0	0	1
Your work options	6	16	5	0	0
Life in general	13	11	1	0	2

Questionnaire respondents reported levels of satisfaction as follows (see Table 4).

The majority of respondents reported being 'very satisfied' (19 per cent) or 'satisfied' (69 per cent) with how well school prepared them for work, with similar proportions 'very satisfied' (24 per cent) or 'satisfied' (60 per cent) with how well school prepared them for further study. In terms of education and training options, the respondents were either 'very satisfied' (31 per cent) or 'satisfied' (69 per cent) with their options. Similarly, questionnaire respondents were 'very satisfied' (22 per cent) or 'satisfied' (59 per cent) with their work options. In terms of life in general, the majority (52 per cent) with 'very satisfied', and almost all others (44 per cent) were 'satisfied'.

The majority of questionnaire respondents (75 per cent) reported that since leaving school, 'things had worked out for them'. Respondents noted: 'I enjoyed working for a year and now love the course I'm doing at uni'; 'I have travelled overseas, nearly completed my degree and played lots of music'; 'gained full time employment in a job I enjoy'; 'I have had great experiences despite hardships and gotten into the course I wanted'; 'I am doing the course I wanted and am enjoying it a lot'; 'starting a family, moved out of home and am financially stable'.

However, a not insubstantial proportion (25 per cent) reported that this was not the case: 'original post-school plans fell through. Didn't do enough contingency planning to move on quickly'; 'Probably thought I would be studying; didn't put a lot of thought into what I was actually going to do after school. Sort of just treading water at this stage'; 'I've only really 'gone with the flow'. I haven't made any real effort to get my life on track until recently'.

Finally, one questionnaire respondent who reported being dissatisfied suggested:

When you're in high school, you want a husband, a university degree, a solid job and expect that all that is easily done. I am comfortable now and realise that that is what I have aspired to all along. A job that I like and enough time to do my various hobbies. And cats.

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

The final phase of research involved focus groups with non-metropolitan deferrers who did, and who did not, take up their university offer. The following section explores the perspectives of these young people.

GAP YEAR

Many respondents took a gap year after completing Year 12, before taking up their university offer, commencing other post-school education and training options, or taking up employment. In some instances, respondents approached the gap year as an opportunity to establish themselves financially:

Yeah I definitely needed the gap year to work and earn money because [my] parents couldn't support me and Melbourne is 200 kilometres away so travelling back and forth is too much really. I couldn't live ...

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer in regional Victoria)

Many respondents combined both employment and travel during their gap year:

So, as soon as I finished school I worked in hospitality for like six months, or maybe a bit less even, and then I travelled for eight months and then I came straight back here to start at [metropolitan university].

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

For others, the gap year represented a transition into post-school employment and training:

I ended up coming to a decision after talking with the family and the boss and that kind of thing that I would just take a traineeship and just go with that for my gap year and make a little bit of money and have some fun. But ... I pretty much got drunk for a few months and moved out of home and then had to move back home because I wasted all my money. And then met up with my partner, and then we had a child, and then we moved out of home again and yeah, so it's been eventful.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

Some Year 12 completers viewed the gap year as an opportunity to “recover” from Year 12 studies:

I was just chilling out after Year 12. ... I think for me if I'd gone to university straight away regardless of whether I could afford it or not, I don't think I would've done very well psychologically because year twelve kind of knocked me around a bit.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer in regional New South Wales)

I just wanted a break from study and Year 12 was just so much study all the time so, yeah, nice break. It was good.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

I started working on my parent's business, the farm. ... I played a lot of video games and watched a lot of movies. Essentially what I'm doing now, just a little bit less. Just mostly recreation. Didn't go over to Europe or wherever.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

For others, the gap year provided an opportunity to make decisions regarding further education and training opportunities:

I wanted to do work experience [at] all these different places so I could figure out what I wanted to do.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

I needed a break from studying and I wasn't totally sure what I wanted to do. And I wanted to travel so I did that.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

I just wanted to work and see where I was at and see did I actually want to do it. I wanted a bit of time figure out what I wanted to do, that's pretty much the main reason.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

At least one respondent extended her gap year whilst she worked out her future work and study plans:

... This is my second gap year. My first gap year I went travelling over to Europe for three months, which I always planned to do. I got into Health Sciences in [metropolitan university], but only deferred for a year. Then I couldn't defer again ... And I've just been working this year at Bunning's full time, just getting money.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

Some respondents found that the gap year prepared them well to take up their university offer:

I found it way easier moving to Melbourne after having a year not at school. I think you can kind of see this cultural shock in the first couple of weeks of uni with people who've gone straight from school to uni and it's this sort of massive big thing that's kind of hugely overwhelming ... I didn't feel quite as overwhelmed ...

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

RURAL LOADINGS

Some respondents acknowledged the benefits of living in a non-metropolitan Victorian location in terms of university entrance requirements:

Actually, living in a regional area was so much easier for me. Because with my score there was no way I would've gotten into medicine at all. It was only because I was from a rural area.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer in Medicine at metropolitan university)

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS INCLUDING RELOCATION

For many, financial considerations played an important part in determining post-school education, training and employment choices, and realising those plans.

Financial independence

Many respondents deferred their university offer to earn money and establish their financial independence:

Money. Because [metropolitan Melbourne suburbs are] really expensive to live [in], I didn't want my parents to support me, I kind of wanted to go for an independent approach.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

... It was a money thing as well. ... It was kind of in the back of my mind that I would like a little bit of extra cash to support me while I moved out and yeah

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

I worked full time – I actually worked three jobs – in that six months, and then I continued to work three jobs for my first year, for my first six months of study. And I didn't do very well – passed everything – but it was not pleasant.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

Costs associated with accommodation, transport and university study

Costs associated with accommodation represent a key barrier to taking up a university offer:

It was just a bit too far away. I thought I liked the city but I didn't really. ... It was three hours on transport, trains to get back here on the weekend because I was homesick. It was really stressful. ... Living on campus down in Melbourne is a lot harder and a lot more expensive.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up a university offer in metropolitan university then transferred to regional university)

I think probably accommodation/finding somewhere to live [is a barrier]. ... If you don't have [accommodation with family], or you have to live on campus or find somewhere to rent I think that's going to be really hard and probably money as well.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

For some, residential accommodation supported their transition to university:

I think when you get here you're a bit knocked off your feet. You get used to it pretty fast depending on your environment. ... I lived at the college. It was really handy to have eighty other people around me who are in that same position all learning together.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

I lived on campus in the first year so the transition from there was pretty easy because they expect a lot of regional people to come to campus to stay for one or two years or however length ... So a lot of support was given through that because they know that that option is there for people moving inter-state or from country Victoria so a lot of support was given ... so yeah, it was a pretty easy move.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)



Transport represents a barrier both in terms of time, and money:

You don't want to seem ungrateful for what they've given you. ... But, at the same time, I couldn't afford to go up there anyway. ... I was commuting, and I was sitting with kids that were from the city, and they were talking about how there was a 20 minute train trip, and they get to go home and have dinner cooked for them, and everything is peachy and wonderful. ... It is a bit more difficult because you have to travel four hours a day and it doesn't feel worth it.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer in metropolitan Melbourne)

I spend a lot of money on public transport.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

That's where a lot of my money does go [public transport] because my campus is not where I live, so I catch trains. So it's not that much each day but it adds up.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

It does make it more difficult when you're in regional, and have to travel that far, and having to move into the city. Because it's not viable to still live at home.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

Youth Allowance

For many respondents, government financial support was essential for them to take up their university offer:

For me, I wouldn't have been able to go to uni and do the course I'm doing without Youth Allowance, like, the Living Working at Home benefits, and like, I dislocated my shoulder this year and I work ... and I had to get surgery so I couldn't work for like three months, and without that Youth Allowance, I would not have been able to survive.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

I'm fully dependent on it [Youth Allowance]. It's pretty much my living allowance.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer in regional Victoria)

Many respondents found the process of demonstrating eligibility for government financial support frustrating:

Yeah, you definitely have to jump through hoops.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

The eligibility criteria for government financial support influences the choices young people make as they transition from school:

Yeah it really influenced my decision because to be an independent student you have to take that gap year. After that gap year I was eligible ... The gap year wasn't particularly something I wanted to do but it also helped me get some time to take a break from study and ease back into this working environment.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

... To try and get some support from the government like Youth Allowance so I was aiming to be able to get that because that would help me as well when I moved out so I was working as much as I could for that reason so I would have my own savings as well.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

... Halfway through the year they changed the way to get Youth Allowance. So, instead of it being a monetary thing, you had to work a certain amount of hours a week, for a long period of time. And I didn't want to take 18 months off. So I ended up just changing the course, and staying at home.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

... They make you jump through hoops when you do want to leave [home], especially if you want to go to uni. The 18 months – the 12 months -- working fulltime, I don't think they should be able to change it within that year. That really did screw me around a lot.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer in regional Victorian)

Financial support in the form of scholarships also plays an important role in supporting young people's decision to take up a university offer:

The government obviously really helps ... I could live off my Youth Allowance, I'm not a big drinker or anything like that so I barely spend any money, it's just for rent and the fuel is just a little bit extra, but most of it is obviously spending money. ... so I'm still depending on those scholarships to get me through university and Youth Allowance and whatever I work is that extra bit for moving out, etc.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

Some respondents recommended that young people be given additional guidance in completing the Youth Allowance application:

... I would have liked [it] if someone would have sat down with me and went through it with me because though I did that with my Dad, every time I went into Centrelink they'd just send me to a phone which I sat at for half an hour on hold and then I just ended up leaving because yeah.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

Employment pressures

Some respondents found the pressure of juggling employment and study challenging:

... It's quite difficult to juggle all that and it's kind of always on your mind that if you don't work enough then you might not have enough money but then if you work too much your grades are going to fail...not fail... your grades are going to go down a little bit because you've worked too much but at the same time you have a bit more money so you feel a bit more comfortable, so the balance is difficult.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

I think yeah, working's good ... you can meet new people and find another sort of community. ... But it is hard if you're trying to do both.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

Finding work represents challenges as well:

Yeah, finding work for me has been a massive pain ...

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)



Transition straightforward

There were exceptions, with some non-metropolitan deferrers now based in metropolitan Melbourne suggesting that the transition to Melbourne was straightforward:

For me and a lot of my friends we just came here and I guess we adapted, just got used to it. It didn't change dramatically or anything, we just adapted to a new city, bigger lifestyle kind of thing. But I never really saw anyone that struggled, but I know there were people.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

I haven't found money a problem. I haven't had to work at all. Yeah.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

I was really surprised how easy it was because I mean like, my girlfriend and I, we were going to move out together and we just had a look at a bunch of places and went up for interviews around Box Hill and the first place we applied for, we got it the next day... it's easy.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

This included some non-metropolitan deferrers who moved to Melbourne but did not pursue university studies:

No it was pretty easy, I've lived here before so I kind of slid back in and was fine and already knew my way around.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

FUTURE UNIVERSITY STUDY INCLUDING GUIDANCE ABOUT OPTIONS

Respondents who had not taken up their university offer were divided in terms of whether they would pursue university studies in the future. Financial security and program choice represented factors:

Yeah, I feel, I might like to do some study in the future, but, definitely not 'til we would have a lot more savings behind us, and we would be a lot more I dunno, have a lot more financial security.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

I don't even know how to reapply. And then I haven't decided what I want to do. I want to go to uni, and study, but I haven't decided.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

... 'cos I don't know what I want to do, so I don't really want to just jump into something ...

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

I'm with Bunning's at the moment, which they have offered me to do a business course through them and they were going to pay for it and all that kind of stuff, but it seems to be talked about and nothing to be done about it. So, that's why I'm getting a bit sick of it, because I thought 'OK, this year, I'll do that, and that'll be fine,' but now it's just up in the air, who knows what. I'm trying to get back into uni but I don't have a clue.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

FAMILY EXPECTATIONS AND SUPPORT

Family experience and expectations influenced respondents in terms of their decisions to take up university studies or other options, and secure government financial support:

Yeah, my Mum helped me out with Youth Allowance and stuff as well. And she hadn't had too much experience with it either because I'm the first one to go to university in my family ... we kind of stumbled through it together trying to figure it out, yeah ...
(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

Mum never finished year twelve so they obviously had no idea on know how the system worked so we were all sort of learning about the system as we went.
(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer in regional Victoria)

But because my family have always liked study. ... Mum and dad didn't go to university; they barely finished school. For some reason me and [sibling's name] were sort of all pressed for university and because mum was so supportive a lot of the kids don't have that so I guess that's why they don't really do anything, they're just happy to work.
(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

My parents just told me to do what I thought was best. My dad he always worked on the family business. He never applied for a job or anything, so he didn't know anything about it, and a sort of similar thing with mum. She never did university or whatever. So, she just told me to use my best judgment and to go with what my teachers told me.
(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

CAREER GUIDANCE

The respondents' experiences with school-based career guidance varied:

We had a career office, yeah. I just never saw them.
(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

There were heaps of options for career counselling for courses and what to do at uni, but then that was it. There was no broader information. It was just what course you want, this is how you get into that course.
(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

... At [regional New South Wales university] they have a careers counsellor and I went to see him just before I left to come back for the summer because I've sort of had a few doubts about my course. I don't feel good enough to be in it sometimes. So I just had a chat to him ... I feel like if I'd done that in high school it would've been good for me.
(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer in regional New South Wales)

BRIDGING COURSES

For some respondents, the transition to university was eased by bridging courses:

The pathway program at [metropolitan university] was a massive influence, because I got a pretty low score of like 52 or something, which was pretty shit. So that was a good way to get in ... You just continue on with your course as normal for the rest of it.
(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer at provincial campus of metropolitan university)

SCHOOL ENCOURAGEMENT TO APPLY FOR UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Many respondents reported that schools strongly encouraged them to apply for university study, regardless of the students' intention or interest:

I originally said I didn't want to apply because I didn't know what I was going to do, and then she said, 'well, apply that way' you know 'you're going to get it, or you might get it, and then you'll have better options to choose from'.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

Yeah, it was sort of expected you would all apply for university. It was all 'what will you be applying for' rather than 'will you be applying for anything'?

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

Some respondents recommended that in addition to encouragement, schools provide information regarding finances and accommodation:

... [schools] obviously encourage you to go and do tertiary study no matter what you do but it's kind of always assumed that you're going to move and all the major universities are [in Melbourne] but they never really talk about the whole money side of things or the actual physical moving as a thing and also having access to information.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

HEALTH AND MOTIVATION

At least a few respondents chose not to take up their university offer due to ill health:

I finished school in 2011, and deferred my course, because I have Chronic Fatigue Syndrome ... I just didn't think I'd be able to cope with the lifestyle. So I pretty much took off a year for recovery ... Yeah, because it was really hard to manage my life around it, because there would be days when I wouldn't be able to get out of bed or anything. So it wouldn't be very good for uni, because I wouldn't be able to go to lectures or anything.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

... Public transport and how far away I live from work and school or whatever are a major factor, because I have epilepsy, so I can't drive and I have to rely on public transport and things like that.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

I guess I'm maybe generally lazy or whatever. I'm not sure. Psychological problems maybe. ... So it's basically a lot of justifying not going and doing something, which I guess comes back to my laziness. Just basically, 'Oh, I can't do that, I have to wait, I have to wait, and the farm's always there so I've always got a bit of income coming in'.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)



REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES

Some respondents would prefer to pursue post-school options in the country:

... Obviously [metropolitan university] ... is huge and very intimidating. [Regional university] was a lot more accessible, a lot more relaxed, laid back, it was bush setting -- I love the bush, there's kangaroos. I don't know if you have kangaroos in Melbourne. ... The city is busy; it's kind of stressful and just makes me anxious. I feel dirty ... It's a different environment and I don't know it's really hard to explain. ... I kind of like home ... And the idea of moving back seemed a lot easier so I think I was kind of overwhelmed still coming from Year 12, mentally exhausted so it was a bigger deal then than it was now, so it might come back to that maturity thing again, I just wasn't ready at that time.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up a university offer in metropolitan university then transferred to regional university)

For others, the range of program offerings in regional universities was problematic:

There's a [metropolitan university] campus in [regional city] but they only offer a really small range of courses and I knew I wanted to do something more in-depth and I knew that ... the [regional city] campus while it is really nice and I've heard a lot of good things about it, didn't have the facilities. So it was always an option to go down to Melbourne or even to move inter-state to find what I wanted to do.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up a university offer)

At least a few respondents questioned the quality of programs offered by regional universities:

I don't know, [the regional university] was just in no way appealing to me and I haven't heard all that great things about it, so ...

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up a university offer)

... There hasn't been a challenge in my course. I got 100% on one of my subjects this semester, I didn't even think that was possible, I don't think that would be possible in Melbourne because my sister obviously goes to [metropolitan university] and the lecturers say you can never expect 100% otherwise that means your work is perfect, it's just not probable. So I'm disappointed with my course in that sense, it's not hard, I think it comes back to the kids that are in there, there are those low kids that have got in, it's almost like they're dropping the standards of marking to keep numbers in for the university. I love my course, the teachers are great, everything about it is great but I would like more of a challenge that way.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up a university offer in non-metropolitan area)

I've heard a lot of people talking about it and they're not positive, because they don't think they will be getting the same quality, or even if the quality's the same, it will be looked down upon, because we're from [regional Victoria university campus].

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up a university offer in non-metropolitan area)

COMMUNITY AND RELOCATING TO STUDY

Many respondents commented on the importance of their home community:

Moving to Melbourne is a big thing. ... Not many people are fond of the town, but when you do move out you realise how much you do like your town.
(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

In the end it was [leaving the community behind], because I'd met a lot more people than I thought I would but it was still something I wanted to do.
(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

... Sometimes I feel like I am missing out on some of that sort of family life because my older brother has his own family now, I'm sort of missing out on that side of things and it does get me upset a little bit sometimes but I know that I've always got them there and I can always go back.
(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

For others, establishing a new community is important:

Coming to Melbourne, you can branch out and you can really kind of be who you want to be. You're not judged all the time by people who know what's happened in the past. ... I think it's better.
(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

I think it's a huge thing for somebody to move to Melbourne to go to uni without having a bunch... having a network here or some connections that they can rely on here.
(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

I think one of the things I'd have to say that personally motivated me to go to university after deferring, was the community at the [regional campus of metropolitan university]. Which is why I decided to go regional rather than in the city, because it was quite different there. I really enjoyed my time down there. It's a lot more open and, not necessarily relaxed, but yeah...
(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer at regional university)

PRESSURE AT SCHOOL

At least a few respondents noted the pressures Year 12 students faced:

I think there should possibly be a lesser focus on marks and scores. It's so drummed into you that if you don't get this number we don't want you ... that's where the pressure comes from I felt in Year 12 was if you don't do this right, that's it. And that's not true at all ... You see those people just absolutely ruining themselves in Year 12 because they think it's the most important thing in the world to get that number and it's just ... I think there needs to be a little bit lesser focus on that because there're always pathways to get to where you want to go ...
(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

Yeah, I think there's this expectation...there's sort of this divide at high school between the people who expect to go to uni, and most of them do, and the people who don't expect to go to uni and expect to, you know, get jobs or get apprenticeships or, you know, whatever it is they expect to do ... Particularly in rural high schools ...
(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

It's almost just assumed through society really because that's the next logical step in terms of life choices. Once you finish Year 12, more study seems to be the expected thing to do even though there is twenty billion other options of what you can do straight after high school rather than go to university and get a job.
(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

That expectation can be pretty detrimental I think as well because it means people push straight into things. You know if they're really ambitious in Year 11 and 12 ... They're like, I'm going to get into this course, I'm going to do this, and they don't actually have any life experience ...
(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

Yeah most schools in Melbourne there's an expectation that you ... go to uni when you finish school, whereas I don't think that exists so much in rural Victoria.
(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

OVERALL SATISFACTION

Overall, almost all respondents reported being satisfied:

Yeah I've been really happy. I'm kind of going beyond what I ever thought I'd do so anything from here on in is doing work and the degree that I'm doing is kind of above what I thought I might achieve so, yeah.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

I found something that I loved and even if I had trouble with what I was doing I could always move or try something else ... I was kind of lucky that I did actually find my niche and work options were a bit easier for me because I just transferred my position ... I know that I'm pretty lucky with my job at the moment and then that I found a really great course that I love doing. So yeah, it's been really positive.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

Yeah, I'm very satisfied. I think that moving to a college was one of the best things I could have done because that's ... like I didn't know anyone and moving there's like now I do know a lot of people. And also taking a gap year was another one of the best things I did. Like I know I gained a lot of confidence in my gap year. I think I grew up a lot and...

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

I've moved out with a bunch of people from regional Victoria and a lot have all had really good experiences and really smooth transitions really, yeah. I mean, there's always support from the family as well in some ways on all kinds of levels, but yeah. It's been good.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

I'm pretty satisfied. As I said I'm looking forward to second year because I know I've got a lot to learn and it'll be a long year but I don't feel like I'm lagging behind, I feel like I'm in a good place.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

Yeah, really satisfied. I have my parents to fall back on if I need, and currently....government...and I have scholarship funding, so financially I'm happy, and I'm doing the course I wanted, so I'm happy.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

I want to get a degree, that's like one thing that I want tick off my list and moving away means I have more options to do something with my life. I could stay in my hometown and work in the supermarket all my life but that's not living, for me anyway. I want to be more than that and the course is appealing as well.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer in regional New South Wales)

For some, happiness has increased as they adapted:

... Six months ago I was not happy at all – about a year ago – I was, like, my options are being cut. But now I've adapted and I really like my course, and I'm working, so I have enough money to get me by. I can do things I want to do. So, I've adapted and I'm really happy

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

Many of the respondents who did not take up their university offer were also satisfied overall:

Like, I've got a lot of experience and I've had a lot of fun and I've started a family so I don't think I'd wanna change any of it... Yeah, pretty satisfied. Like, I guess I could have picked a better career to start off with. But training... has been good and I've picked a career that I've been making good enough money to support my family.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

I'm actually really satisfied where I am, working at the call centre with really nice people. It's a really good environment and I don't see myself doing it forever – probably just a couple of years – I'll probably look down other avenues with the Department of Human Services.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

A few respondents who commenced university but dropped out of study regretted their decision:

I do kind of wish that I'd finished the course and went a little bit further with it but I'm not totally dissatisfied. The part that I did do did help me to get to where I am now. I'm happy with it in that perspective but I do wish I kind of took it a little bit further.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer but did not complete)

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW FINDINGS

The final phase of research also involved in depth interviews with non-metropolitan deferrers who did not take up their university offer. The following section explores the perspectives of these young people who did not transition to university study.

GAP YEAR

Many of the number of the respondents took a gap year to work to earn money and increase their financial independence:

... The first year after school I took a gap year and so I worked at a supermarket where I live, between 15 and 30 hours a week, and then after, at the end of that year, I kept working at the supermarket ...

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

I took a gap year and worked. ... Part of it was because I wanted to make myself financially independent, because I was still reliant on my parents to pay accommodation and college.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did take up university offer)

I was working at Maccas. ... to work and earn some money.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

A few respondents took a gap year to work and travel:

I stayed at home. I didn't move out when I was living in Ballarat, because there wasn't a need to. Worked full time, worked my butt off there, and then travelled a little bit. Saved a lot. That was pretty much it. I was looking at saving and going forward. That's what my focus was.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

I have worked. I have gone on a holiday. I've got myself a full-time job. That's about it.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

I was working at the restaurant and at the end of that year I went overseas for five weeks and did a bit of travelling over there

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

As such, the gap year was primarily used by respondents to earn money and in a few instances, travel.

LEARNING STYLES AND PREFERENCE FOR EMPLOYMENT

Respondents who did not transition to university or complete university identified issues regarding learning styles:

I've never really been good at standing still and studying. Always enjoyed doing hands-on things.
(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

So, when I deferred, it was originally because I don't learn very well from a book. I don't like learning from a textbook. I like learning on the job. I was probably a bit hesitant about failing it. To be honest, I think I was put off a bit about the chance of that happening. And also, like obviously, if I didn't like books, I found school hard enough as it was just getting through my senior school years, so I just wanted to take a year off.
(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

The respondents noted the change in learning environment from school, to university:

... In high school you've got the teachers constantly hounding you to get your assignments in and they've actually got the power to contact your parents so that your parents can pressure you to do that. In university, the most powerful tool the lecturers and tutors have is the guilt trip and the onus is on you to hand in the assignments and to hand in the coursework. And for me, it didn't encourage me to do the work or to get it in. It just made me feel worse about myself. It just enhanced that spiral downwards. "Suddenly assumed responsibilities" is the best way to describe it.
(non-metropolitan respondent, did take up university offer)

In a few instances, the respondents noted a clear preference for employment and vocational training over university studies:

I was doing office admin and I really enjoyed that. I was learning heaps and it was a good opportunity. And I sort of really didn't want to go. And I didn't want to move really. I just didn't want to ... do full-time study [at university]. ... TAFE was excellent. That was so good to do. So much cheaper and more flexible.
(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

... [I] came back to my job at the restaurant [after travelling] and came up with the idea of trying to get a job at the bank. I thought that was a good idea. ... It's pretty much a lack of a better idea I guess. I thought it was a secure job that I may enjoy, and it beats hospitality. ... I saw it as a bit of an education that you can get paid to do, because I was learning on the job. I've learnt all these different roles since I've been there, but I've been getting paid at the same time sort of thing and I've been enjoying it.
(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)



FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Financial considerations represent a key influence both in terms of decisions taken to establish financial independence, eligibility criteria for government financial assistance, and costs associated with university study (principally including accommodation).

A number of respondents interviewed indicated that the need to establish financial independence influenced their decision to defer their university offer, and subsequent transition choices:

[I deferred] just because I didn't have the money.
(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

In the first year it was because I didn't have any money [that I deferred].
(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

... For me I think it was being able to be financially independent was a huge thing, I just wanted to earn money and obviously I didn't want to stay in hospitality but I wanted to get a stable job that pays well and I could enjoy whilst earning money I think that was one of the big factors as well.
(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

Probably just to make a bit of money for a year, financial situation.
(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

Some respondents experienced difficulties gaining government financial support, which influenced their decision to defer:

We struggled to classify me as independent, because my family has a small percentage in a family holiday place. ... In my mind Centrelink can't be seen as a government agency, it's a pagan deity that will sometimes bestow its boons upon you and other times smudge you into the ground. You have to view it as a spiteful god.
(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

A number of respondents identified costs associated with university participation (that is, course and book costs, and accommodation):

Probably the course costs [are a barrier], the books costs, and the people whose parents earn too much to get support have to foot the bill themselves. Also difficulty getting support from the government.
(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

Just the cost of it is through the roof. The cost of uni is huge, especially for rural people, and to move everything and that type of thing. And if you're going to live in residence. ... It's just so much money. ... Except for kids who have rich parents, but a lot of people down here are just dairy farmers, and that sort of thing.
(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

Probably the move away from home [is a barrier].
(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

I think money's a huge one. It think it's really difficult when you're in high school, to make the kind of money to pay for accommodation, is the biggest one, because it's kind of easy for you to say "oh I'll pay the HECS off later, it's a good system, it won't happen to me until I'm earning a certain amount", but the accommodation, especially if you're not from the area and you can't live with your parents, even just commuting is expensive and exhausting – I think that's a huge one, if you wanna go to a decent university.
(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

I got accepted at [a metropolitan Melbourne university] so that would've meant moving as well so that obviously had a bit of an effect too because it was a big move.
(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

FUTURE UNIVERSITY STUDY

Some respondents indicated that they may pursue university studies at a later stage:

It's not something I've ruled out entirely ... I'm pretty open to all that learning-when-you're-older... I haven't completely drawn a line through it.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

Guidance regarding choice was identified by a number of respondents who had not transitioned to university study:

... There is no reason why I wouldn't take up uni. I just want to work out what I want to do there ...

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

FAMILY EXPECTATIONS

Many respondents indicated that family expectations played a key role in their decisions about post-school education, training and employment pathways:

I reckon it has a lot to do with family and the sort of family you're raised in. I know that a lot of my friends who went to uni probably initially went because their parents expected it of them. Whereas for me, growing up, my mum was very understanding that I don't learn well in a book scenario – that I learn well on the job. She was very supportive of that. She wasn't worried when I didn't go to uni.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

My parents have always said, it doesn't matter what I wanted to be, they just want to put me in the best position to get there and that's why they sent me to a private school, so they said that even if I wanted to be a hairdresser, they want me to get the score that I want, so that if I changed my mind halfway through, I could go and be an astrophysicist or whatever. But, they've always said it doesn't matter if I could go to uni, that doesn't matter to them at all.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)



CAREER GUIDANCE

Experiences with school-based careers advisers was mixed:

We had career counselling and they were very helpful and very thorough and they remembered who you were every time they came. But I don't think anyone can properly prepare anyone for what comes after Year 12. It's harder than it seems to get a job that isn't McDonald's. And it's harder than you think to keep your savings from dying, and learning how far money goes and everything is not something you can be told. ... You don't realise it until you're actually doing it.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

We had a career counsellor and that person tried to point you towards a career with things that were of interest to the individual in mind. ... But I mainly made my own decisions.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

... When I was in school, we had our Year 12 co-ordinator who would help us out with what sort of courses we should be doing. And he was hopeless. ... At our school we didn't have [assistance sourcing scholarships]. That definitely sucked, because you didn't have the time to do it.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

At least one respondent recommended gender-inclusive guidance:

I think there needs to be a bit more education when you're younger. ... I think that a lot of girls choose dance and drama and art and stuff and are afraid to go near the sciences and the specialist maths. So I think it would be really good, when you're in Year 9, and starting to make those decisions, to have female scientists and female mathematicians coming into the school ... having confident, strong beautiful, professional women and saying 'this is who you can be if you really want to'.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

For many respondents who chose not to pursue university studies, clarity in terms of career and program choice direction appeared to be key determinants:

But at the time I really didn't know what I wanted to do and I just wanted the option of going to university and I thought business sounded like the best option.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

I don't reckon I got really any information or help deciding what I wanted to do when I was at school. Especially in Year 12 I thought there would've been more. I reckon I only talked to that careers counsellor once, it was just a one ten minute thing and that was sort of it and it's up to you.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)



SCHOOL ENCOURAGEMENT TO APPLY FOR UNIVERSITY PLACE

Many respondents reported that their schools encouraged them to apply for university entrance, regardless of their interest or post-school intentions, primarily to maximise their options:

There's a big push on university, and little else. ... Originally I didn't actually intend on applying for uni. It was actually my Principal who set everything up for me and put in a recommendation letter and all that sort of stuff, to push me in that direction.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

Indeed many of the respondents who received and then deferred their university offer did not intend to pursue university studies, or the specific program they initially applied to undertake:

I don't know, I wasn't 100% interested in that course. I wasn't sure about it really and in the end wasn't sure if I wanted to do that course. It was mainly through school because you get to apply to courses and stuff like that.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

I never really intended to go straight to university, I was a bit over school by the time school was finished, so I was always going to defer but I really didn't know if I was going to go or not. The year later I was actually thinking about it and I guess that's when I thought about all my options.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

HEALTH AND MOTIVATION

Health and motivation to study played a role in some respondents decisions:

I had anxiety issues and depression issues that were perhaps because I was living away from home, living in residences. ... There were support avenues there, I just didn't utilise them. If there had've been somebody who'd have stepped in and picked up the program, other than myself, it might've been good.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer the deferred)

Identity influenced some young people's decisions:

Sometime during the year I decided that Psychology would be too hard and decided to do teaching ... but somewhere in it, I decided that it wasn't for me at all. You know, lots of reasons. Mostly, I wasn't enjoying the course, and I'm not really a university person.

(non-metropolitan respondent, took up university offer)

REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES

Some respondents reported that the local regional university had limited program offerings that influenced their decisions:

The only university closer to me is now [regional university]. I probably wouldn't have gone there as they offer a very limited range of courses. ... Had it offered a course that I was interested in, then, yeah I probably would've considered it.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

There's about four different subjects you can do [at the small regional university], rather than thirty at [the larger regional university] and fifty at [the large metropolitan university].

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

COMMUNITY

The sense of community in non-metropolitan areas, and the prospect of losing this by moving to metropolitan areas to pursue university studies, influenced some respondents:

... Coming from a regional area, the biggest barriers would be probably losing that sense of community. ... So, depending on how introverted or extroverted you are, I think it would impact on having that sense of family.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

I think it's that community factor, yes. They prefer to stay and live at home [rather than take up a university offer].

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

OVERALL SATISFACTION

Overall, many of the respondents who did not take up their university offer were satisfied with their post-school options:

Really satisfied, actually. I've been really happy with what I've been doing. Work, I think, I sort of fell into a good place. ... I've been pretty lucky actually.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

For a small town, I'm very happy with the opportunities I've been able to get ...

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

Some, however, were not very satisfied:

I'm not dissatisfied, but I'm not satisfied. I'm about middle ground. I mean, I wish I were somewhere better but I could be a hell of a lot worse. Mildly dissatisfied if anything.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)

I am not totally satisfied, no, I would have probably gone to uni and leave that whole stuff behind me ... but I have got to work.

(non-metropolitan respondent, did not take up university offer)



CASE STUDY #1

“TESS”

Tess completed Year 12 at a public school in regional Victoria.

Tess found school hard, and reported difficulty “just getting through my senior school years”. She had no intentions of progressing to university study whilst at school. However, Tess’s school principal and teacher promoted university education, and encouraged her to apply for a university place.

Tess applied, and subsequently received an offer for a para-professional, health sciences degree at the local regional university. Tess had reservations about continuing her studies at university. Unlike some of her friends, Tess did not feel pressured by family to take up her university offer. She was interested in achieving financial security through employment immediately post-school, and looked forward to the prospect of saving for a house. Tess had reservations about the length of time required to complete her proposed university studies (“In a way I’m quite impatient”).

Tess deferred her university offer, and continued working in the local retail outlet where she had worked during her senior secondary schooling. Tess did not take a “gap year”.

After completing her senior secondary certificate, she worked full-time, taking short overseas trips to Bali with friends. Tess initially lived at home with her family whilst working full-time in regional Victoria. She subsequently moved to Melbourne with her partner to undertake a full-time administration position.

Tess is interested in continuing her learning. She reports being supportive of “learning when you’re older”, and has commenced a vocational certificate with a registered training organisation. This certificate is in a field distinctly different from her initial application for university entry.

In the future, Tess is interested in exploring a position with the police force, which she perceives as particularly attractive given the opportunity for training and more learning on-the-job, as opposed to “book learning”.

Unlike her friends, Tess is positive about her capacity to earn money of a comparable level to those who completed university studies.

Tess is very satisfied with the pathways she has pursued after completing her senior secondary schooling:

“Yeah, I’ve been very happy with my life. I’ve been pretty lucky actually”.

CASE STUDY #2

“LINDA”

Linda completed her schooling at a private school in regional Victoria.

She had positive experiences with the school career counsellors, and anticipated continuing to university despite her parents being supportive of alternative choices. However, Linda deferred her offer of an Arts (Psychology) course to work to gain some financial backing: “I know that when you’re a student, even if you’re living on two-minute noodles, you’re going to want to have chocolate or alcohol and all that sort of things, for when you’re studying or partying or whatever you’re doing. It’s not exactly a cheap thing to do. So, the main reason was money”.

After working for a while, she commenced an Education program at a regional university: “I did a semester there, but somewhere in it, I decided it wasn’t for me at all. You know, lots of reasons. Mostly, I wasn’t enjoying the course, and I think I’m not really a university person. ... I decided that instead of getting a huge HECS debt, I’d quit before then, and decide to do something else that I’d actually enjoy”.

Linda stated: “It was a hard decision to stop going to uni this year, because I sort of worried what my friends and family would think ...The fact of the matter was that for a little while there I was miserable and that’s not how you want to be. So I just decided, I don’t have to be miserable, I can just stop”.

Linda gained employment as an IT consultant: “I just answer emails and help out with any clients [the employer] has”. She is also writing: “I ... participated in National Novel Writing Month. I’m trying to write a book. So I wrote 20,000 words in November, which is pretty exciting”.

Whilst she would have liked to go to university: “I love the idea of being one of those educated people with a university degree and people look up to people with university degrees”, she does not see university study as relevant to her current position or future employment plans.

Overall, Linda is happy with her current employment arrangements, particularly in terms of gender equality and opportunities for career progression: “everyone starts out as a person taking calls and then they work up to whatever it is that they want to do, which is fantastic ... And also, they make sure that 50 per cent of their workforce is female and it’s the same through every level or employment ... which is amazing, because it means that not all of my bosses are men, and also that my gender’s not going to hold me back, which is obviously a concern, unfortunately”.

CASE STUDY #3

“BEN”

Ben took a gap year after completing Year 12, during which he travelled and then gained employment to meet eligibility criteria for government financial support for university study.

Ben stated: “A lot of people who defer, I think about 80 per cent only defer because they need to become independent ... to classify as independent. There’s no other reason in my mind why people would defer”.

Ben took up his university offer and commenced archaeology and history at a university in metropolitan Melbourne.

Despite some difficulties, he was granted Youth Allowance to support his university studies. He studied at university for one year, but for “a combination of social circumstance, lack of personal commitment to the course and psychological reasons, ... failed all of those subjects in a spectacular fashion”, which he attributed in part to living in residences: “I had anxiety issues and depression issues, that was perhaps partially because I was living away from home ... not completing assignments, getting caught up in the social aspect of it all”.

Ben recognised that there were counselling services available, but “I was raised with ‘you can tough it out, oh it’s not so bad’ ... When it actually got to the point when I really need to ask for help, I was too far gone”. In addition, the university discontinued his major program. He deferred his university studies again, moved back to the country and gained employment.

A year later, he moved to metropolitan Melbourne for employment in the retail sector. Whilst working in the retail sector, he is interested in moving into a business administration role.

It is possible that in future he would pursue university studies, although only if ‘it got to a point where (it was needed) to get higher in the internal corporate ladder’. He considers that moving from a non-metropolitan area to metropolitan Melbourne young people lose the ‘sense of community’, although he recognises that employment opportunities are more limited, and industries less diversified in regional areas. Overall, Ben stated “I’m not dissatisfied, but I’m not satisfied. I’m about middle ground. I mean I wish I were somewhere better but I could be a hell of a lot worse. Mildly dissatisfied if anything”.



CASE STUDY #4 “LOUIS”

Whilst at school, Louis received support from counselling and transition officers regarding post-school employment and education options.

He applied for a university place in Education, and received an offer from a regional university located in his hometown.

However, Louis had reservations about university study: “I’ve never really been good at standing still and studying. Always enjoyed doing hands-on things”, so deferred his offer of a place and worked part-time at the local McDonalds. Louis suggested that barriers to taking up a university place could include “something like lack of money or wanting to be independent, like trying to live by themselves or something for a while”.

Since leaving school, Louis has continued to live at home, and reports not being eligible for Youth Allowance. After a short period of post-school, informal work experience, Louis decided to pursue an apprenticeship in carpentry. He completed a 15 week pre-apprenticeship TAFE program in carpentry, which he enjoys: “I just did it ‘cos I enjoyed it”.

Louis is currently working part-time while seeking an apprenticeship. He does not envisage commencing university studies at any point in the future. Louis hopes to remain living in regional Victoria and reports being happy with his post-school employment and education transitions.

CASE STUDY #5 “SHELDON”

Sheldon received assistance before leaving school from a counsellor regarding education and employment options.

He applied for a university place (Commerce) with the encouragement of the school, although never was truly interested in that particular course: “I don’t know, I wasn’t 100 per cent interested in that course, I wasn’t sure about it really and in the end wasn’t sure if I wanted to do that course. It was mainly through school because you get to apply to courses and stuff like that.”

After completing school, Sheldon deferred his offer of a university place and worked in a local supermarket (between 15-30 hours per week) for over a year. He pursued employment, rather than university education, “just to make a bit of money for a year”. He subsequently gained full time employment in another supermarket in a regional Victoria town near his home.

Sheldon lives at home with his family. He may pursue university education in the future, once he is clearer about his course preferences: “... there is no reason why I wouldn’t take up uni, I just want to work out what I want to do there”. In order to do that, he would like financial security, as he recognises the costs associated with undertaking university education: “the course costs, the books cost, and the people whose parents earn too much to get support have to foot the bill themselves. Also difficulty getting support from the government”.

Sheldon is not satisfied with his current situation, but recognises financial constraints: “I am not totally satisfied, no, I would have probably gone to uni and leave that whole stuff behind me, but I have got to work”. Sheldon is interested in continuing to live in regional Victoria and cites as his reasons friendships, family and community.

CASE STUDY #6 “SANDY”

Since leaving school, Sandy went on a short (one-week) holiday and then commenced working several positions:

“A lot of hospitality, cause that’s all you can really get down here. So I work three jobs and I work in the pharmacy as well. I did all that to try and save”.

Whilst originally offered a place at William Anglis in hospitality, Sandy realised that she enjoyed working: “I was learning heaps and it was a good opportunity. And I sort of really didn’t want to go. And I didn’t want to move really. I just didn’t want to go do full-time study”.

Sandy would like to continue to live in the country. She nominated financial considerations as a key deterrent: “Just the cost of it is through the roof. The cost of uni is huge, especially for rural people, and to move everything and that type of thing. And if you’re going to live in residence. Like my sister is living in residence ... Like it’s nine grand just to stay there and get a couple of meals. It’s just so much money”.

Sandy enjoys office administration and would like “something along the lines of receptionist ... work in a big firm, or something like that”. Sandy identified a lack of supportive career guidance, limited capacity to get financial support (particularly for many farming families), and money as key barriers, with money being the most important: “Easily money. Without a doubt. Except for kids who have rich parents, but a lot of people down here are just dairy farmers, and that sort of thing. They don’t have the money to flash around for their kids to go to uni and study more. That type of thing is definitely huge down here”.

Overall, Sandy is happy: “For a small town, I’m very happy with the opportunities I’ve been able to get”.



CONCLUSION

The research conducted by the researchers within the last five years reveals that over sixty percent of young people who deferred their university offer subsequently commenced and continued university study.

The main reasons given by non-metropolitan deferrers for deferring their university offer included “to take a gap year”, and financial considerations. The majority of respondents commenced university studies subsequent to their initial decision to defer. Almost all respondents were satisfied with their study choices. Just over half received Youth Allowance. 79 per cent were employed (65 per cent part time; 26 per cent full time), and a number received other financial support.

Young people from non-metropolitan areas defer their university offer at twice the rate of their metropolitan counterparts. Non-metropolitan deferrers are more likely to take up a place at university in their second year out of school, and continue their study in their third year, than their metropolitan counterparts. However, the overall proportion of non-metropolitan students who continue to university remains lower than for those from Melbourne (Polesel et al. 2012).

The majority of respondents (88 percent) reported being “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with how well school prepared them for work, with similar proportions “very satisfied” (24 per cent) or “satisfied” (60 per cent) with how well school prepared them for further study. The majority of questionnaire respondents (75 per cent) reported that since leaving school, “things had worked out for them”. However, a not insubstantial proportion (25 per cent) reported that this was not the case, and it is this latter group that represents the “at risk” young people dissatisfied with the education, training and employment transitions since completing Year 12 (Polesel et al. 2012).

Overall, the findings from our deferral studies suggest that non-metropolitan deferrers are in need of the greatest support in their first two years out of school, when financial pressures and travel barriers are felt most keenly. While their rates of university take-up and continuation are strong in later years, there is a case for more effective structures of initial support both to prevent deferral in the first place and to assist those who do defer in taking up their university offer sooner.

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below arise from the six-year program of research on students who defer a university offer in regional Victoria, as well as from the recommendations of the working group, which includes the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and the representatives of regional Local Learning and Employment Networks. They are designed to improve educational outcomes and transitions of young people from regional Victoria.

1. Young people from regional Victoria are in need of the greatest support (course and career guidance, social and financial support) in their first two years out of school. This is when financial pressures and travel barriers are felt most keenly. There is a case for more effective structures of initial support both to prevent deferral in the first place and to assist those who do defer.
2. There is a clear need among these young people for assisted independence while studying.
3. Continuous post-school education and career guidance is important, both during and after secondary education.
4. Additional support and advice to young people from regional areas in both preparing for relocation in order to participate in higher education and in the initial year of university would assist all young people, including deferrers, to complete their degree in a timely manner.
5. There is a need for affordable accommodation for young people from the country near their chosen educational institution, such as subsidised access to university residential colleges or dedicated college-type accommodation, both of which represent the supportive environment required by very young first year university students resettling in the city from regional Victoria.

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