DROPOUTS DO BETTER THAN NON-STARTERS

Starting a course is better than doing nothing, Lauren Ahwan discovers STUDENTS who drop out of their tertiary course are financially better off than those who never started their post-school study.

La Trobe University’s Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity research reveals the median incomes of Year 12 graduates who had attempted, but not completed, a bachelor degree was $7500 more than school leavers who had never enrolled at uni.

Similar wage differences were observed between vocational qualification holders who had and had not attempted further study.

Researcher Michael Luckman says the findings should dispel the notion that those who do not complete a qualification are “failures”.

He says it should also encourage non-completers not to abandon study altogether, with the research showing 60 per cent of university dropouts went on to complete a different post-secondary qualification later.

“What this shows is that it’s relatively common to kind of step in and out of higher education,” Luckman says.

“Increasingly, we see that students are transitioning between sectors, institutions and courses. Our analysis shows the student life cycle is more complex than is generally assumed.”

Luckman believes the financial benefits experienced by non-completers stems from the skills and knowledge they learn during their short time at uni.

“Not everyone uses their whole education (degree),” he says. “A lot of coursework (university study) these days can be viewed as mini projects – some may have an element of work-integrated learning to them – so you can present that (to prospective employers as examples of your skillsets).” About one million Australians have started, but not completed, a bachelor degree. In the vocational education and training sector, it is estimated more than half of students who start a certificate I qualification or higher will not finish it. Similar completion rates are recorded for apprentices.

As well as a higher salary, dropouts may be able to receive recognition of prior learning and fast-track the completion of the course if they return to study later.

Depending at what stage of the course students drop out, they may receive an exit qualification, such as a certificate II from a certificate III course, to recognise the learning
outcomes that have been achieved.

This year, Gordon Institute of TAFE, in conjunction with the Civil Contractors Federation and Civil Train, introduced a cadet program for apprentices to provide early workplace skills and career development.

Over 35 days, cadets study core units from the Certificate III in Civil Construction course.

After that, those who decide not to proceed with the apprenticeship receive recognition of the skills they have learned to date, says TAFE design and construction head Wayne Ketchen.

“This is a very staged approach (to apprenticeships),” Ketchen says. “(Cadets) might be doing units in First Aid or working on construction sites or communication in the workplace. The idea is to support our younger apprentices so that, if they choose to walk away (from their training) then they still take something with them and they can (use those skillsets) to go into another trade.” In the first two years, 120 cadets are expected to complete the cadetship.