HumanAbility

Enrolments and Completions – Consultation findings

Exploring why care and support VET students do not always complete qualifications

Acknowledgement of Country

HumanAbility acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders – past and present, and recognise their enduring connection to their culture, lands, seas, waters and communities.

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Address: Level 13/Suite 4, 80 Collins St (North Tower), Melbourne 3000

Phone: 1800 486 262

Website: www.humanability.com.au

Email: research@humanability.com.au

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List of acronyms

Acronym	
AI	Artificial intelligence
ANZSCO	Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
CHC	Community Services training package
EWYL	Earn While You Learn
HLT	Health training package
LLN	Language, literacy, and numeracy
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
RTO	Registered training organisation
SIS	Sports, Fitness, and Recreation training package
TTA	Teacher, trainer, and assessor

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Executive Summary

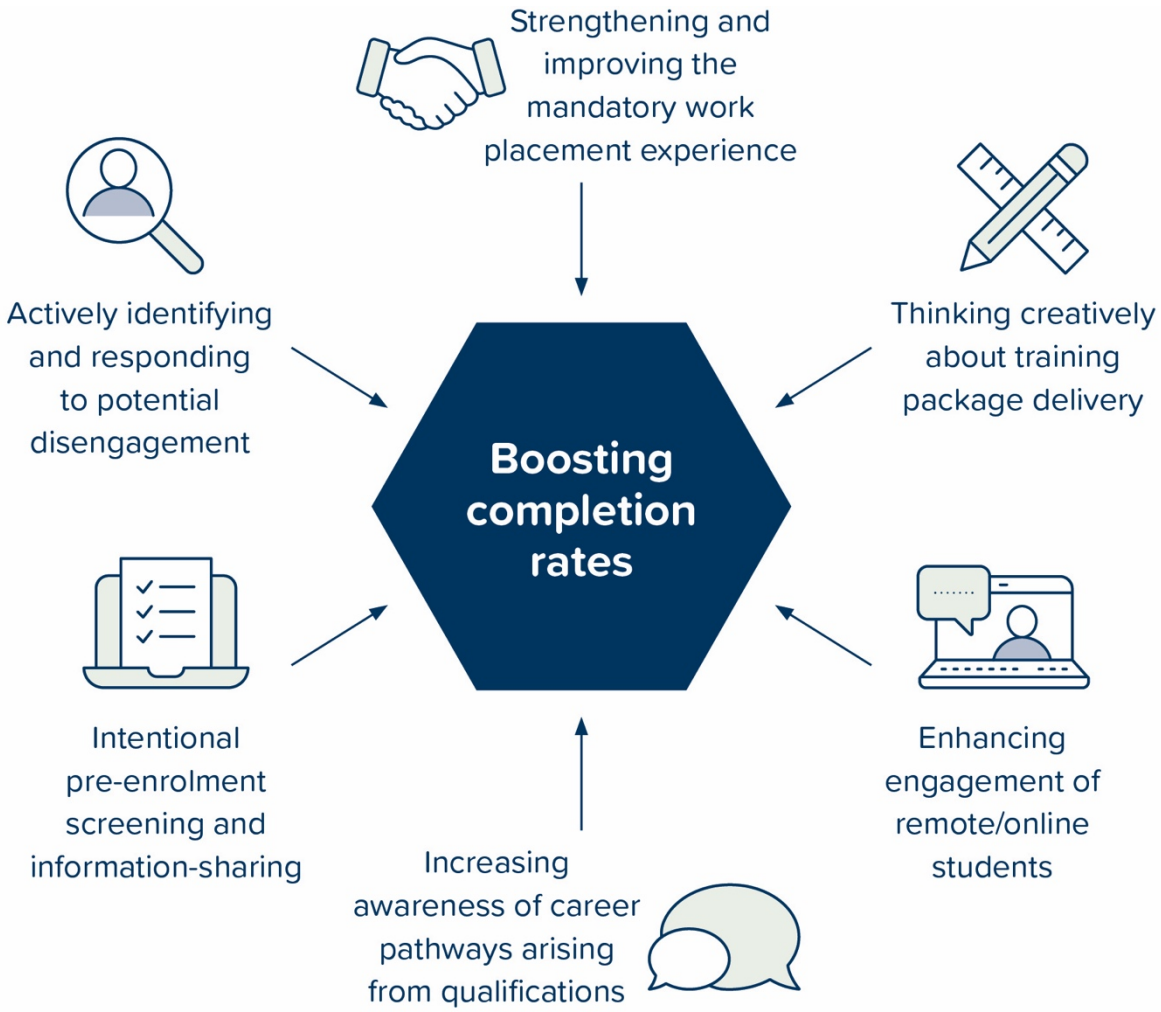
The rising demand for care and support services places direct pressure on the pathways through which new, skilled professionals enter the workforce. However, while program enrolments across the CHC, HLT, and SIS training packages continue to rise, the data indicate that the number of program completions, on a year-by-year basis over the past half-decade, have generally stagnated.

HumanAbility's Enrolments and Completions research project is exploring why many students – close to half – enrolled in the CHC (Community Services), HLT (Health), and SIS (Sport, Fitness, and Recreation) training packages do not go on to complete. While VET students participating in these qualifications are slightly more likely to graduate compared to the wider VET average, demographic trends and both emerging and acute workforce shortages in related sectors make it critical that completions continue to rise.

Between November 2025 and January 2026, HumanAbility consulted with over 200 stakeholders from across Australia, including training providers, students, employers, peak bodies, and unions. The consultations surfaced seven key challenges to keeping students engaged through to completion:

- Students' complex needs and capacity levels
- Misalignment between expectation and reality of care and support work
- Content and difficulty of training material
- Motivation to enrol may impact likelihood of completion
- Challenges with mandatory work placements
- Acute challenges faced by remote and regional stakeholders
- Wider systemic barriers

To respond to these challenges and help drive improvements in completion rates, stakeholders shared many ideas for change, as well as actions they have already taken.



A final report for this research project will be released by the end of June 2026. This report will include a series of recommendations, informed by the insights presented here and refined by further consultative work.

1 Introduction

1.1 Context for this research

Across Australia's vocational education and training (VET) system, less than half (49%) of students enrolled in a nationally accredited qualification go on to complete.[1] While this overall completion rate has lifted slightly in recent years, concerns around the impact on workforce sustainability has led to numerous reviews and inquiries examining the issue. Headlined by the National VET Completions Taskforce's October 2023 report,[2] such analyses have largely examined the factors behind low completion rates at a broad, whole-of-VET system level.

As highlighted in this project's initial Issues Paper, the training packages under HumanAbility's remit – CHC (Community Services), HLT (Health), and SIS (Sport, Fitness and Recreation) – are not immune to the problem. Despite rising numbers of students commencing VET qualifications in the human (community) services, children's education and care, aged care and disability services, health, and sport and recreation sectors, a gap between enrolment and completion numbers persists. Across all three training packages, 52.4% of students who enrolled in 2020 completed their qualification within four years. While some students begin a qualification never intending to complete the entire program (for instance, in cases where this is the only way they can engage with a certain skill set or unit), the decisions of a large number of the student cohort to disengage and drop out could be avoided.

Potential impacts of not addressing low completion rates across HumanAbility's training packages come into sharp focus in the context of the rapidly expanding care and support economy they help underpin. A key finding from the Treasury's most recent Intergenerational Report pointed to significant growth in the population aged 65 and older in coming decades.[3] In 2021, the then National Skills Commission predicted a gap of 211,430 FTE across the care and support workforce by 2049-50.[4] The pressure this will place on the health, aged care, and other care and support sectors elevates the importance of the VET pathway into these workforces. Critically, the issue is already a live one: around a quarter of occupations within the Community and Personal Service Workers ANZSCO major occupation category already face consistent shortages.[5]

1.2 Enrolments data

Between 2019 and 2024, annual enrolments across HumanAbility's three training packages rose by 21.2%, from 565,515 to 685,425.6 The most significant increases occurred in the HLT (28.1% growth in enrolments between 2019 and 2024) and CHC (26.0% growth) training packages.

[1] National Centre for Vocational Education Research (2025), DataBuilder ('VET Qualification Completion Rates' tab)

[2] Secretariat of the National VET Completions Taskforce (2023), National Vocational Education and Training Completions

[3] Australian Government Treasury (2023), 2023 Intergenerational Report, p.37.

[4] National Skills Commission (2021), *Care Workforce Labour Market Study*.

[5] Jobs and Skills Australia (2025), 2025 Occupation Shortage List – Key Findings Report, p.15.

[6] National Centre for Vocational Education Research (2025), DataBuilder ('Total VET students and courses' tab)

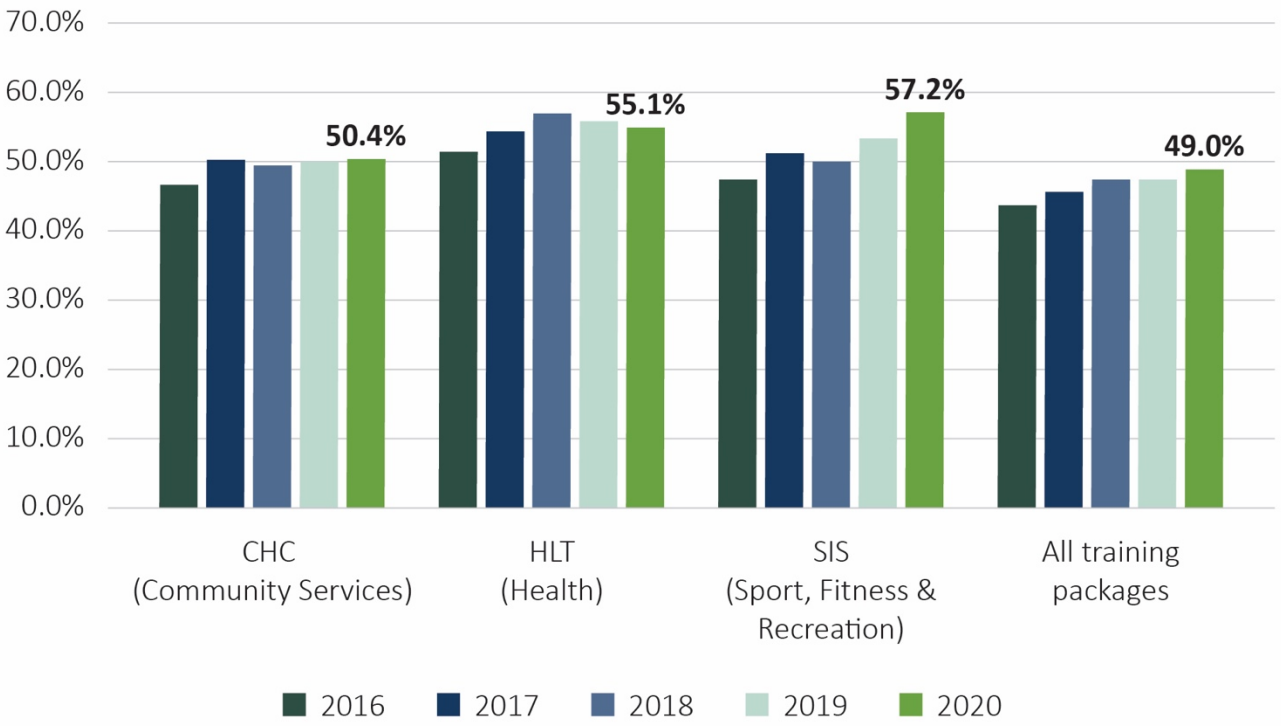
The increasing appeal of these qualifications arguably reflects the rise in community demand for, and policy settings underpinning growth in, related services. The influence of subsidy-related initiatives at state and territory levels (such as *Career Start* and *Career Boost* in Queensland, and *Smart and Skilled* in New South Wales) is also likely to continue driving this enrolment growth.[7]

1.3 Completion rates data[8]

In late-2025, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) released new completion rate data covering all training packages and their underlying qualifications. NCVER defines a completion rate as the proportion of students who enrol in a given year and go on to complete that qualification over a four-year period. Accordingly (and allowing for the delay in completion numbers to be finalised and published), *observed* completion rates are available for the years 2016-2020.

Figure 1, below, shows that observed completion rates across all three HumanAbility training packages are generally rising. It also reveals that all three training packages are tending to see more students, on a proportional basis, go on to complete than across the overall VET system. However, when considered in raw number terms, the 47.6% of CHC, HLT, and SIS students who commenced in 2020 but did not go and complete equates to these sectors missing out on over 162,000 potential new workers. In the context of the aforementioned shortfalls predicted in the care and support workforces in the coming years, actions to close this gap are critically needed.

Figure 1: Completion rates (after 4 years), HumanAbility training packages vs all training packages



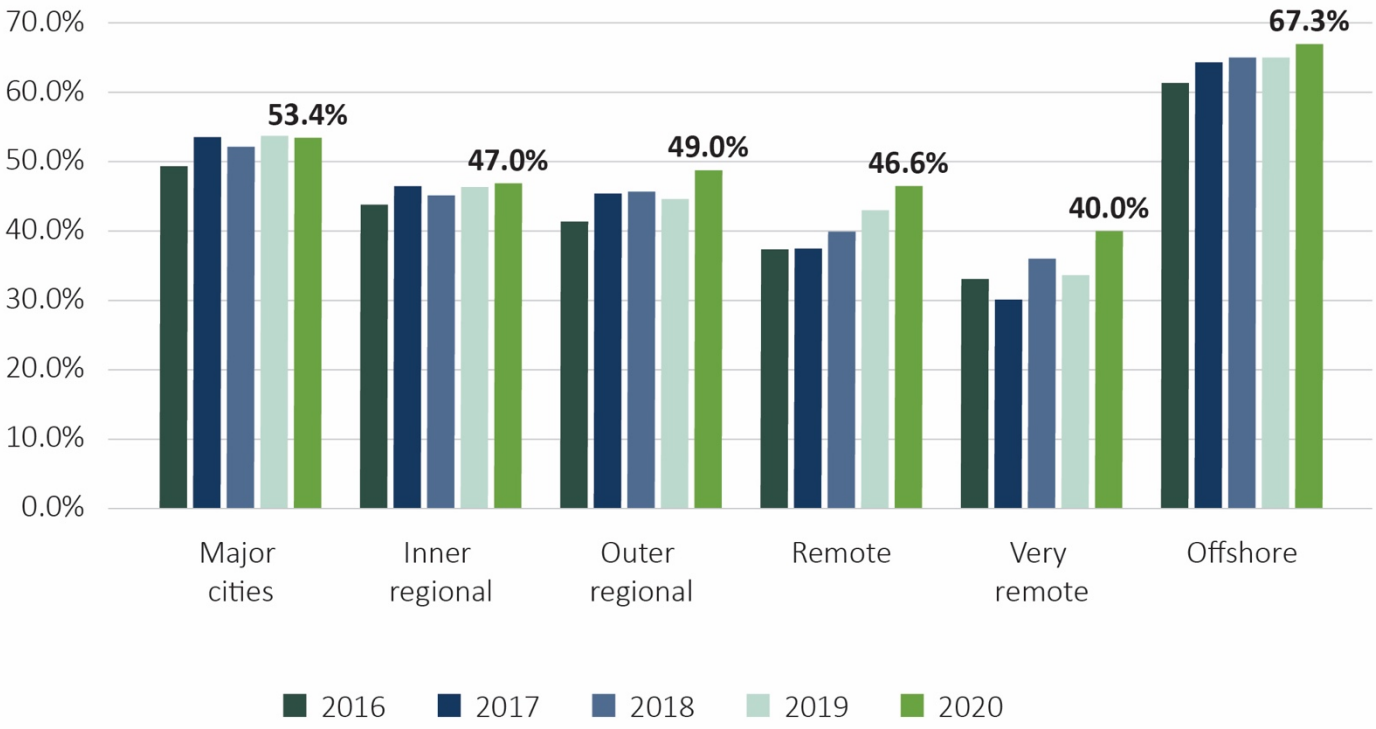
[7] Note that potential impacts of these schemes on completions arose in the consultations and are discussed later in this report.

[8] All completion rates presented in this section were drawn from analysis of data from National Centre for Vocational Education Research (2025), DataBuilder ('VET Qualification Completion Rates' tab).

For more recent years (namely 2021 and 2022) NCVER also provides *projected* completion rates. Promisingly, these projections continue to rise relative to the observed rates shown in Figure 1: among cohorts who enrolled in 2022, the proportion of students expected to complete has increased to 57.6% in CHC, 60.1% in HLT, and 57.7% in SIS. Again though, while these upward trends in care and support VET programs are promising, it is imperative that completion rates continue to rise.

Analysis of the NCVER data reveals several trends and differences in completion outcomes; many of which were raised by stakeholders in our consultations. The data show, for instance, a noticeable difference between urban/regional and remote and very remote students. Figure 2, below, highlights that the more remote a student, the more unlikely they are to successfully complete their qualification (note that 'offshore' typically refers to overseas-based students, who are generally far more likely to complete).

Figure 2: Completion rates (after 4 years) by student remoteness region, CHC/HLT/SIS training packages combined



The implications – for training providers, local employers, and of course students themselves – are clear. Unless more is done to support all stakeholders to continue improving these completion rates, familiar issues impacting remote communities, including workforce shortages, skills gaps, and a lack of services available to community members, are likely to continue. At the same time, promisingly strong upticks in the most recently available completion rates among remote and very remote students – driven particularly by strong gains in the CHC and SIS training packages – must be noted.

The data can also be used to compare completion outcomes by students' age at commencement (as presented in Figure 3, below). While differences exist at qualification level, when grouped and analysed at the combined CHC/HLT/SIS level we can see that with the exception of the much younger or much older cohorts, completion outcomes are fairly consistent – and are generally rising – between the ages of 25 to 50.

As will be discussed, stakeholders noted that students' responsibilities outside of study can have an impact on their likelihood of completing. Figure 4 shows – perhaps counterintuitively – higher completion rates among employed VET students compared with unemployed students. Likely driven by the higher-than-average completion rates among those aged 15–19 highlighted in Figure 3, it is also evident that students not yet in the labour force when they commence a care and support VET qualification are the most likely (by a marginal measure) to go on and complete.

Figure 3: Completion rates by student age at commencement, CHC/HLT/SIS training packages combined

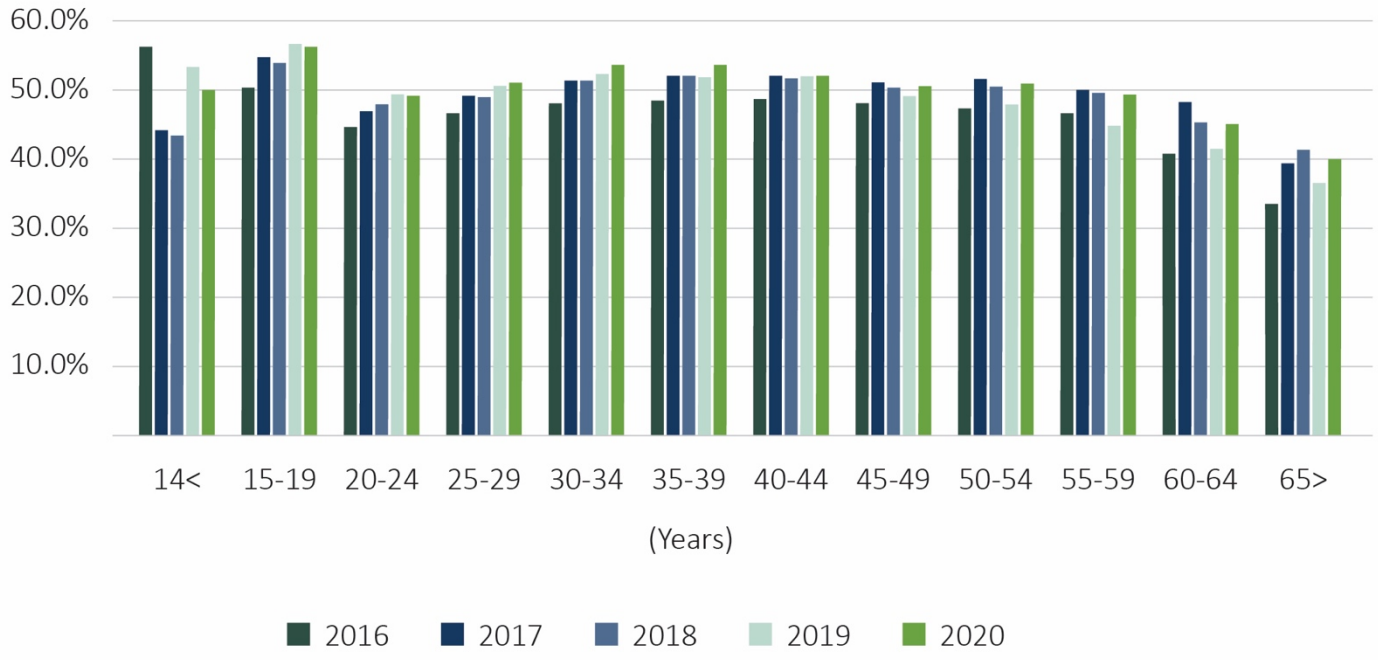
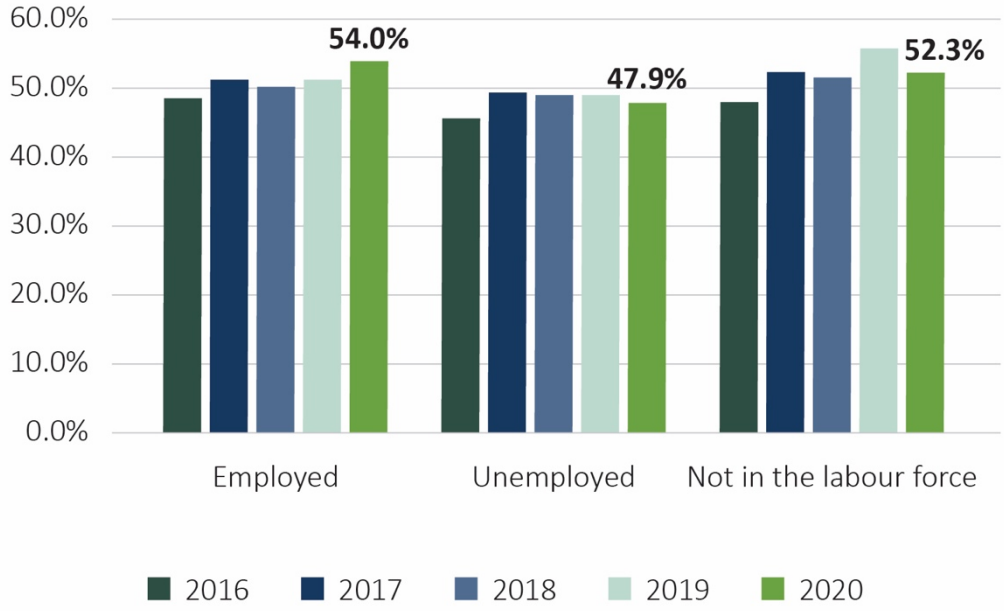


Figure 4: Completion rates by student labour force status at commencement, CHC/HLT/SIS training packages combined



NCVER's data also show how completion rates can vary across training providers of different management types. Stakeholders interested in exploring how their own completion rates, at both training package and qualification level, compare to other providers are encouraged to access DataBuilder.

1.4 Diversifying training pathways, including traineeships and other earn and learn models

There are concurrently low numbers of traineeship commencements and completions across the care and support sectors. While traineeship commencements across the CHC, HLT, and SIS training packages rose between 2017 and 2021, since then numbers have been on a consistent decline. Throughout this period, completion rates among students engaged in these traineeships have also dropped – from an average of 65.2% across all three training packages in 2016 to 57.1% among 2020 commencements.[9]

Given the urgency of improving pipelines of skilled workers to fill future workforce shortages across the care economy, lifting course completions is one of several pathways HumanAbility is exploring. In this context, a lack of sustainable Earn While You Learn (EWYL) models in the care and support sectors is also contributing to exacerbating workforce shortages. This, combined with many qualifications requiring unpaid mandatory work placements, is creating barriers to attracting and retaining students.

Other sectors with greater government support, the infrastructure to support learners, and/or tailored EWYL models see far greater trainee commencements than in the care and support sectors. In 2024, for example, the number of people who started traineeships in construction and plumbing was around one and half times larger than in early childhood education and care, and around five times larger than in aged care and disability services.

Opportunities to strengthen EWYL models, a related solution for addressing workforce pipelines, are being explored in HumanAbility's Earn While You Learn research.

2 Project outline, status, and methodology

2.1 Project outline and status

Launched in mid-2025, HumanAbility's Enrolments and Completions research project aims to examine the issue of VET completions as it relates specifically to qualifications underpinning the care and support sectors.

The project's first output, *Issues Paper 1*, was released in September 2025. It provided background context and invited initial contributions on the specific directions the research should take, as well as how stakeholders are experiencing the issue. It was also via the release of *Issues Paper 1* that stakeholders were invited to participate in one of several consultation activities.

This report – *Issues Paper 2* – provides a detailed overview of the consultation phase. A summary of the methods used to gather stakeholder views is presented below, at Section 2.3. *Issues Paper 2* outlines the

[9] National Centre for Vocational Education Research (2025), DataBuilder ('Apprentice and trainee completion rates' tab)

key themes and concepts emerging from these discussions, examining both the challenges stakeholders face around completions and broader student engagement, and the ways in which system actors have already sought to address the issue.

Following release of this paper, the project team will work with stakeholders from across the care and support sectors to develop a series of recommendations aimed at various parts of the system. These will be presented in the project's final report, to be released by the end of June 2026.

2.2 Key research questions

The project's key research questions, refined by feedback from stakeholders on Issues Paper 1 and consultations with HumanAbility's five Industry Advisory Committees, are:

- Are there specific qualifications or units more affected than others in terms of students facing barriers to completion?
- Are there systemic impacts of non-completion (e.g., for industries, or for students themselves, with respect to their subsequent career trajectories)?
- Are there 'hotspots' in the student journey where risk of disengagement is higher?
- Can understanding of students' demographic characteristics be used to predict when additional support may be needed?
- What can we learn and adapt from specific strategies training providers and other stakeholders have already enacted to improve completion numbers?

2.3 Methodology (consultation phase)

2.3.1 Consultation activities

To help answer these questions, and uncover other relevant findings and insights, we engaged in a series of tripartite consultations with a diverse range of impacted stakeholders. The views, experiences, and strategies of over 200 stakeholders – comprising training providers, students, employers, peak bodies, and unions across the care and support sectors – were collected between November 2025 and January 2026. Table 2, below, outlines each of the consultation activities undertaken.

Table 1: Summary of consultation activities

Activity	Date	Number/type of stakeholders consulted	Details and purpose
In-person workshops (x5)	Nov 2025	52 (training providers, employers, peak bodies, unions, government)	Held in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, and Darwin. Stakeholders were asked to consider and respond to the following questions: • How are you and your organisation experiencing the issue of non-completions?

			• In your experience, when and how do students disengage from study? • What is being, or could be, done to improve completion rates?
Online workshops (x4)	Nov-Dec 2025	68 (training providers, employers, peak bodies, unions, government)	Held online via Microsoft Teams, allowing for engagement by stakeholders in areas not visited by project team. Same questions as at in-person workshops.
Workshop short survey	Nov-Dec 2025	92 (majority of participants from in-person and online workshops)	A short survey completed by workshop participants, affording valuable quantitative data. Questions related to perceived severity of issue, AQF level/s of greatest concern, and actions taken to improve completions.
In-depth interviews	Dec 2025 – Jan 2026	9 (training providers and peak bodies)	Selected stakeholders (from the workshops and recruited by other means) sat down for a 30-45 minute 'deep dive' on the issue. These interviews generated case studies of how organisations are acting to boost completion numbers and student engagement.
Student survey[10]	Nov-Dec 2025	73 (students currently enrolled in CHC, HLT, SIS training packages)	Questions explored what issues students have faced or are facing, and whether they have considered dropping out.

2.3.2 Demographics of consultation participants

The composition of the sample of organisational stakeholders who took part in the consultations largely reflected the relative population of each state and territory, with New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland making up 75.2% of participants. Stakeholders from the Northern Territory and Western

[10] While its findings – presented throughout this paper – are valuable, two important caveats about the student survey must be flagged. Firstly, the small sample size means its insights cannot be generalised to any real extent across wider student groups. Secondly, by virtue of their willingness to engage with the survey at all, respondents were presumably among the more engaged students approached by our organisational stakeholders; consequently, it is very likely that the prominence of issues and barriers reported by respondents understates the true situation. We might reasonably assume, for instance, that the proportion of students currently enrolled in care and support VET qualifications who have considered dropping out at some point is far higher than the 23.3% of respondents who admitted to this in our survey. Also noteworthy – in the broader context of VET completions – is the fact that 17.8% of students surveyed had previously begun, but not completed, a different VET qualification.

Australia each comprised around 9% of the sample, while all other states and territories were represented to lesser degrees. Training providers of all management types took part in the consultations, alongside unions, employers, and peak bodies from across HumanAbility's sectors.

Among the student sample, 37.0% were enrolled in qualifications related to the children's education and care sector, with a similar proportion (35.6%) studying other programs within the CHC training package (such as aged care, disability services, community services, social work, and mental health). Students enrolled in HLT qualifications made up 20.5% of the sample, while SIS students comprised 6.8%.

Around one in seven students surveyed (15.1%) identified as First Nations, and 11% reported having a disability. In terms of previous highest level of education, 39.7% had completed another VET qualification prior to commencing their current studies, and almost equal proportions (21.9% and 20.5%, respectively) had completed high school or completed an undergraduate tertiary program. The remaining 17.8% had either completed high school or a postgraduate tertiary program.

3 Key themes from stakeholder consultations (challenges and barriers)

Despite improving completion rates across all three HumanAbility training packages, it is clear much more must be done if Australia is to meet the workforce growth forecasts in the coming decades. The issue of persistently low completion rates, regardless of their relative level compared to the wider VET system, manifests in many ways. Informed by what our consultations uncovered, this section summarises the most reported areas in which completions are impacting organisations. Interspersed throughout are relevant insights collected from our survey of students, serving to create a rounded perspective of the most prominent issues identified, experienced, and reported by all stakeholder groups.

3.1 Complexity of students' needs and capacities for study (at a broad level)

For organisational stakeholders, an especially complicating factor in the context of completion rates is the complex nature of students' personal situations and academic capabilities.

The nature of the VET system means that for many qualifications entry requirements are minimal (if they exist at all). Accordingly, any given student intake potentially comprises learners with a diverse range of prior educational experience. As stakeholders highlighted in our consultations, this requires considerable pre-planning for every lesson or lecture by teacher, trainer, and assessor (TTA) staff, to ensure course content is delivered in a way that negotiates, as much as possible, the learning preferences and capabilities of all students.

An additional, related, factor is the sheer diversity, and complexity, of students' lives beyond study. As with all of us, learners engaging with care and support VET qualifications balance their study workload with all manner of external personal responsibilities and pressures. These can include – and often in a combination – family and caregiving duties, working (either in a sector related to their current study or a different sector entirely), and other study. Navigating these competing priorities can require compromise in one area or another. With the risk always present that a student may decide that study is bringing down, rather than enhancing, their overall life satisfaction, it is often incumbent on training providers (and other system

stakeholders, such as those involved in providing placement experiences) to proactively identify this risk, and then respond to it with either internal or external support.

3.1.1 Students' personal circumstances impacting on ability to focus on study

Perhaps the single most frequently cited obstacle to qualification completion raised by stakeholders is the imposition of 'real-life' pressures and responsibilities on students' capacity to pour their all into their study. Representatives from all organisation types, spanning all three HumanAbility training packages, offered this issue as a key challenge; typically raising it as the immediate first thought when asked to consider why many students fail to complete.

Data from the student survey confirms this anecdotal evidence. Close to four in ten student respondents (39.7%) reported that during their studies they have experienced anxiety or stress related to non-study parts of their lives. This is not surprising: nearly half (48.0%) reported juggling their study with family/caregiving responsibilities, while almost three-quarters (72.6%) are also working (almost evenly split between those working in, or outside of, sectors related to their current study). Indeed, over a third of students surveyed are balancing at least two non-study related commitments.

With all of this considered, it is again hardly a shock that among the 23.3% of student respondents who admitted to having thought about dropping out of their qualification entirely, a large majority (76.5%) reported finding it difficult to balance their study with other life commitments. Financial stressors are also a key factor behind disengagement, cited by both organisational stakeholders and students themselves. Student survey data revealed that of those students who had considered dropping out, close to a third (29.4%) pointed to feeling overwhelmed by the financial burden of studying (including its impact on their ability to work at the same time).

For training provider stakeholders especially, additional work is required (and has been undertaken) to support students facing such issues. Supplementing the frequency with which this was raised in both the in-person and online workshops, analysis of data from the short survey completed by organisational stakeholders reveals that over half (55.1%) of organisations that have taken steps to improve their completion rates have introduced or enhanced internal support services focussed on non-study related issues, such as counselling or cultural safety. Promisingly, of the overall cohort of student respondents who had considered dropping out of their current studies, the receipt of support from their training provider was noted by almost a quarter (24.0%) as the main factor behind deciding to continue the qualification.

3.1.2 Students' diverse academic capacities

A commonly reported issue in the context of completion rates across HumanAbility's training packages is the difficulty training providers face delivering content to student cohorts with such diverse levels of academic experience and expertise. To reduce barriers to study, VET qualifications tend to have limited minimum entry requirements regardless of their AQF level. While well-meaning in its intention, stakeholders have noted that this principle can create challenges. When asked if, in their experience, there is a particular AQF level at which completions are more of an issue than others, it is noteworthy that organisational stakeholders more frequently cited Certificate III level over higher levels such as Certificate IV or Diploma. This context amplifies the suggestion, shared by several stakeholders, that younger students (who may be more likely to enter VET at Certificate III level or lower) may at times require additional academic support to reach the capability required for successful study.

Indeed, organisations are already acting to help bridge gaps between their students' actual and required levels of language, literacy, and numeracy (LLN) and other academic capacity. Of those organisations who have actively worked to boost completions, almost two-thirds (64.1%) have developed in-house academic supports, including in the areas of LLN or digital literacy. Ongoing work in this space is sure to be welcomed by students: 52.9% of those surveyed who have considered dropping out of their qualification cited feeling overwhelmed by the academic demands of their courses as a key reason.

At the same time, it cannot go unacknowledged that actions taken by training providers and other organisational stakeholders to improve academic skills only adds to an already high workload. As several stakeholders across our consultations emphasised, these efforts can often fall on TTA staff, who already have a challenging enough job delivering qualifications. This enhanced workload can be particularly felt among staff at smaller training providers, who may not have the financial or institutional resources to help shoulder the responsibilities of identifying, planning, or delivering the extra academic supports needed.

3.2 Misalignment between expectation and reality of working in the care and support sectors

A common concern raised in consultations is that too often students seem unaware of the true extent of their expected duties and responsibilities once they enter the workforce. From a training perspective, this issue frequently arises at the point where they begin their mandatory work placement – although it can certainly come earlier in a qualification. While this 'shock to the system', as one stakeholder put it, can impact and often lead to disengagement by students across all three training packages, stakeholders involved in the delivery of key CHC qualifications were more likely to bring this issue up in the consultations. Specific examples include difficulties associated with behaviour management of very young children in children's education and care settings, or some aspects of personal care duties expected in individual support, aged care, and disability qualifications.

More detail on this barrier is presented in Section 4.1, which expands on how stakeholders have sought to minimise the risk of such developments occurring in the first place.

3.3 Content and difficulty of training material (specific to individual qualifications)

Among students who may otherwise appreciate the realities of working in the care and support sectors, in many cases the struggle is more with the content, overall workload, or academic expectations of VET study. Related to the broader themes discussed in Section 3.1, this barrier goes to the at times problematic interaction between specific qualifications and students' individual backgrounds or capabilities.

3.3.1 Course content can at times be triggering or alienating

Many organisational stakeholders involved in the delivery of human (community) services qualifications noted that student disengagement is often triggered by unexpected exposure to sensitive subject matter in mental health, social work, and alcohol and other drugs programs. While such material can be confronting for many, dealing with it in an academic context – especially if expected to 'live out' scenarios such as in role-play activities – can be especially difficult for students with lived experience of these issues.

This same subject matter can be problematic for other students by virtue of the Australian VET system's general emphasis on Western, so-called mainstream cultural and ideological perspectives, such as on mental health treatment and medical and psychological remedies. While perhaps not as widespread an issue as others presented here, several stakeholders reported having discussed this with students who found their cultural backgrounds underrepresented in course material, sometimes leading to disengagement. In other cases, however, this disconnect can be spun in a positive way; for instance, where assessment materials can be structured such that students are encouraged to research and elevate 'alternative' viewpoints or perspectives, including for the benefit of their wider student cohorts.

3.3.2 Difficulty understanding course content, or managing the overall workload required to complete qualifications

For many students, across all three HumanAbility training packages, difficulties can arise due to the actual level or complexity of learning materials. In our survey, 15.0% said they have encountered difficulties understanding the content. Even more concerningly, over a third (34.2%) reported having experienced anxiety or stress about their study workload.

Some stakeholders pointed to the sheer weight and volume of some qualifications in the care and support sectors relative to others at the same AQF level across the VET system. The Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care, for instance, has a reputation as one of the most challenging at AQF Level 3, including a diverse range of practical and theoretical components alongside a thorough placement process. It is of course not alone in its scope and complexity: other qualifications across the CHC, HLT, and SIS training packages attract a similar assessment.

For many students – and this extends to the issues around the existing LLN capacities they bring to their VET studies, as covered in Section 3.1.2 – disillusionment with training products can occur when they come up against specific areas of weakness. To spotlight one example, some organisational stakeholders noted the mathematical and numeracy demands of some units in Health qualifications (such as those relating to medication formulas) may be especially challenging for some students.

3.4 Motivation to enrol may impact likelihood of completion

The consultations revealed that when a student starts showing signs of disinterest it sometimes transpires that the original decision to enrol in a qualification may not have been entirely their own – or, in any case, was inspired by something other than simply their own passion, interests, or career objectives.

3.4.1 Motivation behind enrolment not always driven by students themselves

In an ideal world, every student signs up for and pursues a qualification – particularly one in the CHC, HLT, and SIS training packages, where they will work directly with and provide assistance to others – because they are passionate about and interested in the field. However, the reality is that often the motivation to enrol comes from other, external, sources. Informed by their discussions with students, training provider stakeholders shared that these external drivers behind enrolment are many and varied.

Some students, for example, are pushed into studying a particular qualification by their parents or other family members, even in cases where that course of action would be arguably inappropriate. One training provider shared a case of a 16-year-old who had disengaged from high school being urged by their mother

to enrol in a Certificate IV in Community Services. The program was deemed by the training provider to be unsuitable because the prospective student would have simply been too young to participate in placement activities, let alone perhaps even gain the required checks and clearances needed.

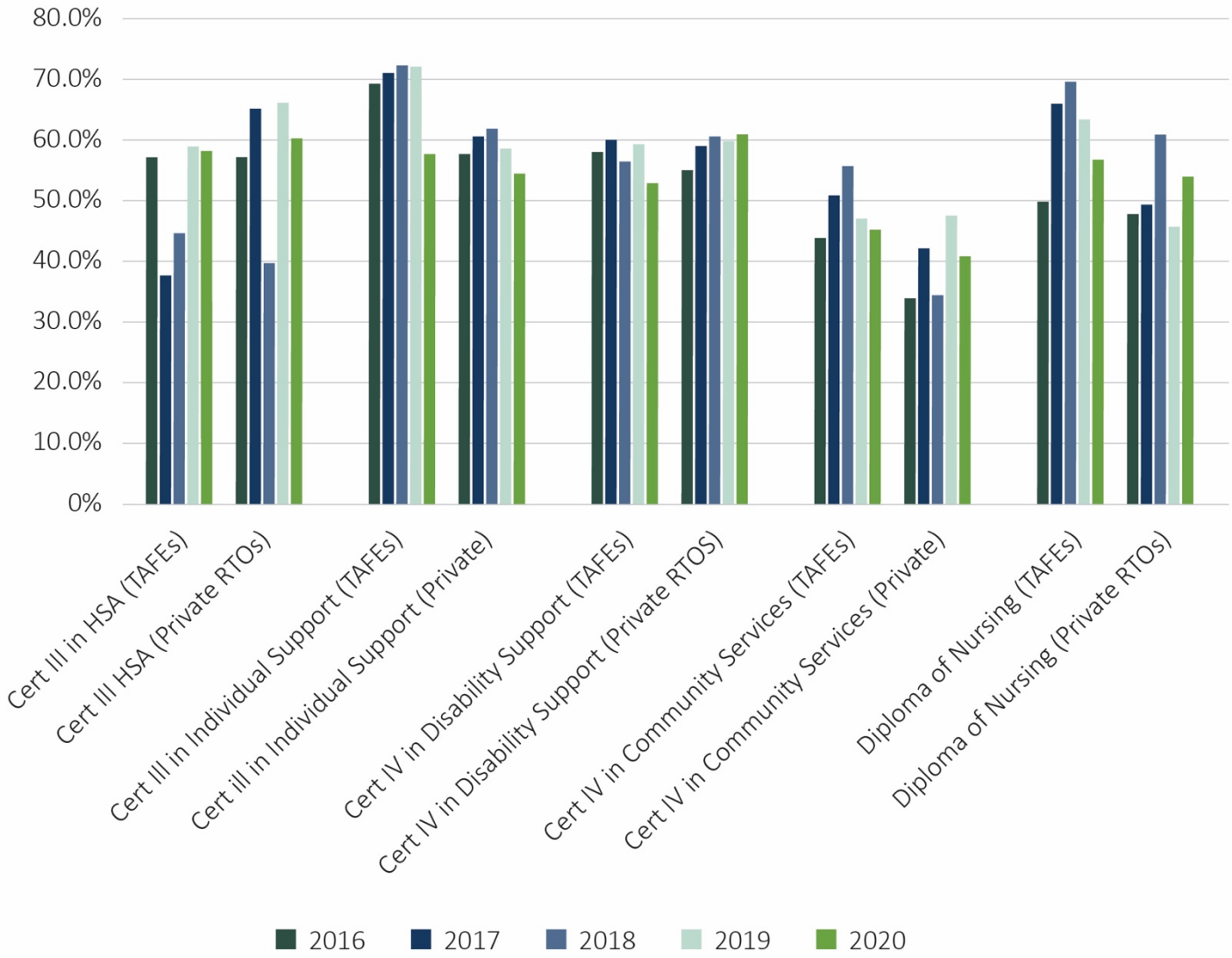
Elsewhere (although it should be highlighted this is strictly anecdotal, reflecting the views of some stakeholders), it has been suggested that in ECEC employers may at times be encouraging staff members to upskill to a higher qualification to help the organisation meet its ratio requirements – implying the drive to enrol may not always be held entirely by students themselves. Similar scenarios where the motivation to enrol may not be fully held by students include where students may be recommended to obtain a certain qualification to meet income support mutual obligation requirements; in such cases possibly more out of convenience than genuine interest. As with the previous point, it is important to note these are likely rare occurrences but should nonetheless be considered amid the wider range of issues discussed in this paper.

Younger students, too, may sometimes find themselves enrolling in qualifications – having, for instance, been encouraged by a teacher in a secondary school setting – without fully realising yet what they may truly want to do with their lives. Examples of this were cited by training provider stakeholders as occurring in ECEC related programs, but also, to a considerable extent, in sports and recreation qualifications (reflecting the very young average age of SIS enrolees, as discussed in *Issues Paper 1*).

3.4.2 Potential impact of fee-free offerings

Some stakeholders suggested that students who enrol via schemes facilitating access to free or highly subsidised VET programs may potentially not have the same level of 'buy-in' as full-fee paying counterparts. While this may possibly be true for some students, analysis of realised completion rates in Victoria – where some HumanAbility qualifications delivered by TAFEs have been freely available since January 2019 – suggests a more nuanced interpretation is warranted. As shown in Figure 5, below, the onset of the scheme had inconsistent impacts on the selected qualifications examined.

Figure 5: Completion rates in Victoria (after 4 years), TAFEs and private RTOs, selected qualifications that became fee-free at TAFE in 2019[11]



For instance, while completion rates increased in some qualifications among cohorts enrolling in the first year of the scheme, in several cases there was a drop-off the following year. At the same time, many other, broader, factors may have been in play (including, very likely, the impact of COVID-19). Indeed, in several of the qualifications in which Victorian TAFEs suffered a decline in the completion rate among the 2020 enrolling cohort, a similar trend occurred among their private RTO counterparts. A hypothesis that the risk of disengagement is likely linked to a far wider range of factors than simply who is paying for the qualification is further supported by evidence from the student survey. Although a small sample, it is noted that of those who reported having considered dropping out of their current studies, only around half (53.0%) had enrolled under the Fee-Free TAFE scheme.

[11] National Centre for Vocational Education Research (2025), DataBuilder ('VET Qualification Completion Rates' tab)

Accordingly, despite the potential lessons that might be learned from such analyses, it remains too early to assess the impact on completions of the expansion of fully subsidised TAFE programs by the Commonwealth Government in 2023. As will all student groups, it is likely that those enrolling under Fee-Free TAFE, or similar state and territory-based schemes, will benefit from initiatives aimed at ensuring they remain engaged and supported through to completion.

3.5 Challenges with mandatory work placements

Many stakeholders singled out the mandatory work placement experience (for qualifications where this is required) as a part of the learner journey where disengagement can often occur. We have already noted, in Section 3.2, how it can typically be during placement that a student is first exposed to the true realities of day-to-day work in the care and support sectors. As such, the placement experience can be at once both richly rewarding and potentially alienating for students. Indeed, while almost one in five students surveyed (19.2%) reported having experienced challenges with their mandatory work placements, 66.0% of those who have a mandatory placement requirement said their experience on placement made it 'more likely' that they will complete their qualification. These findings point to both the importance and, at times, difficulty of providing students with a placement experience that achieves its intended aims.

As stakeholders reported, the more negative side of this ledger includes the reality that – as well intentioned as both training providers and employer partners may be – it is virtually impossible to offer all students their ideal placement. Even in qualifications where the setting and type of mandatory work placement experience is largely predictable, students may become disheartened by logistical factors like the time they are expected to arrive on site, or the length of the placement schedule itself. A problem reported by several stakeholders involved in qualifications with broader job outcomes, such as allied health services/assistance, is that students may simply not identify with the specific setting or scope of practice to which they are exposed; risking a level of disillusionment or alienation from the broader qualification. Such barriers are, of course, exacerbated in regional and remote areas, where there simply may not be enough employer partners available to select from. The fact that the mandatory work placement is typically unpaid can also contribute to wider financial stresses arising from the cost of study.

Students can also become dissatisfied with the placement experience when they do not receive the expected level of mentoring and hands-on training support. Instead, stakeholders suggested that some students have spoken of being effectively utilised as 'just another employee', at times left to undertake regular duties because of employers' own issues with workforce shortages. While examples of this blurring of the lines between placement and regular work duties were cited as occurring in the ECEC sector – including one where a student on placement was asked to work unsupervised because of a regular staff member's absence – other cases of misused students on placement have occurred in the health sector (see Section 4.4 for a case study of how a training provider proactively responded to such a scenario).

3.6 Acute challenges faced by remote and regional stakeholders

The challenges presented above are often felt even more strongly by stakeholders and students in communities outside metropolitan centres. Geographic isolation results in obvious pressures – ranging from the cost and lack of availability of support services, to the scarcity of in-person training and placement opportunities.

Often there can be a cultural dimension to these barriers too. One stakeholder, from a training provider delivering children's education and care qualifications, spoke of the profound challenges in keeping very remote learners fully engaged through to completion. Barriers range in severity and nature, from the tangible – such as a lack of, or unreliable, internet coverage – to the emotional and social – for instance, navigating spousal opposition to women seeking to gain skills and employment. In light of these obstacles, the training provider has enacted strategies to boost engagement, including paying for students to travel to and stay for short periods on-campus to undertake in-person learning and placements. Such work, though, requires considered planning and financial resources. To reduce the chance of students being socially or personally pressured out of taking up these in-person learning opportunities – at once potentially increasing the risk of disengagement from study and incurring irretrievable financial costs to the provider – staff have seen their workload increase to also play a role nurturing and developing a community of learners who sustain and encourage one another.

In spite of these barriers, because of this commitment the training provider has had great success in achieving completions; ultimately serving remote communities by growing the pool of educated childcare workers where such growth is arguably most critical. Nonetheless, these complications highlight the severe difficulties faced by providers of training to remote and very remote learners.

Broader challenges faced by such students, extending also to others who engage fully with online delivery modes regardless of where they live, is the unique challenge of being assessed on practical competencies without being able to demonstrate these skills in person. While such a barrier can arise in every qualification under HumanAbility's remit, stakeholders referred to examples such as units on providing individual support, and infection prevention, as cases in point.

3.7 Wider systemic barriers

Organisational stakeholders raised several other broader elements that, in their experience, may be contributing to student disengagement across care and support VET qualifications. These range in their scope and dimension, variously relating to the lack of barriers to entry in several of our sectors, the preference of some employers to favour higher education students for placements over VET enrolees, and the rigidity of recognition of prior learning (RPL) frameworks making it difficult for students to gain credit for previously acquired skills and knowledge.

3.7.1 Qualification not always needed to enter workforce

With several HumanAbility sectors not having a formal entry requirement to join the workforce, many training provider stakeholders noted that students – regardless of whether or not they are struggling with study or aspects in their personal life – may often realise the qualification they are working towards is technically not needed to find a job.

Anecdotal evidence gathered in our consultations point to many cases where a student drops out after becoming aware of unqualified counterparts already working in their intended sector. In other instances, the student may themselves be encouraged by their own employer to forego the qualification and focus on their paid employment. While students may find a benefit in the short-term (for instance, removing the study-related workload), in the long term they are likely to be worse off; for instance, they may not necessarily be able to rise up pay scales linked to qualification attainment.

For trainees in sectors without minimum entry requirements (such as in parts of aged care and disability services), the trainee wage is usually lower than the minimum Award wage offered to unqualified workers. HumanAbility's Earn While You Learn research is examining the implications of this in more detail. A recent discussion paper from that project noted that even when factoring in the supplementary six-monthly Australian Apprenticeship Trainee Support Payment, a trainee undertaking the Certificate III in Individual Support (even if on the highest trainee wage, available to students five or more years out of school) would not receive the same wage as an unqualified worker in the sector.[12]

3.7.2 Reputation/status of VET compared to other education pathways

Another challenge is that at times VET students are perceived as less desirable than students from higher education qualifications. Stakeholders related to VET nursing qualifications, for instance, noted they sometimes struggle to find their students placements in settings that prefer students enrolled in Bachelor programs. When extended to cover actual job prospects for graduates, such perceptions can have an impact on students' own levels of motivation to continue in the VET offering, sometimes leading to them considering transferring (where possible) to university-based qualifications. To help counter these reputational challenges, there may be scope to better promote the fact that VET training providers frequently have smaller classes than university programs, leading to the provision of significant support for students.

3.7.3 Challenges associated with RPL

Stakeholders also suggested that, across all three training packages, problems with RPL frameworks can sometimes exacerbate feelings of disillusionment with training material. Some students with diverse personal and professional experiences, for example, may find some units overly generic or simplistic. This factor invokes the aforementioned difficulty of designing and delivering training material that caters to the type of diverse learner cohort to which the VET system is targeted. At the same time, it suggests that RPL frameworks – which should ideally reduce the incidence of students being expected to demonstrate competency in areas they have already in their earlier lives – may not always be working as effectively as they could. Of course, crafting an RPL system that is at once consistent, accountable, and flexible is no small ask. However, achieving a compromise whereby eligible students can have broader experience and knowledge recognised alongside their academic achievements could potentially go some way to boosting engagement and keeping highly capable individuals within the VET system and our associated sectors.

[12] HumanAbility (2026), Discussion Paper: Identifying targeted strategies to address structural barriers to the use of apprenticeship pathways in the aged care and disability sectors, p.13

4 Ideas, strategies, and opportunities shared by stakeholders

The consultations revealed stakeholders have been acting to address these problems in many and varied ways. This section details such strategies, drawing out specific examples where possible. Also presented in this section are ideas for change – ranging in their scope from localised to systemic. These areas of opportunity, alongside consideration of the issues covered in Section 3, will inform the development, testing, and refining of recommendations; to be released in a final report by the end of June 2026.

4.1 Intentional pre-enrolment screening and information-sharing

As noted previously, student disillusionment (and subsequent dropping-out) can frequently be triggered by the shock felt when the realities of working in the care and support sectors – often first encountered during participation in practical teaching components of VET programs – become clear. Having identified this, many training providers have introduced more thorough information-sharing protocols during the pre-enrolment stage; moving beyond what might be considered tokenistic promotion of programs and the underlying sectors more broadly. The consultations revealed that other stakeholders, seeking to identify and address early indicators of potential later disengagement, have amplified the screening of prospective students around their motivations, understanding of course requirements, suitability for study and employment, and academic capabilities. Section 4.1 presents examples of these strategies, as shared by stakeholders in our consultations.

It should be noted, however, that the types of screening and information-sharing discussions outlined here may not always be viable options for all training providers. For multi-campus institutions (such as many regional TAFE networks), where enrolments are managed by centralised portals, there is often limited scope to be able to engage directly with students at or prior to the point of enrolment. In such circumstances, alternative approaches may be prudent, such as shifting these discussions to the very earliest stages of student commencement of qualifications; at the very least, prior to census dates.

It is also important to highlight that work being undertaken by training providers to screen, and provide clear information to, students prior to enrolment need not be reductive or limiting in scope. Should a student come to realise that the qualification, or the sector it acts as a pathway into, is not necessarily the right fit for them, these discussions become a perfect opportunity to consider alternatives.

4.1.1 Ensuring awareness of the realities of our sectors, and alignment with students' motivations, interests, and readiness

Examples of such an approach include training providers actively engaging with high school students to educate them about possible VET options – in some cases, inviting students to their campus prior to enrolment to familiarise themselves with the course content, learning environment, and teaching staff. Another case involved a telephone call made by a member of one training provider's education support team to each prospective student who had expressed interest in a qualification. In this call, the staff member outlines, and confirms understanding of, some of the 'less glamorous' aspects of working in certain care and support sectors. Being clear about some of these duties later expected of students – for

instance, responsibilities related to bodily functions in the personal care context – can be very productive in reducing the likelihood of later disillusionment or shock.

This reality extends across all HumanAbility training packages. In qualifications in human (community) services, for instance, several stakeholders highlighted the value of being very clear about the potentially confronting nature of parts of the course material. As invoked in Section 3.3.1, this can be especially important in the context of students for whom personal experience of issues such as trauma, mental ill health, or substance abuse serve as direct motivating factors behind their enrolment – yet could, if not introduced early and clearly enough (including the ways in which understanding of the subject matter will be assessed), also be triggering under certain circumstances, potentially leading to disengagement from study. In this context, one training provider shared how they have achieved noticeable results from having encouraged students to, at commencement of their mental health qualifications, co-create an individualised self-care plan with student support staff (shared also with the course coordinator).

The consultations uncovered many other forms of similar pre-enrolment discussions held by training providers, including ones that delve into students' underlying motivations to study a given qualification. Without specifically knowing the 'why' behind an enrolment, getting a sense of how truly engaged and driven a prospective student is can be difficult to gauge. As discussed in Section 3.4.1, students can sometimes be pushed into enrolling in a qualification by others (employment agencies, relatives, employers, to name a few); not always being driven by their own passions or interests. As discussed above, acting early – such as, if needed, redirecting a student into a more suitable qualification – could play a large role in contributing to a completion down the line, rather than potential disengagement.

4.1.2 Being clear and upfront about the demands of study earlier in the student journey

For some training providers, this type of pre-enrolment engagement can double as an opportunity to ensure that key logistical expectations of study are not only communicated but actually understood, as and when they are most needed. After all, as several stakeholders reported, even if such course requirements (for example, class absence thresholds, clearances or approvals needed, or the likely time students will be expected at placements) are shared with students via email or other written communication methods early on, too often it is not until students raise concerns well after commencement that it becomes clear they may have never acknowledged them in the first place.

While this form of synchronous engagement can be both timely and costly, many noted the trade-off between cost and benefit often skews toward the latter. As one training provider stakeholder explained, "I think [the staff who had to make such calls with students] found it overwhelming, but they did mention that they had a fair few people that went 'oh, actually, no I don't want to do this.'" In this light, the prospective students who did not proceed through to the formal enrolment process, and who were otherwise arguably far more likely than others to drop out at some point, did not end up contributing to lowering the organisation's completion rate.

4.1.3 Screening students early to assess and identify LLN capacity and supports needed

The pre-enrolment stage of the student journey has also emerged as a critical point during which key capabilities, including those related to LLN, can be assessed. As detailed earlier, difficulties arising from students' inability to comprehend certain aspects of program content – such as numeracy skills needed to succeed in units within health qualifications – can trigger or compound feelings of disillusionment that can

potentially lead to disengagement. Proactive screening of students' underlying skill levels in these and other core educational areas has proven to be highly beneficial for many stakeholders. If the identification of learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, takes months to formalise, it may be too late in the piece to respond with adequate supports and tailoring of course material, the student possibly already having disengaged.

One TAFE stakeholder delivering human (community) services qualifications shared how a key step they have taken in recent years involves a semi-structured interview with new students prior to commencement. The provider uses this discussion to gauge whether a prospective student enrolling in a higher AQF level, such as a Diploma program, may perhaps be more suited to entering a Cert III or IV qualification, depending on, for instance, their self-professed ability to compose an essay or undertake research at a high enough standard.

Another training provider stakeholder reported a similar use of pre-commencement LLN screening, although in this instance one undertaken without the need for a staff member to be actively involved. Even prior to enrolment, students completing a questionnaire matching them to the qualification best suited to their interests and career objectives were prompted to undertake a short quiz designed to assess their LLN capacities – giving the training provider useful information on where the student was at.

This screening of prospective students becomes even more critical in the context of enrolment limits. As one stakeholder observed, in cases where the first 30 enrolments into a program's intake are automatically allocated a place, not being proactive about assessing each student's actual motivation or capacity may result in many "students missing out, [who] would have actually been good and stayed" for the duration of the program.

Overall, many stakeholders noted that work being undertaken by training providers to screen, and provide clear information to, students prior to enrolment need not be reductive or limiting in scope. Should a student come to realise that a certain qualification, or the sector it acts as a pathway into, is not necessarily the right fit for them, these discussions become a perfect opportunity to consider and outline alternatives. Where possible, the priority should be to most effectively assign students to suitable courses, rather than limiting them from accessing training at all.

While such efforts are equally important across all our sectors, one stakeholder who delivers mental health qualifications put it especially poignantly, noting that for a student who may have already had to overcome many obstacles in their life, finding the right qualification represents a profound responsibility to help them avoid "another unsuccessful attempt at something." Such framing emphasises how despite completions being a core issue for organisations themselves, at the heart of the problem we are seeking to address are students themselves; all of whom are turning to the VET system to better themselves, their families, and their communities.

4.2 Actively identifying, and responding to, potential disengagement

Once students are enrolled, ideally fully aware of their course expectations and with any required academic supports in place, critical ongoing work must be undertaken by training providers to keep an eye out for risks of disengagement from study.

Some stakeholders noted how fostering strong relationships between teaching staff and students is a priority in this context; particularly in (but not limited to) scenarios involving wholly online teaching delivery modes. To help foster such dynamics, some training providers encourage students to reach out to teachers whenever needed, providing them with contact details not only for their direct trainers and assessors but often all teachers within a given subject area.

Of course, while the ideal situation is one where students feel comfortable sharing when they may be struggling for whatever reason, this is not always the case. More practical strategies need to be in place. One increasingly common approach taken by training providers to identifying when students may be at risk of disengaging or dropping out is to monitor learning management system (LMS) frameworks such as Moodle, Edmodo, and Blackboard. Lack of activity, such as logging on or reading required material, over certain or repeated periods of time may indicate to teaching staff that a student could benefit from a check-in, usually by themselves in the first instance. Once again, while important for all student cohorts, such a strategy has particular value for wholly online learners, where teaching staff are unable to notice possible changes in mood or motivation in face-to-face scenarios. Such discussions, typically informal and genuinely inquisitive rather than accusatory, in many cases lead to the student being referred to support services who may be able to assist further. These supports may take many forms, linking back to the various complexities students have, as covered above in Section 3.1.

Interestingly, and likely depending on the relative size of their student cohorts, some training providers have begun utilising artificial intelligence (AI) to monitor LMS frameworks for such potential flags for disengagement. In some of these cases, AI is even being used to help (although with human input) generate an initial message sent to students. Crucially, any subsequent action – including the identification of specific support services to which students could be recommended – is led by a member of staff.

4.3 Increasing awareness of the potential career pathways arising from different qualifications

Several stakeholder groups, including training providers and employers, suggested more could be done to promote the full range of occupational outcomes care and support VET students can pursue after graduation. Spotlighting such career options, including being clearer about where certain qualifications fit in students' possible pathways into and across workforces, could enhance levels of engagement and students' sense of purpose and direction while studying. A specific example raised by one stakeholder related to the SIS training package, in which the completion of qualifications in fitness, outdoor recreation, or sports coaching could open routes into a diverse range of jobs often not understood by commencing students.

In other sectors, stakeholders noted that students who may already have in mind a specific career trajectory – for instance, entering the aged care or disability sector before eventually moving into a management role – would benefit, and likely remain highly committed, if they were given greater clarity early in their study journey not just on the importance of certain qualifications, but specific elective units therein.

Relatedly, more frequent career expos – at which both prospective and currently enrolled VET students can discuss career options and pathways with training providers, industry employers, and other system

actors – were recommended by several stakeholders. Such initiatives may also serve another purpose. Making connections with passionate individuals from their target industry may help to develop students' sense of professional identity and pride, potentially insulating them from the all-too-common problem of workers within several care and support sectors feeling underappreciated.

Stakeholders also raised how important it is to clearly communicate alternative options available to students who feel a certain qualification is not quite working for them. For example, if an exit interview reveals the student still wishes to pursue a career in a similar field, informing them how completed units in the departing qualification could be used as credit in a different qualification may significantly reduce the chance that the student is lost to the VET system, or the care and support workforce, entirely.

4.4 Strengthening and improving the mandatory work placement experience

As noted above, while the mandatory work placement can often be a truly affirming experience for many students – a chance to put the skills and knowledge they are acquiring into practice in a real-world setting – for others it can become a potential point of disengagement. With a view to minimising the chance of this latter scenario, training providers shared several strategies they have adopted, as well as ideas for change.

One such idea was shared by stakeholders involved in the delivery of mental health qualifications, who suggested that increasing the length of required placement time, to closer to 120 hours, may lead to the twin benefits of providing a deeper experience for students and incentivising more employers to commit to offering placement spots. This latter point was indeed invoked by many stakeholders, who suggested that employers do not always make themselves readily available for placement opportunities. In ECEC, for instance, highly publicised breaches of child safety in recent years have, as some training provider stakeholders claimed, made many employers almost overly risk averse to allowing students into their settings.

However, while stakeholders shared a consensus view on the invaluable role of placements, some emphasised the equal importance of ensuring that the experience is relevant, appropriate, and fit for purpose – and not simply provided because it is available. In some instances, this may require ongoing evaluation and, if needed, change. In one case, a training provider discovered that a hospital hosting their health services assistance students on placement was simply using them to perform tasks in the kitchen. After reviewing the arrangement, and realising the employer was adopting an overly broad interpretation of 'health environmental services' (more usually referring to waste management, infection control, and related activities contributing to the maintenance of safe healthcare environments), the training provider ended the relationship. Such discernment should be applauded, as it constitutes a key step in ensuring students are being appropriately challenged and supported while on placement. It should also not be taken for granted that, in the context of the often limited scope of possibilities for such arrangements (particularly in regional or remote areas), such decisions to prioritise the student experience are never taken lightly.

Another, more tangible, strategy many training providers have enacted is supporting students as early as possible through the process of gaining clearances needed to engage in mandatory work placements. In

both the workshops and interviews, several stakeholders shared how surprisingly often students face obstacles pulling together the required checks (such as police or working with children checks), or in some cases not even understanding this was a requirement until well into the qualification.

4.5 Thinking creatively about training package delivery

While the content and structure of training packages is largely beyond the remit of this inquiry, it was clear from our consultations – as summarised in Section 3.3 – that students sometimes encounter issues with both the topics covered in, and overall workload required to complete, some qualifications. Stakeholders shared multiple ways in which they have acted to alleviate these obstacles, also raising some ideas for ongoing training package development work that could help enhance student engagement and ultimately have a positive impact on completions.

4.5.1 Restructuring, or clustering, the order of unit delivery

Some training providers have learned from their own experience, such as the specific points where students have disengaged and dropped out, to reshape the way they deliver qualifications. Where flexibility is possible (noting this is not always the case), units considered by some students as 'dry' – such as those focussing on compliance or regulatory settings in the sector being studied – have been pushed to latter parts of the program. In such scenarios, training providers had realised that reordering unit delivery so that more engaging material was taught first kept more students interested and, in some instances, provided deeper layers of context to the more legalistic concepts that would subsequently be covered.

Considered clustering of units has also had positive impacts. Some training providers shared, for instance, how they noticed higher levels of student engagement when they shifted unit ordering to allow for a mixture of topics and areas to be taught at the same time; rather than, say, two units covering similar material.

Another positive case study of flexible unit (and assessment) delivery involved one training provider moving to ensure that student's competencies related to certain concepts were assessed right at the end of the given unit, rather than waiting for it be assessed during the mandatory work placement. In essence, this 'opening and closing' of units resulted in students gaining a heightened sense of accomplishment, contributing to them feeling like they were making more marked progress than they might have were the assessment piece still waiting to be undertaken at a later point.

4.5.2 Exploring the potential value of 'taster' or 'bridging' courses

While stakeholders have contrasting views on the merits and pitfalls of the idea, it is noted that some did suggest in our consultations that shorter courses could potentially play a preparatory, or 'stepping stone', role in readying students for larger qualifications. Several, for instance, suggested there might be value in considering a Certificate II in Early Childhood Education and Care. Without taking a position on this matter, HumanAbility advises stakeholders that it will in 2026 be undertaking research into the role played by such short-form courses, including microcredentials, across the care and support sectors (although this inquiry will largely focus on the professional development and upskilling context, as opposed to the concept of 'taster' courses).

4.5.3 Contextualising learning materials to enhance engagement by different student cohorts

A lesser used strategy raised by stakeholders has involved learning materials being reframed to more directly target, and be made more understandable by, certain student cohorts. Staff at one training provider working almost exclusively with very remote First Nations students, for example, collaborated to contextualise teaching content into more accessible language, and saw very strong results in the process.

Another training provider achieved similar success by engaging an AI platform to convert learning materials into audio content. Again, this had a measurably noticeable impact, with analysis showing high levels of engagement with the course material in this different format. Maintaining the integrity of training packages and facilitating enhanced student engagement, such examples highlight the value of creative approaches to qualification delivery.

4.6 Enhancing engagement of remote/online students

While several of the ideas and approaches discussed above apply equally to all student cohorts, stakeholders shared other strategies that may have specific benefits for learners residing in remote communities or who otherwise are undertaking their studies fully online.

4.6.1 Using emerging technologies to facilitate experiential learning

Linked to a barrier discussed above (namely, the challenge of assessing online learners' practical skill acquisition) is a strategy several stakeholders reported having employed in recent years: using virtual reality and other emerging technologies to 'gamify' the learning experience. Such technology can be used by students to immerse themselves in, for example, a clinical setting in which they can identify and locate equipment and explain their intended usage. Applications for such programs could extend to all HumanAbility training packages, and their use may indeed increase in coming years.

4.6.2 Bringing remote students to campus-based environments for short stints

As with the case study outlined in Section 4.6, other stakeholders highlighted the benefits – where possible – of bringing remote students to a campus for a week at a time (or a similar period), potentially on multiple occasions throughout the delivery of a qualification. Meeting in-person with fellow students and TTA staff can help not just enhance feelings of connection and collaboration, but provide invaluable experience applying practical skills and knowledge, as well as a chance to demonstrate practical competencies.

Providing such opportunities is of course a costly endeavour, not to mention time-consuming logistically and practically, and is certainly not an approach made available to all training providers. To that end, some stakeholders have suggested targeted funding be provided to students and training providers, as well as potentially employer partners involved in mandatory work placement experiences linked to such visits.

4.6.3 Providing financial incentives for students to learn and work in remote areas

One highly promising case study of direct funding for students is a joint initiative being delivered by the Tasmanian Government and Early Childhood Australia.[13] The scheme will offer scholarships, tailored mentoring, and additional financial incentives to remain in the workforce after graduation in especially remote parts of the state, to up to 200 ECEC students. Early interest in the scheme has been very strong, highlighting its clear appeal. HumanAbility will be watching with interest as the program, with its emphasis on multiple strategies outlined throughout this part of the paper (including individualised support plans, the development of professional identity, networks, and purpose, and a focus on ensuring training and career pathways are sustained and consolidated in communities impacted by severe workforce shortages), unfolds.

[13] Early Childhood Australia (2025), 'Workforce Development Scholarship Program', https://eysac.com.au/scholarship/

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