

About the research

The impact of increasing university participation on the pool of apprentices

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In recent years, Australian governments have placed considerable emphasis on the importance of both university participation and undertaking an apprenticeship. This paper looks at whether there is a relationship between the two and, in particular, whether the expansion of university participation (for example, the uncapping of university undergraduate places following the Bradley Review [Bradley et al. 2008]) is likely to have an impact on the pool of those undertaking a trade apprenticeship. The authors consider certain aspects of an apprentice's background: reading and mathematics achievement at age 15 years and socioeconomic status. The potential impact of an expansion in university participation on the pool of apprentices is examined by comparing two cohorts from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY): the Y95 cohort who were in Year 9 in 1995 and the Y06 cohort who were aged 15 years in 2006.

Key messages

- The likelihood of undertaking an apprenticeship is affected by the propensity to go to university.
- Young men are less likely to undertake an apprenticeship if they are academically inclined.
- Apprenticeships are more likely to be undertaken by young men from a lower socioeconomic status background.
- LSAY shows that participation in both university and apprenticeships grew between 1995 and 2006.
- Young men who were less academically inclined and from low socioeconomic status backgrounds contributed to this growth in apprenticeships.
- The growth in university participation has come from academically lower-performing young men with a higher socioeconomic status background.

The authors note that any educational expansion (whether through apprenticeships or attendance at university) will also have an impact on that part of the population who previously were neither undertaking an apprenticeship nor going to university. They also observe that those who are in the best position to take advantage of opportunities in both apprenticeships and university places do so, irrespective of whether position is measured by mathematics and reading achievement or socioeconomic status.

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