

# Executive summary

The purpose of this paper is to provide an analysis of the impact of increasing university participation on the intake quality of apprentices. In this paper, we use two cohorts of the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), separated by 11 years, and compare male trade apprentices. In particular, we investigate whether their academic ability measured at age 15 years and their socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds have changed over this time period, and whether the increase in the probability of going to university has impacted on these characteristics.

The results from this paper show that over this 11-year period the probability of undertaking both apprenticeships and university has increased. This paper shows that, between the 1995 and 2006 cohorts, the increase in the probability of going to university impacted on the quality of apprentices unambiguously. More apprentices come from the bottom two quintiles in relation to mathematics and reading achievement. However, given the expansion of apprenticeships, there has been very little movement in the number of apprentices who have mathematics and reading achievement in the top two quintiles.

In terms of university participation, this paper also found that the expansion of higher education has resulted in a noticeable shift in the proportion of male university students in the top academic achievement quintiles.

A further finding from this paper is that with the expansion of both higher education and apprenticeships the growth in higher education has come from individuals with middle to high socioeconomic status backgrounds, whereas apprentices are likely to have come from those who have lower SES.

It should be noted, however, that apprenticeships are quite different from university places. While the government can easily increase the latter, and has by uncapping undergraduate places, the former depend on the willingness of employers to offer them. This willingness primarily depends on the labour market and the opportunity it offers in terms of activity in the trades. When we think in these terms there is a certain symmetry in the impact of expansion in both apprenticeships and student places. Those who are in the best position to take advantage of opportunities do so, irrespective of whether position is measured by mathematics and reading achievement or socioeconomic status.