

Apprenticeships in homelessness: a quantitative study

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Abstract

Training and education are acknowledged routes into employment, but they also entail risks of contemporaneous financial loss, and economic and social insecurity. This paper explores the specific risk of homelessness among apprentices and trainees, drawing on a survey conducted in South Australia in 2013. Housing has been largely overlooked by studies of the wellbeing of apprentices and trainees, and by explorations of the drivers of attrition rates that continue to plague Australia's training schemes. The data examined here reveal the high proportion of income that trainees spent on their housing; home moves motivated by the desire to reduce rental or mortgage payments; and a small proportion of learners who experienced periods of homelessness. Closer statistical analysis reveals that apprentices and trainees with past experiences of homelessness were disproportionately likely to be pursuing courses in retail and personal services, or in transport. They were also likely to be receiving Youth Allowance or AUSTUDY payments. We recommend better recording of apprentices' and trainees' housing situations and greater use of administrative data to improve our understanding and reduce the incidence of homelessness among this population.

Keywords: apprentices/trainees, homelessness, housing costs, financial stress, housing stress

Introduction

The slowing of the Australian economy over the last half decade has momentarily refocused public attention on the risk of unemployment and, if arguably less so, the economic and social plight of young people. In early 2014, unemployment among 15 to 24 year olds sits around twice the national average, whilst that of 15 to 19 years olds remains close to three times the national rate (ABS 2014; ACCI 2010).

While the causes of youth unemployment are complex and varied, those first to lose their jobs, or those encountering barriers to labour market entry, are often those least well educated or trained. Youth training and training policy in Australia have remained fraught with problems and are critiqued for failing to meet societal and economic need and skill demands (McDowell et al. 2011). Apprenticeship training has repeatedly been in the spotlight, in particular because of the continued high dropout rate among apprentices and trainees (McDowell et al. 2011; Karmel & Mlotkowski 2010a; 2010b), and the harsh economic reality of having to meet living and training expenses on an apprenticeship or traineeship award (Bittman et al. 2007; Schutz et al. 2013).

This paper explores a very specific social and personal crisis faced by a small but far from negligible fraction of trainees and apprentices: the risk of homelessness. Using data from a survey of trainees and apprentices in South Australia, we estimate the scale of the risk of homelessness for this group of young people. Homelessness among apprentices and trainees remains a largely unreported and unrecognised social phenomenon, despite its potentially adverse effects on a person's ability to continue their training. Community housing projects such as 'The house that builds people' project in Canberra,¹ recognise the social need for improving the housing situation of apprentices in a hands-on manner. In this paper, we seek to make the empirical case for paying greater attention to the housing situation of those undertaking apprenticeships and traineeships.

In the following sections, we first summarise some of the literature on youth training in Australia, its successes and challenges, and we discuss the crossover with the literature on housing instability and homelessness among young people. We then move on to introduce the specific aims and objectives of our study, before presenting our approach and the survey data generated, and discussing its strengths and weaknesses. The next section presents our survey results. The final section of this paper draws together the evidence and presents recommendations for improved housing and youth training policy and practice.

Background and literature

Who are the apprentices?

In recent years, Australia's apprentices have become an increasingly diverse group of learners, most notably with respect to their age characteristics. As recently as 1995, three in four apprenticeships and traineeships were taken up by young adults below the age of 20; by 2009, this had decreased to fewer than two in five

(NCVER 2011a; Table 3, own calculation). In the September quarter 2011, 14 per cent of current apprentices and trainees were aged 45 and over, as were 13 per cent of new apprentices and trainees (NCVER 2011b, own calculations). Just over half of all current apprentices and trainees were younger than 25 years of age (NCVER 2011b).

Not everyone who starts a traineeship or apprenticeship also completes his or her training. In fact, high course drop-out (around 48 per cent; see McDowell et al. 2011) has been a major issue for youth training in Australia for some time, posing cost burdens on training systems, as well as reducing prospects for sustained employment for those dropping out. Low apprenticeship awards have been found to be a factor contributing to course drop-out from training (Karmel & Mlotkowski 2010a; Bittman et al. 2007), alongside workplace-related causes (poor relationship with the employer/trainer), and lack of support and loss of interest in the work (McDowell et al. 2011; Snell & Hart 2008). The effect of awards has, however, not been uniform, raising drop-out rates especially in non-trade occupations, such as sales, and community and personal services, where wage premia upon completion can be minimal or indeed negative. In general, expected post-apprenticeship earnings tend to be more important in affecting completion rates than (current) training wages per se (Karmel & Mlotkowski 2010b; 2011).

Notwithstanding the primacy of post-apprenticeship earnings in regards to completion rates, low earnings during traineeships or apprenticeships can pose a significant risk to apprentices and their training activities. Low earnings during training acutely affect current living conditions, as trainees and apprentices manage on limited financial resources. Apprentices' and trainees' expenses include many direct costs associated with training. These often compete with expenses associated with leisure activities retained from pre-apprenticeship times as young people seek to maintain their friendship networks. Reports on apprenticeships and the risk of drop-out do not typically capture the broader picture of living as an apprentice and, most notably, lack consideration of housing stability (NCVER 2010; Karmel & Mlotkowski 2011). Likewise, reports on homelessness typically fail to capture information adequately about apprenticeship and other educational pathways (Chamberlain & Mackenzie 2008; Homelessness Taskforce 2008), and their risk of homelessness.

The living arrangements of young learners in Australia

The living arrangements of young Australians have undergone a transformation in recent decades. Young adults' extended education and the resultant delay in financial independence and self-sufficiency have increased the age until which young adults remain living with their parents (ABS 2009; Mission Australia 2011). Many young people commencing work-related training nonetheless choose to leave the parental home, or are forced to do so as a result of travel-to-work distances that make daily commutes between parental home and work difficult; others leave as a result of parental conflict, including physical or sexual abuse (Crane et al. 1996; Rosenthal et al. 2006; Martijn & Sharpe 2006). Those who find themselves living away from the parental home typically face the challenge

of meeting high costs of renting, with or without the financial backing of their parents (Burke et al. 2002a; Schutz et al. 2013). Individuals and households on low and moderate incomes have increasingly been 'squeezed out of home ownership and both private and social rental' (Vitis et al. 2010: 1) as wages have failed to keep up with rising house prices and rentals, and eligibility criteria for social housing have been tightened, while affordable housing stock has decreased (Yates 2011). In a study using 1999 data, about one in five job-seeking young adults cited housing difficulties as a 'major factor' in previously abandoning tertiary studies (Burke et al. 2002b). Almost 40 per cent of students in receipt of Rent Assistance from the Commonwealth Government stated that receipt of this support had been a major factor in their decision in favour of studying.

Low income and a tight, often expensive housing market can combine to cause an increased risk of housing instability and, ultimately, homelessness. A large proportion of Australia's homeless people are young adults or adolescents. On census night 2006, almost one third – about 32,000 – of all homeless people were aged 12–24 years (Muir et al. 2009). A report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW 2011), using Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) data, concluded that about four per cent of SAAP clients aged 18 or over had been in post-secondary education or training prior to receiving SAAP support in 2010–11 (AIHW 2011: 29). Almost half of those people – 48 per cent – were living transiently with friends and relatives – typically understood as examples of 'secondary homelessness'.² In an earlier study, MacKenzie and Chamberlain (2008) had estimated that, in 2006, about 1,800 of Australia's almost 22,000 homeless youth aged between 12 and 18 had been TAFE students.

More recent statistics about the receipt of the Youth Allowance (YA) provided by the Australian Government Department of Human Services (DHS), equally illustrate the risk of housing instability among young people. YA is a means-tested benefit for 16–24 year olds studying full-time, undertaking a full-time Australian Apprenticeship, or looking for full-time work. A variant of YA is the YA-UTLAH: the Allowance paid to those for whom it is deemed 'Unreasonable to Live at Home'. This unreasonableness is defined as resulting from 'extreme family breakdown (other than normal parent/adolescent conflict)', 'serious risk of your physical or mental health if you continue to live at home', or if parents or caregivers 'cannot provide a suitable home as they do not have stable accommodation' (CYA 2013). In August 2012, 17 per cent of all YA recipient apprentices – 761 in total – received the YA-UTLAH, down from around 25 per cent in previous years.³ Just over a third of all YA-UTLAH recipients were living in New South Wales (36 per cent), while around a quarter were based in Victoria (27 per cent) or Queensland (22 per cent). Six per cent of YA-UTLAH recipients lived in South Australia. These statistics represent significant youth cohorts who cannot rely on parental support to avoid or overcome the housing-related stressors that contribute to housing instability and risks of homelessness.

For those affected, episodes of homelessness can entail not only adverse social, physical and emotional effects, but also long-term problems in work and labour

market participation as a result of interrupted or incomplete training and education. Conversely, housing security and stability have practical merits in that they increase opportunities for, and probabilities of, obtaining and retaining employment (Dupuis & Thorns 1998; Mavromaras et al. 2012).

Study objectives and approach

The present research explores the prevalence of homelessness among apprentices and trainees, focusing on those in South Australia and using new survey data collected for this purpose. Specifically, the research sought to record (i) current housing arrangements of apprentices and trainees and (ii) past experiences of homelessness during traineeships or apprenticeships. To address these issues, the study adopted a mixed method approach that included stakeholder interviews (largely private and third-sector youth training providers and business organisations), focus groups and one-to-one interviews with apprentices, an online survey of members of the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) network, a telephone survey of a sample of providers of the Australian Apprenticeship Mentoring Program (AAMP) and, finally, a survey of apprentices and trainees. The current paper focuses on the analysis and findings of the latter survey, adding new statistical evidence.

Survey of apprentices and trainees in South Australia

In March 2013, 3,000 apprentices and trainees who were registered at the time or during the previous 12 months in vocation and educational training (VET) courses in South Australia (SA) were invited to take part in a brief survey regarding their living arrangements. The survey asked about the type of accommodation in which these apprentices and trainees were living, whether they were living independently or with others, and how much they spent on their accommodation. The survey also specifically asked apprentices and trainees about accommodation arrangements when they were away from their homes for block training, that is, intensive class-based sessions held on campus.

The survey was facilitated by the South Australian Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST). DFEEST maintained the state's register of apprentices and trainees. In line with regulations protecting the identity of apprentices and trainees, and the confidentiality of the research, DFEEST prepared a survey sample on behalf of the researchers, drawing a random sample of 1,000 apprentices and 1,000 trainees who had been registered on SA VET courses in February 2013. An additional sample of 500 former apprentices and 500 former trainees who had cancelled or withdrawn from such courses in the previous 12 months was also randomly selected. As at 8 February 2013, 11,738 apprentices and 28,761 trainees were registered in VET courses in SA, while 5,387 apprentices and trainees had cancelled or withdrawn from their courses in the preceding 12 months.

Past and present apprentices were invited to complete the survey online. In addition, half of the group of current and past apprentices were also sent a paper

copy of the survey questionnaire, alongside a reply paid envelope. Reminder letters to those who had not yet returned their questionnaires or participated online were issued in late April 2013, with a deadline for participation of 10 May. Again, this work was undertaken by DFEEST. Conscious of the challenges associated with surveying apprentices and trainees, survey participants were offered the incentive to be included in a draw for a tablet computer.

Two hundred and twenty-one (221) apprentices and trainees participated in the survey, giving a response rate of 7.4 per cent. Amongst the respondents were 106 current apprentices (response rate: 10.6 per cent), 81 current trainees (8.1 per cent), 21 past (i.e., cancelled or withdrawn) apprentices (4.2 per cent), and 13 past trainees (2.6 per cent). Unfortunately, it was not possible to establish how many of the non-returns resulted from out-dated address information that was particularly likely to have adversely affected the survey of past apprentices and past trainees. More generally, this survey, which sought to measure the prevalence of homelessness among learners, suffered from having to rely on surveying people with known addresses. It was thus very likely to miss an unknown number of apprentices and trainees who were no longer living at their address, including some who might have been homeless at the time. Moreover, youth workers participating in the qualitative part of this study told us that young homeless people, especially young men, were typically reluctant to talk about their experiences and, for this reason, would have been less likely to participate in this survey. Our own efforts to engage young men with previous homelessness episodes in this study confirmed this. Both caveats imply that this survey was most likely to under-estimate the full extent of the homelessness risk among apprentices and trainees in South Australia.

Survey responses were weighted to reflect the sex, age and vocational characteristics of the original sample frame (see Appendix A for details on the weighting). Whilst low, the response rate was not atypical for a survey of this type, as colleagues at DFEEST also confirmed. Post-program monitoring surveys conducted by the Department of Employment (formerly DEEWR) of its Job Services Australia and Disability Employment Services initiatives typically achieve a response rate of no more than 25 per cent (AIHW 2013). These surveys are typically better resourced than our survey was and include, for instance, telephone follow-up. Compared with our inclusion of past trainees and apprentices, the DoE surveys are conducted much sooner after program participation – about 3 months after participating in employment services.

This said, low response rates risk bias especially where non-response is not random, that is, when those not responding differ markedly in their characteristics or experiences from those who do participate in the survey. Where a low response rate also results in small case numbers, the robustness of statistical analyses may be reduced. While measures of statistical significance can help to ascertain the latter, weighting of the response sample can seek to correct for response bias. To do so, various weights were constructed and tested for their ability to match the response sample to the initial sample of 2000 current apprentices and trainees.

DFEEST was able to provide the researchers with simple cross-tabulations of the sex, age (under 25, or older) and type of apprenticeship or traineeship of those in the sample, which were used to develop sample weights (see Appendix A). In the absence of more detailed information about the sample population – notably cell frequencies across the three variables – the match remained imperfect, in particular with respect to the age distribution among apprentices and the sex distribution among trainees. Importantly, however, weighting improved the match of courses attended, in particular by trainees. As will be seen later in this paper, regression analysis found that it was course type rather than age or sex that was most strongly associated with the risk of homelessness. For this reason, weighted data was preferred to unweighted data for the descriptive analysis. Moreover, weights that simultaneously, if imperfectly, corrected for sex, age and course bias, were preferred over weights that only corrected for one or two of these variables, as they generated the best match across the three indicators.

Findings

In this section, we report the main results from our research, starting with descriptive statistics profiling apprentices and trainees in South Australia captured in this survey, before turning to a more detailed statistical analysis of apprentices and trainees with past homelessness episodes. The small number of responses inevitably restricts the scope of some of the data analyses, recording many findings as statistically non-significant even when large in scale. Regardless of this caveat, we report these results where they are critical for describing and understanding the housing situation of young people in training. In some instances, we report the absolute number of responses to survey questions alongside percentage response rates to acknowledge that these statistics were based on small case numbers.

Because of their distinct characteristics, we analysed current apprentices and current trainees separately. Past apprentices and past trainees, however, were combined into one group and briefly examined for key information about housing and homelessness. Because of their small numbers, no formal analysis of the survey returns of past students was undertaken, although they were included in the regression analysis reported below to increase its statistical robustness.

Descriptive analysis

Current apprentices and trainees in South Australia captured in the survey differed on some key demographic characteristics and vocational course choices. Both apprentices and trainees were, in the majority, male, but this was much more the case with respect to the former than the latter: while 93 per cent of current apprentices were male, almost two-thirds of the trainees were (63 per cent; Table 1). Trainees also tended to be older than apprentices: 69 per cent of current trainees were 25 years of age or older, compared with 29 per cent of current apprentices. The mean age of apprentices was 26 years (median: 20), while the mean age of trainees was 35 years (median: 34). The youngest apprentice in the survey was 16 years of age and the oldest was 66. The youngest

trainee was 15 and the oldest 60 years of age. Reflecting these age differences, the majority of current apprentices were single and never married (68 per cent; compared with 27 per cent of trainees), while half of current trainees (50 per cent) were married (compared with 23 per cent of apprentices).

Table 1. Current apprentices and trainees in SA – sex, age, vocation

	Apprentices %	Trainees %
Male	93.3	63.0
Female	6.7	37.0
>=24 years	71.2	30.9
25+ years	28.8	69.1
Agri-/Horticulture	0	6.0
Building Trades	23.1	3.6
Business & Management	0	33.7
Retail & Personal Services, Transport	9.6	31.3
Social & Medical Services	0	8.4
Technical & Manufacturing Trades	62.5	3.3
Other	4.8	13.3
N (unweighted)	106	81

Current apprentices surveyed were predominantly studying technical and manufacturing or building trades (86 per cent); while current trainees included in the survey were, in particular, attending courses in business and management, retail, personal services, or transport (65 per cent).

Living arrangements

Housing differed markedly between apprentices and trainees, again quite likely reflecting differences in age and also partnering. Thus, whereas 61 per cent of apprentices were living with their parents, this was true for only 27 per cent of trainees (Table 2). Trainees were more likely than apprentices to be living in accommodation that they owned and typically shared with a partner: 46 per cent of trainees did so, compared with 22 per cent of apprentices. Apprentices (13 per cent) and trainees (17 per cent) were similarly likely to be renting their accommodation, either by themselves, with partners, or with others. A fraction of apprentices reported squatting without paying rent (1 per cent).

Renting and home ownership

Even when living with parents or other family relations, apprentices and trainees typically paid for or contributed towards the cost of their accommodation: 39 per cent of apprentices were paying rent to parents or other family, as were 11 per cent of trainees. Whereas only 2 per cent of apprentices owned their property outright and 21 per cent were paying off a mortgage, the respective statistics for trainees who reported higher levels of home ownership were 11 per cent

and 38 per cent. A further 11 per cent of apprentices and 18 per cent of trainees paid rent to a landlord. Twenty-three per cent of apprentices and 17 per cent of trainees lived rent-free, while a further two per cent of apprentices and one per cent of trainees paid rent to a friend.

Table 2. Type of current accommodation, apprentices and trainees, SA

	Apprentices %	Trainees %
With parent(s) at home	61.2	26.8
Rented accommodation – with partner	5.8	7.3
Rented accommodation – shared (other than with partner)	3.9	6.1
Rented accommodation - by yourself	2.9	3.7
Owned accommodation – with partner	22.3	46.3
Owned accommodation – shared (other than with partner)	0	1.2
Owned accommodation - by yourself	1.0	4.9
Squatting (not paying rent)	1.0	0
Other	1.9	3.7
N (unweighted)	106	81

Rooms per person

Measured in terms of the number of rooms, trainees lived in smaller accommodation on average, reporting a median of 4.9 rooms available to them for exclusive or shared use, compared with 5.4 rooms available to apprentices. The mean number of rooms available to a trainee was 0.69, compared with 0.78 in the case of apprentices. Neither statistics were significantly different between the two groups. However, both were markedly below the estimated Australian average of about 2 rooms per person (OECD 2011). Trainees were also less likely than apprentices to have exclusive use of a room: whereas 34 per cent of trainees said they had no room for their exclusive use, the same was true for 15 per cent of apprentices.

Incomes, costs of housing, costs of living

Mean mortgage or rent payments per week amounted to \$174 (in 2013 AU\$) for apprentices and \$243 for trainees. Median weekly payments of \$100 for apprentices and \$246 for trainees indicate that accommodation costs were skewed towards the lower end of the distribution in the case of apprentices, but towards the higher end in the case of trainees. Information about income was available for 73 apprentices and 77 trainees. With reported mean incomes of \$627 per week for apprentices (median: \$600) and \$654 for trainees (median: \$747), apprentices spent about 27 per cent of their income on rent or mortgage payments (median: 17 per cent), whereas trainees spent about 38 per cent (median: 31). The above statistics for trainees were somewhat inflated by the inclusion of a few very high values of rent or mortgage as a percentage of income of trainees. Excluding those exceeding 100 per cent, the mean decreased to 33 per cent, whereas the median remained at 31 per cent. All these estimates excluded

amounts for Youth Allowance or AUSTUDY payment received by nine (five per cent) respondents, of whom only five had reported the amount (ranging from \$45 to \$350) received.

By comparison, average full-time adult weekly earnings in South Australia reported in the 2012 Year Book Australia amounted to \$1,184.20, dropping across Australia to \$559 for the youngest group of full-time employees aged 15 to 19 years (ABS 2012a: 302–309). No breakdown for South Australia was reported by the ABS (2012a). Other sources indicate that, across Australia, owners with a mortgage spend an average of 18 per cent of the average gross income on housing costs (including repaying the principal outstanding on the loan); while renters from private landlords spend about 20 per cent; renters from state and territory housing authorities expend about 19 per cent of the gross income on housing costs (ABS 2013). Thirty per cent expenditure of gross income on housing is commonly used as an indicator of ‘housing stress’ among low-income households (AHURI 2014).

Financial stress

We asked apprentices and trainees whether they had sought help in the last 12 months, or whether they had been unable to pay bills or had gone without food or heat in their home ‘because they had been “short of money”’. Close to a quarter (23 per cent) of apprentices and a fifth (21 per cent) of trainees reported having had to seek help from friends or family in the last 12 months because of financial problems. About a fifth of apprentices (19 per cent) and one-sixth of trainees (15 per cent) had been unable to pay car registration or insurance, while a sixth of both apprentices and trainees (14 per cent; 15 per cent respectively) could not pay their telephone, gas, or electricity bills. Between five and six per cent of apprentices and trainees had been unable to pay their mortgage or rent on time; or had gone without meals (seven per cent of apprentices and trainees) as a result of their financial problems.

Home moves

The majority of apprentices and trainees had either always lived at their current address or had lived there since before they commenced their apprenticeships or traineeships. However, 23 per cent of apprentices (unweighted N=26) and 11 per cent of trainees (unweighted N=14) had moved to their current address during the course of or just before their studies began. In some small proportion of instances, these moves had been motivated by the need or desire to be closer to the place of work: 21 per cent of apprentices and 20 per cent of trainees who changed address had done so for that reason. Four per cent of home moves by apprentices were driven by the wish to be closer to the place of training.

As was noted earlier, trainees spent on average 38 per cent of their earnings on paying for accommodation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, 20 per cent of trainees who had moved home had done so because they wanted to reduce their mortgage or rent payments. This compared with eight per cent of apprentices moving home for the same reason; in addition, one in eight apprentices (12.5 per cent) returned to his or her parental home.

Living without permanent address

Survey respondents were asked whether, since beginning their apprenticeship or traineeship, and other than during block training, they had ever been without a permanent place to live. Ten per cent of apprentices (unweighted N=11) and six per cent of trainees (unweighted N=8) reported such episodes since starting their VET course. Typically, these apprentices and trainees ended up staying with relatives. Seven of the 11 apprentices (64 per cent, unweighted) who had experienced episodes without a permanent address reported having done so, while a further five (45 per cent) had stayed with friends. Likewise, two of the eight trainees (25 per cent, unweighted) who had reported episodes of living without a permanent address had spent these periods with relatives, while another two (25 per cent, unweighted) had spent them with friends. While these apprentices appeared to have arranged comparatively stable and secure temporary accommodation, three of the 11 (27 per cent) apprentices without a permanent address in the past reported to have lived in caravans or to have slept rough on the streets. One apprentice reported staying in a boarding house or hostel.

In total, and using weighted data, we estimate that about eight per cent of apprentices and trainees had experienced homelessness whilst undergoing their training. If those who were able to return to live with their parents or who found shelter with other relatives are excluded, this statistic decreases to about three per cent and identifies the proportion of apprentices and trainees who stayed with friends ('couch surfing': see McLaughlin 2012), in a caravan, a boarding house or hostel, or slept rough. These percentages are subject to some uncertainty as a result of the complex survey design, heterogeneity within the sampled population, and low response rates. The statistics should therefore be read as merely indicative of a homelessness risk among apprentices and trainees. They are also likely to underestimate the full extent of homelessness among apprentices and trainees since, as discussed earlier, our sampling would have excluded apprentices and trainees with no permanent address at the time of the study. It is also reasonable to assume that previously homeless learners were less likely and less willing to participate in this survey.

Statistics from the 2011 Census of Housing and Population suggest that in South Australia 37.5 persons per 10,000 residents (all Australia: 48.9) were homeless on Census night, defined as either living in improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out; living in supported accommodation for the homeless; staying temporarily with other households; staying in boarding houses; staying in other temporary lodging; or living in 'severely' crowded dwellings (ABS 2012b). These homelessness rates varied with age groups, peaking at 65.6 per 10,000 among those aged 19–24 years. But others of similar age to those of the apprentices and trainees surveyed for this study were similarly affected by homelessness. Homelessness rates were 44.0 per 10,000 for those aged 12–18, 53.2 per 10,000 for those 25–34; before dropping to 41 per 10,000 for those aged 35–44.

Different collection and estimation methods make a direct comparison of the ABS statistics and this survey's statistics difficult. On the face of it, the differences are considerable: an average of 37.5 homeless persons per 10,000

Australian residents versus between 3 and 8 per 100, that is, 300–800 per 10,000 apprentices and trainees. But whereas the Census data refers to the Census night, the survey data refers to any time during a person's apprenticeship or traineeship. Not enough is known about the duration of homelessness during training to allow these statistics to be adjusted for their different accounting methods. This said, seen in the context of official statistics and related research referred to earlier in this contribution, these statistics suggest a notable risk of homelessness among trainees, even when compared with others in the same age group.

Regressions analysis: who are the homeless apprentices now?

So far, the descriptions have focused on the general characteristics of South Australia's apprentices and trainees identified in our survey. The survey also sought to explore factors that may be associated with the risk of homelessness among this group. Being a retrospective survey that asked participants to recall incidents of homelessness, and lacking the scope and scale for collecting detailed life history data, it would have been inappropriately ambitious to assume the capacity to identify actual causes of homelessness among apprentices. However, the data allowed us to explore the present-day training choices and living arrangements of those with past experiences of homelessness.

For this purpose, we conducted a logistic regression analysis to determine the current characteristics of young people who had experienced homelessness compared with those who had not, using the entire response sample of current and past apprentices and trainees. This sample included 28 individuals who had reported previous incidents of living without a permanent address. This analysis used unweighted data, while controlling for differences between apprentices and trainees, and current or past learners, as well as for sex and age. Only whether a person was a trainee rather than an apprentice marginally influenced the results, as trainees were slightly less likely than apprentices to have reported episodes of homelessness. The difference, however, was only statistically significant at the 10 per cent level (Table 3).

Other more strongly differentiating characteristics were the type – or industry – of the apprenticeship or traineeship, current living arrangements, the receipt of Youth Allowance or AUSTUDY, and reported incidence of financial stress.

In analysing the sector of the apprenticeship, building trades were used as a comparison. Apprentices in this sector were least likely to report past incidents of homelessness. Statistically significantly higher risks of homelessness than among those in the building trades were reported by apprentices/trainees in retail and personal services, and transport; a diverse range of other certificated courses – including in training and assessment; signwriting; occupational health and safety; warehousing; and glass production; and, albeit to a lesser degree, social and medical services.

Table 3. Odds ratios from logistic regression: experience of homelessness during apprenticeship or traineeship

Homeless	Odd ratio	Std. Err.	Statistical Significance
Trainee	-1.41	0.80	*
Cancelled apprenticeship or traineeship	1.25	0.69	*
Female	-1.16	0.83	
Age	-0.004	0.02	
Industry/Sector(Building trades)			
Retail & Personal Services, Transport	2.84	1.30	**
Social & Medical Services	3.31	1.81	*
Technical & Manufacturing Trades	1.70	1.19	
Other	3.54	1.64	**
Receipt of AUSTUDY or YA	2.16	0.86	**
Paying rent or mortgage (Paying parent/s or other family member)			
Paying friend	2.64	1.02	**
Paying landlord/estate agent	0.50	0.65	
Making mortgage payments to bank	-0.67	0.94	
Living rent-free	-0.61	0.72	
Financial stress in last 12 months	1.13	0.59	
_cons	-2.84	1.88	

Note: $\text{Chi}^2(16) = 42.30$. Prob > $\text{Chi}^2 = 0.0004$. Log likelihood = -58.452911. Pseudo $R^2 = 0.2657$. No. obs = 191
Statistical significance: ** 5% level; * 10% level

Apprentices and trainees reporting episodes of homelessness were statistically significantly more likely than others currently to receive Youth Allowance or AUSTUDY payments. They were also more likely than others currently to be paying rent to a friend rather than paying a parent or family member – which, alongside living rent-free, was the most frequent living arrangement among apprentices/trainees. Whilst outside the five per cent level of statistical significance, albeit only marginally so, people in training who had experienced homelessness were more likely to have experienced other forms of financial stress because they had been ‘short of money’ in the 12 months before the survey. This included: not being able to pay electricity, gas or telephone bills, mortgage or rent payments, car registration or insurance; not making the required minimum payment on a credit card; pawning or selling something

because of the need for cash; going without meals; being unable to heat their home; seeking financial assistance from friends or family, or from welfare or community organisations.

These episodes of financial distress appeared not to be directly associated with the amount of the training awards that apprentices/trainees received. Separate analysis of the smaller number of cases for whom income data were available failed to find a statistically significant association between, on the one hand, current income or expenditure on accommodation (gross or as a proportion of income) reported at the time of the survey and, on the other hand, past experiences of homelessness. However, we cannot be certain that income or housing expenditure at the time of the survey had been the same or at least similar to income or housing expenditure at the time when the apprentices or trainees had been homeless.

Conclusion

The survey of apprentices and trainees in South Australia provided some useful insight into the living arrangements of people attending VET courses in the state. While the survey suggested that the majority of apprentices and trainees had stable housing arrangements, typically living with parents (most apprentices and many trainees) or living in a partnered/married household and often in an owned property (particularly trainees), it also found evidence of temporary homelessness. Thus, while the majority of students appeared to be managing their housing effectively, an estimated eight per cent of apprentices/trainees in South Australia had experienced homelessness, staying with relatives, with friends, or in a boarding house or hostel, living in a caravan, or sleeping rough while being without a permanent address of their own.

Having only cross-sectional data that collected information retrospectively and at a single point in time, it was not possible to draw causal connections between training and homelessness. But our statistical analysis is able to depict the current circumstances of people with past experiences of homelessness. Although this shows no direct statistical evidence of current training awards being associated with past experiences of homelessness, apprentices/trainees who had previously been homeless did also disproportionately report having recently experienced financial distress. This was perhaps not a surprising finding given the comparative large share of earnings that apprentices and trainees in our surveys spent on housing alone, which would have limited the resources available to cover the cost of other daily necessities. Reflecting these stresses, apprentices and trainees were disproportionately likely currently to – continue to – receive state financial support, either in the form of the Youth Allowance or AUSTUDY. Whilst not further reported here, the importance of YA and AUSTUDY had been confirmed in conversations with youth workers and training providers, who participated in the qualitative part of this study. According to their accounts, many learners were unaware of the financial support that was available, so helping those experiencing or threatened by homelessness to obtain these additional funds was often a first step to addressing

a housing crisis. In their opinion, apprentices/trainees often had insufficient support – including financial resources and, in some instances, financial management skills – to pre-empt or resolve their crisis.

The regression analysis also revealed that previously homeless learners were significantly more likely than others to pay friends for their current accommodation. This highlighted the importance of peer group support alongside access to public welfare payments for sustained, more stable living conditions among apprentices and trainees.

The roles of life experiences, evolving relationships and living arrangements in buffering against housing and financial risk was illustrated by the experience of trainees. The greater prevalence of partnering and more settled social networks when compared with apprentices may have protected trainees from the most extreme forms of housing deprivation. While experiencing lower income than apprentices and proportionately higher housing costs, they were less likely than apprentices to have become homeless at some point during their traineeship.

Although homelessness is not a widespread problem among learners, just as it is not a widespread problem in Australian society at large, it does have severe effects on an individual's wellbeing and, in the case of learners, their capacity to continue and, indeed, complete their training. The personal costs of homelessness during apprenticeship or traineeship can be considerable, in particular if one considers the long-term scarring effects of homelessness (Noble-Carr 2007; ABS 2012c). In addition to this are the social costs associated with reduced training outcomes and, not infrequently, dropping out of training due to housing stress.

Although our survey was conducted in South Australia, Commonwealth statistics and community activities such as the abovementioned 'The house that builds people' initiative demonstrate that homelessness and housing crises among apprentices and trainees are social issues that are not confined to one state.

The educational setting that these young and sometimes older people inhabit when they experience homelessness makes the prospect of tackling the issue uniquely realistic. Whereas homelessness frequently emerges unnoticed and is recorded only after it has become manifest, apprentices and trainees at risk of homelessness are visible to their institutional environment. This should make it possible to detect housing risk early, perhaps even before it takes on the form of a personal crisis. In light of these considerations, our research developed a number of recommendations intended to improve the capacity of all those involved with training and education, and youth work – including the apprentices and trainees themselves – to be better prepared for detecting, preventing and responding to the risk of homelessness. Most notably, we recommend:

Ensuring that training providers, including employers, maintain a record of each apprentice's housing situation and that this is verified regularly. Surprisingly, our qualitative research found several instances in which even basic address details were neither collected nor checked and updated.

Increasing awareness of Youth Allowance and the Living Away From Home Allowance' among apprentices and promoting their uptake.

Improving the recording of support services requested by apprentices/trainees under mentoring programs operated across the states and territories. Monitoring under the AAMP, federal funding for which ceased at the end of 2014, was geared towards recording retention outcomes. More information should be collected systematically concerning the types of supports requested and provided, and their circumstances.

Linking data across relevant programs. To understand fully the housing situation and risk to apprentices, data regarding the apprenticeship should contain – or be linked to sources containing – information detailing the receipt of Allowances, which would also permit better upkeep of address information.

Monitoring apprenticeship awards and income of apprentices in relation to poverty indices and information on the costs of being an apprentice. With few notable exceptions (e.g., Bittman et al. 2009; Schutz et al. 2013), the living standards of apprentices are rarely assessed, yet that knowledge remains essential for understanding housing risks.

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Endnotes

¹ 'The house that builds people', see <http://thehousethatbuildspeople.com.au>

² For definitions, see <http://homelessnessclearinghouse.govspace.gov.au>

³ Figures provided upon request by then Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, FaHCSIA.

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Appendix A

Weighting of the survey of apprentices and trainees

Weights were constructed to match current apprentice and trainee respondents to the original sample. The matching criteria were sex (male/female), age (aged 24 or less/25 or over) and vocation. The vocations were grouped as follows:

- Agriculture & Horticulture
- Building Trades
- Business & Management
- Retail & Personal Services, Transport
- Social & Medical Services
- Technical & Manufacturing Trades
- Other

The weighting had only small effects on the gender composition of the participating apprentices and trainees, and on the age distribution and VET course distribution of apprentices. However, effects on the age distribution and the vocational course profiles of trainees were more marked (see Table 1).

Table A.1. Current apprentices and trainees in SA – variables used for weighting, weight effects

	Current apprentices			Current trainees		
	Population Sample	Response Sample		Population Sample	Response Sample	
	%	Unweighted %	Weighted %	%	Unweighted %	Weighted %
Male	89.9	91.5	93.3	55.9	58.0	63.0
Female	10.1	8.5	6.7	44.1	42.0	37.0
Age: >=24	75.1	70.8	71.2	33.0	46.9	30.9
Age: 24+	24.9	29.2	28.8	67.0	53.1	69.1
Agri-/ Horticulture	0	0	0	6.7	6.2	6.0
Building Trades	21.8	21.7	23.1	2.7	1.2	3.6
Business & Management	0	0	0	29.6	19.8	33.7
Retail & Personal Services, Transport	8.5	13.2	9.6	34.7	32.1	31.3
Social & Medical Services	0	0	0	8.4	13.6	8.4
Technical & Manufacturing Trades	63.2	63.2	62.5	3.3	8.6	3.3
Other	6.5	0.9	4.8	14.6	6.2	13.3
Not available	0	0.9	0	0	12.4	0
N (unweighted)	1000	106	106	1000	81	81

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