

# An investigation into the 2005 apprentice / trainee commencement cohort in TORGAS and the factors relating to their cancellation rate

Final report  
August 2006



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## **Acknowledgements**

This Report was commissioned by TORGAS management. The commitment of their staff to the project is gratefully acknowledged.

Apprentices, trainees and other TORGAS stakeholders willingly gave their time to be interviewed. Their openness in sharing their experiences is appreciated.

Narelle Sanford provided research assistance for the project. Her contribution to the data collection process is acknowledged.

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## 1. Review of previous literature

There has been a recent strong surge in apprentice intake with the annual commencement level increasing by 95% between 1996 and 2004 – from 29 400 in 1996 to 57 500 in 2004. The case is such that the apprentice training rate in 2004 was the highest attained since 1992 (Toner, 2005). In view of this, it should be noted that “the growth in the numbers of New Apprentices from 1996 to 2002 was largely a result of growth in traineeships (and other non-traditional apprenticeships), with little change in the numbers participating in traditional apprenticeships (NCVER, 2003)” and that “traditional apprentices now make up around one in three (31 per cent) of all apprenticeships and traineeships (NCVER, 2004)” (Ainley & Corrigan, 2005, p. 3).

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER, 2004) reported an estimated 126,900 completions of apprenticeships – and traineeships – in 2003. It reported an average of 21 000 apprenticeship completions per year during 2002-2004 (NCVER, 2005). In the year ending 31 December 2005 compared to the year ending 31 December 2004, commencements grew by 3% to 264 700; completions rose by 2% to 138 700; and cancellations and withdrawals increased by 4% to 130 300 (NCVER, 2006).

In terms of progression through apprenticeships, several studies indicate that withdrawal from apprenticeships occurs most frequently within the first year of training (Cully & Curtin, 2001; Harris et al, 2001; Lamb et al, 1998). That said, Ball & John (2005, p. 5) note, “in more recent years, attrition rates in the first year of an apprenticeship or traineeship have fallen, suggesting that completion rates may be on the increase.”

Research undertaken by Ball and John (1995, p. 6) suggests that there are several demographic factors that influence completion rates. They advocate that “the likelihood of completion is influenced by gender, age, Indigenous status, presence of a disability, highest school level completed and level of qualification for the training contract,” and suggest that the most important influences on completion rates are the following:

- Indigenous status;
- Age;
- Highest school level completed; and
- Level of qualification of the training contract (Ball & John, 2005, p. 6).

They note, too, the influence of residential location upon completion.

Factors associated with higher completion rates pertain to the following:

- Apprentices/trainees who had completed Year 12 in comparison to those who had not completed Year 12 – *with level of education attained prior to the commencement of an apprenticeship or traineeship identified as one of the most important factors influencing completion rates;*
- Apprentices/trainees who were aged 25 years and over (and especially those aged 45 and over) in comparison to those in younger age groups;
- Apprentices/trainees undertaking higher level vocational qualifications (AQF III and IV) in comparison to those in lower level vocational qualifications (AQF I and II);
- Apprentices/trainees engaged in courses of longer duration (i.e., 3 and 4 years) than those shorter in duration;
- Apprentices/trainees employed full time rather than part time; and
- Apprentices living in rural areas in comparison to those living in remote areas and capital cities (See Ball, 2004; Ball & John, 2005).

Non-completion was reported as frequently linked to, in order of prevalence:

- Health and personal reasons;
- Dislike of type of work;
- Getting along with supervisors or others at work;
- Being offered a better job; and /or
- Feeling that the pay was too low (Ainley & Corrigan, 2005).

As such, the most frequently cited reasons for discontinuing seem to be in relation to personal issues, to changing interests, to workplace issues, and/or to rewards (Ainley & Corrigan, 2005; Cully & Curtin, 2001). By way of comparison, “the difficulty of study, future job prospects or the nature of on- or off-the-job training were not [identified as] key reasons for discontinuing a New Apprenticeship” (Ainley & Corrigan, 2005, p. 29). [See Table 1]

**Table 1 Main Reason Why Individuals Discontinue a New Apprenticeship as a Percentage of Total Discontinuations**

	Percentage of respondents citing as main reason	Percentage of respondents citing as main reason	Percentage of respondents citing as main reason
Main Reason	Apprentices	Trainees	All
Health and personal reasons	18	27	22
Didn't like the type of work	23	18	21
Don't get on with boss or other people at work	15	21	18
Offered a better job	8	18	13
Pay too low	11	9	10
Job prospect in industry not good	3	8	5
You weren't happy with the off-the-job training	2	8	5
Problems with travelling or transport	2	3	2
You weren't happy with the on-the-job training	1	3	2
Study was too difficult	1	-	1
Other	16	12	14
Total	100	100	100
<i>Number of cases providing reasons</i>	<i>96</i>	<i>86</i>	<i>182</i>

(Source: Ainley & Corrigan, 2005, p. 30 – LSAY data)

Finally, Ball and John (2005, p. 15) note that “apprentices and trainees reporting a disability have considerably lower completion rates than other Australians” and that “Indigenous Australians have considerably lower completion rates than other Australians.”

## **2. Methodology**

Following discussions with TORGAS in the early months of 2006, the research methodology was devised in line with the intended outcomes of the project – namely, to determine the cancellation rates of, and identify the reasons for cancellation of, apprenticeships/trainees at TORGAS. It was decided that a two-stage methodology would be employed to review of all 2005 starters/commencements located in the Townsville area and investigate their subsequent cancellation rates and trends within this cohort.

### **Stage 1**

Following a review of pertinent literature a description of profiling characteristics was compiled. These profiling characteristics were then formulated as an ACCESS database with the aim of providing for comprehensive and efficient data collection, collation and analysis. These profiling characteristics are detailed in Table 2. These profile characteristics were discussed with TORGAS staff and reviewed in line with the available file data for each 2005 commencement.

The initial analysis was completed examining the key outcome variable (cancelled vs non cancelled) against each of the profile characteristics. This bi-variate analysis represents an initial analysis of the relationship between each characteristic and cancellation. Further data analysis will be considered comparing multiple characteristics. School-based apprentices and trainees were excluded from the analysis.

### **Stage 2**

To investigate the cancellation trends noted in Stage 1, the researchers followed the analysis of the file data with a series of 13 interviews. The intent had been to complete 15 interviews but in the timeline available 15 participants could not be recruited. The interviewees were invited to participate on the basis of sharing specific characteristics the researchers deemed as potentially helpful in developing deeper insights into both cancellation trends and characteristics of resilient apprentices/trainees.

This qualitative data collection involved interviews of approximately 45 minutes duration with questions designed to explore insights into cancellation rates. The questions are included as appendices 11.1-11.6.

Six apprentices/trainees who had commenced in 2005 and remained with TORGAS were interviewed. These apprentices/trainees included those who:

- exited from a state school (2)
- exited from a non-state school (4)
- worked in the construction industry (2)
- worked in electrical (2)
- worked in hospitality (2)
- had left school prior to Year 12 (4)
- self-reported on contact visit as low achieving (1)

Other interviewees were:

- Training provider representatives (2)
- Employer representatives (1)
- School VET coordinators (2)
- TORGAS Field Officers (2)

In addition to the interview data, Stage 2 also involved the review of standard proformas used by TORGAS staff, other stakeholders and other related documents. These documents were used to contextualise the interview responses. The documents utilised are listed below.

- TORGAS Movement Advice
- TORGAS Contact Visit Report
- TORGAS Provision of Services Report
- TORGAS Position Description – Field Officer
- TORGAS Placement Monitoring with New Hosts (flowchart)

As per JCU ethics requirements, the recruitment of interview participants took place in accordance with the following:



## Field Officers

Staff volunteers following briefing.

## Host Business Representatives and RTOs

Host business representatives and RTOs contacted in writing (email) by the researchers – informed of the research – and invited to participate including follow up phone call.

## Apprentices/Trainees

A letter (email) outlining the research and an invitation to participate was written by the researchers and sent out to apprentices/trainees by TORGAS on the researchers' behalf.

The letter asked them to respond – either agreeing or declining to participate. Follow up phone calls – asking apprentices/trainees to return completed response form were conducted by research team.

### 3. Stage 1 Research Findings

Table 2 details the profiling characteristics developed to review each 2005 commencement.

**Table 2 Profiling Characteristics of Apprentices**

Key Characteristics	Specific Characteristics
Personal Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Home Language background</li> <li>• Self- identifies as Indigenous</li> <li>• Self-identifies as having a disability</li> <li>• Residential Address – Town/City (before commencement)</li> <li>• Classification of Town/City (Rural, Remote, Regional, Metropolitan)</li> </ul>
Parental Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Father: Occupation</li> <li>• Mother: Occupation</li> <li>• Significant other in industry</li> </ul>
Educational Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secondary school attended</li> <li>• School Classification – State/Catholic/Private</li> <li>• Year Level of Exit from school – Grade 9, 10, 11, 12</li> <li>• Exit Certificate Level attained – Junior/Senior</li> <li>• Results at Exit Level for English</li> <li>• Results at Exit Level for Maths</li> <li>• OP Result</li> <li>• VETiS subjects undertaken and granted competency</li> <li>• Related Work Placement undertaken during course of secondary school</li> <li>• Unrelated Work Placement undertaken during course of secondary school</li> <li>• Other Vocational Education subjects undertaken and granted qualification (i.e., through TAFE or other provider)</li> <li>• University experience – How many years?</li> <li>• Other qualification</li> <li>• Related Work Experience undertaken prior to commencement</li> <li>• Unrelated Work Experience undertaken prior to commencement</li> </ul>

<p>TORGAS History</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apprentice/Trainee</li> <li>• Industry Area</li> <li>• Specialty Area</li> <li>• Enrolled Qualification Level</li> <li>• Employer Numbers – eg.1, 2, 3</li> <li>• Training Provider</li> <li>• Field Officer – Current name and number of previous</li> <li>• Residential Address – Town/City (during undertaking)</li> <li>• Classification of Town/City (Rural, Remote, Regional, Metropolitan)</li> <li>• Annual Leave Days taken</li> <li>• Days Sick Leave taken</li> <li>• Contact Visit Report Business Below 3</li> <li>• Contact Visit Report Self Assessment Below 3</li> </ul>
<p>Injury</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature of injury</li> <li>• Site in which injury occurred</li> <li>• Duration of ‘Lay off’ time (if any) as a result of injury – non Workcover</li> <li>• Workcover claim – number of days</li> </ul>
<p>Cancellation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cancelled – Yes/No</li> <li>• Point of cancellation of apprenticeship/traineeship – i.e., which month</li> <li>• Who was responsible for cancellation of apprenticeship/ traineeship – i.e., apprentice/trainee, employer, field officer, RTO?</li> <li>• Fails recorded during training</li> <li>• Age at cancellation</li> </ul>

## 4. Limitations of Stage 1 data

The researchers had compiled the profiling tool following a review of the available data. Unfortunately, not all data was available for all cases. In addition, some of the data is considered unreliable and therefore not useful as part of the profiling process.

The most pertinent issue to arise involved the process of self-reporting on behalf of the apprentice/applicant – one that rendered the validity of the data problematic. In line with this was the limited and ad-hoc nature of the provision of supporting evidence.

Other limitations to emerge in the course of the data collection process were as follows:

### Personal Details Section

- Inability to collect information regarding debt recovery.
- Limited information available about Child Allowance deductions. *Note: this did not seem to be a particularly relevant issue in regards to this particular cohort.*

### Parental Information Section

- Limited information available in files about parental occupation and significant other. *Note: this was available only if “Industry Suitability” Form had been completed.*

### Educational Details

- Lack of any information in some cases.
- Information is largely self-reported with limited supporting documentation provided. This was particularly pertinent in the following instances:
  - Difficulty in determining exit level certificate level. *Note: This difficulty stemmed from the fact that it was often the case that the application was lodged prior to the completion school when results were subsequently not available.*
  - Limited provision/unavailability of results pertaining to English and Maths. *Note: This situation stemmed from the fact that school reports were not provided.*
  - OP scores were often not provided, and the nature of the data made it difficult to determine whether or not the applicant was OP eligible.
- The recording of VETiS studies and related work placement(s) was unclear and difficult to determine. *Note: Given this situation, these were determined if dates*

*recorded corresponded to those during which the apprentice/applicant was identified as being enrolled in secondary school.*

It should be noted that the inclusion of information about previous apprenticeships/traineeships undertaken might well prove useful here.

#### TORGAS History

- Lack of clearly outlined details relating to the number of field officers. *Note: The only indication of this was the change of name on documentation.*
- Lack of clearly outlined details relating to the number of host businesses. *Note: The available data does not indicate whether the change of employer was intentional, for example rotational as in Smartvet program, or occurred for other reasons/under other circumstances.*

It should be noted that the inclusion of information about leave without pay would be useful, as this appears to be a significant factor. Additionally, it might be useful to include the number of “breaches” incurred.

#### Cancellations

- Fails recorded not appropriate as CBT. *Note: The only records provided as when apprentice/trainee is deemed competent.*

It should be noted that information pertaining to the reason(s) for cancellation would be a useful inclusion, as would the specification of cancellation, completion or continuing.

## 5. Stage 1 Results

### General profile of 2005 commencement cohort

This section firstly describes the general characteristics of the 2005 intake.

Excluding School Based Apprentices (SATs) the intake of Townsville based apprentices/trainees in 2005 was 193. Of these, 45 were female and 148 were male. Seven self-identified as Indigenous, while 4 identified as having a disability. The age range at commencement was 15 years to 36 years. 67% were between 17-19 years of age. One hundred and seventeen had completed Year 12 (self-reported). One hundred and sixty seven of the commencements (86%) came from the immediate Townsville area (including Alligator Creek, Magnetic Island).

A total of 69 cancellations are recorded for the 2005 commencement cohort. This equates to 36% of the cohort. This includes 1 death (car accident).

### Personal and education profile of cancelled apprentices/trainees

The personal characteristics of the cancelled compared to continuing apprentices is noted below.

Table 3 compares the cancellation rates of males and females. 40 % of commencing females cancelled while 34% of commencing males cancelled.

**Table 3 Gender Profile**

Gender	Continued	Cancelled	Total
Female	27	18	45
Male	97	51	148
Total	124	69	193

Indigenous young people represented less than 4% of the intake. Two of the 7 commencing Indigenous people are recorded as cancellations. One of the four people identified as having a disability are also recorded as a cancellation. These numbers are too small to draw any conclusions.

Figure 1 considers the relationship between commencement age and cancellation. The figure highlights that 50% of 15 year olds cancelled (the cohort is very small). 38% of 16 year olds cancelled, and 29 % of 17 year olds cancelled. There is no clear pattern however, related to age of commencement and cancellation. 36% of 18 year olds cancelled, 30% of 19 year olds cancelled, but 60% of 20 year olds cancelled (the cohort is very small). In this table, ‘false’ indicates that the apprentice/trainee did not cancel, while ‘true’ indicates that the apprentice/trainee did cancel.

**Figure 1 Age of Commencement and Cancellation**



Table 4 indicates the number of commencements cancelled against the completed Year Level of school. This table notes a downward trend. Of the 2005 commencement cohort, 50% of those who had completed Year 9 cancelled, compared to 31% of those who had completed Year 12.

**Table 4 School Year Level Completed**

Year Level of Exit from School	Continued	Cancelled	Total of commencements at Year level	% of Year level cohort cancelled
9	2	2	4	50%
10	15	17	32	53%
11	26	14	40	35%
12	81	36	117	31%

In addition to completed school level, data on school of origin was also collated. At the macro level commencements and cancellations by school classification (State, Catholic, Private) are noted in Table 5. This table indicates that attendance at a state school was more likely to be associated with cancellation (42% of commencements cancelled).

While the numbers from private schools are too small to be of significance, the cancellation rate from Catholic schools is considerably lower (25%).

**Table 5 School System**

School Classification	Continued	Cancelled	Total
Unknown	8	4	12
Catholic	33	11	44
Private	11	2	13
State	72	52	124
Total	124	69	193

If this data is analysed further, it is possible to examine the cancellation rates from particular schools. This data is presented in Table 6, but given the small numbers should be read with caution. Some of the schools in the local area are listed below and several provide cohorts of former students in reasonable numbers. Former Kirwan State High School students had a 35% cancellation rate, Ignatius Park College students had a 23%



cancellation rate, and while Pimlico State High School students had a 50% cancellation rate.

**Table 6 Secondary School Origin**

Secondary School	Continuing	Cancelled	Total
All Souls St Gabriels School (Charters Towers)	1		1
AYR STATE HIGH SCHOOL	2	1	3
BAMAGA STATE HIGH SCHOOL		1	1
Burdekin Catholic High School	1		1
CHARTERS TOWERS STATE HIGH SCHOOL	1		1
Gilroy Santa Maria College (Ingham)	3		3
HEATLEY SECONDARY COLLEGE	5	5	10
HOME HILL STATE HIGH SCHOOL	3		3
Ignatius Park College (Townsville)	13	4	17
KIRWAN STATE HIGH SCHOOL	20	11	31
NORTHERN BEACHES STATE HIGH SCHOOL	4	3	7
PIMLICO STATE HIGH SCHOOL	6	6	12
PROSERPINE STATE HIGH SCHOOL	1		1
Ryan Catholic College (Townsville)	5	2	7
St Margaret Mary's College (Hyde Park)	4	1	5
St Patrick's College (Townsville)	1		1
The Cathedral School of St Anne and St James	3		3
THURINGOWA STATE HIGH SCHOOL	3	2	5
Townsville Grammar School (North Ward Campus)	4	1	5
TOWNSVILLE STATE HIGH SCHOOL	1	2	3
TULLY STATE HIGH SCHOOL	2		2
WILLIAM ROSS STATE HIGH SCHOOL	8	3	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>133</b>

Completing VET in Schools programs is a further characteristic of the commencing cohort. Sixty percent of cancelled apprentices/trainees had no record of completion of VET in Schools subjects.

**Table 7 VETiS Subjects Undertaken and Granted Competency**

VETiS Subjects Undertaken and Granted Competency	Continued	Cancelled	Total
Not completed	52	42	94
Completed	72	27	99
Total	124	69	193

The profiling tool also recorded completion of related work placement or work experience. Tables 8 and 9 indicate that the cancellation rate was lower for those who had completed a related work placement during secondary school.

**Table 8 Related Work Placement During Secondary School**

Related Work Placement During Secondary School	Continued	Cancelled	Total
Not completed	87	57	144
Completed	37	12	49
Total	124	69	193

**Table 9 Related Work Experience Prior to Commencement**

Related Work Experience Prior to Commencement	Continued	Cancelled	Total
Not completed	71	36	107
Completed	53	33	86
Total	124	69	193

As stated previously, a majority of 2005 commencements resided in the greater Townsville area. Annandale, Kelso and Kirwan account for 53 commencements. These suburbs, along with other Townsville areas, are classified by the ARIA index as *Outer Regional Australia*. Table 10 notes the cancellations by the geographic index. Table 10a shows a cancellation rate of 29 % for apprentices/trainees originating from rural areas or smaller towns, but again the cohort size is small. Table 10b examines

cancellation rates for those from large regional centres (the origin of most of the cohort) and notes a cancellation rate of 35%.

**Table 10 Locality Prior to Commencement**

Locality	Continued	Cancelled	Total
Outer Regional Australia	119	67	185
Remote Australia	1	1	2
Very Remote Australia	4	1	5
Total	124	69	193

**Table 10a Rural Locality Prior to Commencement**

	Continued	Cancelled	Total
AYR	2	1	3
CALCIUM	1		1
CHARTERS TOWERS	2	1	3
CLONCURRY	1		1
FORREST BEACH		1	1
HOME HILL	1		1
HUGHENDEN	3	1	4
INGHAM	3		3
LONGREACH	1		1
MAREEBA		1	1
MILLAROO	1		1
MOUNT ISA		1	1
Total	15	6	21

**Table 10b Townsville-Area Locality Prior to Commencement**

Locality Before	Continued	Cancelled	Total
AITKENVALE	6	1	7
ALLIGATOR CREEK	1		1
ANNANDALE	11	2	13
BELGIAN GARDENS	1		1
BLACK RIVER		1	1
BLUEWATER	1		1
BUSHLAND BEACH	2	1	3
CAIRNS	2		2
CAIRNS DC	1		1
CONDON	3	2	5
CRANBROOK	6	3	9
CURRAJONG	2	4	6
DEERAGUN	3	1	4
DOUGLAS	6		6
EDMONTON	1		1
GARBUTT	4		4
GULLIVER		2	2
HEATLEY	3	3	6
HERMIT PARK		1	1
HORSESHOE BAY	1		1
IDALIA	1		1
JENSEN	1		1
KELSO	4	8	12
KIRWAN	17	11	28
MOUNT LOUISA	5	3	8
MOUNT LOW	3	1	4
MUNDINGBURRA	1		1
NORTH WARD	2		2
OONOONBA	1	1	2
PICNIC BAY	1		1
RANGEWOOD	1		1
RASMUSSEN	5	1	6

ROSSLEA	2	2	4
SOUTH TOWNSVILLE		1	1
STUART		1	1
TOWNSVILLE		2	2
VINCENT	3	3	6
WEST END	1	3	4
WULGURU	6	3	9
YABULU	1	1	2
Total	109	62	171

### **Profile of Experience at TORGAS**

The following data examines the relationship of experiences following employment by TORGAS and the relationship between these experiences and cancellation.

Table 11 compares the cancellation of apprentices to trainees. The cancellation rate for apprentices is 31% while the cancellation rate for trainees is 45%.

**Table 11 Apprentice/Trainee Trends**

	Continuing	Cancelled	Totals
Apprentices	91	42	133
Trainees	33	27	60
	124	69	193

Industry of placement had some bearing on the likelihood of cancellation. 28% of apprentices in the metals engineering area cancelled, 40% of business, and over 50% of construction related trades cancelled. Data on the relationship between host businesses and cancellations has also been reviewed, but numbers are too small in each host business to show a significant relationship with cancellations. Table 12 notes the key industry areas and cancellation rates.

**Table 12 Industry Areas**

Industry area	Continuing	Cancelled	Total
Horticulture		1	1
Automotive	13	7	20
Business	20	13	33
Construction	11	12	23
Electrical/Electro-Technology	25	7	32
Furnishing		2	2
Hospitality	11	7	18
Metals/Engineering	36	14	50
Other	6	6	12
Plumbing	2		2
Total	124	69	193

The training provider used by the apprentice/trainee was also reviewed. Only the Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE and BETARAY have numbers of significance. 35% of those attending BRIT cancelled, while 36% of those at BETARAY cancelled.

**Table 13 Training Providers**

Training Provider	Continued	Cancelled	Total
UNKNOWN	1	1	2
ADVANCED		4	4
BETARAY	21	12	33
BRIT	86	47	132
OTHER	17	4	21
WT		1	1
Total	124	69	193

The TORGAS allocated Field Officer relationship to cancelled apprentices/trainees is also noted. Table 14 outlines these trends and we suggest that these trends be examined internally.

**Table 14 Field Officers**

Surname of Current Field Officer	Continued	Cancelled	Total
BUNCE	37	18	55
GILLESPIE	3	3	6
HOAD		3	3
LOVE	3		3
MCGUIRE		15	15
MORGAN	3		3
POOLE (Linda)	34	12	46
POOLE (Leanne)	39	18	57
SMITHWICK	5		5
TOTAL	124	69	193

Analysis of leave taken was also completed. No significant difference is evident between leave taken by cancelled or continuing apprentices/trainees. This includes both sick and annual leave.

Levels of workplace injury were also assessed for their relationship with cancellations. Only 3 of the cancellations had experienced a workplace injury as detailed in Table 15.

**Table 15 Injury Levels**

Nature of Injury	Cancelled
No injury	66
DISLOCATED KNEE	1
EYE	1
HOT OIL BURN	1

Host business satisfaction with apprentice/trainee is recorded through the use of a rating scale completed as part of the contact visit report. Fifty-three of the 69 cancelled

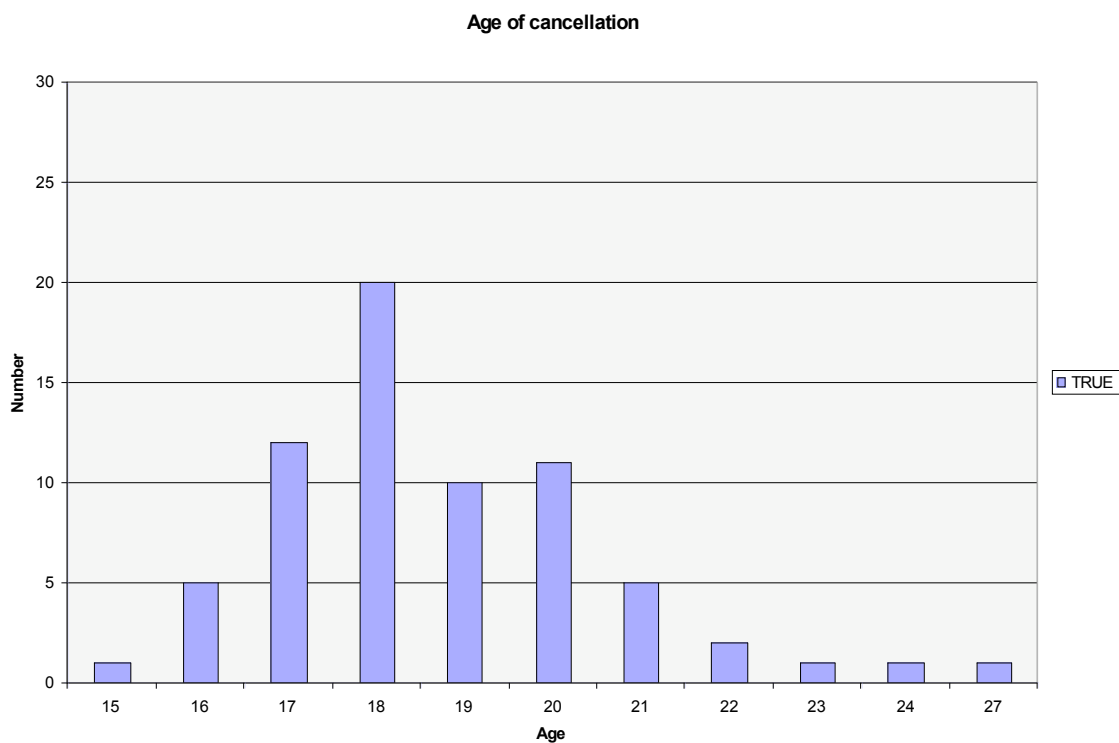
apprentice/trainees had no record of host business dissatisfaction (recorded as 3 or lower) on contact visits.

### Profile of cancelled apprentices/trainees

Age and duration in apprenticeship/traineeship were also analysed.

The age range of cancellations was 15-27 years. The highest number of cancellations was at age 18 as is seen in Figure 2. The mean age at cancellation is 18.72 years.

**Figure 2 Age at Cancellation**



The majority (71.5%) of cancellations occurred within the first 90 days. Longitudinal analysis of the cohort could provide further insight into patterns of cancellation.

Qualification level also had a bearing on cancellation rates. Nineteen percent of total cancellations involved students enrolled in qualification level II, and 80% in level III, as



is noted in Table 16. However, enrolment in Certificate II level qualification is still far more likely to link to cancellation as is seen in the data in Table 16.

**Table 16 Qualification Level**

Enrolled Qualification Level	Continued	Cancelled	Total
II	8	13	21
III	115	55	170
Not recorded	1	1	2
Total	124	69	193

Most cancellations were initiated by the apprentice/trainee themselves as is outlined in Table 17.

**Table 17 Initiation of Cancellation**

Cancellation initiated by		
Apprentice/Trainee	37	54%
Host Business	27	39%
Field Officer	5	7%
Total	69	100%

## 6. Key findings from Stage 1

The profile of the cancellations within the 2005 cohort can be summarised in a range of ways.

Cancellations are

- More likely with trainees (45%) than apprentices (31%).
- More likely in the construction industry (50%) than other areas.
- More likely to decrease according to Year Level completed at school (50% for those who had completed Year 9; 31% for those who had completed Year 12).
- More likely to decrease if VET in Schools subject(s) have been undertaken and completed (27%) compared to 43.5% for students who have not completed.
- Less likely if completion of related work placement undertaken while at school (24%) as compared to 38% who had no record of a related work placement.
- More likely if schooling was undertaken at a state school (41%) rather than a Catholic school (23%).
- Possibly less likely when the town of origin is classified as more remote or rural (29%) in comparison to larger regional centres (35%).
- Most likely to occur within the first 90 days (71%).
- Most likely to occur in the lower level qualification Cert II (61%) as compared to 32% at Cert III.

There appears to be less or little significance in cancellation trends in relation to the following factors:

- Gender
- Age of commencement
- Experience of injury
- Leave taken (sick and annual).

Further investigation is warranted in the following areas:

- Relationship between training provider and cancellations.
- Relationship between field officer and cancellation.
- Contact visit reports as an indication of an 'at-risk' apprentice/trainee.

## 7. Key findings from Stage 2

As stated previously, following discussions with TORGAS in the early months of 2006, the research methodology was devised in line with the intended outcomes of the project – namely, to determine the cancellation rates of, and identify the reasons for cancellation of, apprenticeships/traineeships at TORGAS. Following an initial review of apprentice file data and analysis of the key findings to emerge, a series of interviews with relevant stakeholders were conducted.

### **Key Themes Identified By Interviewees**

In this section we highlight general issues raised by interviewees in relation to the choice of an apprenticeship/traineeship, including the influence of school based advice; the apprentice experience in different businesses and industries; and relationships between the stakeholders and TORGAS. This interview data provides further insight into the statistical data already presented.

#### *Making a decision to undertake apprenticeship/traineeship – school role and influence*

The statistical data highlighted differences in cancellation rates between young people who had attended different school systems. In interviews conducted with the VET Coordinators in two school systems, State and Catholic, possible reasons for these differences were explored. It is important to note that while the interviewees are from different school systems, those interviewed are not necessarily *representative* of each system.

Both schools employ a VET Coordinator, and Career Counsellor or Guidance Officer. In the Catholic school there is one Career Counsellor for 753 students. In the State school system the documented ratio is one Guidance Officer per 1100 students.

In the Catholic school setting, the role of VET coordinator commenced only in 2006. This person is now responsible for issues relating to VET and to the management of the subject *Work Education* as run in the school which enrolls 107 students in Years 11 and 12 (approximately 40% of the senior student cohort). The program appears to be largely a preparatory program for students considering a VET pathway and includes work

experience and placements in 4 sites over a two-year period. Students are required to continue each placement over a minimum period of 6 months in each site.

The VET Coordinator in the Catholic school noted a recent shift in parents' perceptions of apprenticeships, claiming that these had "changed a lot" and acknowledged the impact of media advertising in this. He stated that "a lot of parents are very happy for their boys to do a trade" and that "the notion of [apprenticeships as] a career path is certainly a lot stronger than I think it would have been". He also elaborated to suggest that particular trades were more valued than others by parents and the students of the school, and named electrical (i.e., electrician), diesel fitting, plumbing and carpentry as those more highly valued by parents, and electrical, diesel fitting and carpentry as those more highly valued by students.

In addition to the coordination of the *Work Education* program, the VET coordinator in the Catholic school indicated that his role in helping students make decisions about taking on an apprenticeship/traineeship involved talking about the training involved in apprenticeships/traineeships and the qualifications that students will be working towards. He spoke of the subject *Work Education* as being the "centrepiece" of his work, and as his impetus for "finding students opportunities to go and work." He advised that he made use of parents, Instep and data bases to assist him in this process. He spoke too of his role in "making sure the students out on site are doing the right thing" – i.e., those students on work placement.

He suggested that his work with students in this area occurred when they commenced grade 10, at which point the students made subject selections and planned to undertake a career pathway – a VET or alternative pathway. At this point, students are enrolled in a program called *Pathways* which sees them undertake a TAFE Certificate one day a week, with the aim being that they will be in a position to start applying for jobs at the end of the year.

With over 40% of students enrolled in a potential VET pathway program, the VET agenda is clearly at the *centre* of the school curriculum and a *legitimated pathway* for career options. The relationship between the VET Coordinator and the Career Counsellor however is not clear, and the link between the VET Coordinator and the SET plan

process, the vital Year 10 subject selection process mandated by the State government, is also unclear. At this Catholic school, the Deputy Principal of Studies coordinates the SET plan process in the school with no direct input from the VET Coordinator. The process for the completion of this plan according to the VET coordinator is as follows:

1. An information night is conducted for both parents and students.
2. Students, in consultation with their parents, select subjects.
3. Students are then assigned to a teacher (6 students per teacher approximately and teachers nominate to work with students with whom they are familiar) and undertake an interview to discuss career pathways, subject selection and suitability in light of this pathway, and timetabling of subjects.
4. Students, again in consultation with their parents, then finalise subject selection.

In the State school, the VET Coordinator has wide ranging responsibilities to promote VET career options in the school and she speaks of her industry links and their usefulness in finding apprenticeships for students. Specifically, this VET Coordinator organises and advertises a range of experiences in VET. These include the following:

- Smart Trades Expo – organises trip for Year 10/11/12 – free bus.
- TORGAS information sessions
- Building Construction Training Fund talks
- TAFE talks

Each week she advertises SATs in the newsletter, and is also involved in applying for grants and awards in VET.

Unlike the Catholic school, in this State school, VET is not seen as central to the curriculum although the VET Coordinator describes a culture shift occurring within the school during the last few years. Skill shortages have created the view that apprenticeships are a viable career pathway whereas a few years ago this was not the case. Some staff are now speaking positively about VET options and administrative staff, including the Principal, are more enthusiastic. Parents are more enthusiastic. The VET Coordinator notes that VET is now one designated area of ‘excellence’ within the school although it is not listed on the school website alongside other designated areas of excellence. Within the school, the timetable remains a significant barrier for effective implementation of VET. VET is still fundamentally an ‘add on’ for students due to lack

flexibility in the timetable. Any students involved in VET that requires school absence have to catch up on schoolwork.

In the State school, the VET Coordinator organises Year 10 and 11 work experiences (one week in each year) and other work experience that young people request. The VET Coordinator provides advice directly about VET and apprenticeships to young people who are either referred by the Guidance Officers (usually young people deemed “at risk”) or those who sign up for SATs. She organizes work placement trials for young people who are contemplating SATs. She gives a talk to Year 10 students about VET subjects generally. Her counselling of young people extends to discouragement of those who do not have a “passion” for the industry they are contemplating entering. She also advises young people that their school profile, “behaviour and attendance”, will impact on their ability to participate in work experience or SATs.

As in the Catholic school, the VET Coordinator at the State school is not involved in the SET planning process. The VET Coordinator states “ I have never been asked to help with it”. At this state school, the VET Coordinator thinks that the Guidance Officers and the Year 10 coordinator complete the SET plan. She notes that the Guidance Officers know a “fair amount” about VET. Within the school, there is a sharp separation of advice in relation to the OP subjects and VET subjects, with advice provided by different staff members directly to students. The OP advisor, in this case a Head of Department, actively discourages VET pathways. The VET coordinator states, “If they [the students] are in Year 11 and they are doing OP subjects sometimes the school actively discourages them [from doing a SAT]”.

In the two school systems then, there are some clear distinctions, despite the individual VET Coordinators in each location sharing equal passion about the value of VET pathways. In the Catholic school, a VET pathway is central to senior schooling options with a significant range of work experience/work placements available for students. In the State school, the VET curriculum is peripheral to the school curriculum and is a pathway seemingly promoted to students ‘at-risk’ in the academic curriculum. This difference in curriculum status links to different opportunities to explore VET pathways, with distinctive opportunities afforded to students to legitimately explore VET career options.

The role of the VET Coordinator within the SET plan process at each school site is minimal. The reason for this lack of involvement is outside the scope of this study, but warrants further investigation.

While school-based advice for potential apprentices is one source of information, the apprentices/trainees interviewed indicated that school-based personnel had little to do with their decision to participate in an apprenticeship/traineeship – although some discussed career advice provided at school, generally pertinent only for university study.

One apprentice indicated that “moving into the electrical field, or electrical apprenticeship was nothing that I ever thought of in high school; I was like, move on to uni and go from there, get a degree.” He elaborated upon this, stating that he was “not sure really” why he chose an apprenticeship instead of university. He elaborated further:

I filled out all the forms at TORGAS; they put me through a few interviews.

We sort of went from there. And the more I thought about it, the more I liked it. I really wanted to get into it, and then I started work on it and found that I actually enjoyed it.

He suggested that his decision to commence an electrical apprenticeship stemmed from his interest in engineering and car audio/electronics. He also spoke of the fact that he had little external influences affecting his decision: “No outside influence to say, ‘Hey, come and join us’.” He had not attended trade expos, but rather university expos while at school. In terms of other career advice, he claimed that his school career adviser provided information about a “variety of opportunities.” In light of this variety of possible pathways, he suggested: “The hardest thing for a kid at school is to pick one,” and alluded to having an awareness of multiple pathways leading to the same end point. Another apprentice suggested that at school the focus was only about “uni stuff” and he had “got no information on trades”. Other apprentices noted the significance of employment agencies such as NEATO and JobNETWORK or significant others such as parents or siblings already in the trade area.

### *The experience within the host business*

Once recruited by TORGAS, host businesses clearly provide very different experiences for apprentices/trainees. These contrasting experiences include business involvement in recruitment, different frameworks for training, and distinctive organisational mechanisms to support apprentices.

Large government departments, such as the Department of Main Roads, are involved with recruitment and have a sophisticated support system for training and monitoring of new staff including an assigned mentor, team supervisor and in-house trainers. There is an expectation that the apprentice/trainee will remain with the business for his/her entire apprenticeship and there is a program of learning mapped out for the apprentice/trainee. Small businesses have far less formalised structures, with training a very secondary part of their business. As one construction employer outlines, there is no fixed program for apprentices, rather, the apprentice “might start with internal doors, then move to external. First year is basic, [a] lot of cleaning up behind us”.

Apprentices noted this lack of clear progression as an issue of concern for the construction industry. The problem was made worse by a seeming lack of organisation on the part of the business generally. As one commented: “They [the host business] are not well organised but I can’t do anything about that so just get on with the job” ... “it gets a bit frustrating.”

In addition to concerns in relation to the organisation of learning on-the-job, other apprentices commented that some employers exploit apprentices for short periods. As one apprentice stated: “Some bosses are really bad because they know they can send you back to TORGAS and get another one.” Consistently, apprentices report that TORGAS staff will support them in dealing with issues that arise with the host businesses.

### *Views of TORGAS*

Almost unanimously, the interviewees, both apprentices and non-apprentices, describe their relationship with TORGAS staff, including Field Officers and general office staff, in highly positive ways.



The following apprentice's comment typifies the statements in relation to dealings with TORGAS staff. He states that they provide "more of the professional side of it" and that "relationships are great. Everyone is really helpful, quick. If you ask for something, it's done". He spoke of his interactions with TORGAS field officers and other TORGAS staff in the following manner:

They provide boundaries for you. ... There's every thing that you need to keep going.

... If you put a foot out of place, they will put you back on the path.

They won't take you away. They won't take any opportunities away.

They will just set you back on the right path.

Other apprentices noted the usefulness of the text messaging service.

While the *relationships* with TORGAS were described as positive, the apprentices were less able to clearly articulate the *services* provided and in some cases seemed to be making minimal use of TORGAS services. Although there was an obvious sense in the interviews that TORGAS staff ensured that the apprentices "were organized", the method for doing this was often described vaguely. This included comments such as the following where an apprentice simply stated: "[the relationship is] good, don't have much to do with them just do my job and get on with it".

Other apprentices were unable to describe clearly how the contact with the TORGAS field officers was to operate. One apprentice spoke of seeing his field officer in the following way: "I think I only ever see [field officer] formally ... once every 2 months, once every month".

Some apprentices described with reasonable detail the procedure for site visits including the process for the contact visit report, while others could not recall the format or ever having the process explained. One apprentice does clearly outline his understanding of the contact visit report process. He does so as follows:

The boss tells apprentices of field officer's visit.

During visit, diaries and paperwork are checked with the field officer to ensure that everything is up to date.

Apprentices and host complete the report individually – apprentices first then host – and then discuss as a whole group, during which time problems are identified and spoken about within the whole group. [The opportunity to speak to field officer or boss individually is organized by the apprentice – and it is “not difficult to arrange it.”]

Other apprentices are less clear on the process involved in the contact visit. One suggested he knew about visits before starting the apprenticeship but “not how they worked”. Another suggested that that she knew about contact visits at the start, but not what was involved. In addition, there appeared to be a lack of clarity about the timing of contact visits. Some suggested that the Field Officers visited every 3 months. Another suggested that the visits occurred every two months or so while another commented that “if doing alright only contact visits every couple of months. They check a bit more in first 6 months.”

While unclear about the contact visit process, apprentices were supportive of the purpose of the visit. One apprentice indicates his support for the purpose of the reporting process, suggesting that it “gives you a bit of pride about yourself”. If scores are not good, he comments: “When you do feel bad about it, it just gives you more incentive. Indicates where problems are.” He suggests, however, that site visits are too irregular and should be once a month.

A more critical comment in relation to the workings of, and with, TOR GAS pertained to the pace at which things happened and to which apprentices needed to comply. He suggested: “It appears like they try to rush things. It would be nice to give us a bit of leeway” noting that apprentices “have busy times too.”

The host business interviewee also commented on the contact visit format suggesting that while a useful procedure, the report is often not completed honestly. He provides the example from his business, where the tradesman working with the apprentice completes the site visit report: “I like the tradesman to do it”. Unfortunately, while the tradesperson may be the person most likely to observe the work of the apprentice, the process can be marred by the relationship that inevitably builds between the apprentice and the tradesperson. He explains

his concerns as follows: “If he [the apprentice] is a likeable person, you get a bit attached to them ... you kind of see him as one of your mates”.

He gives examples of tradesmen complaining about the apprentice and then completing the report in a glowing fashion.

I’ll get there and the tradesman’s saying...you’ll have to talk to that kid tomorrow, he doesn’t turn up on time, he’s constantly daydreaming. Then the report will be completed as a 4!

He suggests the need for a better procedure, claiming: “Someone needs to be ‘pushing the point’ – they need examples ... is he interested in getting up after smoko, trying to give ideas? Give evidence for giving the number”.

While the contact visit report format is one way TORGAS staff can note concerns with apprentices’ progress, training providers, who again commented on their positive relationships with TORGAS staff, had other proactive mechanisms to ensure apprentices ‘at- risk’ were identified quickly. These included scheduled bi-monthly meetings with TORGAS staff to review training progress and consistent notification to field officers if the apprentices were late or absent from training sessions. There were also examples of formal training evaluation reports provided to TORGAS following completion of block training periods.

One training provider interviewed suggested the need to develop further proactive strategies in relation to supporting apprentice literacy and numeracy needs. This would involve the screening of all apprentices for literacy and numeracy prior to the first block of training to ensure that support would be accessible in the first critical training block. As the interviewee stated:

The apprentices are asked to tick a box on sign up if they need literacy/numeracy help. The problem is that they don’t. When you arrive at TAFE it is too late. To organise the help when they are in the first block is too hard.

The school VET coordinators demonstrated positive regard for the TORGAS staff they had encountered, and outlined a range of ways they used TORGAS services, including ensuring that TORGAS job vacancies were posted on the school notice

board each week. One suggested that he had some familiarity with TORGAS recruitment processes and requirements for apprentices, and this knowledge would appear crucial in the referral process from schools.

### **What Makes for a Resilient Apprentice?**

The stakeholders offered a whole host of factors that they perceived defined and/or contributed to the resilience of an apprentice. With a view to provide detailed insights, a discussion of each of the stakeholder groups is outlined below.

In view of this discussion, a number of significant factors can be identified as representative of all stakeholders' views. These factors pertain to attitudinal issues such as exhibiting a positive attitude, a strong work ethic, a mature approach and initiative; the willingness to take responsibility and the demonstration of respect for work colleagues/superiors. They also relate to issues pertaining to the apprentice's perceptions of the apprenticeship – do the expectations of the apprenticeship align with the realities of the apprenticeship, and is the apprentice passionate about the trade/apprenticeship? Another factor lies in the focus of the apprentice – now and future oriented focus – in terms of does she/he know what they want to do? Furthermore, an issue identified by the majority of stakeholders – with the exception of the apprentices – was the importance of work placement or prior work experience.

In specific relation to the views of the apprentices, while each of the factors outlined above emerged in their responses with the exception of that of work placement and/or work experience, they also indicated a number of issues not – or not strongly – noted by the other stakeholders. These issues pertained to two key areas: the worksite and the support networks available to them. In regard to the worksite, the apprentices' indicated the importance of being located in a “good” worksite – one in which they experienced a sense of enjoyment in the work and the workplace itself; and one in which they were able to establish good relationships with colleagues/superiors. In relation to the second issue, the apprentices noted the importance of having a stable family life.

#### *VET Coordinators*

In regard to characteristics of continuing apprentices, school VET coordinators identified the following:

- They know what they want to do.
- They respect the people with who they work.
- They are honest.
- They have a very confident communication style – i.e., in terms of talking to both employers and clients.
- They take responsibility for what they do.
- They have the benefit of parental support structures – i.e., parents take a role in decision-making process with the apprentice.
- They are positive.
- They are passionate.
- They have undertaken some form of work placement.

Elaborating on these ideas, the VET coordinators offered the following insights. The first, having reflected on her respective school’s own cancellation rates in SATs – a few years ago (25%) – stated that:

We always make sure that before they sign up, we have to make sure that they do at least one week’s work experience or industry experience.  
 ... The more experience the kids get the better. If the kid is really positive about it I am happy to see them signed up, but if they are like ho-hum I prefer that they do more work experience.

This VET coordinator also expressed the belief that passion for the work is critical. She reported that she has often said to young people, “You don’t sound like you are really passionate about that.” It is to be noted here that the one employer interviewed also cited “passion” as a key to apprentices’ success, as being critical to their completion.

The second VET coordinator expressed the view that there was a relationship between a young person’s schooling and the likelihood of cancellation of apprenticeship/traineeship. In relation to this, he spoke of his school’s fostering of confidence in students and the development of a school ethos to which the students subscribed. Further, he indicated that *Work Education*, and thus the provision of opportunities for students to sample work

sites through work placements, decreased the likelihood of students cancelling. He suggested that work placement was a “very important factor” in increasing retention within apprenticeships.

### *Training Providers*

This issue of work experience was also picked up on by one of the training providers specifically. This training provider stated, “Work experience, if it’s done right, can make a difference. Not using the young person as cheap labour”. He went on to provide an example of a mature-aged apprentice who had only completed Year 9, succeeded and went on to win national training awards – identifying this apprentice as one who, while having poor literacy skills, had lots of work experience. He also suggested that giving apprentices more information prior to trade entry was likely to increase the rate of completion among apprentices.

The second of the training providers spoke of the difficulty of identifying and/or characterising those apprentices who are likely to cancel and those likely to continue. He suggested that he was right, basing his initial opinion on “how they present themselves” and “how they speak to you”, only “about 75% of the time.” He stated, “It’s hard to decide ... overall.” While reiterating the view that it is difficult to identify characteristics of those apprentices likely to cancel and those likely to continue – “I couldn’t really specify specific attributes” – the training provider suggested that those who completed were likely to be “mature” and to “pick things up quickly.” He also stated, “I find most apprentices, if they’re interested in what they’re doing and they like what they’re doing, I don’t think it’s really a challenge for them”. Further, he suggested: “If they start their apprenticeship around 19-21 [i.e., years of age], they’re fine. Especially if they’ve finished high school, even done some further education, they are most likely to breeze through it.”

### *Field Officers*

The field officers also alluded to this notion of the difficulty of identifying characteristics of resilient apprentices – i.e., those likely to continue. In light of this, both field officers spoke of their own instinct, of their “gut feeling,” in gauging those apprentices/trainees likely to complete. For example, one commented: “You just know, you have a feeling too about some people, and you just go with that gut feeling and generally it works out.”

That noted, both spoke of instances in which their “gut feeling” proved to be wrong. One of the field officers told of apprentices who interview well and pass the tests required only to then, “3 weeks down the track ... have gone off the rails.” She elaborated, suggesting that, “It doesn’t happen all the time, but it can happen.” Finally, both indicated that it was a “hard call” to predict those apprentices/trainees who might complete and/or cancel.

The field officers went on to suggest that completion was more likely if the apprentice/trainee had some prior knowledge of what was involved in the work – and cited those who had relatives in the industry or those who were engaged in school-based apprentices. Additionally, they suggested that the following were predictors of completion: having “passion for the job”, “turning up all the time”, “dressing appropriately for interviews”, appearing engaged in interviews (i.e., providing more than yes/no answers) and exhibiting “initiative.” One of the field officers suggested that “contact visits are a great indication because they (i.e., apprentices/trainees) get to assess themselves” and noted that she could make a judgment on the basis that “this kid’s happy, he’s marking his 4’s and 5’s.”

### *Apprentices*

The apprentices also offered insights into what they perceived to be the characteristics of resilient apprentices – of those peers who stay on in their apprenticeship. The key qualities identified are as follows:

- Capacity to establish friendships with work colleagues;
- Respect for work colleagues – “really good blokes, knowledgeable blokes”, appreciating that colleagues have something to offer;
- Personality – i.e., getting along with everyone “plays a huge role”;
- The right attitude – i.e., a “positive attitude”; and
- Takes initiative.

The apprentices also identified a range of other variables as influencing the likelihood of an apprentice completing. These included:

- Having a “good job” in a good worksite;
- Having a mentor on the job;
- Employer and field officer’s belief in apprentice;

- Stable family life – understanding partner (i.e., of travel, work hours), a family that has confidence in apprentice’s capacity to succeed;
- Enjoyment of the work; sense of achievement in the work undertaken; and
- Recognising that an apprenticeship provides qualifications that make it easier to get a job and provides a more secure future.

*Employer(s)*

The employer interviewed, as noted by others above, identified “passion” for the job as a critical factor in the successful completion of an apprenticeship by an apprentice. The employer also commented on the following: those apprentices who have “learned responsibility”, those apprentices who demonstrate the capacity to “build a better work ethic”, and those apprentices whose school reports indicate that they have “good attention to detail” and are not “easily distracted.”

**Specific Insights Offered in Relation to the Reasons for Cancellations**

The data collected here reflects, and is consistent with, the research literature in the field as provided previously. It also offers, however, additional insights in relation to reasons for cancellation of apprenticeships. As in the section above, this one explores emergent key themes before providing detailed discussion in relation to the responses of each of the key stakeholder groups interviewed. As one might expect, the emergent themes identified here sit largely in an oppositional manner to those outlined in the previous section dealing with the features of resilient apprentices.

Issues pertaining to the attitude of apprentices, and more specifically their attitude towards work and study demands, emerged. For example, those apprentices who failed to demonstrate initiative and passion, who exhibited a lack of appreciation for the employer and demonstrated arrogance were seen as less likely, and indeed less suitable, to undertake an apprenticeship successfully. In further relation to this issue, mention was made of work-related factors such as the inability/unwillingness to adapt to work conditions, as well as, the demands of study and as such, issues surrounding the literacy and numeracy levels of apprentices. A lack of preparedness for, and/or misguided perceptions of the nature of, an apprenticeship were also identified as key factors contributing to the likelihood of cancellation, as was the inability to be future oriented. The stakeholders also highlighted issues pertaining to the employer/host business. In particular, mention was made of issues regarding the implications of differing



expectations between employers/host businesses and apprentices, and the mindset and (in)capacity of employers/host businesses to provide apprentices with adequate training and to utilise them in ways that constituted more than “slave labour”. The stakeholders also addressed transport issues, and those pertaining to remuneration. So, too, did several of them identify apprentices aged around 18 years as the most likely to cancel or be cancelled.

### *VET Coordinators*

The first of the VET coordinators believes that cancellations are, mostly, a result of a lack of insight into what is involved on the part of the student or the parent: “Basically they just haven’t thought it through enough and they don’t get enough support from their parents. I don’t think the parents have really thought it through either.” In light of this, she suggested, “I like to be at the sign up. I like the parents to be at the sign up. They have to be careful not to do too many things. They think they are superhuman.”

She identified transport problems as another major issue. Additionally, this VET coordinator cited another key concern as being the mindset of some employers: “It’s really problematic – when I was an apprentice ... it’s about slave labour”. In view of this, she stated that employers need to understand that their role is training and that they need to have a clear plan.

In regard to characteristics of cancelling apprentices, the second of the VET coordinator identified the following:

- They have literacy and/or numeracy problems.
- They lack confidence in talking to adults (a factor the VET coordinator identified as “a big one”).
- They exhibit a lack of initiative.
- They are arrogant.
- They do not truly appreciate what the employer is doing for them.

Additionally, this VET coordinator identified 2 students who had cancelled out from school-based apprenticeships in 2006. He suggested that the first, an indigenous male, demonstrated “a problem attending”, while the second, “had no get up and go, no passion (for the particular trade he was undertaking).”

### *Training Providers*

The first of the training providers identified the following key issues as being relevant to apprenticeship cancellation:

- Not enough money – 50% wage.
- Late starting age – 18 – “When they start at Year 12 they are involved in a whole range of things – cars/drinking etc”.
- Impatient for everything. “Yet the career path is clear through to university. Some students who can see a pathway are more likely to hang in. Not patient to wait to get to the top”.

He also identified some less likely reasons for cancellations as being:

- Physical reasons– nowadays there is light-weight wood, nail guns etc, all reducing physical demands.

The second of the training providers, in identifying reasons for cancellation, suggested that “the main problem is the education department” which he believed did not “prepare people for the real world.” He also identified the problem of apprentices not being ready for “hard work” and the possibility of “character clashes” between apprentices and other stakeholders. Furthermore, he suggested the issue of wages/remuneration, stating:

Occasionally, it’s wages, remuneration. Apprentices get into their 2<sup>nd</sup> year, and this is with adult apprentices as well, they may have started a family, or purchased a house, or have a car on hire purchase, and they find that they’re struggling financially and they may leave, seek better money.

This training provider also suggested, “good family background, good family support” is not always an adequate indication. He commented, too, that “far too many young apprentices who attempt to take up an apprenticeship without the education” are at risk, and that “I don’t think they’re fully aware when they enter the apprenticeship just how much schooling is still involved.”

### *Field Officers*

When cancellations occurred, the field officers suggested that they did so for the following reasons:

- Apprentice’s/trainee’s inability/unwillingness to adapt to work conditions – for example, start and finish hours.

- Apprentices/trainees “did not want to be there.”
- Apprentices/trainees “showed no initiative whatsoever.”
- A lack of understanding of what is involved in the work on behalf of the apprentice/trainee and/or host – “kids not knowing what’s expected and host expecting too much.”
- Uncertainty on behalf of the apprentice/trainee – “kids going into things they’re really not quite sure of.”
- The host “not having the time to teach them (i.e., the apprentice/trainee).

### *Apprentices*

The apprentices also offered insights into what they perceived to be the characteristics of those apprentices likely to cancel out of an apprenticeship and/or factors influencing such cancellation.

- “Personal life”;
- Illness and injury;
- “Better chances or better opportunities might come up”;
- Expectations of apprenticeship don’t match actual/reality of apprenticeship;
- Immaturity – one apprentice suggested that it was usually the younger apprentices who cancel, those below twenty, as “they don’t know what they want to do with their life”;
- “Can’t see the future benefits”;
- “Maybe they can’t see where they are going” (i.e., purpose, pathway);
- “Commitment, enthusiasm or passion for the job might not be as high”;
- “Simply not enjoying what they’re doing”;
- Not getting along with people at work – “a lot of tradesmen think it is their job in life to make it hard for apprentices because assholes picked on them”;
- Problems with employer;
- Poor treatment in the workplace – “used as slave labour, on the shovel all week and don’t learn anything ... ways treated and spoken to badly”;
- “Safety issues are also a concern”;
- Working conditions – i.e., required to spend a lot of own money on tools, trailer and petrol in order to travel to different work sites; hard, physical nature of work; long hours can inhibit family life;
- Money – low wages seen as inadequate, would like to move out of home but cannot afford it, better money offered elsewhere;

- Trouble keeping up with and/or passing study demands.

### *Employer(s)*

The employer interviewed suggested that factors linked to cancellation related primarily to attitude and (un)realistic understandings of the job. The employer, as also noted previously, expressed the view that a real passion or interest in the job is critical, and stated: “Lots don’t have real interest – they are fresh out of school keeping their mind on the job”; “Doesn’t have a passion for the job. Need better direction”. The employer continued, suggesting some apprentices who have cancelled really “did not want to be there”. They had problems getting to work, showed no initiative on site. He indicated that these apprentices: “Didn’t ask any questions. You don’t want them asking the same questions, but they have to ask questions”. He also suggested that money can play a part – children are not sticking with their parents – trying to rent a flat etc.”

### **Specific Insights into High Cancellation Areas**

The data collected offers insights into particular areas identified as being synonymous with high cancellation rates among/of apprentices. These included: construction and early school leavers – with a focus on the relationship of this group with age and education, and the implications of this, evident.

### *Construction*

With regard to the construction industry specifically, the employer interviewed shared a range of insights into why the construction industry would have a higher cancellation rate. He suggested that some builders ring TORGAS and say that they need an apprentice experienced in putting up trusses for 3 weeks – and thus use TORGAS a “bit like [a] skilled labour” agency. He acknowledged that he almost quit himself: “I was a second year apprentice and I wanted out. Monotony”. This employer also suggested that the work of a first year apprentice is “basic” and involves a “lot of cleaning up behind us.” In addition to this, the employer suggested that other companies prefer to start with second year apprentices who have some skill level.

The training providers also offered insights into the cancellation rate of/by apprentices within the construction industry. The first training provider suggested that the rotation of

young people through businesses in construction can be problematic: “I have seen that apprentices moving from one host to another are given just menial things – used as cheap labour. If the host employer has the long term commitment – that’s great.” He noted that apprentices get stressed when they meet during the block training and hear what others are up to in their workplaces: “The apprentice gets worried that they are not getting proper experience and they pull out.” He stated that the apprentices needed “meaningful tasks” and added “we are now doing our training in this way – always real life tasks.”

The trainee/apprentices interviewed, offered further insights from the position of a trainee and an apprentice working in the construction industry. The first, a trainee who left school following the completion of year 10 and is employed in the civil construction field, speaks very positively about the job:

Where we are it’s a good job. They look after us. I have been working since I was 16. It’s a whole different world in the workforce, you start to act different, think different. When you are wearing government clothing you have to really set an example and then it just carries on into your everyday life. At [employer] they really drilled into me about responsibility.

The second, who left school halfway through year 11 to take up an apprenticeship, is an apprentice carpenter. This apprentice, who acknowledged the support of his fellow carpenters, claimed to be experiencing “a lot of bad days at the moment because the employer is not organised”. In light of this, he acknowledged that “there is less enthusiasm and [the] desire to work is dropping. I cope by keeping out of it.”

Furthermore, this apprentice claimed: “I wouldn’t be a carpenter if I had my time again because they are the lowest paid, have to clean up all the time after the other trades, it’s dirty and you are more like a labourer – but I have come this far so I might as well keep going.”

### *Early School Leavers*

The issue of early school leavers was perceived somewhat differently at times by the various stakeholders interviewed. In particular, discussion as to whom – according to which age group – was the most likely to continue in an apprenticeship, who was the most suitable candidate for undertaking an apprentice, emerged as areas marked by differing opinion.

The first of the training providers appeared to de-prioritise the importance of school completion with his example of a mature-aged apprentice who had only completed Year 9 and who had poor literacy skills, who had succeeded and gone on to win national training awards. Picking up on the notion of mature-aged apprentices, and in relation to school completion – and thus early school leavers – the second of the training providers suggested, as stated earlier: “If they start their apprenticeship around 19-21 [i.e., years of age], they’re fine. Especially if they’ve finished high school, even done some further education, they are most likely to breeze through it.”

In relation to the completion of high school and age the second training provider suggested:

We find most private employers these days aren’t interested in employing young people ... whether it’s maturity or having a driver’s license – which is a handy thing, quite often it’s part of the job. And you find [for] private employers, year 12 is a prerequisite, matriculation is a prerequisite.

In relation to age and schooling, he also suggested:

Some of the young apprentices we have may be struggling with their schooling [i.e., within apprenticeship], and may have struggled at school, and they’ve been advised to do a trade – which is quite often ill advised. It’s not a big drama. It means more work for us, and quite often that will be a challenge but that challenge will turn into a reward. And it’s good to see them get through, and quite often we can assist in placing them when they finish their trade.

Some difference of opinion was apparent when the views of the field officers were compared to the views of the training provider outlined above. Both field officers signalled that apprentices/trainees aged 18-20 years were the most challenging group to work with, while 15-16 year old apprentices/trainees and those older than 20 years were easier to work with. In light of this, they suggested that the latter 2 groups had a higher work ethic and, in the case of the 15-16 year olds, were more likely to have home-based support, while the 20+ years group were more mature.

The apprentices/trainees, too, offered some insight into the related issues of apprentice age and maturity, and the demands of apprenticeship-based study. One of the apprentices commented on finding his peers at TAFE “very frustrating” and suggested:

“I think they need to take TAFE a little more seriously ... I think some of it is age, a maturity thing.” Picking up on the issue of preparedness to study – and in this way the comments of the apprentice and second training provider cited above, another of the apprentices suggested that cancellation was more likely if apprentices had trouble keeping up with and/or passing study demands. One apprentice also suggested that it was usually the younger apprentices who cancel, those below twenty, as “they don’t know what they want to do with their life.” This issue of age – and (im)maturity – was further noted by a trainee who spoke of a trainee leaving because he was “playing ‘silly buggers’ – doing dangerous things”. He spoke, too, of another younger trainee – 18 years old – who was still living at home who quit. Of this person he suggested: “Everyone just put a bit too much on him I suppose ... Working with 60 year old blokes who have been doing it for years and years and that type of stuff it does get a bit frustrating sometimes.”

## 8. Recommendations for TORGAS

The recommendations provided here are underpinned by a key premise: that TORGAS engage in strategic intervention in order to address the issue of apprentice/trainee cancellations.

In line with the recommendations provided in the Interim Report, the following recommendations remain pertinent:

1. Develop a proforma completed on enrolment/recruitment that includes all the characteristics identified as relevant to cancellation.
2. Review the process of self-reporting for educational qualifications. Reliable data may not be gleaned from self-reported data on resumes. A systematic process for the collection of educational data, including transcripts, should be developed. This should include the following measures:
  - a) Attain and record results pertaining to English and Maths; and
  - b) Attain and record OP scores.
3. Include a systematic recording of school-based experiences of VET in Schools as part of the entry process.
4. Include a systematic recording process for previous experiences in VET related areas.
5. Improve the recording of experiences as a TORGAS employee by systematising the following:
  - a) The number of field officers assigned to apprentice;
  - b) The number of employers and reasons for apprentice's movement between employers (i.e., intentional or otherwise);
  - c) The taking of leave without pay by apprentice;
  - d) The number of "breaches" incurred by apprentice.
6. Develop an exit protocol/proforma that identifies the reason(s) for cancellation – and by whom – of the apprentice's training contract.

The following additional recommendations are made in light of the qualitative research undertaken subsequent to the submission of the Interim Report.



7. *Recruitment processes*: In addition to the preparation of a template as described above, potential apprentices and trainees who have not completed work experience or a related VET placement, should compulsorily complete a minimum of ONE week work experience in the industry chosen. This would address the high cancellation rates of those (including some state school students) with limited prior contact with the industry – and serve as a ‘taster’.
8. *Induction*: Continue with sign up induction process but prioritise the provision of clear and adequate information about the range of services TORGAS offers (both apprentices and employers) and the format and purpose of the contact visit report. This could include specific material such as: “What to do if you are thinking of quitting – Steps to follow”.
9. *Early monitoring*: Continue with equivalent process of conducting a contact visit once a month. In addition, ensure the provision of:
  - a) early and prioritised monitoring of apprentices who fall within the categories of early school leavers, state school students, those working in the construction industry, and 18 year olds. Thus addressing high cancellation rates associated with these groups.
  - b) reworking of “Placement Monitoring With New Host” form to include a statement such as: “Field Officers must confirm the process for solving problems with both the host business and the apprentice(s)”.
10. *Preparation for block training*: Ensure that collaboration with training providers includes a pre-training literacy and numeracy screen of apprentices and the dissemination of any other relevant profile information. This will ensure that literacy and numeracy support provision can be in place prior to the first block of training.
11. *Contact visit report format*: Develop a ‘rubric’ that includes descriptors that specify required performance standards to support businesses and apprentices in accurately recording their experience. Recent research indicates that a checklist, as is currently used, is not often the most effective tool to assess performance. A standards rubric offers descriptive statements for each level of performance. For example: *Punctuality –Level 1: Apprentice is frequently late for work duties. Level 5: Apprentice always arrives on time for all work duties.* The development of this ‘rubric’ may improve the usefulness of the contact visit report as an early

warning mechanism, harnessing the already good rapport that exists between the stakeholders and TORGAS staff.

12. *Targeting host businesses*: Ensure the provision of effective summaries of apprentice experiences are provided to host businesses as part of the “Movement Advice” process. This should include a concise summary of work tasks completed to date, and an indication of the ideal range of work competencies that might be addressed in the next work place. In addition, TORGAS may consider that some host businesses look to provide mentors (who are not necessarily their supervisors/assessors) within the work site for apprentices, particularly those at risk.
13. *Informing schools*: Continue to ensure schools are provided with information about the full range of services provided by TORGAS and in particular the recruitment process and the profile of successful apprentices.

## **9. Further research**

Some suggested areas for further research both relevant to TORGAS and the VET research community emanating from this research follow.

1. Apprentice school origin and cancellation rates. This could include an analysis of:
  - a. The different roles in the school structures in relation to career advice;
  - b. School Guidance and VET career decisions;
  - c. The SET plan process and links to VET career decision making;
  - d. Role of school-based experiences in career decisions.
2. A longitudinal study of apprentices and cancellations across the duration of their apprenticeships.
3. Shifts in parental perceptions of VET career options.
4. Developing employers’ understanding(s) of apprenticeship needs and requirements across the scope of the apprenticeship.

## 10. References

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## **11. Appendices**

### **11.1 Project Information Page**

TORGAS is currently involved in a collaborative project with James Cook University School of Education researchers, Dr Angela Hill and Dr Leanne Dalley-Trim. TORGAS funds the project. The project aims to identify the reasons for the cancellation of apprenticeships/traineeships as occurs within the organisation, and to identify policy and procedural changes required to address this issue and to reduce the rate of cancellation among apprentices/trainees.

We would like to interview a range of staff and students in relation to this issue – their experiences regarding the cancellation of apprenticeships/traineeships. You are invited to participate in ONE interview of 30-45 minute duration at a time that is convenient, in a location of your choosing. The interview will be conducted by Dr Angela Hill or Dr Leanne Dalley-Trim. You will be asked a series of questions about the topic, which will be recorded on an audio tape player. The sort of questions you might be asked will relate to issues about the reasons for the cancellation of apprenticeships/traineeships as undertaken through TORGAS. A sample of these questions is:

- Describe your experiences as a trainee/apprentice or with trainees/apprentices.
- What factors have helped you to remain in your apprenticeship/traineeship?
- What types of support have you found helpful as an apprentice/trainee or when working with apprentices/trainees?

You may stop the interview at any time if you feel uncomfortable about any of these questions. The project officer will summarise the taped interview. A copy of the summary will be returned to you for checking and alteration.

The information gathered from all interviews is strictly confidential and the names of all participants, the names of workplaces and other locations in the area will not appear in the project outputs unless you specifically request to be identified. The data collected will be used to promote greater understanding of the factors influencing cancellations of apprenticeships/traineeships within TORGAS, support the development of TORGAS interventions that reduce the rate of apprenticeship/traineeship cancellations, produce

both an interim and final report to TORGAS, and produce academic and professional documents such as journal articles and conference papers.

The interview summaries and the tapes will be securely locked in a filing cabinet in the office of the Principal Investigator for five years and then they will be destroyed. Signed consent forms will be stored separately, also in a locked cabinet.

If you have any questions about the project please contact the Principal Investigator, Dr Angela Hill on 47816570 at any time; if you have any concerns about the way the project is being conducted, you may contact the James Cook University Ethics Committee through Ms Tina Langford (Ethics Administrator, JCU, Townsville 4811; ph 4781 4342, Fax: 4781 5521; email [Tina.Langford@jcu.edu.au](mailto:Tina.Langford@jcu.edu.au)).

Thank you for your participation in this project.

## 11.2 Informed Consent Form: Individual Interview

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS** Dr Angela Hill, Dr Leanne Dalley-Trim

**PROJECT TITLE:** Investigating the factors related to cancellations at TORGAS

**SCHOOL** School of Education

**CONTACT DETAILS** Ph: 47 816570 Fax: 47251690  
Email: Angela.Hill@jcu.edu.au

### The project:

This project is initiated and supported by research funding from TORGAS. The research is being completed by Principal Investigator, Dr Angela Hill and Co-Investigator, Dr Leanne Dalley-Trim. TORGAS aims to gain a better understanding of:

- the reasons for apprenticeship/traineeship cancellations
- cohorts or profiles of apprentices/trainees most at risk of cancellation
- possible changes required in TORGAS recruitment processes
- intervention strategies for apprentices/trainees most at risk of cancellation.

### What I am asking of you:

You will be invited to share your experiences in relation to the reasons for cancellation of apprenticeships/traineeships. These interviews will be conducted in order to explore apprentice/trainee, employer, TORGAS staff and trainer perspectives on the reasons for cancellations or conversely reasons for remaining in the apprenticeships.

I would like apprentices/trainees, apprentices/trainees who cancelled their apprenticeships where possible, and other members of the training provider network e.g., employers, teachers and TORGAS staff to participate in ONE individual interview. These interviews will be audiotaped. The time commitment asked of all those participating is 30-45 minutes for each individual interview.

### What I am committing to:

*No personal details will be gathered in this research. You, and your organisation where relevant, will not be identified in any way in transcripts or published results. You have a right not to respond to particular questions and/or to withdraw at any time without needing to offer reason or explanation. If you do withdraw, any data you have provided to that point will be destroyed.*

Tapes/transcripts of the interviews will be analysed. Data will be stored securely in the School of Education for at least five years. At a time when the data is no longer required, it will be securely destroyed by the researcher(s).

### Your consent

The aims of this study have been clearly explained to me and I understand what is wanted of me.

I know that taking part in this study is voluntary and I am aware that I can stop taking part in it at any time and may refuse to answer any questions. I understand that any information I give in the individual interviews will be kept strictly confidential and that no names will be used to identify me with this study without my approval

<b>Participant's Name: (printed)</b>	
<b>Signature:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Parent/Guardian's Name [if required]: (printed)</b>	
<b>Signature:</b>	<b>Date:</b>

*Thank you for your participation.*

### 11.3 Apprentice/trainee interview questions

1. General background
  - a. Explore: School background, school subjects, VET in Schools, work experience, enjoyment of school, leaving level.
  - b. Age on commencement?
  - c. Where were you living before – i.e., location and family circumstances?
2. Decision to become an apprentice (*link to answers in 1 where possible*)
  - a. What motivated you?
  - b. How did you decide which type of apprenticeship?
  - c. Did you know anyone else in the trade area?
  - d. Explore formal advice mechanisms – i.e., VET coordinator/school career advisor/career markets/teacher/trade expo.
  - e. Did you consider/explore other options?
3. TORGAS initial experience
  - a. How did you come to work with TORGAS?
  - b. Did your/your family circumstances change on commencement with TORGAS – e.g. moved?
  - c. What happened when you started working with TORGAS – i.e., induction/allocation of field officer/introduction to host business?
  - d. How many host businesses have you experienced?
4. Stakeholder relationships
  - a. As an apprentice you have to deal with lots of different people – explore: TORGAS/host business/training provider. How do you work/relate/interact with these people – who are they (names)/how often/what reasons/relationship status?



- b. What are the good things about working with these people/what are the bad things?
- 5. Field officer visit reports
  - a. Specially explore field officer visit format.
  - b. Specifically explore Contact Visit report procedure/process.
- 6. General support mechanisms
  - a. Like every job, you'd have your good and bad days. How do you cope with ups and downs of the jobs? – Explore after work activities/home situation/mentors/peers on the job/peers.
  - b. What's the best thing about being an apprentice? What is the worst? Explore critical incidents and explore responses for insights into continuing.
- 7. Perceptions of peers staying and leaving
  - a. You are obviously doing really well in your apprenticeship – what do you think is the reason for your success?
  - b. Some apprentices don't stick it out and leave – do you know anyone who has left? Do you know why they left?

## 11.4 Field Officer questions

1. General background
  - a. Tell us about your work with apprentices –how long/role/contact?
2. TORGAS history
  - a. Tell us about your role with TORGAS.
  - b. Explain the contact visit procedure.
3. Experience with apprentices/trainees
  - a. What are some of the challenges/rewards of working with apprentices?
4. Cancellation vs continuing
  - a. Tell me about your experiences with apprentices who have cancelled – explore insights.
  - b. Have you ever initiated a cancellation?
  - c. Explore characteristics of continuing vs cancelled apprentices.
  - d. How do you identify an apprentice at-risk/what do you do if you identify someone at risk?
5. Field officer visit reports
  - a. Specially explore field officer visit format.
  - b. Specifically explore Contact Visit report procedure/process.

## 11.5 VET coordinator interview questions

1. General background.
  - a. Tell us a bit about your school and school community and how apprenticeships are viewed
  - b. Tell us a bit about your personal view of traineeship/apprenticeship-
2. TORGAS
  - a. What do you know about TORGAS- how do they operate /recruitment/ contact/processes
3. Own role
  - a. Tell us about your role in helping students making decisions about taking on an apprenticeship/traineeship.
  - b. What's does the school do to support the student process for making the decisions about apprenticeship/traineeship
4. Cancellation vs continuing
  - a. Nationally trends are high in apprenticeship cancellations. TORGAS lower. Do you know any apprentices who have cancelled from your school (explore insights-what are the warning signs)
  - b. Characteristics of continuing vs cancelled apprentices
  - c. Do you think there is any relationship between a young person's schooling and the likelihood of cancellation? (career education/counseling/vet in schools/work experience/SET plan)

## 11.6 Others' questions

1. General background
  - a. Tell us about your work with apprentices – how long/role/contact?
  - b. What areas do you provide training for, training in, for TORGAS –
    - i. e.g., metals and engineering?
2. TORGAS relationship
  - a. Tell us about your relationship with TORGAS – who/what/why/when do you have contact with?
  - b. Who else do you do training for? What areas do you provide training for?
  - c. How is the relationship with them different to your relationship with TORGAS?
3. Experience with apprentices/trainees
  - a. What are some of the challenges/rewards of working with apprentices?
4. Cancellation vs continuing
  - a. Tell me about your experiences with apprentices who have cancelled – Explore insights.
  - b. Have you ever initiated a cancellation?
  - c. Characteristics of continuing vs cancelled apprentices?
    - i. (Cancellation rates contrast between metals and construction – Could you tell me any characteristics? E.g., low literacy/numeracy?)
5. Feedback
  - a. Do you provide any feedback to TORGAS? How would they know if you had concerns about an apprentice? If so, what type? E.g., Evaluation and Attendance Report.