THE number of school leavers going on to higher education has dropped to its lowest level in six years.

More students are being forced to defer study because they can’t afford to support themselves.

One in 10 school leavers from last year deferred their university enrolments, figures being released by the Education Department today show.

However, the number of students in apprenticeships, traineeships and employment increased.

The On Track survey of school leavers found just 61.9 per cent of the class of 2007 went on to university or TAFE, compared with 68.5 per cent of those who left school in 2003.

The figures is the lowest since the survey of school leavers was first published in 2003, and is down 4.5 per cent on last year.

TAFE enrolments have also dropped for the fifth year in a row. Fewer than one in five VCE graduates gained a place, down from 20.1 per cent of 2003 school leavers.

Education Minister Bronwyn Pike said the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning and apprenticeship participation could partly have contributed to the TAFE decline.

“The lower level of study is being covered by VCAL subjects rather than them having to study at TAFE,” she said.

“Students then often move straight on to apprenticeships.”

University enrolment dropped this year to 43.9 per cent, compared with 47.4 per cent last year.

“It’s part of the broadening of the base of options for school leavers... and also something about our robust labour market,” Ms Pike said.

Apprenticeships and traineeships increased to 9.8 per cent, up from 18.1 per cent last year.

The survey, which interviewed more than 33,000 school leavers in April, tracks the post-school destinations of VCE graduates.

The number of students deferring tertiary study had doubled over the past five years, and a low of 6 per cent of 2003 school leavers.

The survey found about 60 per cent of those deferring were working because they needed money to support themselves while studying, and to qualify for youth allowance.

With a large number of particularly country kids choosing to defer, it’s clear the Commonwealth Government needs to have a look at the overall program of income support for students,” Ms Pike said.

The number of unemployed VCE graduates remained steady at 2.9 per cent, but the number of graduates employed increased by 14.4 per cent.

The survey also found:

- ISIK College of Broadmeadows had the highest university enrolments for the second year, running at 96 per cent of students.

- Half of Year 10 students at La Trobe Secondary College were working, the state’s highest share.

- Students of Kangan Institute of TAFE’s VCE program went on to have the highest TAFE enrolment at 53 per cent.

- The number of students completing their VCE last year, every student from the class of 2007 is on track to fulfil their diverse career ambitions.

- Half of Year 10 students at La Trobe Secondary College were working, the state’s highest share.

- One quarter of students at La Trobe Secondary College in Mount Beauty and Mount Beauty Secondary College were unemployed, the most in the state.

- About 80 per cent of Victorian schools who offer VCE are involved in the On Track survey.

- The consistently high-performing Presbyterian Ladies’ College in Burwood was one of the schools whose data was not published this year.

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