Fewer students do VCE and get a job

No improvement in graduate transition rates

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MORE than one in four VCE graduates from the class of 2008 are not at university, TAFE or training, with figures showing transition rates from Victorian high schools have barely improved in recent years.

State Government data to be released today shows the proportion of year-12 graduates who undertake further education or training has remained unchanged over the past two years, and is markedly lower than 2005 levels, despite a concerted effort to improve paths for people who complete school.

But in a sign that the gaps in education might be narrowing, more students from poorer families have enrolled in university this year, and many schools have been successful despite having a high proportion of disadvantaged students.

The latest On Track study, an annual survey following the destinations of high school graduates, shows that of the government school students going on to university, one-third are from the poorest families in Victoria, compared with 27 per cent last year.

"There's certainly been a big emphasis in reducing educational inequality in Victoria, and the data seems to be moving in the right direction," said Dr Phil McKenzie, from the Australian Council for Educational Research, which conducted the study on behalf of the Government.

The On Track figures come eight months after Premier John Brumby and Education Minister Bronwyn Pike launched a five-year education blueprint for schools designed to tackle underperformance and make schools more accountable for their results.

But while the findings identify strengths and pressure points for the state, they may also prove contentious on a federal level because of the high rate of students who deferred their studies in a bid to qualify for the Commonwealth's Youth Allowance.

According to the data, more than 12 per cent of last year's Victorian graduates postponed their studies this year, with regional students deferring at more than double the rate of city students. But changes announced by the Federal Government last month will tighten the workplace criteria for Youth Allowance, making it harder for many of these students to obtain the benefit.

The study also shows:

- The proportion of students enrolling in university has increased slightly, from 43.9 per cent last year to 45.6 per cent this year, while almost 30 per cent of all VCE graduates are not engaged in any form of education or training.

- Private schools continue to get more students into university than do public schools (55 per cent compared with 37 per cent), but public schools tend to have more young people enter TAFE than do private schools (28 per cent compared with 15 per cent).

- The proportion of students who entered TAFE has remained at 18 per cent across the state, while the number of students who started an apprenticeship or traineeship has dropped from 9.8 per cent to 8 per cent.

The study also found that as the economic downturn took hold, the number of students who secured a job had fallen slightly, from 14.4 per cent in 2008 to 12.4 per cent this year.

Education parliamentary secretary Steve Herbert said the survey showed the Government was "delivering real results for every student, regardless of social circumstance, or where they live".

More than 36,000 school-leavers took part in the survey.