



NCSEHE

National Centre for Student
Equity in Higher Education



Curtin University

DATA, ACCESS & SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE

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Context

Australian Student Equity Policy Framework

- Long history of policy commitment to equitable participation in HE: *A Fair Chance for All* (1990)
- Equity is measured as enrolment share
- 6 designated equity groups – currently under review
- 25 years of time series data
- 2010 higher education reforms:
 - 40/20 attainment targets
 - Demand driven funding system plus Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP)

Context cont'd

Australian Student Equity Policy Framework

2017

- Second unsuccessful attempt at major policy reform: desire to introduce performance measures and performance-based funding with a view to curb attrition rates and the overall cost of the HE system
- Funding freeze through budget process: re-caps the system
- External evaluation of the contributions of HEPPP: insufficient evidence to demonstrate direct impact on low SES participation rate (ACIL Allen Consulting, 2017)
- Review of equity groups under way (ISSR, 2017)

Australian Student Equity Data Framework

Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS)

- Annual data collection by the Department of Education and Training under the Higher Education Support Act (HESA) 2003:
http://heimshelp.education.gov.au/sites/heimshelp/2018_data_requirements/2018higherstudent/pages/he-student-2018#nav
- Published as Selected Higher Education Statistics –Student data (usually released in June each year, latest is 2016):
<https://www.education.gov.au/selected-higher-education-statistics-2016-student-data>
- [Appendix 2](#) – Equity groups [head count]
- [Appendix 5](#) – Equity performance data
- 2017 Student Experience Survey: [National Report](#) (provides data for the [QILT website](#))
- 2017 Graduate Outcomes Survey: [National Report](#) (provides data for the QILT website)
- Applications data through State-based TACs (Tertiary Admissions Centres)

Variables available through HEIMS

As selected and grouped by the Grattan Institute (2018)

Figure 3.1: The student and course characteristics used to analyse completion prospects

Personal and family	Academic performance	Institution and course	Engagement with study
1. Gender	1. ATAR	1. Institution	1. Type of attendance
2. Age	2. Highest qualification	2. Field of education	2. Mode of attendance
3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	3. Basis of admission	3. Course length	3. Remoteness of campus
4. Disability		4. Credit used	4. Move away from home
5. Citizenship			5. Travel time
6. Socio-economic			6. Commencing in semester 2 rather than semester 1
7. Language spoken at home			
8. Country of birth			
9. Remoteness of home			
10. Year 12 state or territory			

Equity Fellowship

HEPPP and institutional practice

The Fellowship explored how the Rudd-Gillard Government's vision of a more equitable higher education system was translated into institutional practice.

RQ 3: How did institutional HEPPP programs as meso-level structures contribute to student outcomes at institutional and sector levels?

Review of HEIMS equity performance data (2010-2015) with regard to access, participation, retention and completion rates of students from low SES backgrounds to identify changes over time at sector and institutional levels.

Core findings:

- Trend of stagnant participation by students from low SES backgrounds has been broken but outcomes at the institutional level were highly variable.
- Impact difficult to establish empirically but strategic intent emerged as an important variable.

Increase in Low SES Participation Rate

Policy reforms broke the trend of stagnant participation

The reform agenda to widen participation in Australian higher education over the past seven years has been a demonstrable success:

- From 2010, Australia recorded the first substantial increase in participation rates since the 1990s, up from 16.3% in 2009 to 18.2% in 2015 (Koshy, 2016), an increase of 1.9 percentage points.
- Significantly more students from low SES backgrounds in the system now than ever before: 130,246 students in 2015 compared to 90,447 in 2009 (Koshy, 2016).
- Increase of 44% while the undergraduate cohort overall expanded by 30%.
- Sector has achieved Commonwealth targets for 2015-16 based on the postcode measure of low SES but not on the SA1 measure: 127,000 domestic undergraduates in low SES and 18.1% participation rate (Commonwealth Government, 2016).

Equity Fellowship: Interpretive Model – Part 1

Criteria	National range (n=37)	Bottom third (n=12)	Middle third (n=13)	Top third (n=12)
Equity performance				
2015 Participation, access, completion and retention rates of domestic undergraduate students from low SES backgrounds (SA1 measure with PC 2011 fall-back) Retention ratio (2014)	Participation: 3.25% – 33.45% Access: 3.33% – 33.55% Completion: 3.34% – 33.18% Retention: 62.72% – 89.07% Retention ratio: 0.93 – 1.01	Participation: low < 13% Access: low < 13% Completion: low < 11% Retention: low < 78% Retention ratio: low < 0.98 (n=10)	Participation: medium 13-23% Access: medium 13-22% Completion: medium 11-20% Retention: medium 78-81% Retention ratio: medium 0.98-0.99 (n=20)	Participation: high > 23% Access: high > 22% Completion: high > 20% Retention: high > 81% Retention ratio: high > 0.99 (n=7)
Change in the no. of domestic UG students (2010-15)	Change: -10% – 141%	Low increase < 16% (n=14)	Medium increase 16-27% (n=12)	High increase > 27% (n=11)
Change in low SES participation rates (2011-15 based on SA1)	Participation rate increase: -5.42 – 5.61 percentage points	Participation rate increase: negative < 0 percentage points	Participation rate increase: medium 0.1-1.3 percentage points	Participation rate increase: large > 1.3 percentage points
Size and structure of HEPPP program				
HEPPP Participation \$\$\$ received (2015)	\$374,000 - \$10,772,000	Small < \$3m	Medium \$3m-\$4.5m	Large > \$4.5m
% rollover request in 2011	0 – 139%	None	Medium 1-50%	Large > 50%
Structure of 2015 HEPPP program: expenditure / initiatives as per Equity Initiatives Map (n=35)	Pre-access: 0%-58% / 0%-75% Access: 0%-40% / 0%-40% Participation: 3%-92% / 25-89% Attainment: 0%-14% / 0%-20%	Pre-access: 0-15% / 0-20% Access: 0% / 0% (n=9) Participation: 3-42% / 25-43% Attainment: 0% / 0% (n=19)	Pre-access: 16-30% / 21-43% Access: 1-7% / 1-14% (n=13) Participation: 43-62% / 44-60% Attainment: 1-5% / 1-6% (n=7)	Pre-access: 31-58% / 44-75% Access: 8-40% / 15-40% (n=13) Participation: 63-92% / 61-89% Attainment: 6-14% / 7-20% (n=9)
Number of HEPPP-funded initiatives (2012 and 2015)	2012: 9 – 61 2015: 4 – 53 (n=35)	2012: Moderate < 20 initiatives 2015: Small < 10	2012: Large 20 – 32 initiatives 2015: Medium 10-20 initiatives	2012: V large > 33 initiatives 2015: Large > 20 initiatives

Unpacking the Relationships between Institutional HEPPP Programs and Student Outcomes

HEPPP programs and equity performance

- The increase recorded at sector level was not at all evenly distributed across the 37 public universities which received HEPPP funding in 2015: some universities contributed disproportionately to the national increase in low SES participation rates.
- There were no clear correlations between the changes in low SES participation rates over the period 2011-2015 and either:
 - The amount of HEPPP funding received
 - Institutional growth (undergraduate cohort)
 - The size and diversity of the undergraduate student cohort.
- Strategic intent with regard to institutional equity outcomes emerged as an important variable in the case studies: growth, diversity, social justice.

Unpacking the Relationships between Institutional HEPPP Programs and Student Outcomes

Demand-driven funding and HEPPP

Complex relationships between demand-driven funding and HEPPP: difficult to untangle the relative impact of each policy empirically. However, their different contributions can be clearly delineated conceptually:

- Demand-driven funding solves access issues at sector level but not necessarily at the institutional level as some institutions and courses remain highly selective.
- Demand-driven funding does not overcome the barriers to access associated with awareness, aspirations, attainment and affordability. These dimensions are addressed by HEPPP funded work.
- Neither policy is able to address the most important barrier to access comprehensively: attainment at school level. This was a particular challenge for the selective universities in this study.

Summary and Implications of Findings

2016 Equity Fellowship

- There are complex interrelationships between institutional equity strategy and its growth or other strategic objectives which need to be considered in explaining differential student outcomes.
- The influence of institutional equity strategy and practice needs to be theorised and included in impact evaluations as critical contextual information.
- Any impact evaluation of HEPPP needs to account for the effects of demand-driven funding.

NCSEHE Briefing Notes

Equity Student Participation 2011-2016

Table 4b: Low SES Population Share by State, National Ranking of SA1 Areas (2011 Census estimates)

	2011 Census
New South Wales	24.6%
Victoria	20.6%
Queensland	29.9%
Western Australia	22.7%
South Australia	30.7%
Tasmania	45.6%
Northern Territory	23.0%
Australian Capital Territory	0.2%

Source: ABS (2015).

As the vast majority of Australian undergraduate students attend an institution in their home state, institutional low SES shares will in large part reflect the size of the low SES population in their jurisdiction, as can be seen in Table 4c where low SES enrolment shares tend to track state and territory population shares.

Table 4c: Low SES Enrolment Proportion, All Institutions in State or Territory, Table A Providers, 2011-16

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
New South Wales	16.2%	16.6%	17.0%	16.9%	17.0%	17.0%
Victoria	13.1%	13.6%	14.1%	14.1%	14.3%	14.4%
Queensland	17.6%	17.7%	17.7%	17.3%	17.5%	17.6%
Western Australia	11.7%	12.2%	12.5%	12.6%	13.1%	13.3%
South Australia	17.4%	17.9%	18.8%	19.0%	19.4%	19.8%
Tasmania	25.5%	25.1%	25.2%	25.7%	25.4%	24.6%
Northern Territory	18.1%	18.5%	18.1%	17.4%	17.5%	17.9%
Australian Capital Territory	5.3%	5.7%	5.6%	5.5%	5.3%	5.1%
Multi-State	12.6%	12.9%	12.3%	12.0%	12.1%	12.2%

Source: Australian Government Department of Education and Training (2017).

Changes to the equity framework

Assigning SES on the basis of first address (Cardak et al., 2016)

Table 5: Low SES Enrolment Proportion, SA1 Measure – First Address, 2014–16; and 2016 SA1 Measure – Current Address

SA1 – First Address	2014	2015	2016	2016 Current Address ^b	2016: Ratio of First to Current Address
National – Low SES^a	17.7%	17.5%	17.3%	16.1%	1.07
Group of Eight	10.6%	10.2%	9.8%	8.8%	1.11
ATN	16.1%	15.8%	15.4%	14.1%	1.09
IRU	20.8%	20.5%	20.2%	18.4%	1.10
RUN	31.0%	30.0%	29.3%	26.9%	1.09
Unaligned Group	19.0%	18.9%	18.7%	18.1%	1.04
Regionally Headquartered	29.2%	28.3%	27.5%	25.7%	1.07
Metro Institutions with Regional Campuses	16.3%	16.0%	15.7%	14.3%	1.10
No Regional Campus	14.3%	14.4%	14.4%	13.9%	1.04
New South Wales	18.3%	18.0%	17.8%	17.0%	1.04
Victoria	14.8%	14.9%	15.0%	14.4%	1.04
Queensland	21.1%	20.4%	20.0%	17.6%	1.14
Western Australia	14.5%	14.7%	14.5%	13.3%	1.09
South Australia	22.9%	22.4%	21.9%	19.8%	1.11
Tasmania	29.3%	27.6%	26.2%	24.6%	1.07
Northern Territory	18.3%	18.1%	17.6%	17.9%	0.99
Australian Capital Territory	6.3%	6.1%	5.9%	5.1%	1.16
Multi-State	12.5%	12.5%	12.4%	12.2%	1.02

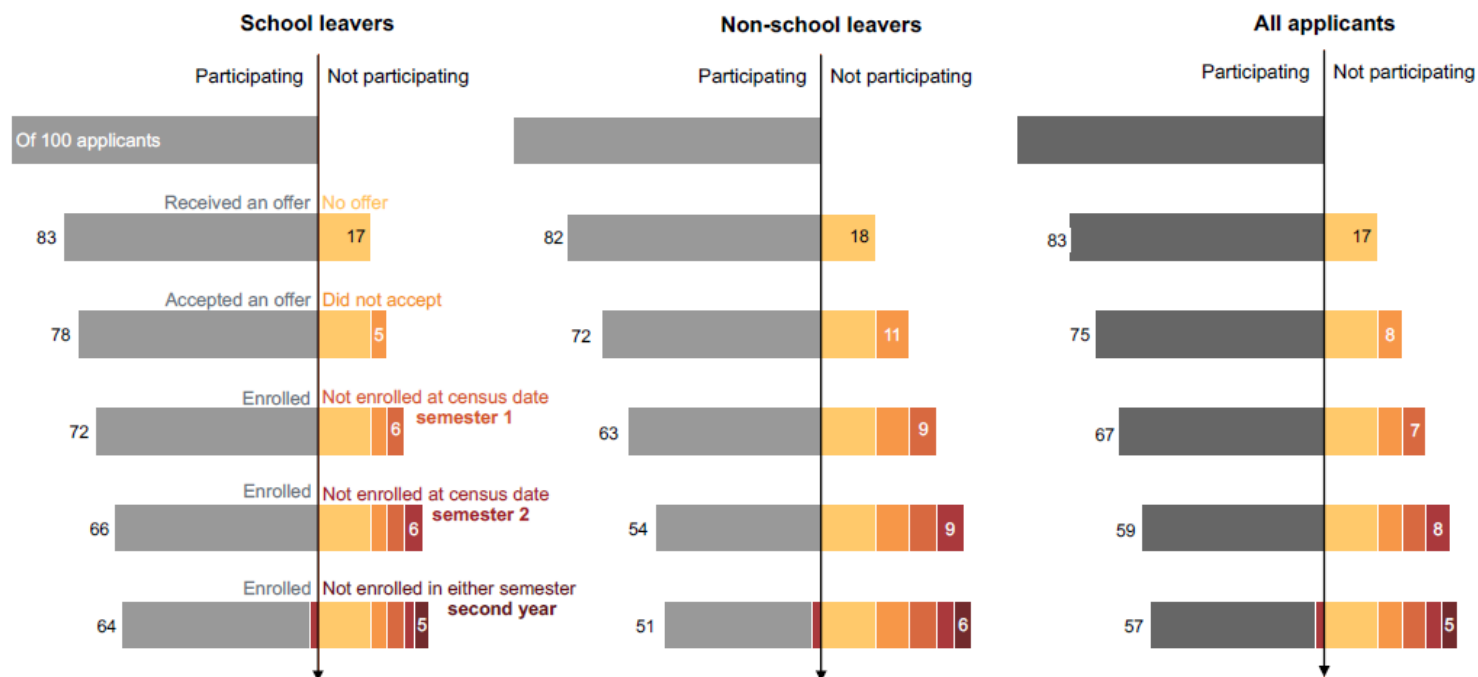
Note: a. Please see the *Introduction* for how measure of low SES, regional and remote equity groups and institutional groupings in this briefing note differ from those in earlier issues. b. Estimates using the *current address* are sourced from Table 4a and 4c above.

Source: Australian Government Department of Education and Training (2017).

Attrition as a research and policy challenge

Grattan Institute (2018)

Figure 1.2: A mutual selection process decides who will continue with their course
Applicants for the 2014 academic year



Notes: 2014 domestic bachelor applicant cohort only. Those who completed high school in 2013 are considered school leavers. Applications to tertiary admission centres and direct applications are considered. Only those who accept or defer an offer are considered in the enrolment stages. Second year is equivalent to the third and fourth semesters after commencing studies. Applications to UAC (NSW) and UTAS (Tasmania) have a high proportion of 'offer response unknown' observations and been omitted from the analysis. The analysis only includes applicants, enrolments and completions in bachelor courses. See Appendix A for detailed methodology.

Source: Department of Education and Training (various years).

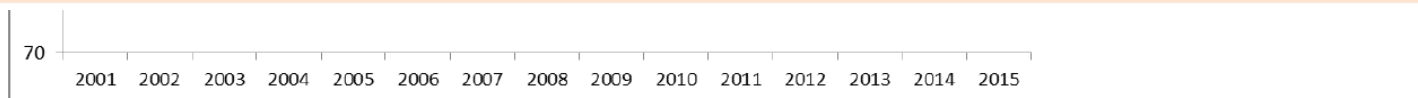
HESP Discussion Paper

Drivers of attrition

Attrition Rates by Mode of Attendance and Institution

Table 15: The attrition rate of commencing students by mode of attendance at selected institutions (per cent)

Institution	Mode of Attendance	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Australian Catholic University	External	33.33	21.74	25.00	0.00	0.00	40.00	22.22	13.24	17.33	21.54
	Internal	13.11	12.36	11.77	12.70	12.90	13.52	13.20	13.37	13.86	14.84
	Multi-modal		0.00	12.00	0.00	0.00		22.73	25.00	8.33	33.33
Bond University	Internal	11.24	9.59	10.37	11.43	9.58	8.45	10.25	10.06	11.02	10.62
Charles Darwin University	External	30.43	33.92	32.15	29.80	28.11	31.44	30.08	30.91	28.79	29.21
	Internal	27.31	28.94	28.22	28.70	25.32	29.92	29.89	24.26	30.40	25.38
	Multi-modal	20.78	14.85	13.11	12.64	12.89	9.54	12.96	13.78	13.16	13.88
Charles Sturt University	External	28.15	29.77	31.09	26.98	25.64	27.61	28.67	26.84	27.53	30.20
	Internal	11.45	12.76	12.73	11.41	13.86	13.26	12.62	13.99	17.25	17.66
	Multi-modal	11.30	11.07	11.49	8.83	8.45	10.39	7.97	10.30	10.84	9.83
Charles Sturt University	External	2,938	2,872	3,072	2,876	3,432	4,289	3,771	4,035	3,952	4,123
	Internal	2,411	2,344	2,326	2,121	1,948	2,013	1,847	2,001	1,797	1,438
	Multi-modal	460	488	470	532	899	1,309	1,318	1,350	1,328	1,557
Charles Sturt University	High SES	20.16	21.25	23.02	16.60	17.50	20.91	19.94	19.64	21.08	22.99
	Low SES	18.92	20.70	19.58	18.35	20.19	20.87	21.03	20.51	22.36	24.10
	Medium SES	20.05	21.28	22.98	20.13	19.91	20.56	20.47	20.45	21.87	22.64



Adjusted and 'modified for student distribution' institutional attrition rates

Domestic bachelor commencing students, 2014, per cent

Table A1: Adjusted and 'modified for student distribution' institutional attrition rates, domestic bachelor commencing students, 2014, per cent

Institution	Adjusted attrition rate	OLS 'modified' attrition rate	Logit 'modified' attrition rate
The University of Melbourne	3.7	8.6	5.3
University of New South Wales	4.8	9.2	5.9

Table A1: Adjusted and 'modified for student distribution' institutional attrition rates, domestic bachelor commencing students, 2014, per cent

Institution	Adjusted attrition rate	OLS 'modified' attrition rate	Logit 'modified' attrition rate
The University of Melbourne	3.7	8.6	5.3
University of New South Wales	4.8	9.2	5.9
The University of Sydney	5.9	10.3	7.2
Charles Sturt University	22.7	15.2	13.2
Federation University Australia	23.3	21.3	18.3
Central Queensland University	23.9	18.9	17.0
Southern Cross University	24.1	20.5	17.8
Curtin University	20.1	17.0	15.0
Eastern College Australia Inc	21.9	13.9	11.5
University of Southern Queensland	22.2	16.6	15.3
University of New England	22.6	15.1	13.8
Charles Sturt University	22.7	15.2	13.2
Federation University Australia	23.3	21.3	18.3
Central Queensland University	23.9	18.9	17.0
Southern Cross University	24.1	20.5	17.8
Christian Heritage College	24.4	21.8	19.1
Swinburne University of Technology	24.7	16.8	14.4
Holmesglen Institute of TAFE	25.8	23.5	22.9
Charles Darwin University	26.1	18.7	16.5
Tabor Adelaide	27.4	18.9	15.3
Melbourne Polytechnic	28.1	24.5	20.8
University of Tasmania	37.7	30.2	25.4
Standard deviation (percentage points)	7.5	4.4	4.3

Completion rates – Cohort analyses

4 years, 6 years, 9 years

Cohort Analysis

Table 27: Four year completion rates for commencing domestic Bachelor students by Table A Institution (per cent)

State	Table A Institutions	2005-08	2006-09	2007-10	2008-11	2009-12	2010-13	2011-14
	Charles Sturt University	43.7	41.3	41.1	41.2	37.7	39.1	38.9
	Macquarie University	47.1	48.2	48.7	49.9	46.9	43.1	43.0
	Southern Cross University	37.9	39.9	40.2	38.9	38.5	40.6	38.7

Table 29: Six year completion rates for commencing domestic Bachelor students by Table A Institution (per cent)

State	Table A Institutions	2005-10	2006-11	2007-12	2008-13	2009-14
	Charles Sturt University	56.0	54.2	53.7	55.9	53.5
	Macquarie University	71.9	71.9	73.2	73.0	71.3
	Southern Cross University	52.6	54.7	52.7	52.1	52.5

Table 31: Nine year completion rates for commencing domestic Bachelor students by Table A Institution (per cent)

State	Table A Institutions	2005-13	2006-14
New South Wales	Charles Sturt University	62.3	61.3
	Macquarie University	78.7	77.7
	Southern Cross University	59.3	60.7
	The University of New England	61.3	59.5
	The University of New South Wales	82.5	81.9
	The University of Newcastle	77.4	77.0

Cohort analysis through an equity lens

Completing university in a growing sector: is equity an issue?
(Edwards & McMillan, 2015)

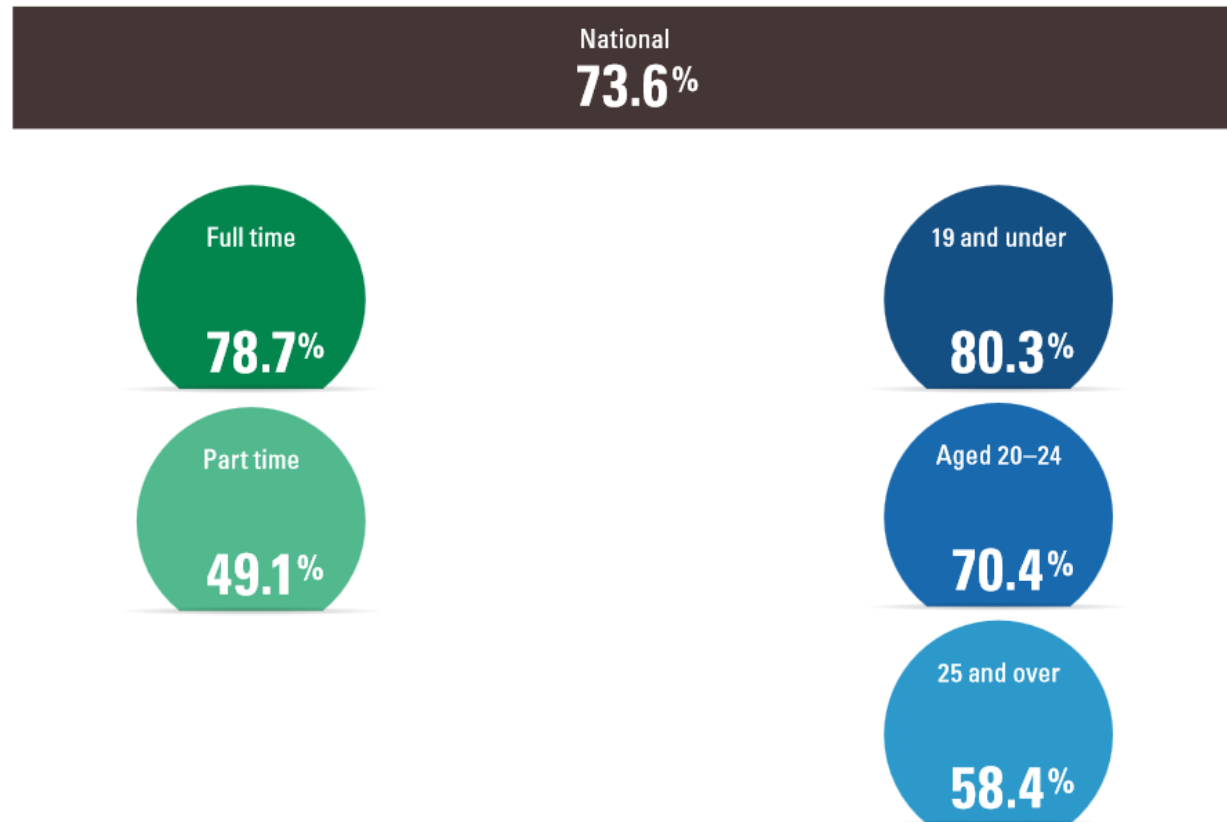


Figure 1: Completion rates, nine years after commencement, for selected characteristics, domestic bachelor students commencing in 2005

Influence of student characteristics on attrition

Linear regression analysis

Table A3: Ordinary Least Squares linear regression analysis (full model and bivariate linear regressions by student characteristics) for 2014 attrition rate of domestic bachelor commencing students

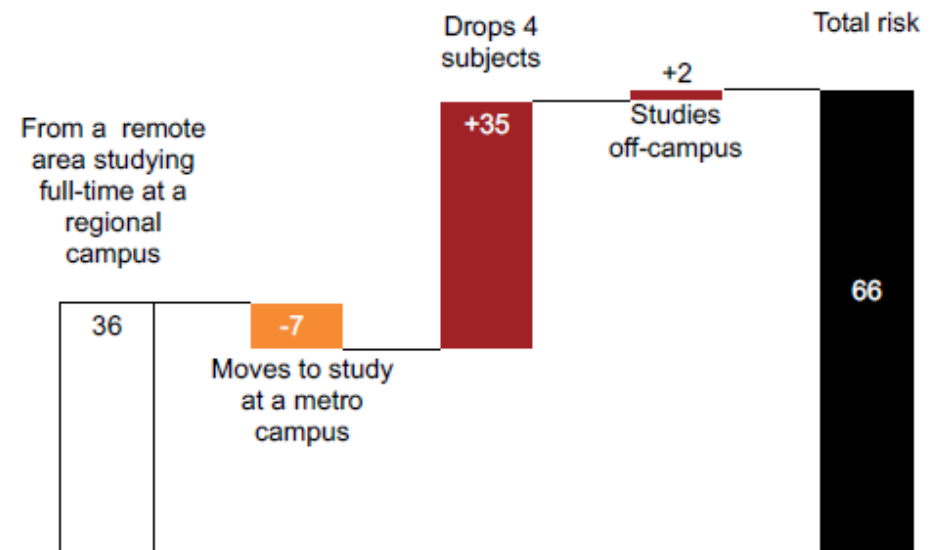
Student Characteristic	Adjusted R ² (variation explained), %
Institution	18.83
Type of attendance (full-time, part-time)	4.94
Mode of attendance (internal/external/multi-modal)	3.12
Age group (<20, 20-24, 25+ years)	2.66
Basis of admission (ATAR group, higher education, mature age etc)	2.51
Field of education (narrow field of education)	1.49
Socio-economic status (SES)	0.29
Indigenous	0.14
Non English Speaking Background	0.08
Gender	0.01
Full model including above variables	22.55%

What kind of information is in students' best interest?!

Grattan Institute (2018) proposal for a risk calculator

Figure 5.1: Studying full-time minimises the risk of not-completing university

Risk of not completing university within eight years, per cent



Notes: This hypothetical prospective student is assumed to be a non-Indigenous male Australian citizen who speaks English at home, reports no disability, lives in a median SES area of NSW, lives 20- to-40 minutes from campus, and starts university in the first semester. He uses a previous diploma as his basis of admission.

Source: Grattan analysis of Department of Education and Training (various years).

Student Experience Survey 2017

Small differences by student demographics

Table 7 The undergraduate student experience, by demographic and contextual group, 2017 (% positive rating)

	Group/subgroup	Skills Development	Learner Engagement	Teaching Quality	Student Support	Learning Resources	Overall Educational Experience
Gender	Male	78	60	78	72	82	76
	Female	82	59	81	73	84	80
Age	Under 25	81	63	80	72	84	79
	25 to 29	77	60	78	71	82	76
	30 to 39	78	61	79	72	83	77
	40 and over	79	62	80	73	84	78
Indigenous	Indigenous	75	57	76	69	81	74
	Non-Indigenous	81	61	81	73	84	79
Home language	English	81	61	81	73	84	79
	Other	75	57	76	69	81	74
Disability	Disability	75	57	76	69	81	74
	No disability	81	61	81	73	84	79
Study mode	Internal	81	61	81	73	84	79
	External	75	57	76	69	81	74
Total		81	60	80	73	83	79

* Previous higher education experience and First in family status include commencing students only.

Table 10 The undergraduate student experience, 2017 – by university (% positive rating, with 90% confidence intervals)*

	University	Skills Development	Learner Engagement	Teaching Quality	Student Support	Learning Resources	Overall Educational Experience
First in family status*	Australian Catholic University	84.2 (83.6, 84.8)	67.7 (66.9, 68.4)	80.7 (80.1, 81.4)	74.6 (73.8, 75.4)	84.5 (83.9, 85.1)	80.4 (79.8, 81.1)
	Bond University	92.7 (91.3, 94.1)	85.0 (83.1, 86.9)	92.7 (91.3, 94.1)	90.8 (89.1, 92.5)	93.9 (92.6, 95.2)	90.5 (89.0, 92.1)
	Central Queensland University	79.5 (78.1, 80.8)	50.2 (48.1, 52.3)	82.2 (80.9, 83.5)	78.9 (77.3, 80.5)	85.7 (84.3, 87.2)	80.1 (78.7, 81.4)
	Charles Darwin University	76.6 (74.6, 78.6)	50.3 (46.9, 53.7)	76.2 (74.3, 78.2)	73.7 (71.3, 76.2)	82.5 (79.9, 85.1)	74.9 (72.9, 76.8)
	Charles Sturt University	78.6 (77.7, 79.6)	66.2 (64.7, 67.7)	78.4 (77.5, 79.3)	76.7 (75.6, 77.8)	82.1 (81.0, 83.3)	75.9 (74.9, 76.9)
Previous high education experience**	Previous high education experience	79	61	82	75	87	80
	New to higher education	79	61	82	75	87	80

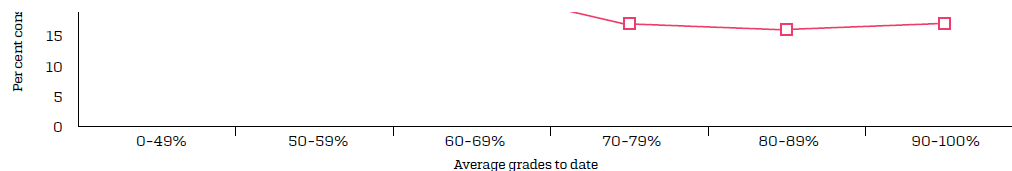
SES: Considering early departure

Equity students were more likely to consider departure

Table 14 Selected reasons for considering early departure among undergraduate students, 2016 and 2017

Departure reason	Per cent considering departure 2016	Per cent considering departure 2017
Health or stress	41	45
Study life balance	27	30
Workload difficulties	25	26
Need to do paid work	25	26
Financial difficulties	24	25
Personal reasons	24	24
Need a break	22	24
Expectations not met	22	23
Boredom/lack of interest	22	22
Career prospects	20	19
Family responsibilities	17	18

First in family status [†]	First in family
	Not first in family
Previous higher education experience ^{††}	Previous experience
	Previous experience
	New to higher educa



Limitations of current data collections

HESP Discussion Paper

- Annual student data collection can be used to derive measures of student progress by institution and field of education.

Issues:

- This information is not easily accessible nor is it promoted as an information source for (prospective) students, researchers and policy analysts.
- The introduction of longitudinal data and case studies may also assist student analysis and higher education policy making, e.g. benefits of incomplete HE participation.
- Tracking students across the tertiary sector would permit enhanced analysis of student pathways across the sector: need for a common student identifier.
- The current data collection does not capture why students decide to leave (nor, indeed, why they choose to return). But: Student Experience Survey = intention to leave, and the reasons why. Need for departure survey?
- Plus for equity research/performance analysis: student characteristics explain very little of inter-institutional variance once other factors are accounted for.

Concluding remarks

The Australian context

- Need for high levels of data literacy among practitioners and university managers to navigate various data challenges: definitions, availability, levels of (dis)aggregation, analysis approaches, and interpretations
- Student characteristics explain very little of the inter-institutional variance in attrition and completion rates once other factors are accounted for (which are highly correlated with equity student groups), esp.:
 - Prior attainment (SES)
 - Part-time study (age, disability and carer responsibilities)
 - Type of institution (regionality, SES, age, Indigeneity, online study)
- Policy challenge: how to develop meaningful performance indicators, incentives and benchmarks? How to avoid essentialising disadvantage and encourage universities to provide tailored support to diverse cohorts?

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Thank You and Questions

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