



Australian Government

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Undergraduate Applications, Preliminary Data for 2009



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Produced by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2008.

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Contents

Preliminary Applications Data	3
Trends in preliminary applications.....	3
Applications by basis of admission.....	4
Variations between preliminary data and final data.....	5
Applicant demographics.....	6
Trends in the Year 12 Feeder Population	9
Trends in Year 12 Completer Pathways	9
Undercount of Non-School Leaver Applications	11
Impact of Changes in Labour Market Conditions	11
Data Qualifications.....	12



Preliminary Applications Data

This report looks at the number of applications made through Tertiary Admissions Centres (TACs) as at 3 November 2008 as part of the application process for the 2009 academic year.

The main universities application process runs from August to February each year for admission in the first semester of university study. Most applications for domestic undergraduate places at university are made through state TACs during this period.

As a result of the establishment of a new data collection, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) has access for the first time to unit record data on applications made through the TACs for the 2009 academic year. Unit record data provide more detail and allow a finer level of analysis.

From the 2010 academic year, DEEWR will also have access to data on applications submitted directly to universities. National data on direct applications has not previously been available.

Trends in preliminary applications

There were 219,642 applications for admission to university in 2009 as at the start of November 2008. Table 1 shows the number of applications in each state in comparison with preliminary applications at the same time last year.

Table 1: Preliminary applications as at November, 2007-08 and 2008-09

State	2007-08	2008-09	% change
NSW and ACT	68,603	72,607	5.8%
VIC	61,766	64,447	4.3%
QLD	40,030	39,784	-0.6%
WA	15,861	16,164	1.9%
SA and NT	19,546	19,941	2.0%
TAS	6,359	6,699	5.3%
TOTAL AUSTRALIA	212,165	219,642	3.5%

As this is the first year of a new data collection, it should be noted that preliminary applications data for 2008-09 are not directly comparable with preliminary applications data for 2007-08. Further detail explaining data collection methodologies can be found in the 'Data Qualifications' section below

Overall, applications have risen by 3.5% compared with the same time last year. This is stronger growth than has been observed at preliminary stages of the admissions process in any year since 2003 when early applications rose 5.4%. On early applications data received in previous years (for the end of September), applications fell in three out of the past four years, including last year (down 2.2%). Note, however, that final applications figures can differ from trends provided by earlier applications data – as last year when an early decline had become a slight (0.2%) increase by March 2008.

Applications are up in all states except Queensland which recorded a slight decline of 0.6%. Growth was above the national figure in NSW/ACT, Victoria and Tasmania.



Applications by basis of admission

The majority of applicants in all States except Tasmania are current Year 12 students. Nearly 60% of applicants nationwide as at November 2008 were current school leavers. The proportion varies somewhat by State (Table 2). Data on applications by current Year 12 students have not been reported to DEEWR before this year and the introduction of a new unit record data collection on university applications and offers.

Table 2: Applications by current Year 12 students as a proportion of all applications, as at November 2008

State	Total	Current Year 12	Current Year 12 (%)
NSW and ACT	72,607	43,294	59.6%
VIC	64,447	40,659	63.1%
QLD	39,784	23,072	58.0%
WA	16,164	10,793	66.8%
SA and NT	19,941	10,573	53.0%
TAS	6,699	3,038	45.4%
TOTAL AUSTRALIA	219,642	131,429	59.8%

Applications have historically been disaggregated into broad categories 'school leavers' and others. Table 2 shows the number of preliminary applications by basis of admission categories – School Leavers and Non School Leavers.

'School leavers' includes all applicants attempting a Year 12 qualification in 2008, plus applicants who completed Year 12 in 2007 and have not previously participated in higher education.

All other applicants are 'non-school leavers'. This category includes applicants who have applied on the basis of qualifications other than Year 12 results, such as prior university undergraduate degrees, postgraduate studies, VET award courses, STAT scores, employment experience and/or special entry provisions.

Note that figures for 'school leaver' applicants for 2008-09, derived from the new unit record data, are only approximately comparable with figures reported for earlier years (see 'Data Qualifications' below for details).

Preliminary applications data show quite strong growth (5.6%) in non-school leaver applications. School leaver applications have grown more slowly (2.5%). Strong growth in non-school leaver applications this year reverses a trend where non-school leaver applications have been falling in each of the previous four years.

This year, school leaver applications account for two-thirds of all preliminary applications. This is down slightly on the past two years – when numbers of non-school leaver applications were low – but is very close to the historic average. More non-school leavers apply later in the admissions process, so that final applications data are likely to show a lower proportion of school leaver applications among total applicants.

Non-school leaver applications have risen in all States. Last year, all states except Tasmania recorded decreases. Western Australia has recorded particularly strong growth (9.7%) in non-school leaver application in 2008-09. For each of the past four years, Western Australia recorded double-digit decreases in non-school leaver applications, including a 15.8% drop last year. There was also rapid growth this year in NSW/ACT (8.4%), Tasmania (8.0%) and South Australia/Northern Territory (7.4%).



Table 3: Number of school leaver and non-school leaver applications as at November, 2007-08 and 2008-09

State	School leavers			Non school leavers		
	2007-08	2008-09	% change	2007-08	2008-09	% change
NSW and ACT	46,046	48,144	4.6%	22,557	24,463	8.4%
VIC	40,874	42,876	4.9%	20,892	21,571	3.3%
QLD	25,855	25,318	-2.1%	14,175	14,466	2.1%
WA	11,910	11,828	-0.7%	3,951	4,336	9.7%
SA and NT	13,060	12,978	-0.6%	6,486	6,963	7.4%
TAS	3,664	3,788	3.4%	2,695	2,911	8.0%
TOTAL AUSTRALIA	141,409	144,932	2.5%	70,756	74,710	5.6%

Variations between preliminary data and final data

Preliminary data cited in this report cover applications received by early November. This is still quite early in the application process. The bulk of applications, between 84% and 88% nationally since 2001, are usually received by the TACs by end of September each year. TACs continue to receive applications after the end of September. Total applications increase by around 6-8% by early November. As such, preliminary data for November are a fairly reliable lead indicator of movements in demand. Nevertheless, figures do vary over the course of the admissions process, and annual percentage changes can look quite different – especially at the State level – depending on when the calculation is done.

As already noted, the main universities application process runs from August to February each year. While dates for applications and offers vary between the TACs, some key times for domestic undergraduate applications that influence applicant behaviour are the ‘on-time’ cut-off date, release of Year 12 results and the offer rounds. Applicants can add, delete or change the order of their preferences up until the close of the main application round in late March.

The ‘on-time’ cut-off date provides a deadline for applications to be submitted without attracting any late fees. The precise date is agreed by TACs each year. While prospective students can continue to submit applications after this date, applicants – especially current Year 12 students – are strongly encouraged to apply by the ‘on-time’ deadline.

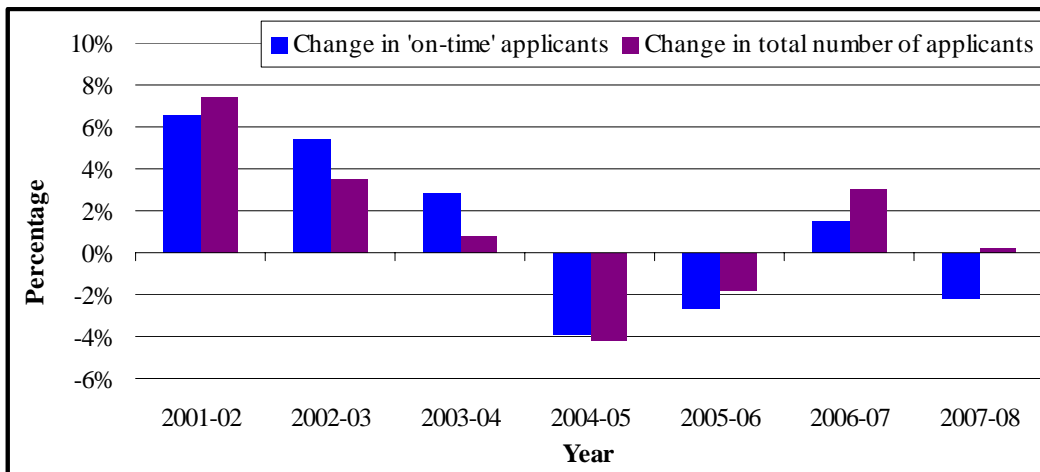
The release of Year 12 results in December also influences Year 12 students’ application behaviour as it results in changes to preferences in view of the likelihood of gaining admission to various institutions or courses. Anecdotal evidence based on changes in the number of applications at various stages in the application process also suggests that a small number of applicants will withdraw their application at this point.

Offers are posted by TACs on behalf of the universities they represent. In most States and Territories, the offer of a place will be to the highest preferred course for which the applicant is eligible and competitively placed. The dates of each offer round and the number of offer rounds varies slightly by State. Some applicants will change their preferences depending on whether they get an offer in their preferred course in the first offer round.

Figure 1 shows the percentage change in applications as at the end of February, in comparison with trends in early applications numbers (for ‘on-time’ applications to the end of September). The largest variance was recorded last year. Preliminary data showed a 2.2% decline in applications whereas the final number of applicants showed a 0.2% increase. Variation can be even greater at the state and field of education level. A more accurate picture of demand will emerge as more applications are received over the next few months.



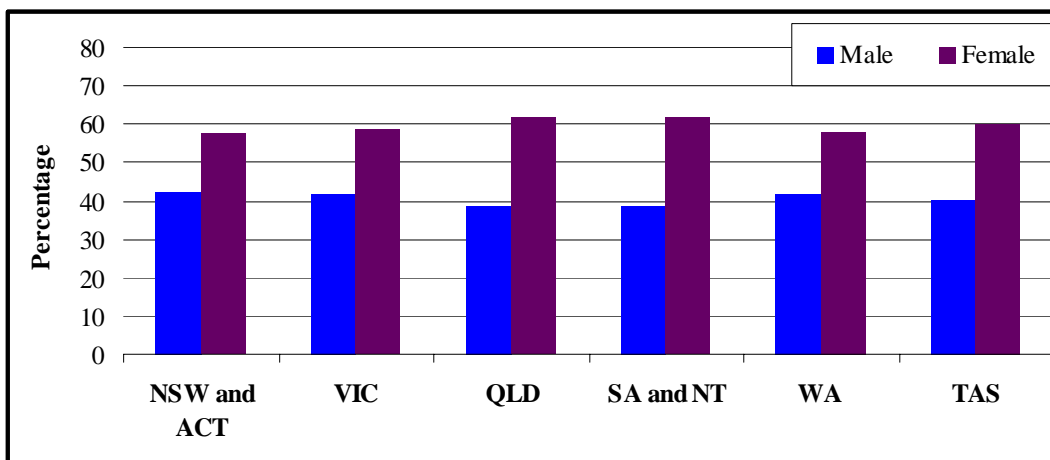
Figure 1: Previous year trends in the preliminary data compared to total applicant, 2001-02 to 2007-08



Applicant demographics

In the preliminary applications data to November 2008, only 40.0% of applicants were male. The mean age of males was slightly lower than that of females (19.8 years and 20.4 years, respectively). More detailed analysis such as the field of education preferences by gender and the gender ratio of high performing Year 12 students will be conducted in the detailed *Applications, Offers and Acceptances 2009* report expected to be released in April/May 2009.

Figure 2: Proportion of applicants by state and gender



For the purpose of comparing the outcomes of those aged 19 and under (the majority of whom are school-leavers) with older applicants, we have divided applicants into four age categories. In previous reporting, applicants could only be split into two very broad groups: those aged 20 years and under and 21 years and over, with all applicants aged 21 years and over referred to as mature age applicants.

Using the finer level of detail available from unit record data, this report divides applicants into the following main groups:

- those aged 19 and under ('the school leaver cohort')
- those aged 20 to 24 years ('non-traditional age')
- those aged 25 years and older ('mature aged').

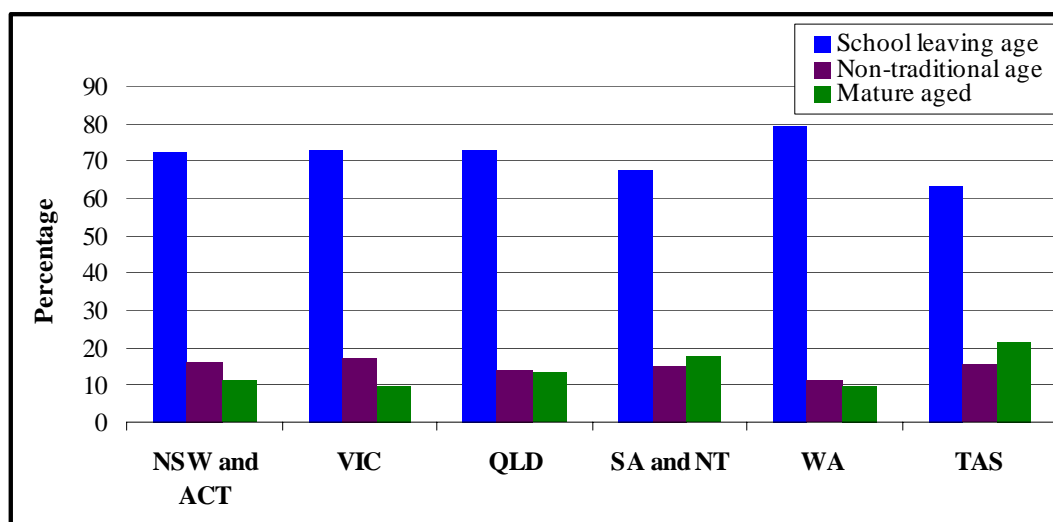
The fourth category will be a subset of the school leaver age cohort, those applicants aged 16 and under, hereafter referred to as 'early achievers'.



Nationally, the majority (73%) of applicants to November 2008 are aged 19 and under. Those in the non-traditional age group accounted for 16% of applicants and those defined as mature aged accounted for the remaining 12%. There was a small group of applicants aged under 16 (a total of 782 or 0.5% of the school leaver age cohort). There was considerable variation among states in the proportion of school leaver applicants and their older counterparts.

The school leaving age cohort ranges from 80% of the total in Western Australia down to 60% in Tasmania. The proportion of applicants in their early 20s varies less by State, but is notably lower in Western Australia (11%) than elsewhere. Mature age applicants make up more than 20% of the total in Tasmania, but less than 10% in Western Australia and Victoria. South Australia/Northern Territory also recorded a high proportion (18%) of mature age applicants.

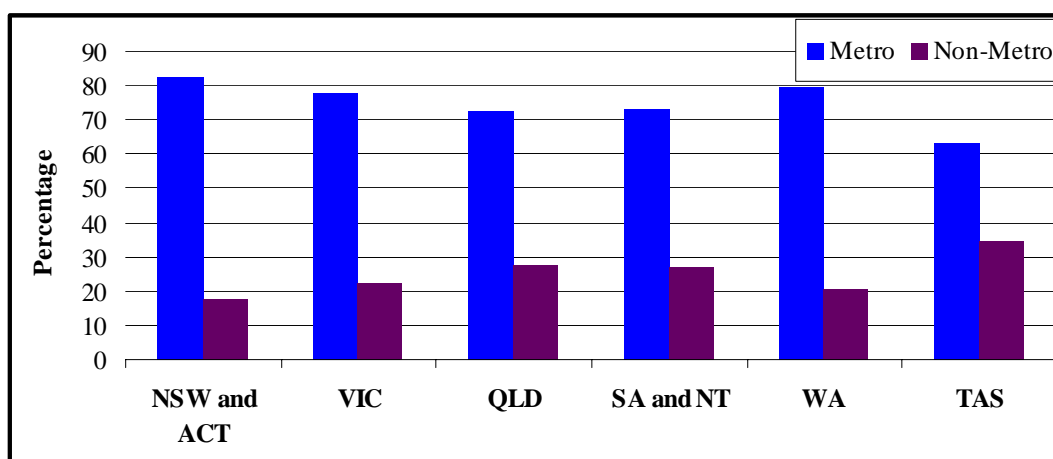
Figure 3: Proportion of applicants by state and age



Applying the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) “remoteness” categories to data collected as part of the ABS Census of Population and Housing in 2006 shows that 61% of Australia’s population lived in metropolitan areas (that is, mainland state capitals or major urban districts). The proportion of higher education students in metropolitan areas was 74%.

Findings from the preliminary data show that 78% of applicants were from metropolitan areas when using the MCEETYA “remoteness” categories. More detailed analysis on applications by region will be conducted in the detailed *Applications, Offers and Acceptances 2009* report.

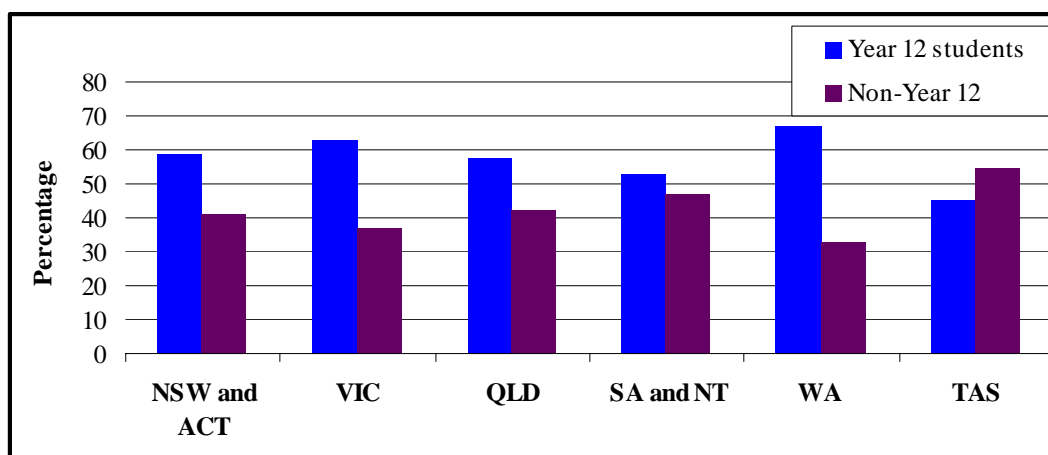
Figure 4: Proportion of applicants by state and region



A sub-group of the School Leaver group are current Year 12 students. A current Year 12 student is an applicant who is currently studying for their secondary qualification and is due to complete this qualification in 2008.

In the preliminary data for 2009, there were a total of 131,429 current Year 12 students applying for university. They represent the majority of applications made through TACs (60%). Those applying on the basis of other qualifications or secondary qualification obtained from a previous year are grouped into a Non-Year 12 category as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Proportion of current Year 12 applicants by state

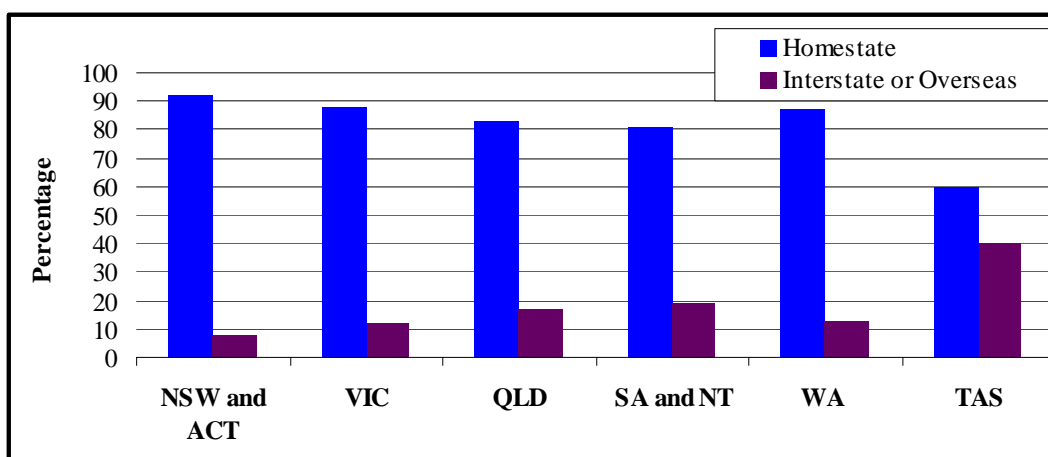


Caution needs to be exercised when interpreting applications data classified by prior educational attainment and highest level of prior educational attainment as self-reported or claimed qualifications are yet to be verified for a large number of applications at the time of the preliminary data submission. Nevertheless, preliminary data show that 19% of applicants stated that their highest level of prior educational attainment was incomplete or completed university study and 6% of applicants stated that their highest level of prior educational attainment was incomplete or completed study in the VET sector.

Based on the postcodes reported for permanent home residence by applicants, 13% of applications to TACs were from interstate applicants. The large proportion of interstate applications for Tasmania (40%) reflects, in part, applicants applying for nursing places at the University of Tasmania's campus in NSW.

With the establishment of the new data collection, a project will be undertaken during 2010 to review the potential for creating a unique identifier designed to reduce duplication in the count of applications.

Figure 6: Proportion of homestate applicants by state



Trends in the Year 12 Feeder Population

The main feeder group to universities are persons of school leaving age. ABS data presented in Table 2 shows that the number of 17 year-olds is projected to increase by 1.1% in 2008.

Table 4: Projected population of 17 year-old cohort, 2006 to 2008

State	2006	2007	2008	% change 07-08
NSW	91,171	94,237	95,106	0.9%
VIC	68,786	70,816	71,482	0.9%
QLD	55,758	59,122	60,512	2.4%
SA	20,920	21,332	21,373	0.2%
WA	29,280	30,222	30,402	0.6%
TAS	6,845	6,927	7,071	2.1%
NT	2,993	3,363	3,288	-2.2%
ACT	4,672	4,702	4,735	0.7%
TOTAL AUSTRALIA	280,443	290,742	294,001	1.1%

Source: ABS, *Population Projections* (Cat No. 3222.0) - Series 29(B) Projected Persons Age 17

School retention rates will influence the number of persons of school leaving age who are able to apply to university on the basis of their secondary qualification achieved upon completing Year 12. Growth in the number of 17 year-olds in recent years has been partially offset by slight falls in the Year 12 retention rate (as shown in Table 3). Data on retention rates for 2008 are expected to be published by the ABS in early 2009.

Table 5: Apparent Retention Rates, 2005 to 2007

State	2005	2006	2007	% point change 06-07
NSW	71.1	70.5	69.7	-0.8
VIC	80.6	79.9	80.1	0.2
QLD	79.9	78.8	78.5	-0.3
SA	70.7	71.5	72.7	1.2
WA	72.5	71.8	70.3	-1.5
TAS	67.1	64.8	65.4	0.6
NT	59.1	58.4	61.7	3.3
ACT	87.5	88.7	85.2	-3.5
TOTAL AUSTRALIA	75.3	74.7	74.3	-0.4

Source: ABS, *Schools* (Cat No. 4221.0) - Year 7/8 to Year Apparent Retention Rate

Trends in Year 12 Completer Pathways

Data from the ABS Survey of Education and Work show that the percentage of Year 12 completers going on to higher education fell slightly to 41% in 2007 (down from 43% the year before) but was 3 percentage points higher than the low of 38% in 2005. In contrast, the proportion going on to VET in 2007 (21%) was unchanged from the previous year, but down several percentage points on earlier years. The proportion in employment and not in education, 31%, was up 3 percentage points on the previous year and was the highest figure recorded since the series began in 1996.



Figure 7: Year 12 completers – participation in higher education and vocation and technical education (VET), 1996 to 2007

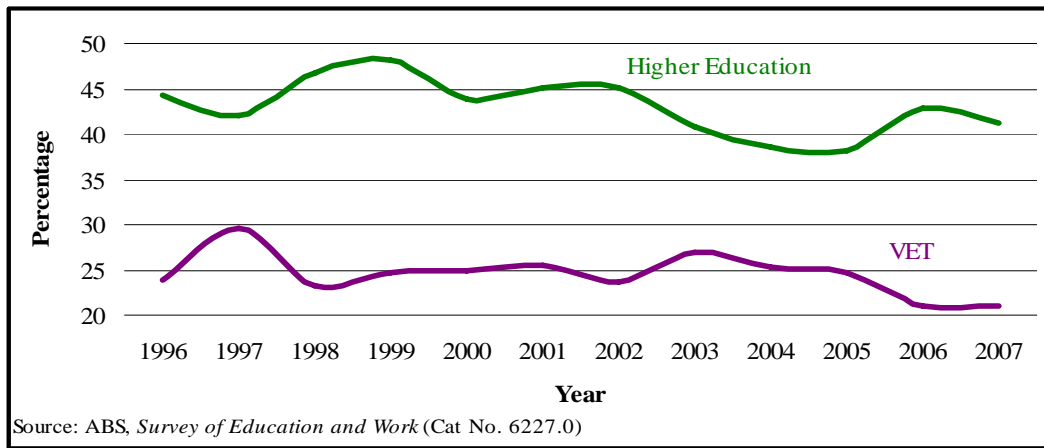
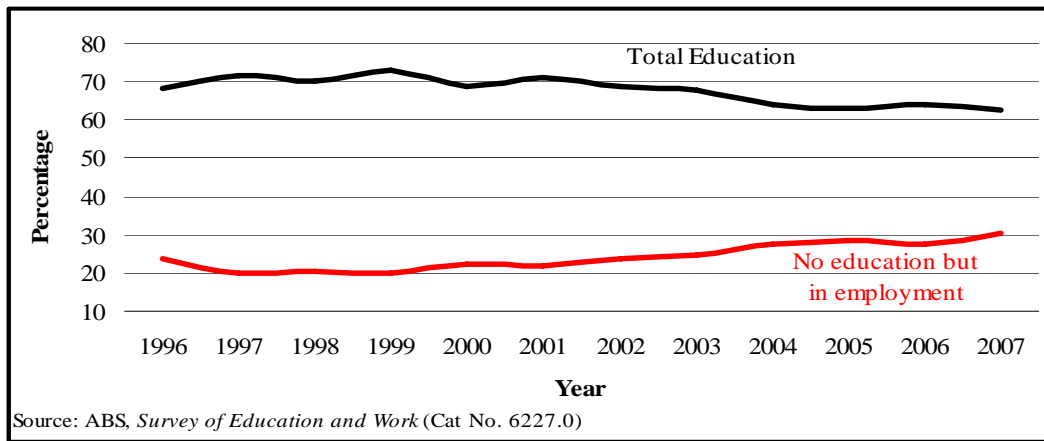
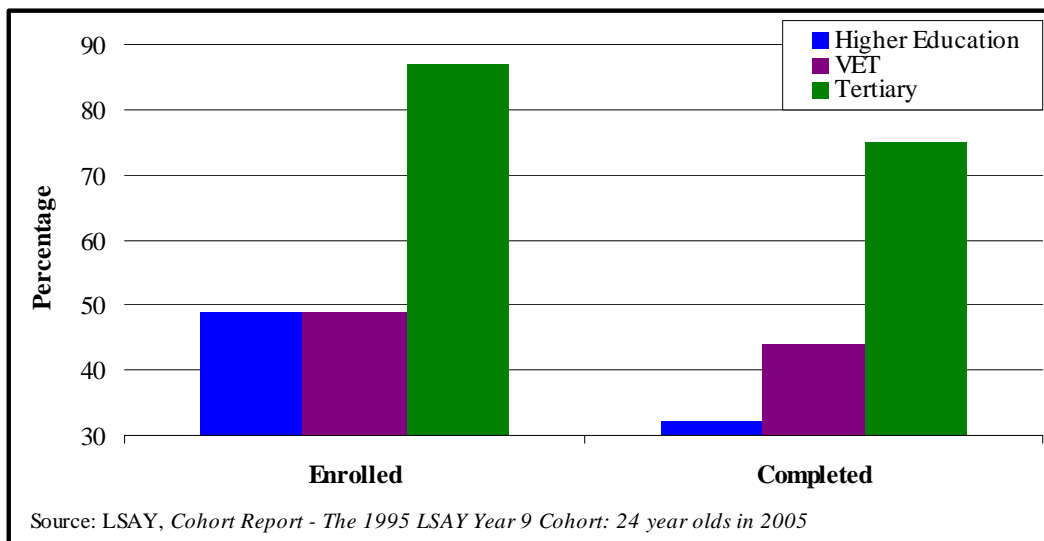


Figure 8: Year 12 completers – participation in tertiary education and employment, 1996 to 2007



The Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth survey shows that nearly half (49%) of young people who were in Year 9 in 1995 had attended university at some point in the ten years after completing Year 9 (that is, by the time they were aged 24). The number who had ever enrolled in post-school education and training, which includes university and vocational education and training, was 87% by 2005.

Figure 9: Participation in tertiary education by age 24, 2005



Undercount of Non-School Leaver Applications

The number of Non-School Leaver applicants appears to be undercounted. Anecdotal evidence, supported by a comparison of commencements data against applications data, suggests that a high proportion of mature age applicants apply directly to universities. The 2010 data collection will include data on direct applications.

Impact of Changes in Labour Market Conditions

Changes in labour market conditions can also influence demand for university places. In a weaker labour market there are fewer job opportunities and wages and salaries tend to increase more slowly so that investment in post secondary education means that there are likely to be lower opportunity costs (in foregone wages) for people who leave work to study.

The national unemployment rate was 4.3% (seasonally adjusted) in October 2008 – unchanged from October 2007. However, job vacancies series which are a leading indicator of employment have been falling in recent months.

Table 6: Unemployment rate, October 2007 and October 2008

State	2007	2008	% points change
NSW	4.6	5.2	+0.6
VIC	4.4	4.4	0.0
QLD	3.7	3.8	+0.1
SA	5.3	5.3	0.0
WA	3.6	2.2	-1.4
TAS	5.5	3.5	-2.0
NT	4.9	3.0	-0.1
ACT	2.5	2.7	+0.2
TOTAL AUSTRALIA	4.3	4.3	0.0

Source: ABS, *Labour Force* (Cat No. 6202.0)

Seasonally adjusted figures except for Northern Territory and ACT (trend).

Based on the experience of the last major economic downturn in the 1990s, reduced employed opportunities were associated with an estimated 11% increase in the number of school leaver applications over a three year period between 1990 and 1993. A weaker labour market encouraged students to stay on and complete Year 12 thus increasing the size of the Year 12 feeder population. In addition, a weaker labour market encouraged a larger proportion of Year 12 completers to apply for higher education.

By way of comparison, during the last major economic downturn experienced in the early 1990s, reduced employment opportunities were associated with an estimated 12% increased in mature age applications increased over a three year period.



Data Qualifications

The data referred to in this report is for applications for undergraduate university places received by the State TACs as at 3 November 2008. It should be noted that:

- The data includes applications made before the 'on-time' closing date plus applications made during October. The 'on-time' cut-off was 29 September 2008 for all TACs. Applicants that submit their applications after the 'on-time' date must pay late fees.
- Comparisons between 2008-09 and 2007-08 are indicative and approximate only due to changes in scope and definitions associated with the introduction of a new unit-record data collection on university applications and offers.
- Figures cited above for years prior to 2007-08 are for 'on-time' applications (that is, end of September).
- The data does not include applications made directly to universities. However, most applications from domestic students – including the bulk of applications from school leavers – for undergraduate places are made through the TACs.
- The data does not include applications from overseas students.
- A small proportion of applications will be made to more than one TAC resulting in some double counting of applicants.
- 'School leavers' includes all applicants attempting a Year 12 qualification in 2008, plus applicants who completed Year 12 in 2007 and have not previously participated in higher education.
- Percentage changes for school leavers should be used with caution as the scope and definition of 2008-09 figures correspond only approximately to those of previous years. From 2008-09 onwards, DEEWR will report on Current Year 12 applicants. For this year only, data on 'school leavers' are retained for approximate comparative purposes only.
- While completing Year 12 and gaining a Tertiary Entrance Score (TES)¹ is the most common way to gain entry to university, TACs and universities take a number of other qualifications taken into consideration, particularly for adults applying who have not recently completed Year 12 (e.g. Non-School Leaver applicants). Some pathways to gaining entry to a university degree include sitting the Special Tertiary Admissions Test (STAT), articulating from certificate and/or diploma level studies in Vocational Education and Training (VET), university bridging or Foundation programs and previous higher education (completed or commenced).
- Data on offers is not yet available as the offer process has not yet begun.
- Commentators sometimes use early figures on the number of offers made as an indicator of supply of university places. However, it is important to note that the number of offers made does not necessarily equate to the number of places available. When offering places, higher education providers need to take into account that not all offers are accepted and that some applicants will wish to study part time.
- Data recorded on time series is only available back to 2001 due to significant changes in the data collection. Where possible, these time series will be maintained when using the new Application and Offers Data Collection.

¹ The Tertiary Entrance Score (TES) presents State Tertiary Entrance Ranks in a comparable fashion. State Tertiary Entrance Ranks are converted into an Interstate Transfer Index (ITI) score by TACs. Within the wider university sector, this score is known as the Tertiary Entrance Score (TES).



- In 2006, SATAC took over the administration of applications to the NT's Charles Darwin University as well as the SA universities. Thus an applicant with preferences for Charles Darwin University and a SA university is only counted once from 2006 inclusive. For 2003 to 2005, an applicant who made an application to both Charles Darwin University and through SATAC would have been counted twice. Prior to 2003 no figures were available for Charles Darwin University.
- Until 2007, QTAC included mid-year applications in the figure for preliminary applications. QTAC has now excluded mid-year applications, in line with practice at other TACs. This revision reduces the number of applications for Queensland. The time series has been adjusted to reflect this change.

