

Key Findings from the 'Completion Rates of Higher Education Students – Cohort Analysis, 2005-2015' Report

Key messages

- Nine year completion outcomes for the 2007 cohort of domestic bachelor students commencing at Table A and Table B institutions were very similar to nine year outcomes for the 2005 and 2006 cohorts. Nine years after the 2007 cohort commenced, 73.6 per cent of students had completed a course, compared with 73.6 per cent for the 2005 cohort and 73.5 per cent for the 2006 cohort.
- For the 2010 cohort, 66.0 per cent of students had completed a course after six years, the lowest completion rate since the time series began in 2005. This rate is 0.9 per cent lower than the average completion rate of all other cohorts (66.9 per cent). Six year completion rates varied by institution with some institutions experiencing their highest six year completion rate for the 2010 cohort.
- New data shows that the four year completion rate for the cohort of 2012 commencing domestic bachelor students at Table A and Table B institutions was 44.2 per cent. This represents a 0.9 per cent drop compared with the 2011 cohort.

Background

The Department of Education and Training's cohort analysis methodology analyses outcomes for cohorts of higher education students using data from the *Higher Education Statistics Collection*. Commencing student cohorts are tracked using student ID (within institution) and Commonwealth Higher Education Student Support Number, CHESSN¹ (across institutions) which provides an overview of student outcomes four, six and nine years after students commenced a course. That is, how many students had completed their studies², how many were still studying, and how many were neither studying nor had completed an award and therefore were no longer at the original institution or the institution to which they had transferred.

The tracking of cohorts over time enables a better understanding of the progression of students through the higher education system. Tracking outcomes also assists in understanding student performance and is a useful tool for identifying students with specific characteristics who are more

¹ The CHESSN was first implemented in the Higher Education Student Data Collection in 2005 under new policy initiatives introduced through the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (HESA).

² Students who completed an award course. The award course may not necessarily be the same course that the student initially enrolled in. For example, a student who commenced a Bachelor's Pass degree in 2005 and by 2013, their award course completion could be for a Bachelor's Honours degree. Similarly for field of education, a student may have commenced a Science degree but completed an Arts degree. Likewise, a student may have commenced study at one institution, but completed their study at a different institution.

likely to drop out and may benefit most from early assistance. Three reports including a detailed account of cohort analysis results have previously been published, the latest in January 2017³.

Reports published previously by the Department have shown that in general lower completion rates are seen for those students who study externally; are part-time; are older; are admitted to higher education on a basis other than secondary education; have lower Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) scores⁴; are Indigenous; have a lower socio-economic status or come from a regional area of Australia. Completion rates also vary across different fields of education.

Incorporating 2015 data

The new cohort analysis includes data from the 2015 *Higher Education Statistics Collection*, allowing for the assessment of additional student cohorts (2007 cohort for nine year outcomes, 2010 cohort for six year outcomes and 2012 cohort for four year outcomes). The results presented in this paper are for commencing domestic bachelor Table A and Table B⁵ institution students. This expands on previous publications which, for universities, have focused on Table A institutions only⁶.

In addition to incorporating 2015 data, the new analysis includes outcomes by study area, a more detailed breakdown of broad field of education. The 21 study area categories align with those used for the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) website⁷.

Nine year outcomes for the 2007 cohort

- Nine year completion outcomes for the 2007 cohort of domestic bachelor students commencing at Table A and Table B institutions were very similar to nine year outcomes for the 2005 and 2006 cohorts. Nine years after the 2007 cohort commenced, 73.6 per cent of students had completed a course, compared with 73.6 per cent for the 2005 cohort and 73.5 per cent for the 2006 cohort.
- The proportion of students who were still enrolled; re-enrolled, but dropped out before nine years; or never returned, was also similar across the 2005, 2006 and 2007 student groups.
- In addition, the pattern of completion information by various student characteristics was comparable between all three cohorts. The differences to note are:
 - for students with ATARs between 30 and 49, the proportion of students who had completed a course after nine years was 58.2 per cent for the 2007 cohort, compared with 51.4 per cent for the 2005 cohort and 50.6 per cent for the 2006

³ The previous reports are *Completion Rates of Domestic Bachelor Students- A Cohort Analysis, 2005-2012*; *Completion Rates of Domestic Bachelor Students- A Cohort Analysis, 2005-2013* and *Completion Rates of Higher Education Students- Cohort Analysis, 2005-2014*.

⁴ Analysis of ATARs only includes scores for those students admitted to higher education on the basis of secondary education.

⁵ Bond University, University of Divinity and The University of Notre Dame Australia.

⁶ With the exception of overall institution results for Table B institutions published in *Completion Rates of Higher Education Students- Cohort Analysis, 2005-2014*.

⁷ www.qilt.edu.au. The QILT website provides prospective students with relevant and transparent information about Australian higher education institutions from the perspective of recent students and graduates. It is funded by the department.

cohort. This variation in completion rates is in part influenced by the small number of students in this category. Variation within cohorts is more apparent in the six and four year outcome data, where a longer time series is available;

- study areas reporting changes in completion rate were:
 - Nursing with a 74.5 per cent completion rate for the 2007 cohort, declining from 76.2 per cent for the 2006 cohort and 77.3 per cent for the 2005 cohort;
 - a 72.3 per cent completion rate for Teaching Education in the 2007 cohort, decreased from to 73.3 per cent for the 2006 cohort and 74.8 per cent for the 2005 cohort;

Six year outcomes for the 2010 cohort

From 1 January 2012, the Australian Government removed limits on the number of Commonwealth Supported Places for domestic bachelor degree students at public universities (Table A institutions) (excluding medical places) under the 'demand driven system'. Although the demand driven funding system was fully implemented in 2012, it was preceded by a transition period whereby the previous 5.0 per cent over-enrolment cap for Commonwealth Supported Places for domestic bachelor degree students at public universities increased to 10 per cent for 2010 and 2011.

The 2015 publication provides the first six year outcomes for a cohort of students impacted by the demand driven system (2010 cohort). Results for the 2010 cohort provide an early indication of how commencing domestic bachelor student⁸ outcomes under the demand driven system compare with outcomes for commencing students prior to the demand driven system. The data presented here includes Table B institutions as well as Table A institutions. The impact of this inclusion is minor due to the relatively small number of students at Table B institutions.

- For the 2010 cohort, 66.0 per cent of students completed a course after six years, the lowest completion rate since the time series began in 2005. This represents a 0.9 per cent decrease from the completion rate average of all other cohorts (66.9 per cent).
- 77.8 per cent of the 2010 student cohort had completed a course or were still enrolled (defined as 'engaged' with higher education). This rate was 0.7 per cent below the 2009 cohort (78.4 per cent) and the average of all other cohorts (78.1 per cent).
- The pattern of completion by various student characteristics has been relatively stable across time, however, the differences to note are:
 - A decrease in the six year completion rate of students from a Non-English Speaking Background (NESB), from 71.1 per cent for the 2009 cohort to 68.9 per cent for the 2010 cohort. This decline fits with the trend for a small decline in the six year completion rate of NESB students over time, down from a high of 72.5 per cent for the 2005 cohort.

⁸ Cohort data presented here includes all bachelor level courses (Bachelor's Pass, Bachelor's Honours and Bachelor's Graduate Entry), rather than just Bachelor's Pass courses, which are the focus of the demand driven system. The number of Graduate Entry and Honours students are small, however, making up 4.3 per cent of the 2010 cohort.

- All three Socio-Economic Status (SES) groups experienced the lowest six completion rate on record for the 2010 cohort, an outcome of the overall decline in the completion rate. For students from a low SES background, the six year completion rate was 60.6 per cent. The equivalent figure for medium SES students was 64.9 per cent and 70.5 per cent for high SES students.
- The six year completion rate for students from a metropolitan area was the lowest on record for the 2010 cohort (66.9 per cent, compared to an average of 68.0 per cent for all other metropolitan cohorts).
- Notable outcomes within study areas are:
 - the completion rate for the 2010 cohort of teacher education students (62.0 per cent) was lower than for the 2009 cohort (63.5 per cent), continuing the decline over time of six year completion rates for teacher education students from a high of 70.3 per cent in 2005;
 - the six year completion rate for legal and paralegal studies decreased. The 2010 cohort of legal and paralegal studies had a 64.4 per cent completion rate after six years, compared with 68.6 per cent for the 2005 cohort.

Outcomes by institution⁹

A number of institutions increased the six year completion rate between the 2009 cohort (pre-demand driven system) and 2010 cohort (first demand driven system transition year). These institutions are highlighted in Table 1 (over page). In addition, many of these institutions experienced the highest six year completion rate for the 2010 cohort, across all cohorts from 2005 to 2010. These institutions were Southern Cross University, University of New South Wales, Deakin University, La Trobe University, Monash University, CQUniversity, University of the Sunshine Coast, The Australian National University and Bond University.

Over time, as more six year outcome data becomes available for additional cohorts, any trends in changing student outcomes by institution under the demand driven system will become clear.

⁹ A degree of variation in completion rates across higher education institutions relates to the student and course profiles

Table 1: Six year completion rates for commencing domestic bachelor students by Table A institution and Table B institution, 2005-2010, 2006-2011, 2007-2012, 2008-2013, 2009-2014 and 2010-2015, %

		2005-2010	2006-2011	2007-2012	2008-2013	2009-2014	2010-2015
Table A institutions							
New South Wales	Charles Sturt University	56.0	54.2	53.7	55.9	53.5	54.6
	Macquarie University	72.1	71.9	73.2	73.0	71.3	69.4
	Southern Cross University	52.7	54.7	52.7	52.1	52.5	55.6
	The University of New England	53.0	51.6	49.4	50.8	49.0	47.2
	The University of Newcastle	71.0	70.7	67.1	64.7	64.1	63.5
	The University of Sydney	84.4	84.2	82.8	81.6	81.9	82.9
	University of New South Wales	75.8	74.7	75.5	75.9	78.1	79.6
	University of Technology, Sydney	77.1	76.3	77.0	77.1	77.1	76.7
	University of Wollongong	76.0	75.0	77.4	76.5	76.7	75.2
	Western Sydney University	68.4	67.7	64.4	63.9	63.1	61.2
Victoria	Deakin University	64.6	64.9	65.9	68.6	70.5	71.3
	Federation University Australia	65.4	57.7	56.7	53.2	51.3	36.4
	La Trobe University	70.5	70.7	69.7	70.1	69.5	70.8
	Monash University	74.2	77.1	78.2	79.7	79.3	79.8
	RMIT University	68.5	68.7	70.3	72.4	74.8	74.2
	Swinburne University of Technology	65.7	66.8	66.1	64.1	65.5	65.1
	The University of Melbourne	83.9	84.7	86.4	87.7	88.0	87.7
	Victoria University	61.0	62.4	60.2	62.3	57.4	54.7
Queensland	CQUniversity	44.0	41.8	42.2	43.6	42.5	45.5
	Griffith University	62.7	62.9	63.3	64.8	64.1	62.6
	James Cook University	52.0	51.4	53.1	56.1	55.6	54.2
	Queensland University of Technology	67.7	65.5	65.6	66.9	69.3	68.3
	The University of Queensland	73.1	70.2	69.8	72.7	71.3	71.7
	University of Southern Queensland	43.4	39.7	41.9	42.4	44.4	42.5
	University of the Sunshine Coast	48.6	46.8	49.7	54.5	53.2	55.3
Western Australia	Curtin University of Technology	66.6	65.8	65.3	65.5	64.2	63.2
	Edith Cowan University	56.8	56.7	57.7	57.5	55.4	53.5
	Murdoch University	54.1	53.0	50.0	51.6	49.6	50.9
	The University of Western Australia	76.9	75.8	76.3	75.6	74.5	74.1
South Australia	Flinders University	68.1	67.3	65.8	65.1	62.5	62.2
	The University of Adelaide	73.1	74.5	72.4	71.8	70.5	68.4
	University of South Australia	62.2	62.6	63.7	63.6	65.8	64.4
Tasmania	University of Tasmania	64.5	62.3	61.7	59.5	62.7	60.6
Northern Territory	Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education	43.9	35.8	32.6	30.8	36.9	22.1
	Charles Darwin University	46.0	44.0	42.4	43.3	41.8	41.2
Australian Capital Territory	The Australian National University	79.8	80.6	77.8	79.8	81.0	81.1
	University of Canberra	68.8	67.4	64.7	62.8	65.5	59.2
Multi-state	Australian Catholic University	75.2	75.0	73.3	73.3	69.5	68.3
Total for Table A institutions		67.0	66.8	66.6	67.1	66.7	65.8
Table B institutions							
Victoria	University of Divinity	44.4	33.0	32.1	37.5	45.9	44.0
Queensland	Bond University	71.0	73.3	71.3	73.1	72.8	74.8
Western Australia	The University of Notre Dame Australia	68.3	71.4	74.4	77.3	75.2	73.8
Total for Table B institutions		68.0	70.5	71.2	74.7	73.7	73.4
Total for Table A and Table B institutions		67.0	66.8	66.6	67.2	66.8	66.0

Four year outcomes for the 2012 cohort

Four year outcome data is now available for the 2012 commencing domestic bachelor student cohort (outcomes by 2015), the first cohort to commence study under the fully implemented demand driven system. Although the proportion of students who have completed a course after four years is less than 50 per cent, this data allows for an early assessment of cohorts under the demand driven system.

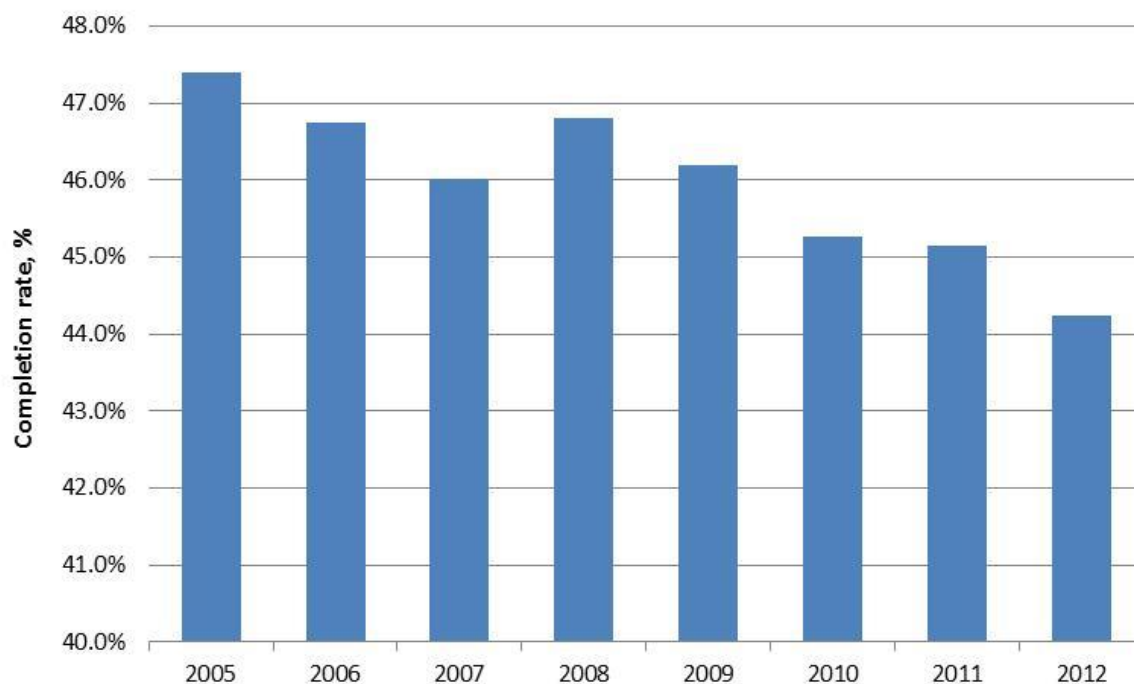
- The two most recent cohort analysis reports included outcome data for the two student cohorts (2010 and 2011) that commenced study in the demand driven system transition period. These reports showed that nationally and across many student characteristics, four year outcome data for the 2010 cohort (outcomes by 2013) showed marginally lower completion rates than for other years (2005 to 2009 cohorts). For the 2011 cohort, four year outcomes were consistent with outcomes for the 2010 cohort (45.0 per cent of students had completed a course after four years for the 2011 cohort, compared with 45.1 per cent for the 2010 cohort). Although the new cohort analysis includes Table B institutions as well as Table A institutions, the pattern of completion rate outcomes across cohorts remains similar (Table 2). That is, the four year completion rate dropped between the 2009 and 2010 cohorts and remained stable between the 2010 and 2011 cohorts.

Table 2: Four year completion rates for commencing domestic bachelor students from the previous analysis and the new analysis, %

	Commencing cohort							
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Previous report with just Table A institutions	47.3	46.7	45.9	46.7	46.1	45.1	45.0	
Change from previous year		-0.6	-0.8	0.8	-0.6	-1.0	-0.1	
New analysis with Table A and Table B institutions	47.4	46.8	46.0	46.8	46.2	45.3	45.1	44.2
Change from previous year		-0.6	-0.8	0.8	-0.6	-0.9	-0.2	-0.9

- New data shows that the four year completion rate for the cohort of 2012 commencing domestic bachelor students at Table A and Table B institutions was 44.2 per cent. This represents a 0.9 per cent drop compared with the four year completion rate of the 2011 cohort. Chart 1 (over page) shows four year completion rates for each commencing cohort from 2005 to 2012 and clearly demonstrates the long-term trend for a decline in the four year completion rate.
- 78.5 per cent of the 2012 cohort were engaged (completed or still enrolled) by 2015. This rate was lower than for the 2011 cohort (79.6 per cent) and the second lowest in the time series (the lowest engagement rate was for the 2005 cohort at 77.5 per cent).

Chart 1: Four year completion rates for commencing domestic bachelor students at Table A and Table B institutions, 2005 to 2012 cohorts



- The decline in four year completion rates for the 2012 cohort prevailed across the whole student cohort. Groups with higher than average declines were:
 - Bachelor's Graduate Entry courses completion rates decreased from 66.3 per cent for the 2011 cohort to 63.5 per cent for the 2012 cohort¹⁰. This decrease was in line with the trend decline in the completion rate for Bachelor's Graduate Entry courses over time (from a completion rate of 73.0 per cent for the 2005 cohort).
 - Within study area:
 - the completion rate for the 2012 cohort of pharmacy students (54.4 per cent) was lower than for the 2011 cohort (60.1 per cent), continuing a decline since the 2008 cohort. There was also a slight decline in the proportion of students engaged (from 94.2 per cent to 93.0 per cent), although this level of engagement is still high compared to many study areas;
 - the completion rate for the 2012 cohort of teacher education students (40.9 per cent) was lower than for the 2011 cohort (43.0 per cent), continuing the decline over time of four year completion rates for teacher education (from a high of 55.4 per cent for the 2005 cohort). There was also a slight decline in the proportion of students engaged between the 2011 and 2012 cohorts (from 75.8 per cent to 75.5 per cent);

¹⁰ Variation was in part influenced by the small number of students.

- the four year completion rate for health services and support was 54.7 per cent for the 2005 cohort then decreased to 50.8 per cent for the 2011 cohort and is now 49.4 per cent for the 2012 cohort. The engagement rate also fell from 82.2 per cent to 80.4 per cent between 2011 and 2012.
- One student group saw an increase in their four year completion rate. The completion rate for students with an ATAR between 95 and 100 increased from 51.2 per cent to 53.6 per cent, for the 2011 and 2012 cohorts respectively. The completion rate for the 2012 cohort was the highest recorded since the time series began in 2005.

Additional four year cohort outcomes will continue to be assessed as data becomes available to monitor any future changes related to bachelor degree study at Table A and Table B institutions.