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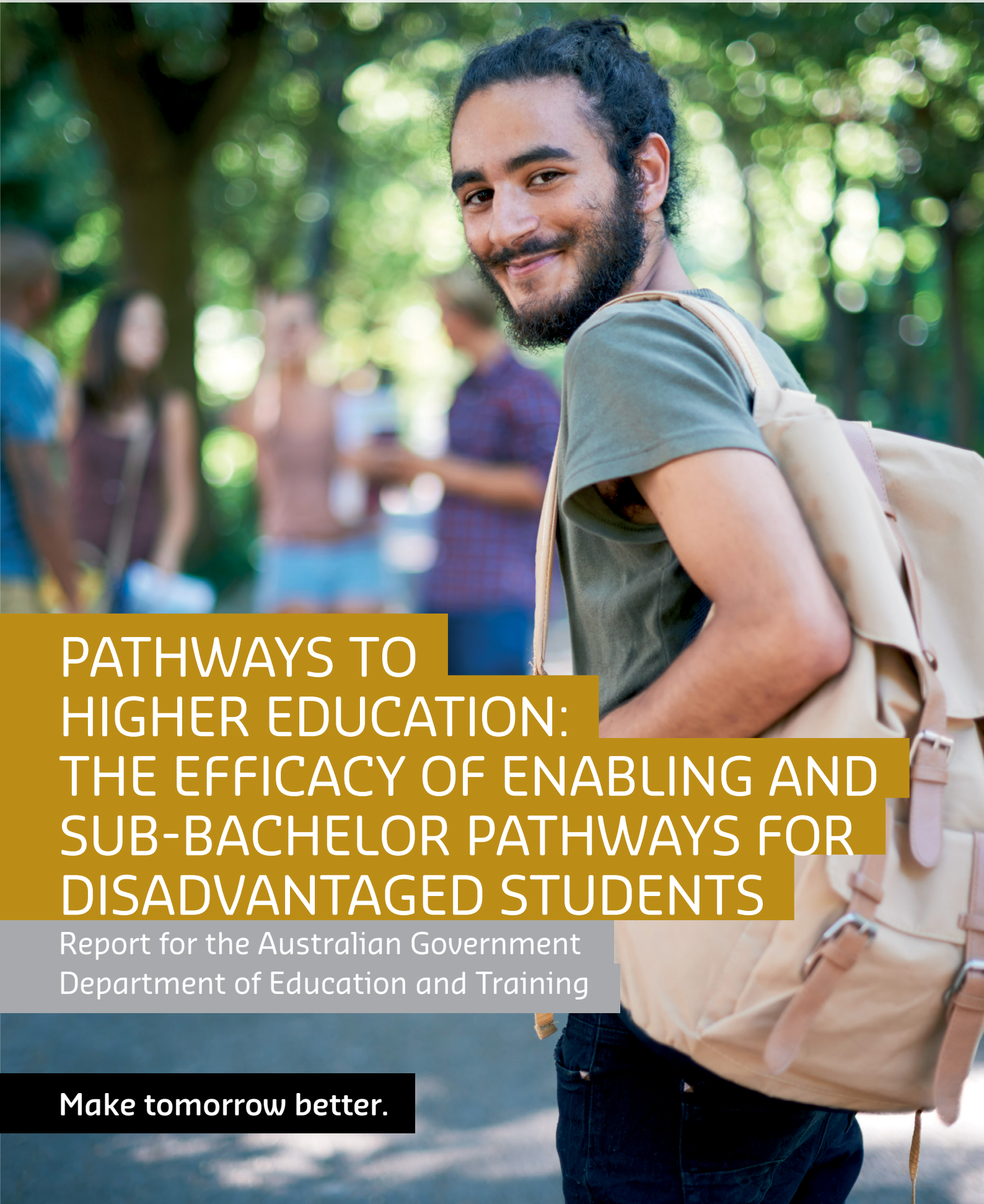

PATHWAYS TO HIGHER EDUCATION: THE EFFICACY OF ENABLING AND SUB-BACHELOR PATHWAYS FOR DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

Report for the Australian Government Department of Education and Training

Make tomorrow better.

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Background

This report details the findings of the Enabling programmes for disadvantaged student groups project, which was funded as part of the Australian Government Department of Education and Training National Priorities Pool funding 2014 round with the research undertaken in 2015. The project team conducted a review of current enabling programs and reported on:

i. the extent to which current enabling courses offered by Australian higher education providers are an effective means of increasing access to, participation and success in undergraduate courses for domestic students from disadvantaged groups;
ii. the appropriateness of enabling courses as a pathway to university for disadvantaged groups compared to other pathways;
iii. the variability in quality between enabling courses that impacts on their effectiveness for disadvantaged student groups; and
iv. what, if any, particular practices or means of delivery should be incorporated into enabling courses to enhance their effectiveness for people from disadvantaged groups.

For the purposes of this report, 'disadvantaged students' were primarily defined in line with the six officially recognised equity groups of students ("the equity group of students"):

- Low socio economic status (low SES) students;
- Students from regional and remote areas;
- Indigenous students;
- Students with a disability;
- Students from a non-English speaking background (NESB) and
- Women in non-traditional areas of study (WINTA).

Findings

The main findings from this research project are:

- There is currently a diverse range of enabling programs available throughout the higher education sector in Australia, including course length, content, and mode of delivery.
- There is a lack of transparency, transferability and information about enabling programs that is likely to hinder student take-up, mobility and progression. Greater consistency of program design would increase opportunities for institutions to recognise enabling programs other than their own for the purposes of admission to further undergraduate studies.
- With the exception of programs designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, most programs are relatively unrestricted in regards to access; both in terms of what types of domestic students can apply and their prior academic performance.
- A greater proportion of students enrolled in and transitioning via enabling pathways are from recognised equity groups than any of the other sub-bachelor pathways examined.
- In terms of raw numbers, enabling programs are second only to VET studies in transitioning more equity-group students to Bachelor-level studies than the other sub-bachelor pathways examined.
- Students from recognised equity groups who articulate via an enabling program generally experience better first-year retention rates than those articulating via most other sub-bachelor pathways.
- In terms of success (i.e. the ratio of units passed to units studied), the evidence appears to be that the equity group of students articulating from many sub-bachelor pathways are experiencing academic barriers to success. However this finding needs to be treated with caution, due to the low numbers of students transitioning via many of the sub-bachelor pathways.

- Across all equity groups, students transitioning via the Associate Degree, Advanced Diploma and Diploma pathways generally experienced better success rates than those transitioning via enabling programs. However this finding should be treated with caution, due to the low numbers of students available for this particular part of the analysis.
- Overall, students articulating via an enabling program expressed greater satisfaction with their experience in comparison with those using a VET pathway. This sentiment was more strongly expressed when participants were asked to consider how well the pathway had prepared them for university studies and whether or not it gave them the confidence to pursue, and a feeling of belonging in, these studies.
- Almost two-third (66.2%) of surveyed students articulating via the VET pathway undertook the VET qualification for its own benefits, not as a pathway to university studies. Furthermore, greater proportions of equity-group students utilise the enabling pathway than the VET pathway. These findings further reinforce the reality that, by and large, the various sub-bachelor pathways serve distinct cohorts of students and act in a complementary, not contrasting, fashion.
- The absence of fees encourages many students to enrol in an enabling program who might otherwise not have enrolled in a VET or other university pathway.
- Enabling programs are currently limited in the extent to which they can both widen and deepen access to higher education because: generally higher education institutions recognise only their own enabling programs for articulation purposes; more than half of all enabling places available nationally are enrolled through only eight institutions; and most enabling programs place limitations on the courses to which the students can articulate to.
- Diversity in the sector has led to a wide range of innovative enabling programs, whose overall success is evident in the national retention rates – and to some extent the success rates - of enabling graduates who proceed to undergraduate level. Further research is required to establish which types of enabling programs are more effective than others, and to promote greater consistency among programs to improve transparency, quality, student mobility, and equity.
- The qualitative findings from the student survey indicate that enabling programs might be improved:
    - by better aligning course content, structures and processes with those at the institutions' undergraduate level, so as to help acculturate students with their post-enabling experience;
    - by ensuring that the enabling program provides the students with both generic and specific knowledge;
    - by enhancing the academic skills development aspects of the enabling courses; and
    - by providing clearer and more transparent information to prospective students who do not always understand what an enabling program is or does.

Acronyms

ACER	Australian Council for Education and Research
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
AUSSE	Australasian Survey of Student Engagement
CGS	Commonwealth Grants Scheme
CSP	Commonwealth Supported Place
EFTSL	Equivalent full-time student load
Go8	Group of Eight
HEIMS	Higher Education Information Management System
IRU	Innovative Research Universities
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NCSEHE	National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education
NESB	Non-English speaking background
NPP	National Priorities Pool
OUA	Open Universities Australia
RUN	Regional Universities Network
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas
SES	Socio economic status
SSAF	Student Services and Amenities Fee
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WINTA	Women in non-traditional areas of study

1. Introduction

1.1 Project Brief

In late 2014, the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) received funding through the Department of Education and Training National Priorities Pool for this research project. The brief was to:

> *Undertake a review of current enabling programmes and report on the extent to which enabling courses offered by Australian higher education providers are an effective means of increasing access to, and participation and success in, undergraduate courses for domestic students from disadvantaged groups.*

The following elements informed the project team's findings in regards to efficacy:

- The number and types of enabling programmes offered by Australian higher education 'Table A'[1] providers (see Appendix A for a complete list);
- The number and types of equity group students transitioning to an undergraduate degree via one of these programmes;
- Their experience in the enabling programme; and
- Their subsequent higher education performance, as measured by first-year attrition, retention and success rates.

For this project a comparative approach was adopted, where the efficacy of the enabling programmes was compared to the efficacy of sub-bachelor pathways. The context for this is as follows. In 2014, the Australian Government's Review of the Demand Driven Funding System recommended sub-bachelor higher education courses should be included in the demand driven system according to the following rationale:

> It would improve the efficiency of the higher education system by better matching students with appropriate courses. It would address student quality concerns about lower ATAR entrants, by increasing their academic preparation before they enter a bachelor-degree course. ***It would provide a lower risk entry point for low SES students*** [authors' emphasis] (Kemp & Norton, 2014, p. 58).

This recommendation was subsequently endorsed by the Government in its *Higher Education and Research Reform Bill 2014*, stating "These qualifications provide effective pathways for disadvantaged students" (Pyne, 2014, p. 6). Accordingly, this project assessed the efficacy of enabling programmes both in general terms (that is; comparing outcomes for equity groups in the enabling programmes against those for all equity groups) as well as against those using other sub-bachelor pathways to higher education.

For the purposes of the Australian Government higher education policy, the following six groups of students are defined as disadvantaged or 'equity group students':

1. Students from a low socio-economic status (low SES) background;
2. Indigenous students[2];
3. Students with disabilities;
4. Students from regional or remote areas;
5. Women enrolled in non-traditional areas of study[3]; and
6. Students from a non-English speaking background (NESB).

[1]The University of Notre Dame Australia is also included: although it is not a Table A provider it does offer enabling programs and receives significant enabling load from the Commonwealth.
[2]The term Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person is currently preferred, however at the time this report was published, the term 'Indigenous' was still being used in the Higher Education Statistics collections.
[3]Encompassing the broad fields of study of Engineering, Science and Information Technology.

1. Introduction (continued)

1.2 Project Team and Governance

The project team comprised six researchers from four universities:

- Dr Tim Pitman, Research Fellow, NCSEHE, Curtin University;
- Professor Sue Trinidad, Director, NCSEHE, Curtin University;
- Professor Marcia Devlin, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Quality), Federation University Australia;
- Dr Andrew Harvey, Director of the Access and Achievement Research Unit, La Trobe University;
- Mr Matthew Brett, Senior Manager, Higher Education Policy, La Trobe University; and
- Dr Jade McKay, Research Fellow, Deakin University.

The project was managed by the NCSEHE, with guidance from an expert advisory group, comprising:

- Mr Anton Leschen, General Manager (Victoria), The Smith Family;
- Dr Cathy Stone, Humanities and Social Science, The University of Newcastle Australia;
- Ms Barbara Webb, Manager, Equity & Equal Opportunity, Federation University Australia;
- Ms Mel Henry, Manager, Corporate Values and Equity, Ethics, Equity & Social Justice, Curtin University;
- Ms Colette Rhoding, Special Advisor to Head of Camus, Broome, Academic Enabling and Support Centre, The University of Notre Dame Australia; and
- Emeritus Professor Stuart Campbell, formerly Pro-Vice Chancellor, Western Sydney University.

2. Background

2.1 Enabling Programs – Their Purpose, Design and Prevalence

Equity in higher education – the idea that higher education should be accessible to all people – has been one of the most persistent policy issues since the creation of mass higher education systems in developed nations, internationally (cf. Martin, 2009; Trow, 1974). However, the nature of socio-economic disadvantage means that educational achievement in the formative (i.e. primary and secondary) years of education is unequal across and within all societies (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2012). This in turn leads to inequitable access to higher education for certain groups within these societies.

Government policy has for a long time acknowledged that disadvantaged groups within society often cannot be clearly defined or differentiated, and that there will be areas of overlap on an individual basis (Department of Employment Education and Training, 1990). Nonetheless, the identification of key groups of students historically underrepresented in higher education is a key catalyst for more coordinated action. Australian higher education policy formally recognises six types of disadvantaged students, or equity groups:

- Low-socio economic status (low SES) students;
- Students with a disability;
- Indigenous students;
- Students from regional and remote areas;
- Women in non-traditional areas of study (WINTA); and
- Students from a non-English speaking background (NESB).

Among key equity groups, both participation and completion rates are consistently lower than national averages (cf. Department of Education, 2014; Edwards & McMillan, 2015; Koshy, 2012). To address the higher education disadvantage experienced by these groups, policymakers have responded with a suite of initiatives, variously targeting the information, skills and attitudes required by these students to lift participation rates. These have been referred to as the five conditions, or 5A's:

1. **Awareness** – an understanding of the available opportunities and how to access them;
2. **Aspiration** – the desire to attend university;
3. **Affordability** – sufficient money to support student life;
4. **Achievement** – the educational attainment level to gain entry to university; and
5. **Access** – admissions policies that open the door to low SES students, and absence of distance and time restrictions (Queensland University of Technology, 2012).

Enabling programs primarily address condition four (achievement) and also conditions 2 (aspiration) and 5 (access).

The official definition of an enabling program, as provided in the Higher Education Support Act (2003), is "a course of instruction provided to a person for the purpose of enabling the person to undertake a course leading to a higher education award" (Department of the Attorney General, 2003, p. 215). More specifically, the Government determines which courses meet the criteria of this definition.

2. Background (continued)

As observed, an enabling program is not a higher education award in and of itself; rather it prepares the student to enter a course (typically an undergraduate degree) by providing them with requisite academic skills. Enabling programs are not recognised in the Australian Qualifications Framework. In general, enabling courses are provided at no cost to the student through Government support. In accordance with the Higher Education Support Act (2003), the Government determines both the number of enabling places offered by each higher education provider and the amount paid to the provider to deliver these programs. In respect of tuition fees the Act mandates that the "student contribution amount for a unit of study is nil if the person undertakes the unit as part of an enabling course" (Department of the Attorney General, 2003, p. 100). The majority of enabling students (97%) are in Commonwealth supported places. Universities choosing to offer Commonwealth supported places in enabling courses are unable to charge a student contribution, as they do for undergraduate students, and so receive the Enabling Loading in lieu of student contributions and in addition to Commonwealth funding for those Commonwealth supported places (Lomax-Smith, Watson, & Webster, 2011).

However, due to the generic nature of the term, a wider variety of university-preparation courses are regularly referred to as enabling and not all of them are tuition-free. In 2012, Hodges et al. (2013a) identified 35 enabling programs being run across 27 Australian universities. Of these, 11 were run by, or in conjunction with, affiliated organisations or external partners. Only 19 enabling programs had no tuition fees. In the fee-charging courses, fees ranged up to a maximum of $27,000. This has led Hodges et al. to draw a distinction between 'enabling' and 'enabling-like' programs, where the former refers to tuition-free programs, generally targeting students who have experienced educational disadvantage. In 2014, 11,588 equivalent full-time students (i.e. EFTSL) were enrolled in contribution exempt enabling course places. A further 314 were enrolled as domestic fee-paying students and 11,124 overseas fee-paying students were also enrolled (Department of Education, 2014).

In terms of design, enabling programs are delineated in terms of duration, mode of delivery and target audience. Many programs are run over a semester however others are run more intensively over a period of just a few weeks. Duration can also be measured in terms of the number of units studied rather than a set period of time within which to complete the course. Enabling programs can be delivered through a variety of forms including classroom, flipped-classroom, distance and online modes of delivery. Many enabling programs target a specific student demographic, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Furthermore, enabling programs not only provide a distinct pathway to higher education but also function remedially, when undertaken concurrently with university education study so as to cater to students who have qualified for entry but are academically under-prepared (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2014). For example, by one calculation around a third of all students enrolled in enabling courses in 2009 were taking them whilst also enrolled in other studies (Lomax-Smith et al., 2011). In some institutions, non-award enabling programs provide a pathway into the institution for disadvantaged learners, as well as providing a form of academic rehabilitation for students to "demonstrate that their capacity for academic success has improved since they were last enrolled in an award course" (University of Melbourne, 2015).

Government funding is based on the number of places allocated to the university and the fields of education being taught within the enabling program. Mode of delivery does not affect the funding.

2.2 The Use of Enabling Programs by Equity-Group Students to Access Higher Education

The Australian *Higher Education Support Act (2003)* provides universities with access to funding for actions to support access and participation for the equity target groups. Post 2005, this funding has been targeted towards a much broader group of potential students via bridging courses (Hodges et al., 2013b). The Act does not specifically state that enabling programs must target, or be exclusive to, students from a recognised equity group. Rather, the aim and design of the enabling programs - it is assumed - will attract significant enrolments from equity-group students. This is because a common aim of enabling programs is to make higher education accessible to those who do not otherwise have the necessary skills and credentials (Muldoon, 2011).

A study of an enabling program at the University of South Australia revealed significantly higher representation of students from five of the six recognised equity groups[4] (C. Klinger & Tranter, 2009). A study of a tertiary education program at La Trobe University found that students in the program were more likely than their undergraduate counterparts to be mature age (86.3% compared with 44.7%) and first in their family to study at university (80% compared with 52.1%). The program also enrolled a considerably higher proportion of NESB students (14.7% compared with 2.3 %), students from refugee backgrounds, defined as those holding a permanent humanitarian visa (10.3% compared with 0.5%), and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (5.9% compared with 0.8%) (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2014).

Between 2010 and 2013, a project was funded by the Office for Learning and Teaching, to investigate the nature and causes of student attrition in enabling programs. The project was undertaken by academics from five Australian universities prominent in the delivery of enabling programs: The University of Newcastle Australia (UoN), the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), the University of South Australia (UniSA), the University of New England (UNE) and Edith Cowan University (ECU). The demographic tables published in the report offered the following insights for enabling students at UoN, USQ and UniSA:

- More than a quarter of students in the enabling programs at all three universities reported parental levels of education as not fully completing secondary education.
- Between 20 and 30% of students (depending on the university) had themselves only partially completed secondary education.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students made up between 1.9 and 4% of students.
- NESB students made up anywhere from five % to over thirty per cent of students.
- The proportion of students who were first in their family to attend university ranged from 46.3 to 51.3% (Hodges et al., 2013a).

More broadly, the 2011 review of the base funding of higher education advised:

Enabling courses are not specifically targeted to under-represented groups, but approximately 50% of students enrolled in enabling courses are identified as being from several equity groups such as Indigenous students, regional and remote students and low SES status students, compared with 30% of all domestic undergraduate enrolments. The remainder comprises students who for a range of reasons are underprepared (Lomax-Smith et al., 2011, p. 122)

[4] WINTA was a not-applicable category for this particular study.

2. Background (continued)

2.3 The Efficacy of Enabling Programs in Terms of Subsequent Higher Education Success

For some time there has been a higher education policy focus on student retention; one which recognises the critical importance of understanding, monitoring and addressing student attrition, particularly in the undergraduate years. To some extent this focus has been driven by national policy imperatives to reduce university student attrition, but also takes into account a recognition of the close link between student equity and retention in higher education (Krause, 2005). There are diverse reasons why students fail to complete higher education studies, extending across three broad domains: personal, social and academic (Nelson, Duncan, & Clarke, 2009). Personal issues relate both to a student's internally-derived identity and/or motivation, as well as personal background and development opportunities (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Bean & Metzner, 1985). From the social perspective, the issue of engagement is increasingly considered. Student engagement focuses on the extent to which students are engaging in activities that higher education research has shown to be linked with high-quality learning outcomes (Krause & Coates, 2008). Engagement is often measured in terms of challenging and stimulating the student through course content; and positive interactions between staff and students; feelings of legitimization within the university community (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2008). However, research regularly identifies, and returns to, the issue of previous academic performance as the most significant predictor of university performance (cf. Gemici, Lim, & Karmel, 2013b; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001).

Enabling programs primarily address the academic sphere of influence. Overall, they are designed to equip students with the skills required to undertake higher education studies, such as those relating to communication, specific literacies and numeracies, research and critical thinking; as well as the 'softer' skills of working in teams or independent thought. However, they also address the social and personal spheres by helping the student become acculturated to a higher education environment and developing a sense of legitimacy or 'belonging' in the field of higher education. Whilst the primary intention of enabling programs is to increase access to higher education, particularly for disadvantaged students, an ancillary aim is to identify early on those students who will not succeed in higher education. Thus, the relatively high attrition rates in enabling programs (approaching 50%) is in some respects desirable, as the enabling program is playing the role of a 'filter' prior to an undergraduate program (Hodges et al., 2013b).

Over the last 15 years (i.e. since 2000), relatively few empirical studies relating to the post-enabling academic performance (e.g. subsequent undergraduate studies) of the enabling students have been conducted. This is in contrast to more abundant research examining efficacy within the enabling program itself (cf. Andrewartha & Harvey, 2014; Habel, 2012; Ramsay, 2013). In regards to those studies considering the subsequent undergraduate academic performance of enabling students, most studies relied on individual cohorts of students of limited numbers, making it problematic to generalise their findings (cf. Ellis, Cooper, & Sawyer, 2001). This constraint is in part due to the relatively small numbers of students utilising the enabling pathway, when measured as a proportion of the total student population. For example, in a study of the first-year experience of 900 students at La Trobe University, only two per cent of respondents had completed an enabling program (Bexley, 2008). In a larger study of more than 2400 students, only three per cent of students had completed an enabling course (James, Krause, & Jennings, 2010) and three per cent was also the figure reported in an analysis of an entire, national cohort of students (Department of Education, 2014).

The relatively few studies undertaken reported varying findings. A study of the academic performance of students entering The University of Newcastle Australia, via traditional and non-traditional means revealed a marginal disadvantage in academic performance for students entering via non-traditional enabling programs. However this was offset by relatively good performance of older students and female students who dominated the enabling programs. The researchers concluded "the significant variable is the nature of students who enter the [enabling] programme, rather than the nature of the programme itself" (Cantwell, Archer, & Bourke, 2001, p. 232). A similar study of enabling students at the University of South Australia found their undergraduate grade point average was significantly higher than those admitted by other means (Klinger & Tranter, 2009; Klinger & Murray, 2011). This finding was used to support their contention that "'second chance' does not in any way imply 'second rate' – quite the reverse" (Klinger & Murray, 2011, p. 146).

An evaluation of an enabling program at Charles Sturt University showed high levels of student satisfaction with the program and corresponding belief by these students that the program was a positive influence on their first-year experience and performance (Smith, 2010). However, this analysis did not report any quantitative analysis in terms of first year attrition and/or success rates.

Many of the studies cited above also reported on the other benefits deriving from enabling programs, most notably the provision of a meaningful pathway for disadvantaged students who otherwise would not be afforded the opportunity to aspire or succeed in higher education studies. In the words of one:

> Due recognition must be given to the proportion of enabling students who do successfully complete their programs and transition to undergraduate degree work. These signify a substantial number of new undergraduate students who would not otherwise have gained access to higher education nor have been well prepared to succeed in that further endeavour (Klinger & Tranter, 2009, p. 8).

Qualitatively, there is evidence elsewhere that enabling programs have diverse benefits with flow-on effects after graduation (cf. Crawford, 2014; John et al., 2014).

An analysis of outcomes for concurrent enabling students (that is, students simultaneously enrolled in an undergraduate degree and a remedial enabling program) suggested that enabling courses were successful in increasing the retention of students in higher education. Across nearly all ATAR ranks and types of pathways, students who took an enabling course had better retention than comparable non-enabling cohorts. For example, of students with an ATAR below 40 in 2009, 86% of those who undertook enabling and undergraduate courses concurrently remained in study in 2010, compared with 82% not in enabling courses (Lomax-Smith et al., 2011).

In terms of national data, a quantitative analysis, which included findings relating to enabling programs, was published by the Australian Government Department of Education in 2014. The report was a cohort analysis of completion rates of domestic bachelor students who commenced in 2005 at a publicly funded university and their progression by 2012. Around three per cent of the 2005 cohort had completed a previous enabling course.

The analysis found:

- 62.6% of students with prior enabling courses completed their studies compared with 72.6% of students with no prior enabling courses.
- 7.1% of students with prior enabling courses and 5.3% with no prior enabling courses had not completed and were still enrolled in 2012.
- 19.6% of students with prior enabling courses and 13.7% with no prior enabling courses had re-enrolled but dropped out before 2012.
- 10.7% of students with prior enabling courses and 8.4% with no prior enabling courses enrolled in 2005 and never came back after 2005 (Department of Education, 2014).

This cohort analysis was updated in 2015, the period of analysis now ranging from 2005 to 2013. In addition to reviewing the 2005 cohort nine years after commencement, this report also provided information on student cohorts four, six and eight years after starting their course. Completion rates showed a decline across cohorts for those students who enrolled in an enabling course prior to their bachelor course. For this group, the 2005 cohort had a completion rate of 39.8%, compared to just 35.9% for the 2010 cohort. There was also a slight decrease for this group in the number of students who had either completed or were still enrolled (down from 75.5% for the 2006 cohort to 73.3% for the 2010 cohort) (Department of Education and Training, 2015).

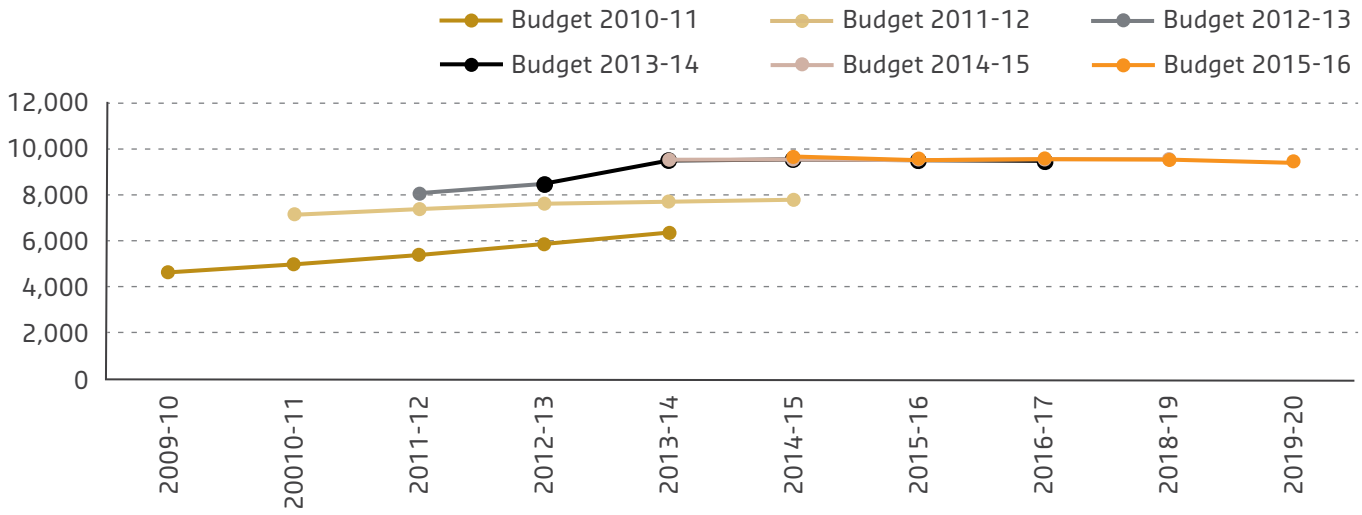
2. Background (continued)

The broad finding of the two analyses, therefore, was that students using the enabling program pathway had higher rates of non-completion than the general student body. However, this finding related to all students in the enabling programs, not those from defined equity groups. An assessment of the efficacy of enabling programs through completions data requires consideration of relevant reference points against which the enabling programs can be compared. Comparisons of completion data against the general student cohort or high ATAR full time students for example would suggest that participation in an enabling program is associated with much lower completion rates. However, when compared against students with an ATAR below 60 or students undertaking their studies externally, completion rates for students that have undertaken an enabling program are higher (Department of Education and Training, 2015). A challenge facing policy makers and institutional decision makers in assessing the performance of any specific higher education policy is identifying the evidence most relevant for assessing progress against policy objectives. At an institutional level, later sections of this report identify expansion and contraction of delivery in enabling programs, suggesting a differential strategic calculus on the relevance of enabling programs across institutions. At a broad policy level, the number of Commonwealth Grant Scheme places for which enabling loading is applied are designated and under the discretion of the Minister. Under a demand driven funding model for undergraduate places, and notwithstanding an increase in the number of enabling places made available from 2010 to 2014 (Figure 1) enabling places are budgeted as constituting a decreasing share of higher education enrolments across forward estimates (Figure 2). The policy trajectory for enabling programs would appear to be contractionary, irrespective of whether they are more or less effective for enabling access to and participation in higher education. This report seeks to build a stronger evidence base around enabling programs to inform broader higher education policy and institutional decision making around enabling programs.

CGS places for which enabling loading applies

Figure 1: CGS places for which enabling loading applies

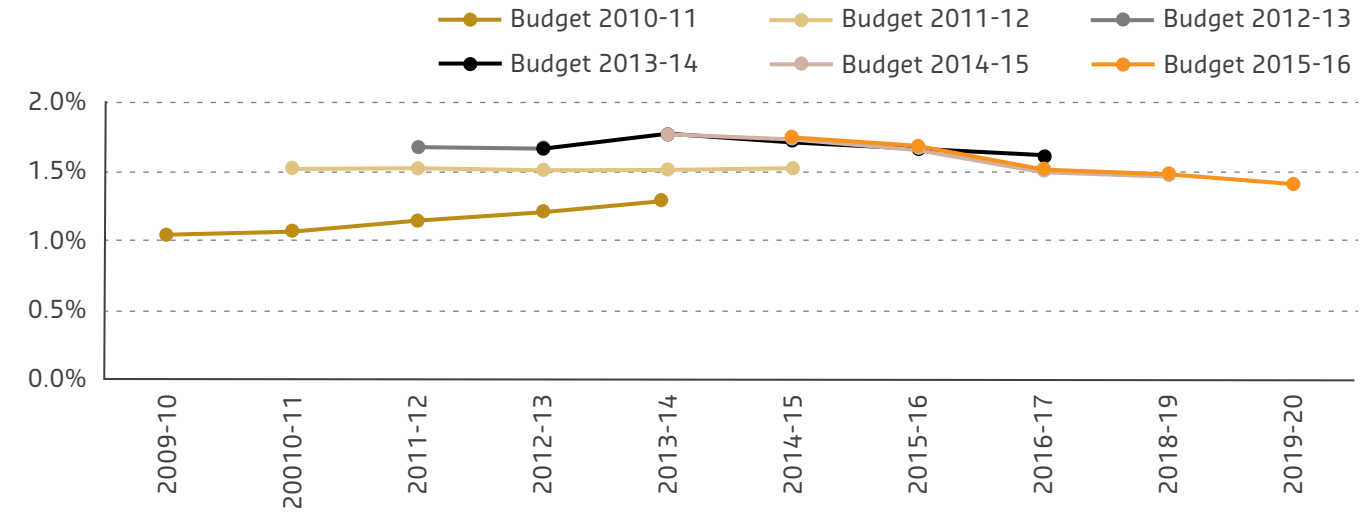
(Source: Portfolio Budget Estimates 2010-11 to 2015-16)



Enabling places as a proportion of undergraduate places (CSP)

Figure 2: Enabling places as a proportion of undergraduate places (CSP)

(Source: Portfolio Budget Estimates 2010-11 to 2015-16)



2. Background (continued)

2.4 The Use of VET Pathways by Equity Group Students to Access Higher Education

Enabling programs are just one in a variety of alternative (i.e. non-school leaver) pathways to higher education. These include alternative admissions tests such as the Special Tertiary Admissions Test, completing Year 12 studies as a mature-age student, recognition of overseas tertiary qualifications, and 'portfolio' entry approaches, which assess a range of prior learning experiences across the formal, non-formal and informal domains. However, the one that has been the focus of most Government policy in recent years has been articulation between the VET and higher education sectors. The introduction of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) in 1995 was a significant step towards the creation of pathways between post-compulsory education qualifications and to make more efficient an individual's progress through education and training, including the recognition of prior learning. It is important to note from the outset that the primary purpose of VET studies is not to act as an alternative pathway to higher education. Individuals undertake VET studies to seek employment, for current employment reasons or who did not previously complete high school and are seeking to redress this issue; as well as for university preparation (Stanwick, 2006). However, for the purposes of this project, the focus is on the VET to university pathway.

Students who are initially unable to gain entry to university may build their skills at TAFE and increase their chances of selection for the higher education course of their choice (Dow, Adams, Dawson, & Phillips, 2010). Students who fail to complete secondary school are more likely to come from families where their parents are in low skilled jobs or low levels of education; and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Watson, 2005). The VET pathway is important for other groups such as regional and remote students (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2010). VET delivery of higher education in partnership with a university can be an especially effective model for smaller regional communities; add to the prestige of the institutions involved; reduce the cost of regional provision through better use of existing resources; and provide impetus for articulation pathways from VET (Dow et al., 2010).

In 2008, a review of the Australian higher education system stated "an effective way to improve access for people from under-represented groups is to streamline movement from VET to higher education" (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008, p. 21). It also proposed that VET was "a common pathway to higher education for many people from under-represented groups" (ibid). This was a position again advanced in the most recent higher education review:

> In submissions and consultations, a strong case was put to the review panel that pathway programs of various kinds were a good response to the challenges of students without the necessary academic preparation for direct entry to a bachelor degree. Pathway programs with a qualification are usually diploma courses with a strong relationship to a specific bachelor degree, or sometimes an associate degree... Evidence to the review suggested that students who entered via a pathway course often did better than might have been expected, given their original level of academic preparation (Kemp & Norton, 2014, p. 18)

Prior research indicates that VET students overall (i.e. not just those from disadvantaged backgrounds) face potential barriers in transitioning to university. These include moving from applied to theoretical epistemologies of knowledge; differences in teaching and learning styles; and contrasts in student-teacher relationships and expectations (Dickson, 2000). Academic literacy is often cited as a particular problem encountered after transition (Watson, 2006). A comparative study of the academic performance and perceptions of degree-articulation students and Year-12 entry students found significantly lower academic performance of the VET-pathway students, which the researchers attributed to 'transfer shock' in that the VET sector did not adequately prepare students for university studies (Tickell & Smyrnios, 2004). Strategies to alleviate this 'shock' include embedding undergraduate practices and programs within the VET program itself (Weadon & Baker, 2014).

Empirical research undertaken since 2000 offers, at best, limited support for the proposition that VET represents an effective pathway into higher education for disadvantaged students. A study published in 2009 analysed the socio-economic profile of VET to HE student transfers and their institutional destination, using published and commissioned unpublished statistics on commencing domestic undergraduate students at public universities in Australia produced by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (Wheelahan, 2009a). The study concluded that VET diplomas and advanced diplomas provided unequal access to public universities in two respects. First, students from middle and high-SES backgrounds made up more than 70% of students accessing university via VET. Second, VET-pathway students were significantly under-represented in certain types of universities, most notably the elite Group of Eight institutions. A conclusion of this study was that VET:

> Provides modest access to low SES students while it provides more access to middle SES students. This is not to underestimate the importance of VET articulation for middle SES students, but it seems that VET diplomas and advanced diplomas will not be an effective mechanism to redress socio-economic disadvantage for low SES students in HE until the socio-economic profile of students enrolled in VET diplomas and advanced diplomas is more representative of the population (Wheelahan, 2009a, p. 266).

Similar conclusions were drawn by a research team analysing high school students' preferences for Bachelor degrees at TAFE (Gale, Parker, Molla, Findlay, & Sealey, 2015). Their report concluded that while the public perception of TAFE was that it was a sector primarily for students from low SES backgrounds, this was not reflected in students' preferences for TAFE bachelor degrees. Instead, the preferences of students from high socioeconomic schools outnumbered other SES groups in almost every TAFE-degree field of study.

VET therefore appears to deepen the participation in tertiary education of existing groups because the socio-economic composition of VET articulators reflects the socio-economic composition of university groups and individual universities (Wheelahan, 2009b). A compounding problem is transition from VET to higher education is more likely to occur from higher-level VET qualifications. However, disadvantaged learners are over-represented in lower-level VET qualifications (Griffin, 2014; Gale et al., 2014; Wheelahan, 2010).

2.5 The Efficacy of VET Programs in Terms of Subsequent Higher Education Success

Research conducted since 2000 has produced contrasting findings regarding the relationship between VET-pathway articulation and higher education success. In a study of students undertaking a compulsory unit in an undergraduate education degree revealed a significant difference in the performance of TAFE (VET) students versus those with no post-school qualification, with TAFE students performing significantly less well in every cohort (Dickson, Fleet, & Watt, 2000).

A study of first-year attrition in higher education of a 2005 survey of domestic students who enrolled in a Bachelor's Degree at an Australian university in first semester 2004, found that:

> Students who entered university through the TAFE pathway, have a disability, are caring for others or were influenced to enrol by any of several sources were still more likely than other students to withdraw because of academic difficulties (Long, Ferrier, & Heagney, 2006, p. 66)

Credit transfer has been identified as a potential reason why VET-pathway students might struggle in university studies. A study of the transition experiences of University of Western Sydney (now known as Western Sydney University) students entering a Bachelor of Education from TAFE observed:

> Students who receive academic credit for previous studies are often expected to undertake subjects normally taken in second or third year, in their first year of study. The generous academic credit arrangements of between twelve and eighteen months awarded by the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) were a major attraction for the students interviewed. However, a mismatch occurred because the students assumed that such advanced credit meant they had been judged as having the necessary knowledge and skills to participate in the more advanced units. Unfortunately, in reality most found that they encountered gaps in terminology, frameworks, knowledge and skills (Aitchison & Catterall, 2006, p. 3)

2. Background (continued)

This finding accords with a general perception that students admitted to university on the basis of TAFE awards often struggle to meet higher education institutions' expectations regarding academic literacy (Watson, 2008). This reflects the current reality of a VET sector adopting a curriculum approach primarily focused on specific workplace tasks and roles, rather than one which employs a capabilities approach, developing a person's theoretical knowledge, technical skills and attributes in a broad field of practice along with the skills for a particular occupation (Moodie, Wheelahan, Fredman, & Bexley, 2015).

Elsewhere, longitudinal research, conducted between 1999 and 2002, tracked the academic progress of a small sample of mature students entering the University of Tasmania, from a disadvantaged region of Tasmania to pursue degrees in accounting and education. The findings revealed that TAFE-background students overall performed academically on a par with other members of the cohort, but that they experienced more study problems and less satisfaction during the first year (Abbott & Chapman, 2006). In a similar vein to the Aitchison and Catterall study, a possible reason put forward for this was that TAFE students were more likely to miss out on key first-year experiences; in this case participating in a pre-university preparatory program. Another case study at the University of Tasmania also found that between 2004 and 2011, students admitted to higher education on the basis of previous VET performed as well if not better than all other student populations (Langworthy & Johns, 2012).

A study of completion rates among undergraduate students conducted by the Commonwealth government in the late 1990s concluded that the method of entry to university significantly affects a student's completion rate (Urban et al., 1999, cited in Watson, 2008). The study found that 53% of women and 49% of men entering on the basis of TAFE qualifications completed a degree. This compared to 72% of females and 64% of males who entered with a Tertiary Entrance Score (TER). Conversely, a 2008 report investigating retention at Griffith University, citing research by Leesa Wheelahan, found that students with TAFE study (either complete or incomplete) were more likely to continue study than school leavers (Griffith University, 2005; Wheelahan, 2005). A comparison of attrition rates for bachelor-level students at Victoria University found those admitted on the basis of TAFE qualifications had attrition rates between 20% and 22%, which was lower than school leavers (24-29%). However, the researchers qualified this finding by saying, "In interpreting these results, it must be remembered that many TAFE articulators were included in the 'Other' category" (Cao & Gabb, 2006, p. 9). Therefore, it is unclear whether the attrition rate for TAFE students would rise, fall or remain constant if all TAFE students were included in the correct category.

Recent research has been conducted that focusses on disadvantaged students articulating from VET studies. A notable example is the study of disadvantaged learners and VET to higher education transitions commissioned by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (Griffin, 2014). Crucially, it found that transition from VET to higher education was more likely to occur from higher-level VET qualifications. However, disadvantaged learners re-engaging with the education sector were more likely to enrol in lower-level qualifications (cf. Gale et al., 2013).

A current study underway at the University of Adelaide focusses on exploring the lived experiences of low SES students via enabling pathways. Dr Habel's project is one of 12 funded via the NCSEHE's 2015 Student Equity in Higher Education Research Grants Program and is expected to complement research currently being undertaken here by the NCSEHE into the efficacy of enabling programs. The final report will be made available on the NCSEHE website (NCSEHE, 2015).

2.6 Policy Trends Across Entry Pathways in Australian Higher Education

The use of enabling and VET pathways in Australian higher education occurs within a dynamic policy context that plays an important role in mediating institutional and student choice around admissions practices. Since the introduction of the demand driven funding system, Commonwealth Supported Places in Bachelor-level programs have been uncapped and grown dramatically, whilst an increase in enabling places from 2010 through to 2014 has been arrested and are forecast to reduce slightly over forward estimates. Across the States, there is significant variety around VET policy, with States like Victoria moving towards demand-driven contestable funding, which has seen the majority of students enrol in private providers. States such as New South Wales and South Australia remain largely dominated by public TAFE institutes. On a State by State basis, and institution by institution basis, policy settings are informing choices around whether to be more flexible about entry standards, to embark on partnerships with TAFE and VET providers, or integrate enabling programs as a central part of the admissions interface. Consequently, at the institutional level the decision whether to increase or reduce enabling load includes strategic and pragmatic considerations. However, there remains an absence of robust sector-wide data on the efficacy of enabling programs which might better guide policy and institutional decision-making.

Non-school leavers make up around 43% of undergraduate offers, making non-school pathways into higher education an important policy consideration. Of non-year 12 applicants, Table 1 below highlights the highest prior educational participation, and demonstrates that a diversity of prior educational experience is likely to feature prominently in university admissions for some time to come. Enabling programs may be a small proportion of overall sector load, and are unlikely to feature as prominently as a VET qualification or an incomplete VET or higher education as a mechanism for entry in the short term. However, if enabling is demonstrably effective in addressing the specific educational needs of some student groups there is merit in considering changes to current enabling program policy; for example, in terms of volume and/or enabling load and/or changes to the design features of the enabling policy

Table 1: Highest prior educational participation, non-year 12 applicants (2014)

Highest prior educational participation	Number	Share (%)
Complete postgraduate	3,367	2.7%
Complete bachelor	12,616	10.2%
Complete sub-degree	2,894	2.3%
Incomplete higher education	53,342	43.1%
Complete VET	14,299	11.5%
Incomplete VET	2,205	1.8%
Complete secondary education	28,177	22.8%
Other qual - complete or incomplete	3,233	2.6%
No prior educational attainment	3,689	3.0%
Total	123,834	100.0%

Source: Undergraduate Applications, Offers and Acceptances, 2014 report. Produced by the Department of Education, 2014.

2. Background (continued)

2.7 Conclusion

The main conclusions to be drawn from prior research are:

1. Enabling programs are not exclusive to, but enrol disproportionately from, groups of students under-represented in the Australian higher education sector. This is in line with their fundamental aim.

2. The enabling pathway offers access to higher education for many students who would otherwise be denied the opportunity to participate. However, on balance, the research to date indicates that their subsequent higher education attainment, in terms of retention and success, is under the national average. However, it is important to qualify that this finding relates to all students using the enabling pathway, not just those from defined equity groups.

3. The VET sector appears prima facie to be a viable pathway into higher education for disadvantaged students. However, on balance the research to date does not support this premise. Furthermore, this finding treats VET qualifications homogenously; for example, not making a distinction between the level of VET qualification and/or fields of study.

4. Students articulating from the VET sector into higher education appear to encounter barriers to success, resulting in below-average performance, in terms of retention and academic performance. As with the enabling pathway however, this finding relates to all students using the enabling pathway and is not specific to students from defined equity groups. Furthermore, this finding again does not take into account any distinctions between different levels or disciplines of the VET qualifications being used to articulate.

3. Project Method and Approach

3.1 Construction of Typology of Enabling Programs

An analysis of enabling pathways provided by Australian higher education (Table A[5]) providers was conducted between March and July, 2015. For each higher education provider, the institutional website was searched for information regarding alternative pathways to institutions and from these searches relevant enabling or enabling-like programs were identified. Where required key-word searches were also employed (e.g. "bridging program," "enabling course," etc.). This information also included online booklets, brochures and other electronic documents including online application processes. For each institutional program the following information was collected, if applicable and if it were available:

- Institution and program name;
- Age requirements;
- Population targeted (e.g. mature age students, domestic students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students);
- Mode of study (e.g. online, campus);
- Any costs indicated (e.g. compulsory texts); and
- Which undergraduate courses could be accessed following completion of the enabling program.

Only information that was available electronically from the website was used to populate the framework. If information was not available then this was indicated (e.g. information "not specified").

The typology outlined in Section 6 should be considered a snapshot of the sector in a particular moment in time, as the research team found evidence of the rapidly-changing nature of enabling programs (both in terms of quantity and design), as universities react to changing student markets and demographics.

3.2 Australian Government Department of Education and Training Data Analysis

The research team obtained detailed quantitative data from the Australian Government Department of Education and Training for the period 2009 to 2013[6]. These data provided:

- A count of the number of students enrolled in Bachelor-level studies, for each of the six defined equity groups;
- A sub-count of the equity-group students enrolled in Bachelor-level studies who had previously (i.e. the semester or year before) enrolled in:
    - An enabling program;
    - VET studies;
    - Associate Degree studies delivered through the higher education institution in which the student subsequently enrolled in Bachelor-level studies;
    - Advanced Diploma studies delivered through the same institution as above;
    - Diploma studies delivered through the same institution as above; or
    - Open Universities Australia studies.
- A further sub-count per institution;
- Retention rates for the students per equity group (including per institution); and
- Success rates for each of the equity groups (including per institution).

Data were extracted from the Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS). The data were correct as of 8 February, 2016.

'Prior VET studies' was determined using Element 327 (New basis for admission to current course), where Code 34 (A TAFE award course other than a secondary education course (Australian or overseas equivalent; complete or incomplete)) was indicated.

[5] Plus also The University of Notre Dame Australia.
[6] At the time the project was commissioned, 2013 was the most recent data available.

3. Project Method and Approach (continued)

For the Associate Degree, Advanced Diploma and Diploma studies, matching was done utilising Provider Code and Student ID. This meant tracking the same student at the same provider. The advantage of this approach was allowing the identification of students who had not yet been allocated a CHESSN. The disadvantage was it meant excluding students who undertook sub-bachelor studies at one institution and Bachelor studies at another. However, since the assumption is that the majority of sub-bachelor students undertake Bachelor studies at the same institution, this method allowed for the capture of more student data.

'Prior enabling course' was determined using Element 310 (Course of study type code), where Code 30 (Enabling course), in either the year they commenced their undergraduate course or the year immediately prior, was indicated. The same caveats therefore apply regarding institution-switching students.

Open Universities Australia prior studies were based on a match utilising CHESSN, due to the more flexible nature of the program.

Consequently, the numbers of all sub-bachelor pathways are almost certainly undercounts.

We compared commencing domestic bachelor level retention and success rates of those who had previously studied an enabling course to a wide range of comparison groups which included:

- The overall student population (minus the enabling cohort to ensure the independence of the two groups);
- VET pathway students;
- Associate Degree pathways students;
- Advanced Diploma pathway students;
- Diploma pathway students; and
- Open Universities Australia pathway students.

To examine the statistical significance of the difference in retention rates between the enabling cohort and respective comparison groups, the project team converted the data provided by the Department of Education and Training into a series of tables to calculate effect sizes and 95 per cent confidence intervals using the relative risk method outlined by Altman (1990). Relative risk in this case is defined as the ratio between the probability of a student from an enabling background being retained or passing their subjects and the probability of a student from one of the comparison groups being retained or passing their subjects. A relative risk greater than 1 indicates that students from an enabling background were more likely to be retained or pass their subjects, while a relative risk below 1 indicated students from an enabling background were less likely to be retained or pass their subjects compared to the comparison group. As the relative risk test is based on the assumption that the two cohorts being examined are completely independent, the enabling cohort was removed from the overall comparison group in our calculations to ensure this assumption was not violated. The remaining comparison groups were completely independent from the enabling cohort and no further adjustments were necessary.

The attrition and success rates used in the report are based on the standard Department of Education and Training definitions. Attrition was calculated as the proportion of students who commenced a bachelor course in year(x) who neither completed nor returned in year(x + 1). Success rates were calculated as the proportion of actual student load (EFTSL) for units of study that were passed divided by all units of study attempted (passed + failed + withdrawn) (Department of Education and Training, 2015).

There were some limitations in our ability to calculate statistical significance for the comparison of the enabling cohort to each of the benchmark cohorts. Based on the original data provided by the Department of Education and Training, we were not able to precisely breakdown the retention and success rates into the raw counts required for the statistical significant calculations. This is likely to have had a small impact on the accuracy of our calculations.

In the case of student attrition, we were not able to distinguish between students who were retained and those who had completed their degree from the original data provided by the Department, which only included a count of all students. The impact of the problem is somewhat ameliorated by the fact that we were examining commencing bachelor students and there were relatively few completers. Based on overall figures provided for the 2013 attrition rate, there were around 5,000 student completions, which was about 2 per cent of the overall commencing cohort.

There were similar issues with deconstructing reported success rates. The official Department of Education and Training success rate measure was calculated using 'certified EFTSL', but only a count of total EFTSL was available for our calculations. Certified EFTSL includes students who: withdrew, passed or failed; but excludes: subjects to be commenced later in the year, were still in progress or the completion status not yet determined. The difference between the count of total EFTSL and certified EFTSL is relatively small and is unlikely to have had a major impact on our results. Based on the success rate data for the overall cohort in 2013, there was a 2,292 EFTSL (1.2 per cent) difference between the overall count and the count of certified EFTSL. In addition, our results for the statistical significance of student success rates are likely to be relatively conservative, due to the fact we used a count of student EFTSL rather than a count of student subject attempts. A count of student attempts, which would be around eight times larger than the count of EFTSL, would have been more methodologically appropriate for calculating relative risk and would have been more likely to find statistically significant differences, however this data was not available to the researchers.

Finally, it is important to remember that the term "statistically significant" means that the result was unlikely to have occurred by chance. In this context, "significant" is not a value judgement on the relative importance of the finding.

3.3 National Survey

A national survey was conducted in order to collect further, more detailed information from students who were enrolled in undergraduate studies, to which they had been admitted on the basis of prior VET or enabling studies. The broad aim of the survey was to establish significant similarities or differences between the two cohorts in respect of:

- Demographics; particularly pertaining to disadvantage, such as socio-economic status, Indigeneity, etc.;
- Motivations for choosing the VET/enabling pathway into higher education; and
- Perceived experience and satisfaction with the relevant pathway.

Participation of the survey was by invitation, via the relevant higher education institution. This allowed a more targeted survey design, as each institution could employ their own business information systems to identify the correct students. These were any undergraduate student who commenced their undergraduate studies in 2013, 2014, or 2015 and who had:

- A VET qualification as a basis of admission into the course; or
- An enabling course as their basis of admission.

The process was facilitated by the Association of National University Planners (ANUP). Support for ANUP was critical as it helped the research team promote the importance of the survey within the sector, especially within the planning departments who are generally inundated with requests to survey students and who, understandably, approach such requests with some degree of caution.

In preparation for the national survey, a pilot survey was constructed and disseminated within one institution only (Curtin University). This allowed the research team to ascertain the efficacy of the survey design, as well as establishing whether or not the target group of students were being correctly identified and contacted. The pilot survey was run from 30 April 2015 to 24 May 2015. A total of 1,477 students were invited to participate, comprising:

- 653 students whose basis of admission was a prior enabling course; and
- 824 students who basis of admission was prior VET studies.

3. Project Method and Approach (continued)

Thirty-eight (5.8%) enabling students responded to the request to participate and 47 (5.7%) of VET students responded. After analysing the findings of the pilot survey, adjustments were made to several of the questions to improve its efficacy. Overall, the structure of the pilot survey was consistent with the national survey, allowing the data to be incorporated. Where applicable, some survey responses were not included in this report as they were not entirely analogous between the pilot and national surveys.

The national survey was conducted from 1 June 2015 to 31 July 2015. Most questions were hard-coded/constrained and were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The remaining questions allowed free-text (open) responses and were analysed via a process of manual content analysis using NVivo software. Survey responses to two key questions were coded according to key themes emerging from the qualitative data. The two key questions refer to the factors that influenced students' decision to enrol in their chosen course and the ways in which the course could better prepare students for university study. Content analysis allowed for a systematic and objective means of making valid inferences from written data (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992) and provided more detailed information, particularly in the case of 'exceptional' answers; that is information that could not be conveyed via the constrained responses.

Including the pilot survey, eleven universities agreed to participate in the survey. Most experienced difficulties in accurately determining the correct basis of admission of the student. For example, in some institutions it was possible that students who had completed an enabling program and subsequently been admitted into an undergraduate course would have their basis of admission recorded as:

- An enabling program completed in the year prior to enrolment in the undergraduate degree;
- An enabling program completed in the same year as enrolment in the undergraduate degree;
- A prior tertiary enabling course OR bridging OR foundation course;
- An enabling course provided only by the same institution;
- An enabling course provided by any institution;
- Mature age entry; or
- An 'other' basis of admission.

For students admitted on the basis of prior VET studies, this was more uniformly recorded across institutions; nonetheless some made a distinction between VET admission (i.e. student admitted into the first year of undergraduate studies) and VET articulation (i.e. student admitted into second or third year of undergraduate studies, having received credit for some or all of their VET studies).

Consequently, the project team requested that each university identify students who were likely to be attributed to either the enabling or VET cohort, as opposed to those who definitely were. The survey instrument was then used to filter out those students who did not fit into either cohort by asking them the following question:

"What pathway did you use to enrol in your current university studies? (If you used more than one, then consider the one you think was the main one)"

- I completed a university preparation course (this is a course designed exclusively to prepare a student for university studies. They are also known as an enabling, foundation course, bridging course or access course);
- I undertook a vocational education course (e.g. TAFE, Certificate IV, Diploma, etc.) first, then transitioned to university;
- I completed high school and used my Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) to qualify; or
- I used other qualifications or another pathway (details requested).

It is acknowledged that the question was interpreted, to an extent, subjectively by the survey participant and therefore it was possible for some to misidentify their basis of admission. However, the potential for this error was considered preferable to sending the survey out to a much smaller number of students/institutions.

The student survey set out to foremost explore and ascertain the reasons why some students prefer the enabling pathway over the sub-bachelor route or vice versa. In total, 2593 students participated in the survey. After data cleaning, the total respondents comprised 981 enabling students and 1230 VET students.

FINDINGS

4. Availability and Design of Enabling Programs

The Australian Government provides the following definition for an enabling program in the Higher Education Support Act (2003):

A course of instruction provided to a person for the purpose of enabling the person to undertake a course leading to a higher education award (Department of the Attorney General, 2003, p. 215).

This is a broad definition and allows institutions much scope in designing the programs. In regards to structure, composition and function of the enabling programs, Hodges et al. observe there are significant differences, which:

Centre especially around the type of institution in which they are based (usually a university or institution in the VET sector), the existence and/or scale of tuition fees [and] the existence and/or level of academic and related entry requirements... In addition to these salient differences, such programs can differ in a wide range of organisational and pedagogical factors, such as the existence and/or level of separate skills-based components, the extent to which some of these or other program components are compulsory and the length of time allowed for program completion (Hodges et al., 2013b, p. 14)

Australian Government funding for enabling programs is operationalised at the aggregate level only. This support is provided via two main funding streams. The first is a fixed amount of enabling load, which is distributed amongst the institutions on a pro rata basis, calculated on average enabling enrolments in a previous fixed period. As the total amount of funding is fixed, institutional allocations are based on their share of all enabling enrolments. The second is a separate allocation for sub-bachelor places negotiated as part of the CGS. Institutions can elect to allocate none, some or all of their sub-bachelor allocation to enabling courses. Above and beyond Australian Government funding, institutions will, from time to time, provide their own funding for enabling programs. This might for example be in the form of allowing more students to enrol in an enabling course than covered by the funding provided. Also, institutions make their own determination about how to allocate the aggregate funding received amongst more than one enabling program. For example, University X might provide a general enabling course, a second specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and a third focussing on numeracy for science students. How the Australian Government funding is allocated across these various programs is determined by each institution.

Table 2 shows the actual student load (EFTSL) for enabling courses at each institution, in 2014[7]. The final column shows what percentage of total student load is made up of enabling courses. Enabling load ranged from 8.38% to only 0.01%. Five universities had no enabling load in 2014. In terms of raw numbers, The University of Newcastle Australia was the largest provider of enabling courses, enrolling 1720 EFTSL in 2014. Proportionately, however, Charles Darwin University is the largest provider, with 8.38% of its enrolments being in enabling courses.

[7]Source: 2014 All Student Load tables: https://www.education.gov.au/selected-higher-education-statistics-2014-student-data.

Table 2: Enabling load per institution, 2014

Institution	Enabling Courses (EFTSL)	TOTAL EFTSL	% of total load
Charles Darwin University[8]	515	6,144	8.38%
University of Southern Queensland	1,079	14,385	7.50%
The University of Notre Dame Australia	638	9,127	6.99%
Central Queensland University	832	12,300	6.76%
The University of Newcastle, Australia	1,720	25,582	6.72%
Southern Cross University	511	9,148	5.59%
University of the Sunshine Coast	443	7,962	5.56%
Edith Cowan University	704	17,272	4.08%
University of Tasmania	678	18,901	3.59%
Curtin University of Technology	1,169	35,310	3.31%
University of Western Sydney (now Western Sydney University)	1,044	32,912	3.17%
The University of New England	352	11,659	3.02%
University of South Australia	599	22,495	2.66%
Flinders University	322	16,428	1.96%
Murdoch University	296	16,392	1.81%
University of Canberra	206	11,731	1.76%
University of Technology, Sydney	426	27,747	1.54%
James Cook University	233	16,471	1.41%
Victoria University	252	20,013	1.26%
University of Wollongong	266	23,502	1.13%
Bond University	46	5,495	0.84%
Charles Sturt University	173	22,018	0.79%
Federation University Australia	70	9,759	0.72%
The Australian National University	103	15,587	0.66%
The University of Queensland	192	39,963	0.48%
The University of Adelaide	96	21,386	0.45%
Macquarie University	125	28,691	0.44%
The University of Western Australia	71	21,093	0.34%
La Trobe University	92	27,436	0.34%
The University of New South Wales	122	39,597	0.31%
Griffith University	74	33,058	0.22%
The University of Melbourne	40	42,637	0.09%
Monash University	14	52,992	0.03%
University of Sydney	4	43,265	0.01%
RMIT University	4	45,475	0.01%
Australian Catholic University	0	21,519	0.00%
Deakin University	0	35,272	0.00%
Queensland University of Technology	0	34,740	0.00%
Swinburne University of Technology	0	22,131	0.00%
TOTAL EFTSL	13,511	977,237	1.38%

[8]Including enrolments from the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education.

4. Availability and Design of Enabling Programs (continued)

To construct the typology itself, the definition of an enabling program as provided within the *Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA)* was used (see above). A total of 48 programs, offered across 27 universities, matched this definition. It was noted that the programs all shared the following, broad, features:

- The programs were expressly for the purpose of preparing (i.e. enabling) a student to undertake a higher education degree course;
- They were tuition free for domestic students, however some were also provided to other types of students (e.g. international students) at a charge; and
- Most had no or minimal pre-requisites for entry, in terms of academic capability.

The following sections describe the key characteristics of the 48 enabling programs in more detail.

4.1 Types of Students Targeted

Overwhelmingly, the enabling programs targeted a broad demographic. Two-thirds (32) were open to any students requiring academic support and development. Particular student equity groups generally were not targeted, with the notable exception of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Almost one third (15) of programs were explicitly designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Only one program (the *UNSW Prep* program at the University of New South Wales) appeared to be designed specifically for equity-group students, stating that to be considered, students needed to be assessed as eligible for the University's ACCESS Scheme. In turn, the ACCESS scheme required the student to experience at least one of the following forms of disadvantage:

- financial hardship/low socio-economic status;
- English language difficulties;
- refugee status;
- disability or long-term illness/medical condition;
- severe family illness/death; and/or
- attendance at a rural or disadvantaged high school.

Several other programs did however state that applicants experiencing particular forms of disadvantage, such as those described above, would be given preference, or were encouraged, to enrol in the program.

Half the programs (24) allowed for entry from the age of 18 or under, meaning most applicants were eligible. A further 14 programs made no specification to age, with the course description implying that all students were eligible. Six programs targeted students 19 years or over, often being described as 'mature-age' students. Although being mature age is not a formally recognised form of educational disadvantage, equity practitioner interest in this area proceeds from the recognition that people who did not successfully complete Year 12 studies, struggle to access higher education without an ATAR. Being mature-age is thus becomes sometimes conflated with prior educational disadvantage.

Four programs were directed at school leavers and appeared to be designed to build up the academic skills of students who had completed Year 12 subject but failed to achieve an ATAR sufficient for entry. An example was the *UC-CONNECT* program at the University of Canberra, which offered two options:

1. A 14-week program for students who had achieved an ATAR of 55 or more; a Year 12 Certificate with a C-grade average; a (VET) Certificate III; or a NSW HSC Band Score average of 3; and
2. A 28-week program for students who had achieved an ATAR between 50 and 54; a Year 12 Certificate with a D-grade average; or, a (VET) Certificate III.

Traditionally, enabling programs have been designed for students who did not pass through the traditional (i.e. Year 12) entry pathway. The introduction of new, school-leaver specific enabling programs may be evidence that some universities are actively dealing with the new market created by the introduction of the demand-driven funding system. Whereas previously low-ATAR students would not have been considered, as student demand regularly exceeded the supply of places, these students now find that there are, potentially, places available at some higher education institutions. In response, these institutions are looking for ways to ensure the student can be provided with appropriate, pre-enrolment academic support. The duration of some of these programs (for example Murdoch University's 4-week *OnTrack Sprint Program*), gives the possibility for students to commence studies the year following completion of Year 12; that is at the same time as their peers.

4.2 Academic and Other Pre-Requisites for Accessing Enabling Programs

It is the intent of enabling programs to allow access for as many students as possible and to provide them with the requisite skills for higher education study. Of the 48 programs examined, a majority (29) specified no minimum literacy or numeracy requirements or for the applicant only to demonstrate English language competency. Some of these programs in fact stipulated a maximum academic capability level. Limitations in this respect included stipulations that the student could not have previously been accepted into a higher education program, successfully passed units of study or as the University of New England TRACKS program put it, were "not otherwise admissible to a course"[9] .

Nine programs required some form of minimum literacy and/or numeracy skill level, however did not detail at what level this would be. Six programs required literacy and numeracy at Year 10 level and one more at Year 11 level. Eight programs required academic skills equivalent to Year 12 level. Whilst these pre-requisites might seem to be higher than expected for an enabling program, in many cases this appeared to be because the program was specifically designed to support Year 12 school leavers who had achieved an ATAR slightly below that required to enter the institution (see for example the UC-CONNECT program at the University of Canberra).

[9]See https://my.une.edu.au/courses/2012/courses/TRACKS.

4. Availability and Design of Enabling Programs (continued)

4.3 Eligibility for Tuition-Free Enrolment

Enabling programs supported by Commonwealth enabling load are designated Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP); a particular type that requires no student contribution. Access to a CSP is restricted to:

- Australian citizens;
- Permanent visa holders; or
- New Zealand citizens.

Nineteen programs provided information as above, matching the Government's own advice to students[10] and sometimes particularly highlighting holders of a humanitarian visa, which is a permanent visa sub-class. The programs designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students clearly stated their intention and most required that the applicant provide some form of confirmation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, usually in the form of a statement. In the remaining programs however, the communication of this information to prospective applicants was less clear. One program referred only to Australian students; another to Australian and PR only, and the remaining programs provided no information in regards to eligibility.

4.4 Costs Associated with Completing the Enabling Program

Although enabling programs are tuition-free for eligible students, there are still costs associated with their completion, as detailed in the following section. These costs include:

- Materials and consumables (e.g. laptops, textbooks, internet access and printing charges);
- Payment of the Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF);
- Living expenses (e.g. accommodation); and
- Travel expenses.

Many programs (23) made no specific mention of associated costs. Five provided more specific information, such as advising the costs of the SSAF and/or approximating the expected materials costs. Many (17) provided non-specific information, such as stating the student would be required to purchase textbooks but proving no information beyond that. Only one program (Murdoch University's *OnTrack program*) advised that the cost of materials would be covered by the institution.

[10]See for example http://studyassist.gov.au/sites/StudyAssist/HelpfulResources/Documents/2015%20CSP%20HECS-HELP%20booklet.PDF.

4.5 Possible Pathways Following Completion of the Enabling Program

The primary purpose of an enabling program is to prepare a student for higher education studies; however enrolment after successful completion of the program is restricted in two ways. First, most universities only recognise their own enabling programs in terms of preparation. Second, only certain undergraduate programs recognise the enabling program as meeting admission requirements. Only two universities advised that its enabling program was a pathway into all undergraduate degrees it offered. Six universities required either a certain level of performance within the enabling program (i.e. a competitive course-weighted average) or that the undergraduate course itself be less competitive. An example was The University of Queensland's College Tertiary Preparation Program, which confirmed entry into any undergraduate program in the institution that had an ATAR cut-off of 88.0 or lower. Fifteen courses provided no information about post-enabling enrolment and the remainder gave non-specific information, such as the Tertiary Preparation Program at the University of Southern Queensland, which advised "When you successfully complete TPP you are guaranteed entry into selected USQ degrees, if you meet the English proficiency requirements"[11].

4.6 Program Delivery

Enabling programs are delivered almost universally in-house. Forty-one programs were run by the universities and a further four by university-owned entities (e.g. colleges). Only three programs were run with the involvement of a third-party provided and in each case these were delivered in partnership with the respective universities.

Classroom (i.e. face-to-face) teaching was the preferred mode of delivery for 41 programs. Of these, 13 offered an online option. Two programs were only offered online. The remainder did not specify the mode of delivery, however the information provided strongly indicated a classroom mode of delivery. However it is interesting to note that four of the five top providers of enabling programs (in terms of EFTSL) provided an online delivery option. These were: The University of Newcastle Australia, University of Southern Queensland, Curtin University and Central Queensland University.

The duration of the programs ranged from as little as four weeks full-time up to 18 months full-time. Most programs (20) specified part-time options and a small number made reference to an accelerated (e.g. intensive summer school) option.

4.7 Representation of Student Equity Groups in Enabling Programs

Nationally, enabling programs evidence reveal significant levels of enrolments from students within the five recognised equity groups[12]. Regional and remote students are the largest-represented group (see Figure 3). This reinforces the important of enabling programs for regional students enrolling not only in regional universities but for regional students moving to take up opportunities in metropolitan institutions.

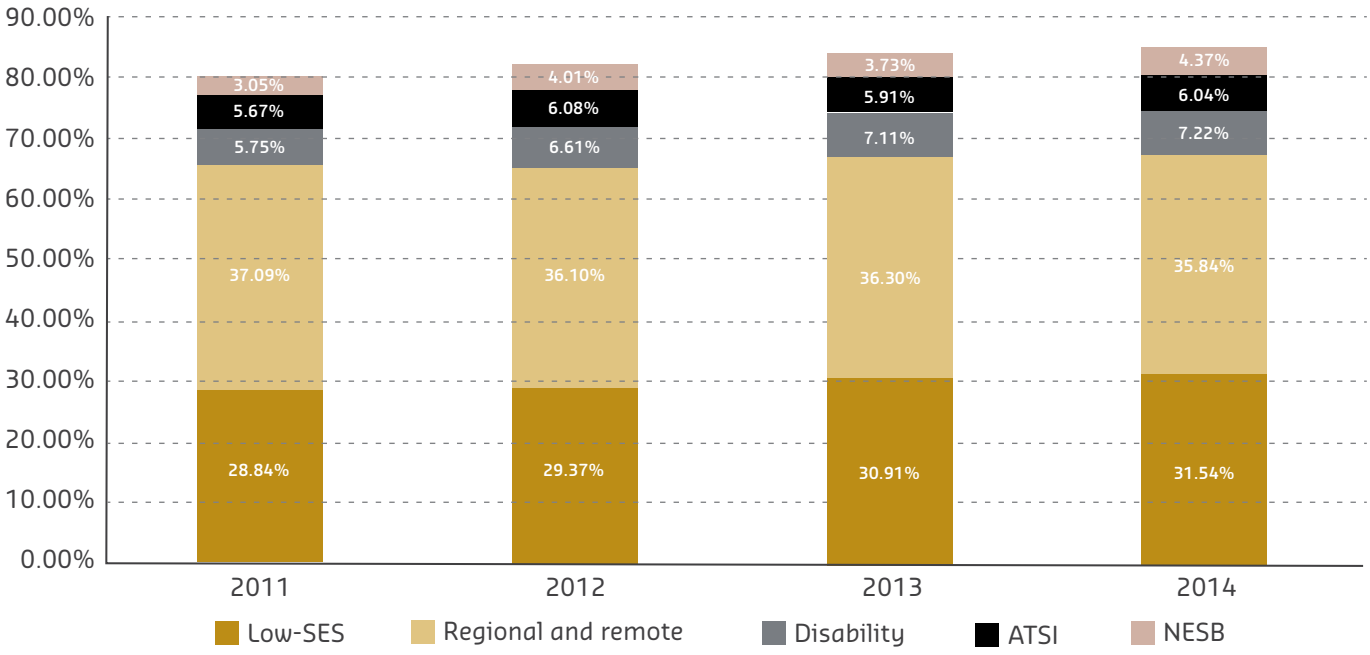
[11]See http://www.usq.edu.au/study/degrees/tertiary-preparation-program-domestic

[12]It is not possible to calculate numbers for women enrolled in non-traditional areas, since the majority of enabling programs have generic course structures.

4. Availability and Design of Enabling Programs (continued)

Domestic enabling students by selected equity groups, 2011-2014

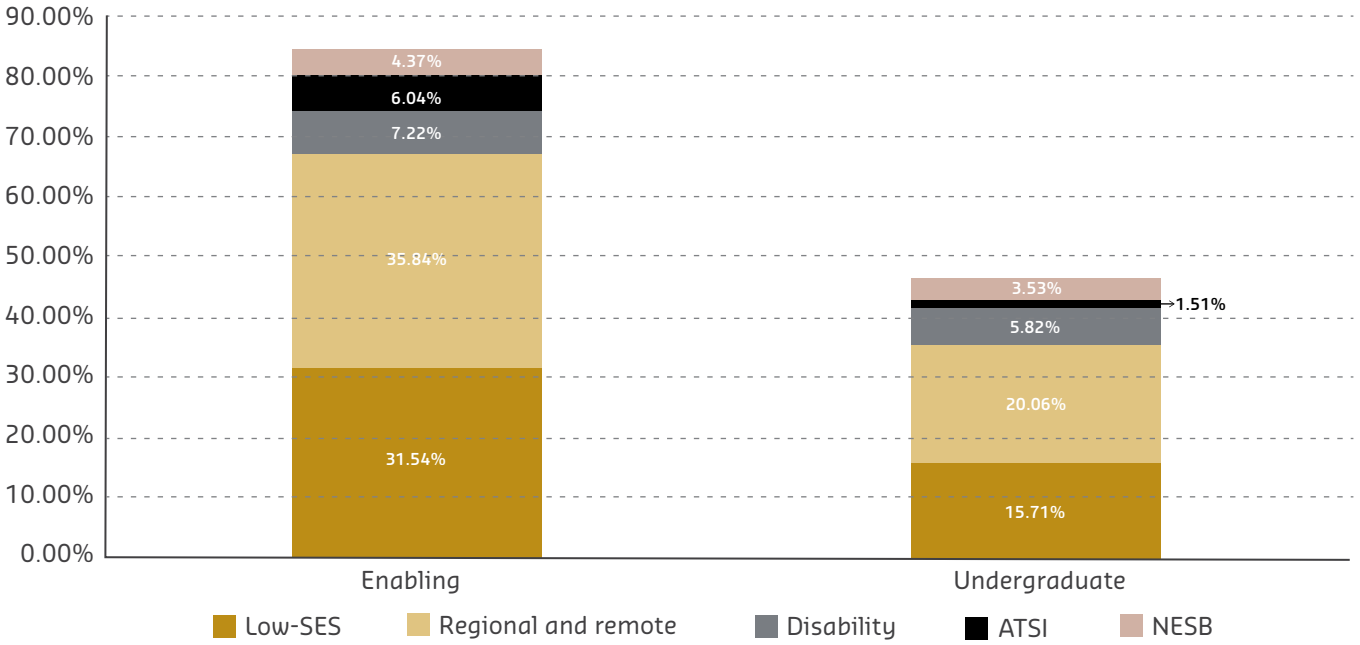
Figure 3: Domestic enabling students by selected equity groups, 2011-2014



Students from low-SES backgrounds also make up a significant proportion of enabling enrolments. Although the representation of the three remaining equity groups is low in raw-numbers terms, the importance of the enabling pathway becomes more evident when compared with enrolments at the undergraduate level (see Figure 4). In all cases, the defined equity groups have higher rates of participation in enabling programs than they do at the undergraduate level. Students from low-SES backgrounds have more than twice the rate of representation at the enabling level than they do at undergraduate, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students see their share increase from 1.51 per cent at the undergraduate level to over six per cent at the enabling level.

Representation of selected equity groups by course level, 2014

Figure 4: Representation of selected equity groups by course level, 2014



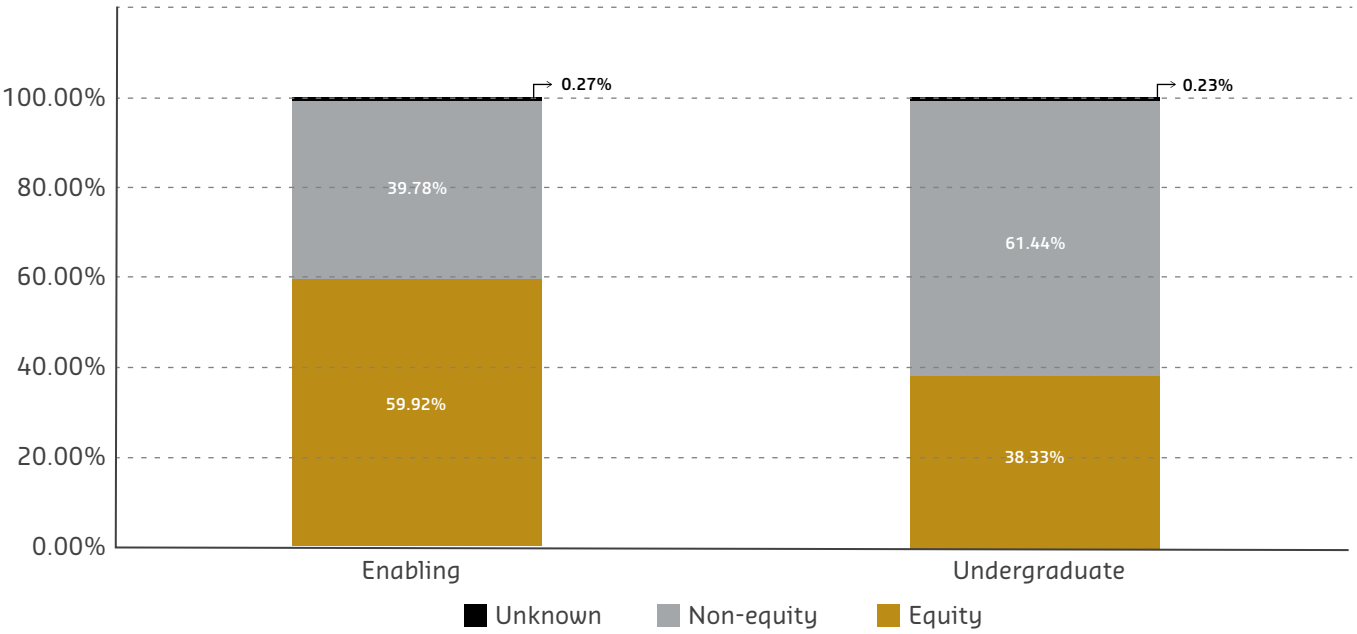
Source: Department of Education and Training statistics provided for research project and Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2014 Student Data (2014 Appendix 2 – Equity groups)

However, these figures should not be interpreted as signifying that more than four out of five (i.e. 80 per cent) of students enrolled in enabling programs are from a recognised equity group, since official equity-group reporting double-counts students. For example, a student with a disability living in a low-SES, regional location would be counted three times in the statistical collection. Figure 5 provides a more accurate picture of equity-group representation, as it uses a bespoke data set that counts students only once; achieved by distinguishing between multiple equity-group representations. For the purposes of this report, the category of women enrolled in non-traditional areas has not been considered an equity group, to allow for comparison between the enabling and undergraduate course levels. Even when eliminating the double-counting aspect, it is apparent that enabling programs are providing an important pathway for students who have experienced recognised forms of disadvantage. At the enabling level, approximately three out of every five students enrolled in 2014 had experienced at least one form of recognised educational disadvantage, compared to two out of five students at the undergraduate level.

4. Availability and Design of Enabling Programs (continued)

Representation of equity-group students by course level, 2014 (adjusted)

Figure 5: Representation of equity-group students by course level, 2014 (adjusted)



This data set also revealed that in 2014, in enabling programs:

- More than 5,000 students enrolled had experienced multiple forms of recognised disadvantage (i.e. belonging to more than one equity group);
- More than 700 students had experienced at least three forms of recognised disadvantage; and
- More than 29 students had experienced four forms of recognised disadvantage.

4.8 Findings

There is currently a diverse range of enabling programs available throughout the higher education sector in Australia. These programs are providing an important pathway into higher education for many disadvantaged students, as evidenced by their high rates of representation.

With the exception of programs designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, most programs are relatively unrestricted in regards to access; both in terms of what types of domestic student can apply and their prior academic performance. The notable exception is the existence of a relatively new form of enabling program, which could be described as 'hot house' programs for Year 12 students who have achieved an ATAR short of that required to be eligible for admission. These programs are typified by:

- A shorter course duration compared to most other enabling programs (as little as four weeks); and
- Applicants required to have sat Year 12 studies and achieved an ATAR, usually between 50 and 60.

On the one hand, these 'hot house' programs go against certain core philosophies of enabling practitioners; namely that the programs be designed to accommodate a diverse range of students with little or no preparation for higher education studies. On the other hand, they could be said to be addressing a very particular need by providing academic scaffolding for many school leavers who would otherwise be rejected by institutions for undergraduate studies. It is also noted that in some cases these 'hothouse' programs are run in addition to more traditional enabling programs that accommodate a wider range of students.

Generally, higher education institutions recognise only their own enabling programs for articulation purposes. Furthermore, more than half of all enabling places available nationally are enrolled through only eight institutions and most enabling programs place limitations on the courses to which the students can articulate to. Therefore it could be said that currently enabling programs widen but do not necessarily deepen access to higher education.

A detailed typology of the enabling programs examined is included as Appendix B.

5. Statistical Analysis of Retention and Success Data (continued)

Further statistical analysis was carried out on the Department of Education and Training data acquired. It is important to note that this statistical analysis should be considered high-level, as it was only possible to control for one variable; namely the basis of admission into the undergraduate course. There are other factors that impact upon academic achievement, such as the educational background of a student's parents (cf. Rich, 2000). More importantly, the pre-tertiary academic achievement of the student is perhaps the most significant factor of all (cf. Gemici, Bednarz, & Karmel, 2014; Gemici, Lim, & Karmel, 2013a). In the Australian higher education sector, prior academic achievement is most commonly measured by ATAR. However, since a major goal of recognising alternative pathways to higher education is to provide options for students who do not have an ATAR, this was a variable that could not be controlled for.

Another important variable that could not be controlled for was the level of the VET qualification. As outlined in Section 4, the higher the level of VET qualification, the less the representation from disadvantaged learners.

The analysis by individual higher education institution was mixed. Many institutions simply didn't have enough cases to produce significant results. For this reason, analysis is confined to the sectoral level.

5.1 Student Retention Rates

Notwithstanding the caveats above regarding the high-level nature of this analysis, the primary purpose of the analysis can be expressed in the following two questions:

1. Was the subsequent Bachelor-level retention rate for the target group of students in the enabling program experience better or worse than the retention rate for those students in each of the other sub-bachelor pathways? and
2. Was any difference in the retention rates statistically significant?

For each of the equity groups, the results are displayed in two ways:

1. A chart showing the retention rates for that group, via each pathway, with the enabling pathway students used as the comparator; and
2. A table listing the exact retention rates and the instances in which the difference in retention rates were statistically significant.

5.1.1 Retention Rates for Low-SES Students

Figure 6: Retention rates for low-SES students, 2009-2013

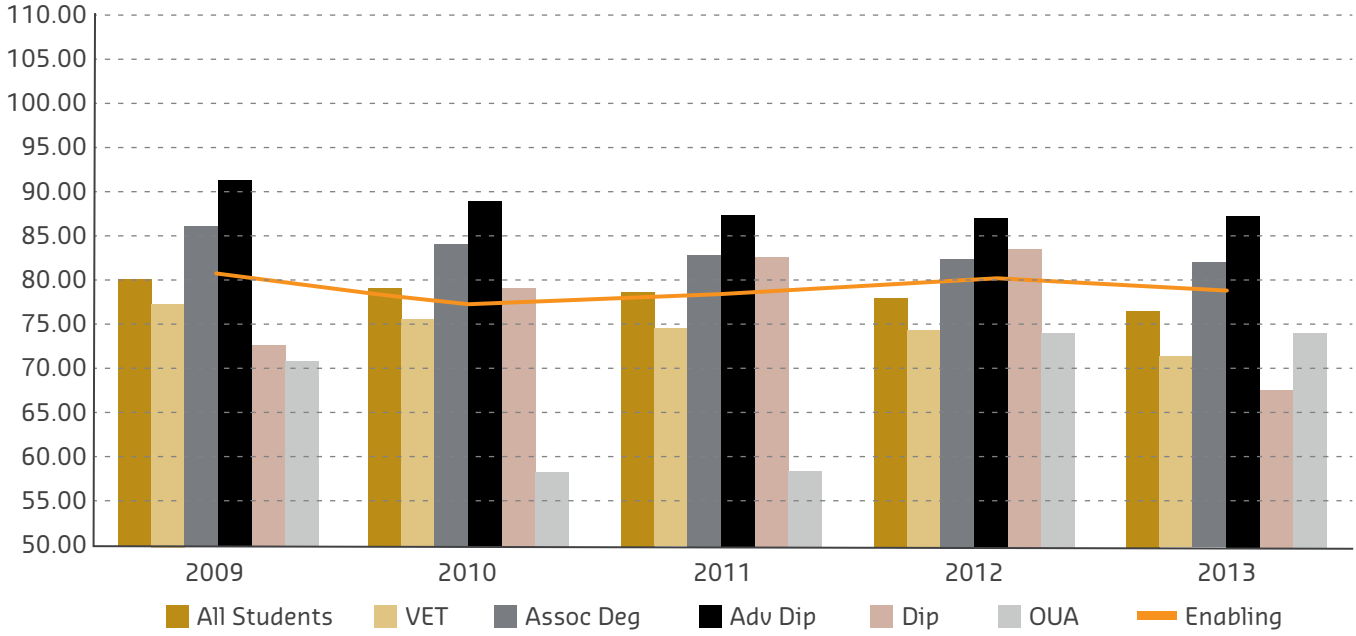


Table 3: Retention rates for low-SES students by pathway, 2009-2013

Year	Enabling	All students	SS	VET	SS	Assoc Deg	SS	Adv Dip	SS	Dip	SS	OUA	SS
2009	80.76	80.24	No	77.38	Yes	86.00	No	91.26	Yes	72.50	No	70.74	Yes
2010	77.35	79.20	Yes	75.59	No	84.11	Yes	89.00	Yes	79.31	No	58.39	Yes
2011	78.51	78.72	No	74.63	Yes	82.98	No	87.42	Yes	82.67	No	58.39	Yes
2012	80.25	77.99	Yes	74.28	Yes	82.53	No	87.08	Yes	83.51	No	73.99	Yes
2013	78.95	76.52	Yes	71.39	Yes	82.13	No	87.28	Yes	67.57	Yes	74.05	Yes

Note: Retention rate after first year of subsequent bachelor-level studies

Key: SS was result statistically significant for this group when compared against enabling student retention rates

5. Statistical Analysis of Retention and Success Data (continued)

5.1.2 Retention Rates for Regional and Remote Students

Figure 7: Retention rates for regional and remote students, 2009-2013

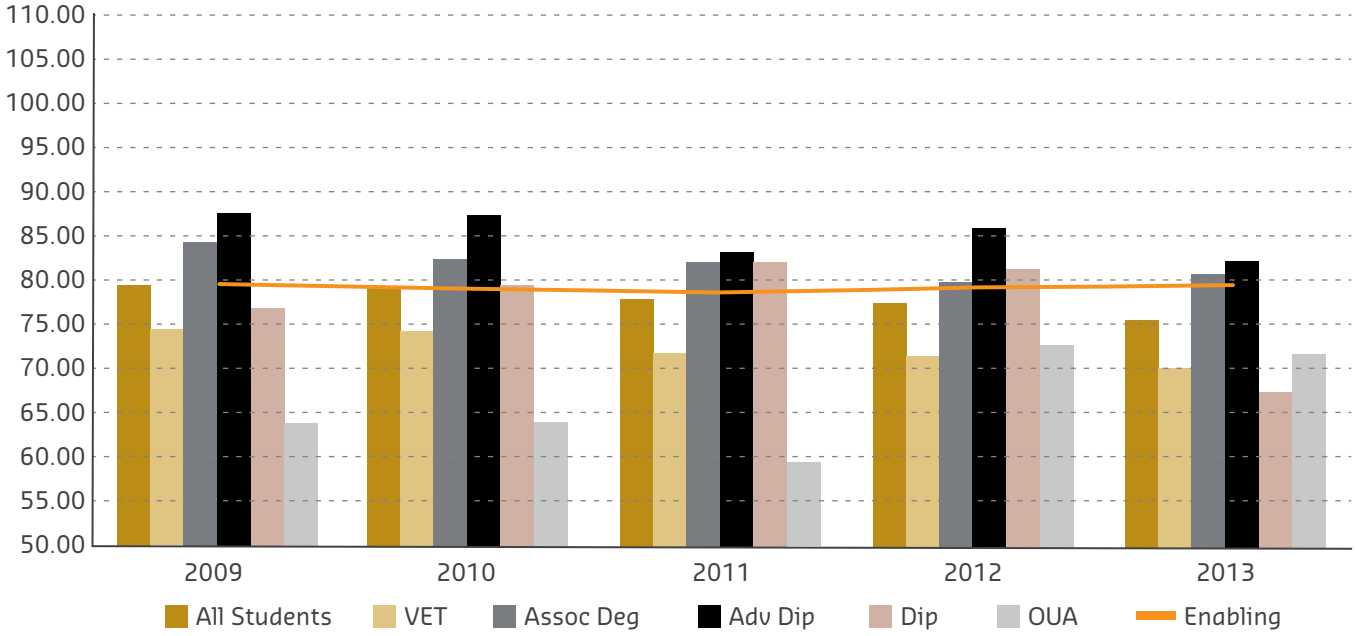


Table 4: Retention rates for regional and remote students by pathway, 2009-2013

Year	Enabling	All students	SS	VET	SS	Assoc Deg	SS	Adv Dip	SS	Dip	SS	OUA	SS
2009	79.72	79.50	No	74.45	Yes	84.44	No	87.77	Yes	76.79	No	63.83	Yes
2010	79.13	79.14	No	74.26	Yes	82.44	No	87.50	Yes	79.46	No	63.93	Yes
2011	78.67	77.88	No	71.66	Yes	82.10	No	83.22	No	82.05	No	59.33	Yes
2012	79.27	77.41	Yes	71.45	Yes	79.83	No	86.17	Yes	81.35	No	72.71	Yes
2013	79.49	75.58	Yes	70.12	Yes	80.78	No	82.22	No	67.37	Yes	71.56	Yes

Note: Retention rate after first year of subsequent bachelor-level studies

Key: SS was result statistically significant for this group when compared against enabling student retention rates

5.1.3 Retention Rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students

Figure 8: Retention rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, 2009-2013

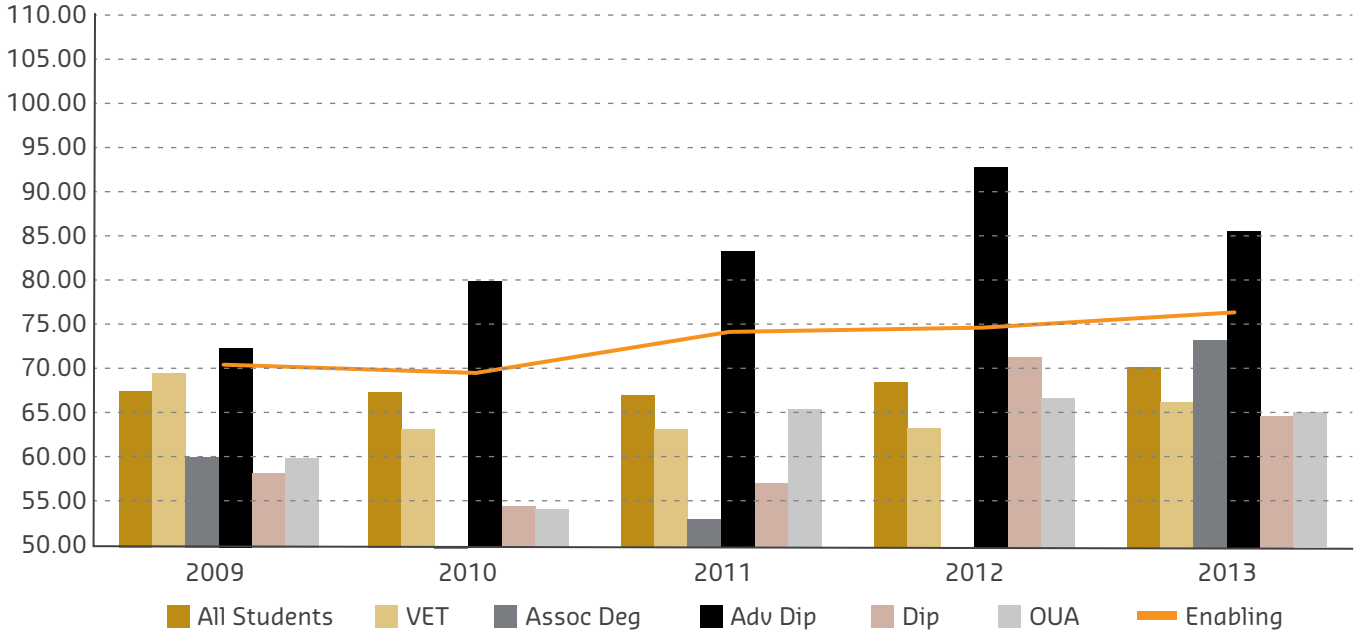


Table 5: Retention rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by pathway, 2009-2013

Year	Enabling	All students	SS	VET	SS	Assoc Deg	SS	Adv Dip	SS	Dip	SS	OUA	SS
2009	70.56	67.61	No	69.53	No	60.00	No	72.50	No	58.33	No	60.00	No
2010	69.67	67.53	No	63.24	No	43.48	Yes	80.00	No	54.55	No	54.17	No
2011	74.31	67.05	Yes	63.12	Yes	52.94	Yes	83.33	No	57.14	No	65.52	No
2012	74.75	68.48	Yes	63.41	Yes	33.33	Yes	92.86	Yes	71.43	No	66.67	No
2013	76.50	70.26	Yes	66.27	Yes	73.33	No	85.71	No	64.71	No	65.12	No

Note: Retention rate after first year of subsequent bachelor-level studies

Key: SS was result statistically significant for this group when compared against enabling student retention rates

5. Statistical Analysis of Retention and Success Data (continued)

5.1.4 Retention Rates for Students with Disability

Figure 9: Retention rates for students with disability, 2009-2013

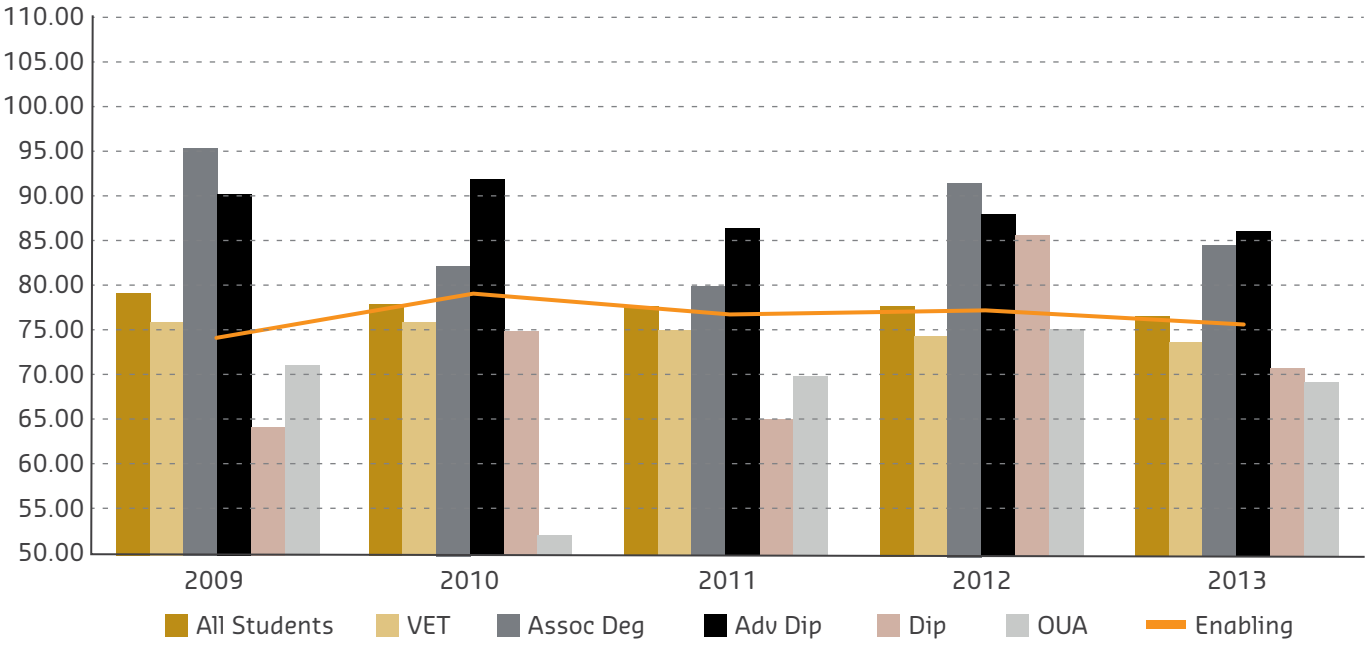


Table 6: Retention rates for students with disability by pathway, 2009-2013

Year	Enabling	All students	SS	VET	SS	Assoc Deg	SS	Adv Dip	SS	Dip	SS	OUA	SS
2009	74.36	79.18	Yes	76.12	No	95.45	Yes	90.32	Yes	64.29	No	71.13	No
2010	79.21	78.12	No	76.05	No	82.22	No	92.00	Yes	75.00	No	52.17	Yes
2011	76.85	77.82	No	75.09	No	80.00	No	86.49	No	65.22	No	70.00	No
2012	77.26	77.83	No	74.54	No	91.43	Yes	88.00	No	85.71	No	75.22	No
2013	75.75	76.60	No	73.70	No	84.62	No	86.21	No	70.91	No	69.40	Yes

Note: Retention rate after first year of subsequent bachelor-level studies

Key: SS was result statistically significant for this group when compared against enabling student retention rates

5.1.5 Retention Rates for Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) Students

Figure 10: Retention rates for non-English speaking background (NESB) students, 2009-2013

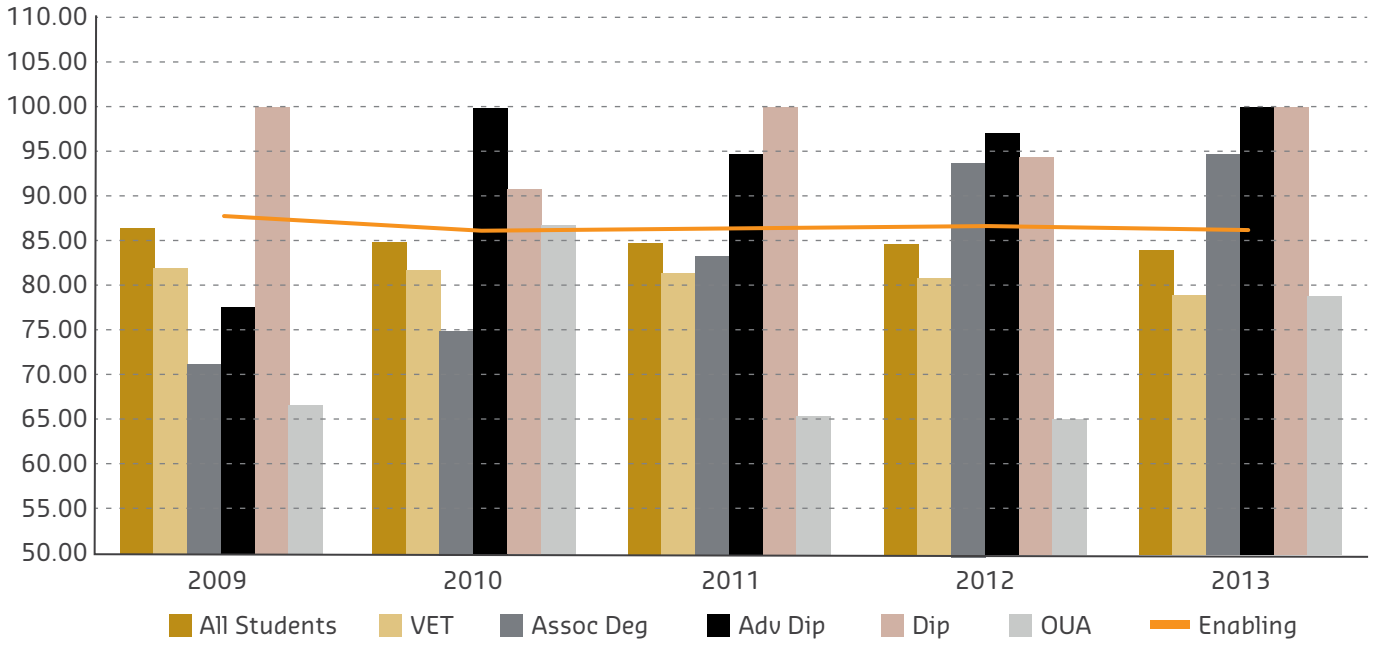


Table 7: Retention rates for non-English speaking background (NESB) students by pathway, 2009-2013

Year	Enabling	All students	SS	VET	SS	Assoc Deg	SS	Adv Dip	SS	Dip	SS	OUA	SS
2009	87.92	86.48	No	82.04	Yes	71.43	No	77.78	No	100.00	Yes	66.67	No
2010	86.48	84.91	No	81.83	Yes	75.00	No	100.00	Yes	90.91	No	86.67	No
2011	86.38	84.74	No	81.51	Yes	83.33	No	94.74	No	100.00	Yes	65.52	Yes
2012	86.97	84.65	No	80.87	Yes	93.75	No	97.06	Yes	94.44	No	65.12	Yes
2013	86.77	84.13	No	79.07	Yes	94.74	No	100.00	Yes	100.00	Yes	78.95	No

Note: Retention rate after first year of subsequent bachelor-level studies

Key: SS was result statistically significant for this group when compared against enabling student retention rates

5. Statistical Analysis of Retention and Success Data (continued)

5.1.6 Retention Rates for Women Enrolled in Non-Traditional Areas of Study (WINTA)

Figure 11: Retention rates for women in non-traditional areas of study (WINTA) students, 2009-2013

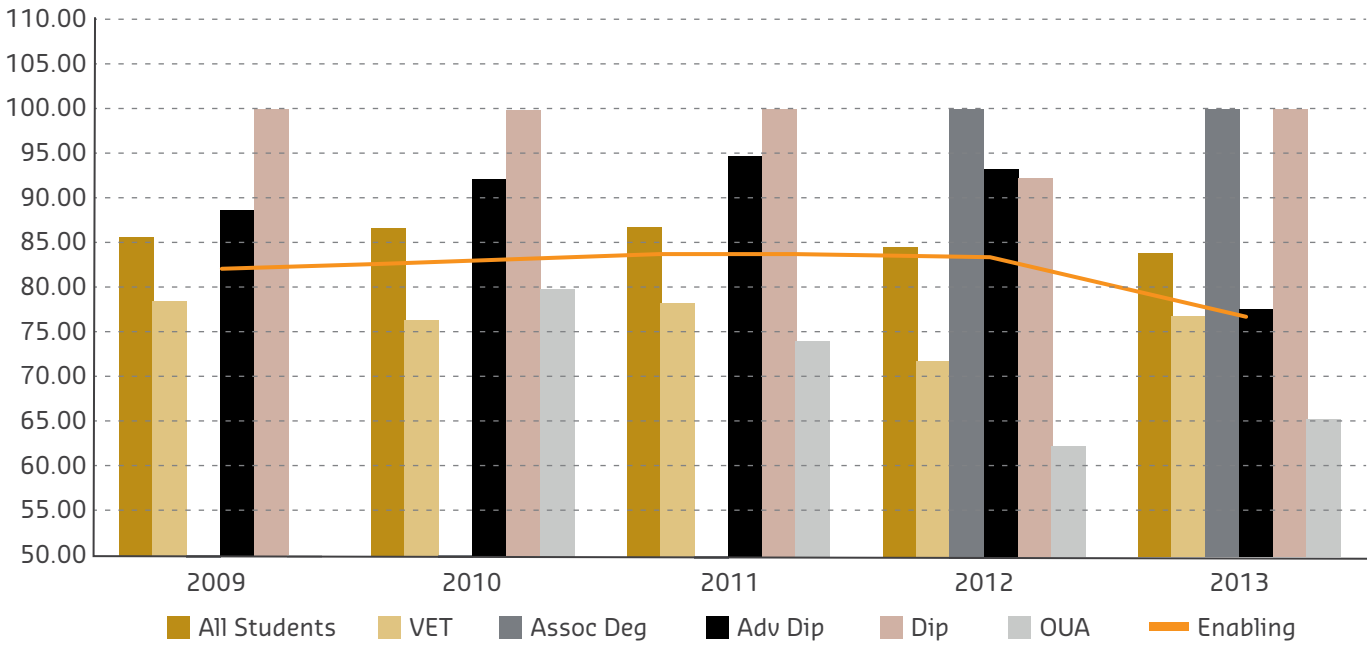


Table 8: Retention rates for women in non-traditional areas of study (WINTA) students by pathway, 2009-2013

Year	Enabling	All students	SS	VET	SS	Assoc Deg	SS	Adv Dip	SS	Dip	SS	OUA	SS
2009	82.27	85.87	No	78.63	No	-	N/A	88.89	No	100.00	No	50.00	Yes
2010	83.33	86.76	No	76.64	No	-	N/A	92.31	No	100.00	No	80.00	No
2011	84.18	86.79	No	78.50	No	-	N/A	94.74	No	100.00	No	74.07	No
2012	83.49	84.61	No	71.95	Yes	100.00	No	93.33	No	92.31	No	62.50	Yes
2013	76.99	84.05	Yes	76.94	No	100.00	No	77.78	No	100.00	No	65.38	No

Note: Retention rate after first year of subsequent bachelor-level studies

Key: SS was result statistically significant for this group when compared against enabling student retention rates

Table 9: Summary of comparative performance of retention rates for enabling pathway students, 2009-2013

		Comparative Retention Rate					
Year	Enabling Retention Rate	All students	VET	Assoc Deg	Adv Dip	Dip	OUA
Low-SES students							
2009	80.76	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
2010	77.35	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2011	78.51	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2012	80.25	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2013	78.95	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
Regional and remote students							
2009	79.72	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
2010	79.13	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2011	78.67	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2012	79.27	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2013	79.49	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students							
2009	70.56	BETTER	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
2010	69.67	BETTER	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
2011	74.31	BETTER	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
2012	74.75	BETTER	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
2013	76.5	BETTER	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
Students with a disability							
2009	74.36	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
2010	79.21	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
2011	76.85	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
2012	77.26	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2013	75.75	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
Students from non-English speaking backgrounds							
2009	87.92	BETTER	BETTER	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	BETTER
2010	86.48	BETTER	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE
2011	86.38	BETTER	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2012	86.97	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2013	86.77	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
Women enrolled in non-traditional areas of study							
2009	82.27	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2010	83.33	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2011	84.18	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2012	83.49	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2013	76.99	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER

5. Statistical Analysis of Retention and Success Data (continued)

5.2 Student Success Rates

Success rates were calculated as the proportion of actual student load (EFTSL) for units of study that were passed divided by all units of study attempted (passed + failed + withdrawn).

The same caveats regarding retention rates apply to success rates: that the analysis controlled for only one variable (i.e. basis of admission) and the analysis was confined to the sectoral level.

For each of the equity groups, the results are displayed in two ways:

1. A chart showing the success rates for that group, via each pathway, with the enabling pathway students used as the comparator; and
2. A table listing the exact success rates and the instances in which the difference in success rates were statistically significant.

5.2.1 Success Rates for Low-SES Students

Figure 12: Success rates for low-SES students, 2009-2014

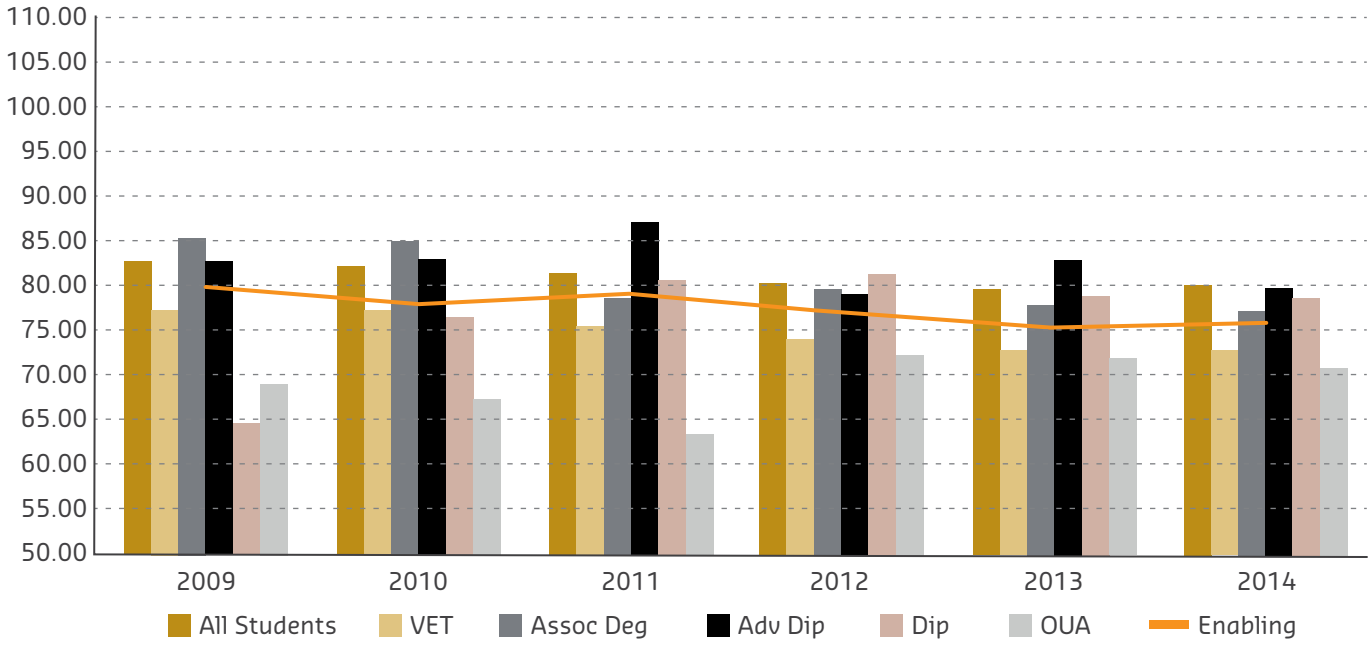


Table 10: Success rates for low-SES students by pathway, 2009-2014

Year	Enabling	All students	SS	VET	SS	Assoc Deg	SS	Adv Dip	SS	Dip	SS	OUA	SS
2009	80.05	82.84	Yes	77.45	No	85.36	No	82.87	No	64.86	No	69.19	Yes
2010	78.21	82.27	Yes	77.46	No	85.01	Yes	83.21	No	76.60	No	67.56	Yes
2011	79.27	81.50	Yes	75.63	Yes	78.81	No	87.20	Yes	80.76	No	63.66	Yes
2012	77.19	80.48	Yes	74.12	Yes	79.77	No	79.19	No	81.44	No	72.63	Yes
2013	75.50	79.79	Yes	72.94	Yes	78.04	No	82.95	Yes	78.98	No	72.03	No
2014	76.04	80.24	Yes	72.92	Yes	77.34	No	79.85	No	78.76	No	70.97	Yes

Note: Success rate after first year of subsequent bachelor-level studies

Key: SS was result statistically significant for this group when compared against enabling student success rates

5.2.2 Success Rates for Regional and Remote Students

Figure 13: Success rates for regional and remote students, 2009-2014

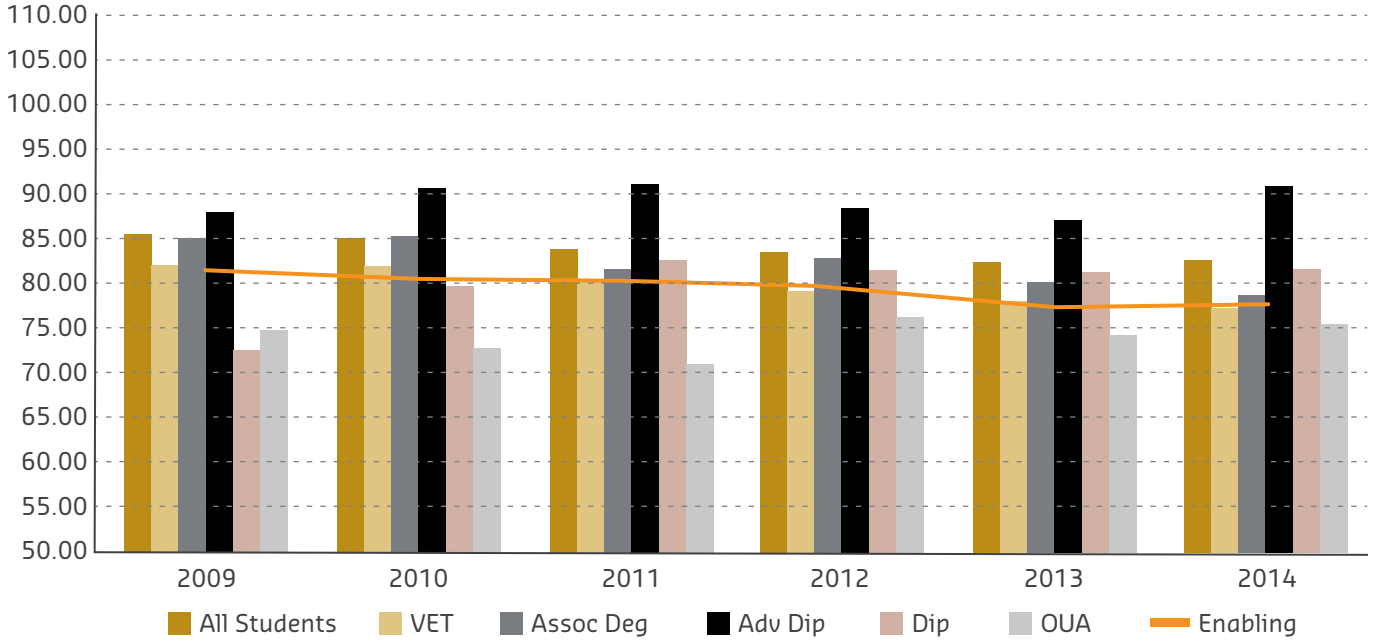


Table 11: Success rates for regional and remote students by pathway, 2009-2014

Year	Enabling	All students	SS	VET	SS	Assoc Deg	SS	Adv Dip	SS	Dip	SS	OUA	SS
2009	81.51	85.55	Yes	82.12	No	85.11	No	88.12	Yes	72.58	No	74.84	No
2010	80.49	85.13	Yes	81.92	No	85.24	No	90.76	Yes	79.70	No	72.69	Yes
2011	80.28	83.94	Yes	80.22	No	81.48	No	91.22	Yes	82.57	No	71.00	Yes
2012	79.51	83.46	Yes	79.13	No	82.86	No	88.44	Yes	81.56	No	76.16	No
2013	77.40	82.35	Yes	78.09	No	80.13	No	87.10	Yes	81.28	No	74.22	No
2014	77.62	82.67	Yes	77.30	No	78.64	No	90.94	Yes	81.64	No	75.41	No

Note: Success rate after first year of subsequent bachelor-level studies

Key: SS was result statistically significant for this group when compared against enabling student success rates

5. Statistical Analysis of Retention and Success Data (continued)

5.2.3 Success Rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students

Figure 14: Success rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, 2009-2014

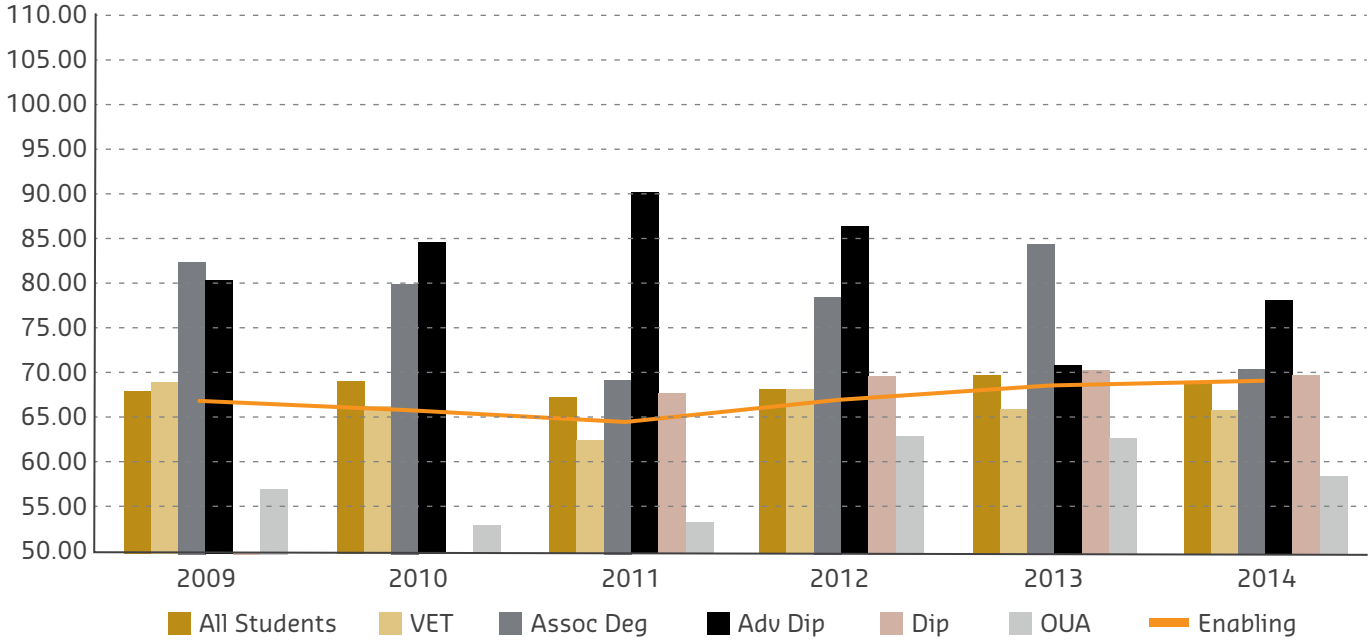


Table 12: Success rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by pathway, 2009-2014

Year	Enabling	All students	SS	VET	SS	Assoc Deg	SS	Adv Dip	SS	Dip	SS	OUA	SS
2009	67.09	68.11	No	69.19	No	82.52	Yes	80.51	No	42.53	No	57.14	No
2010	65.91	69.20	No	66.37	No	80.16	Yes	84.72	No	42.16	No	53.06	No
2011	64.69	67.39	No	62.41	No	69.27	No	90.24	Yes	67.81	No	53.50	No
2012	67.19	68.27	No	68.30	No	78.57	No	86.54	Yes	69.77	No	63.13	No
2013	68.75	69.85	No	66.05	No	84.65	Yes	70.98	No	70.49	No	62.78	No
2014	69.29	68.84	No	65.97	No	70.51	No	78.26	No	69.90	No	58.52	No

Note: Success rate after first year of subsequent bachelor-level studies

Key: SS was result statistically significant for this group when compared against enabling student success rates

5.2.4 Success Rates for Students with Disability

Figure 15: Success rates for students with disability, 2009-2014

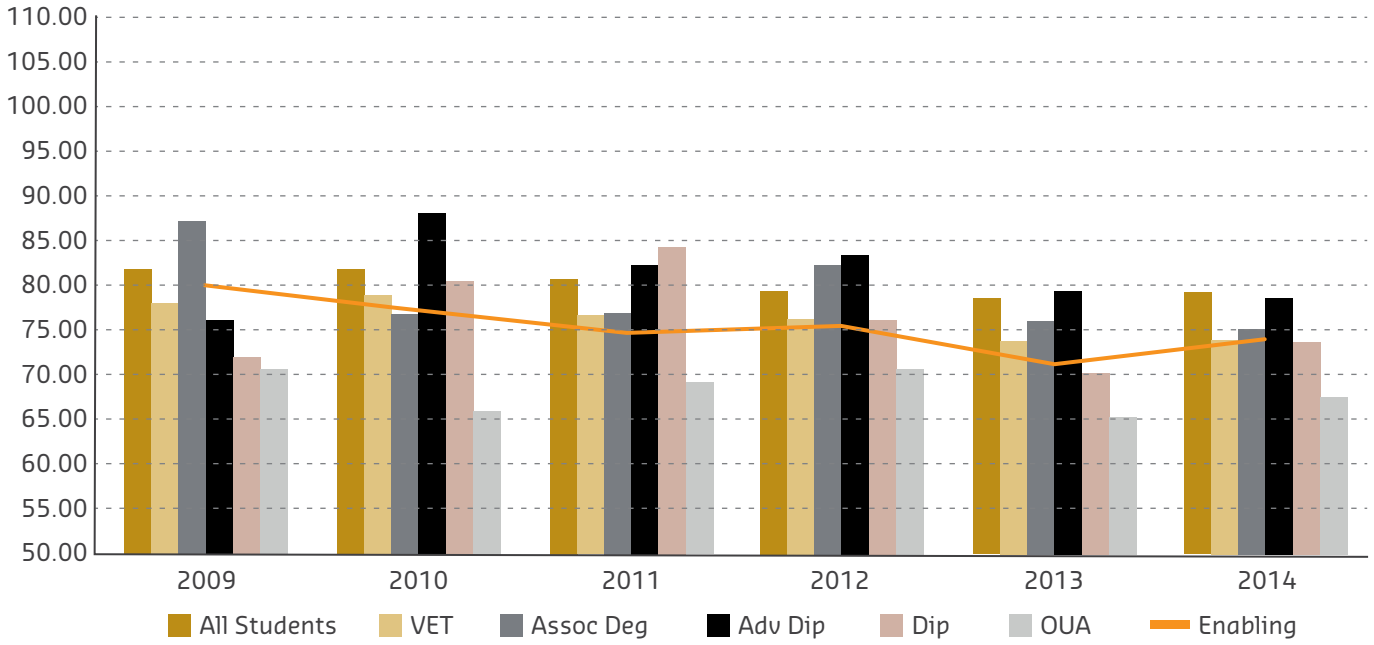


Table 13: Success rates for students with disability by pathway, 2009-2014

Year	Enabling	All students	SS	VET	SS	Assoc Deg	SS	Adv Dip	SS	Dip	SS	OUA	SS
2009	80.08	81.97	No	78.13	No	87.39	No	76.19	No	71.98	No	70.60	No
2010	77.27	81.95	Yes	78.90	No	76.72	No	88.21	No	80.49	No	65.97	No
2011	74.70	80.77	Yes	76.72	No	76.95	No	82.26	No	84.36	No	69.21	No
2012	75.47	79.37	Yes	76.25	No	82.28	No	83.47	No	76.16	No	70.69	No
2013	71.31	78.51	Yes	73.81	No	75.99	No	79.58	No	70.28	No	65.33	No
2014	74.02	79.25	Yes	74.02	No	75.13	No	78.69	No	73.77	No	67.52	No

Note: Success rate after first year of subsequent bachelor-level studies

Key: SS was result statistically significant for this group when compared against enabling student success rates

5. Statistical Analysis of Retention and Success Data (continued)

5.2.5 Success Rates for Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) Students

Figure 16: Success rates for non-English speaking background (NESB) students, 2009-2014

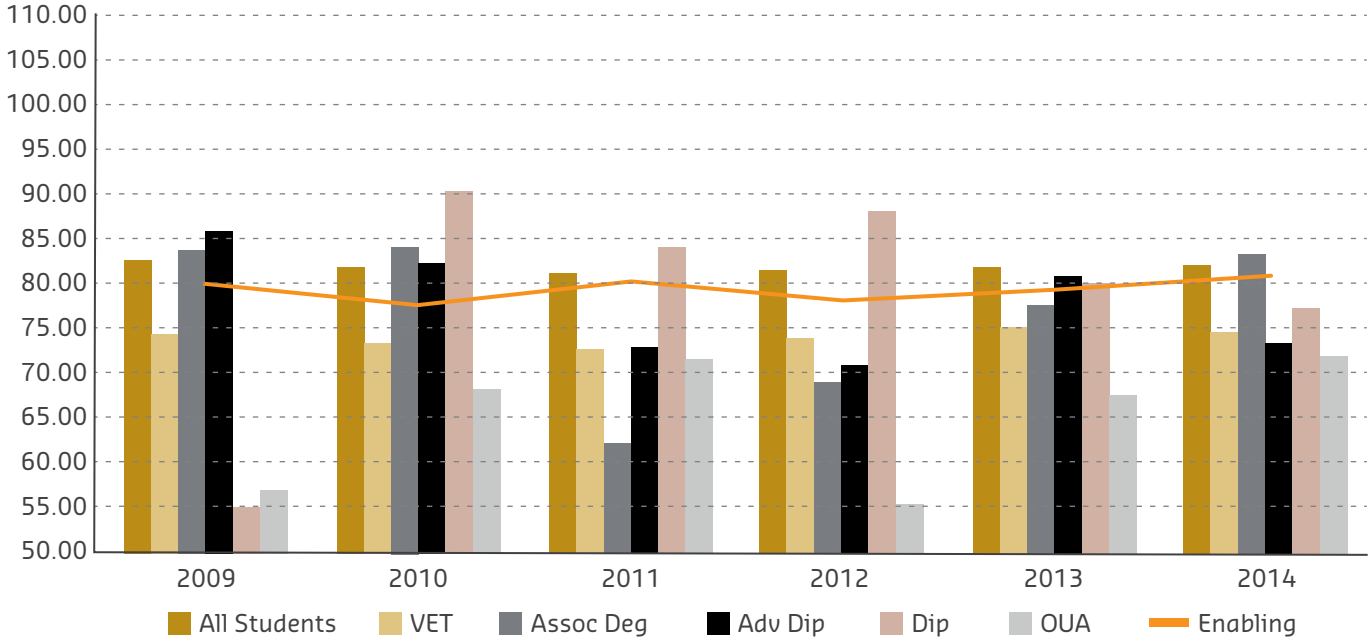


Table 14: Success rates for non-English speaking background (NESB) students by pathway, 2009-2014

Year	Enabling	All students	SS	VET	SS	Assoc Deg	SS	Adv Dip	SS	Dip	SS	OUA	SS
2009	80.08	82.81	No	74.44	Yes	83.78	n.a.	85.94	No	55.17	n.a.	56.85	No
2010	77.68	81.83	No	73.34	No	84.13	No	82.28	No	90.41	No	68.33	No
2011	80.28	81.20	No	72.75	Yes	62.20	No	72.84	No	84.00	No	71.61	No
2012	78.21	81.48	No	73.93	No	69.00	No	70.94	No	88.13	No	55.44	Yes
2013	79.48	81.87	No	75.11	No	77.64	No	80.95	No	80.00	No	67.55	No
2014	80.94	82.08	No	74.57	Yes	83.19	No	73.49	No	77.27	No	71.82	No

Note: Success rate after first year of subsequent bachelor-level studies

Key: SS was result statistically significant for this group when compared against enabling student success rates

5.2.6 Success Rates for Women Enrolled in Non-Traditional Areas of Study (WINTA)

Figure 17: Success rates for women in non-traditional areas of study (WINTA) students, 2009-2014

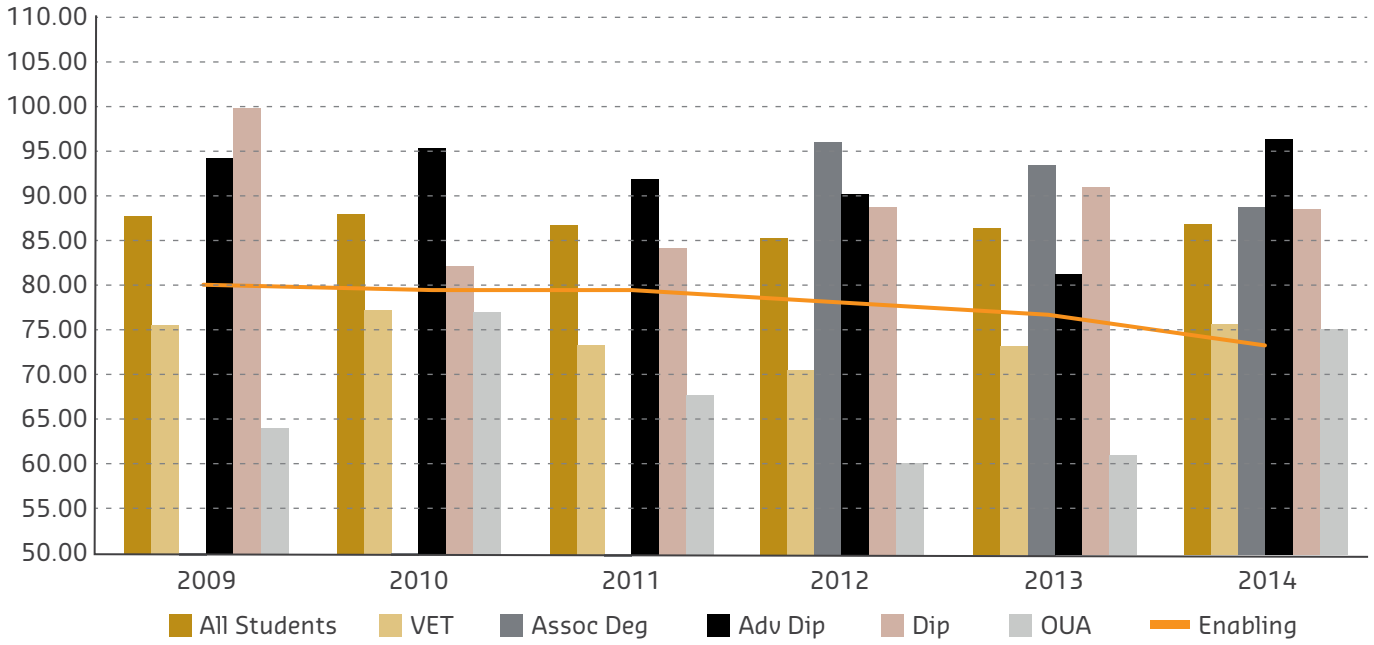


Table 15: Success rates for women in non-traditional areas of study (WINTA) students by pathway, 2009-2014

Year	Enabling	All students	SS	VET	SS	Assoc Deg	SS	Adv Dip	SS	Dip	SS	OUA	SS
2009	80.33	87.86	No	75.85	No	-	n.a.	94.29	No	100.00	n.a.	64.35	No
2010	79.75	88.08	Yes	77.29	No	-	n.a.	95.56	Yes	82.35	n.a.	77.22	No
2011	79.74	86.75	Yes	73.52	No	50.00	n.a.	92.03	No	84.21	n.a.	67.95	No
2012	78.35	85.46	Yes	70.76	No	96.08	n.a.	90.38	No	88.89	No	60.36	No
2013	76.80	86.52	Yes	73.34	No	93.75	n.a.	81.48	No	91.23	No	61.15	No
2014	73.58	86.85	Yes	75.85	No	88.89	n.a.	96.46	Yes	88.76	No	75.35	No

Note: Success rate after first year of subsequent bachelor-level studies

Key: SS was result statistically significant for this group when compared against enabling student success rates

5. Statistical Analysis of Retention and Success Data (continued)

Table 16: Summary of comparative performance of success rates for enabling pathway students, 2009-2014

		Comparative Success Rate					
Year	Enabling Success Rate	All students	VET	Assoc Deg	Adv Dip	Dip	OUA
Low-SES students							
2009	80.05	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
2010	78.21	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
2011	79.27	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2012	77.19	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2013	75.50	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2014	76.04	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
Regional and remote students							
2009	81.51	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
2010	80.49	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
2011	80.28	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2012	79.51	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2013	77.40	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2014	77.62	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students							
2009	67.09	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
2010	65.91	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
2011	64.69	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2012	67.19	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2013	68.75	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2014	69.29	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
Students with disability							
2009	80.08	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER	BETTER
2010	77.27	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2011	74.70	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2012	75.47	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2013	71.31	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
2014	74.02	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
Students from non-English speaking backgrounds							
2009	80.08	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER
2010	77.68	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2011	80.28	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	BETTER
2012	78.21	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	BETTER
2013	79.48	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2014	80.94	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER	BETTER
Women enrolled in non-traditional areas of study							
2009	80.33	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2010	79.75	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2011	79.74	WORSE	BETTER	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2012	78.35	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2013	76.80	WORSE	BETTER	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	BETTER
2014	73.58	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE	WORSE

5.3 Volume of Students per Pathway

Figure 18: Number of low-SES students in bachelor-level studies by prior studies, 2009-2013 combined numbers

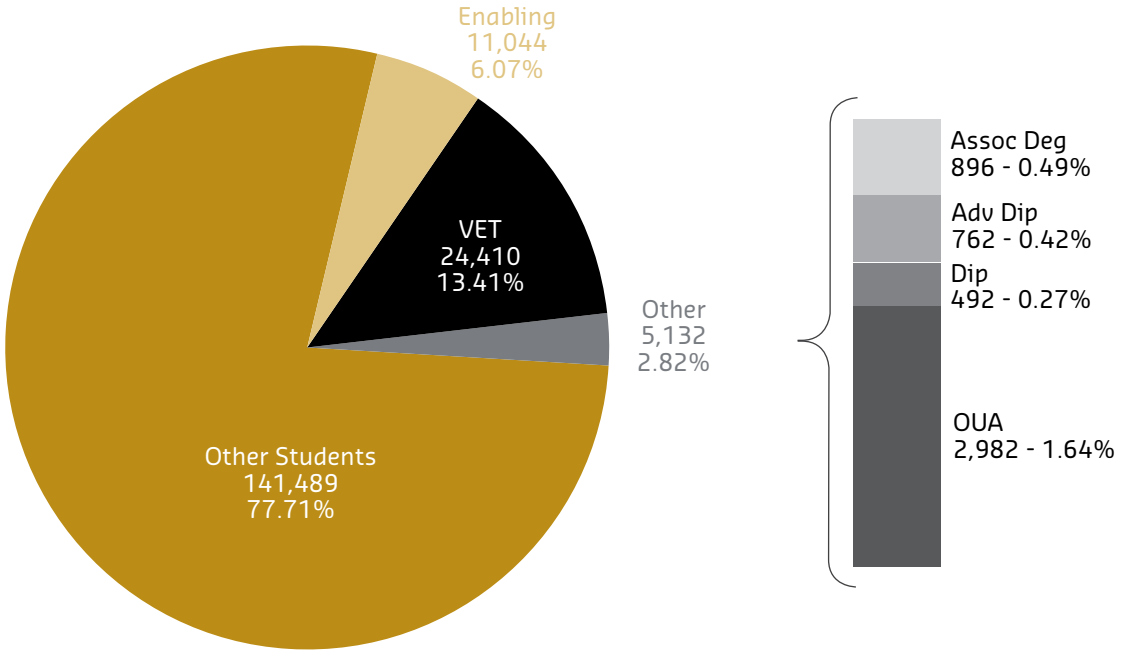
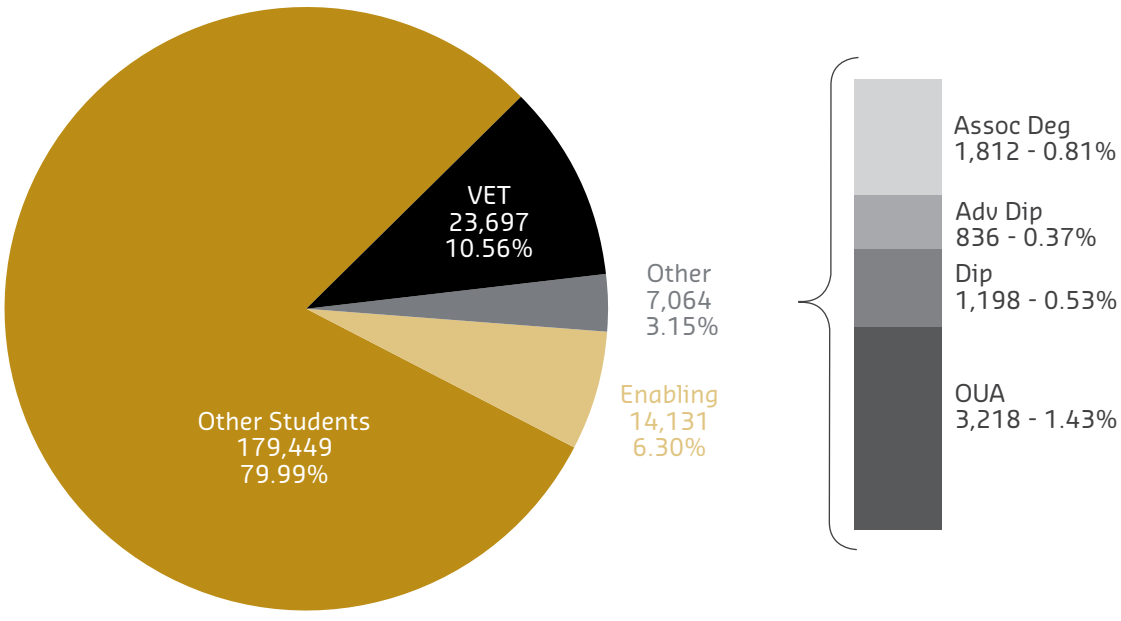


Figure 19: Number of regional and remote students in bachelor-level studies by prior studies, 2009-2013 combined numbers



5. Statistical Analysis of Retention and Success Data (continued)

Figure 20: Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in bachelor-level studies by prior studies, 2009-2013 combined numbers

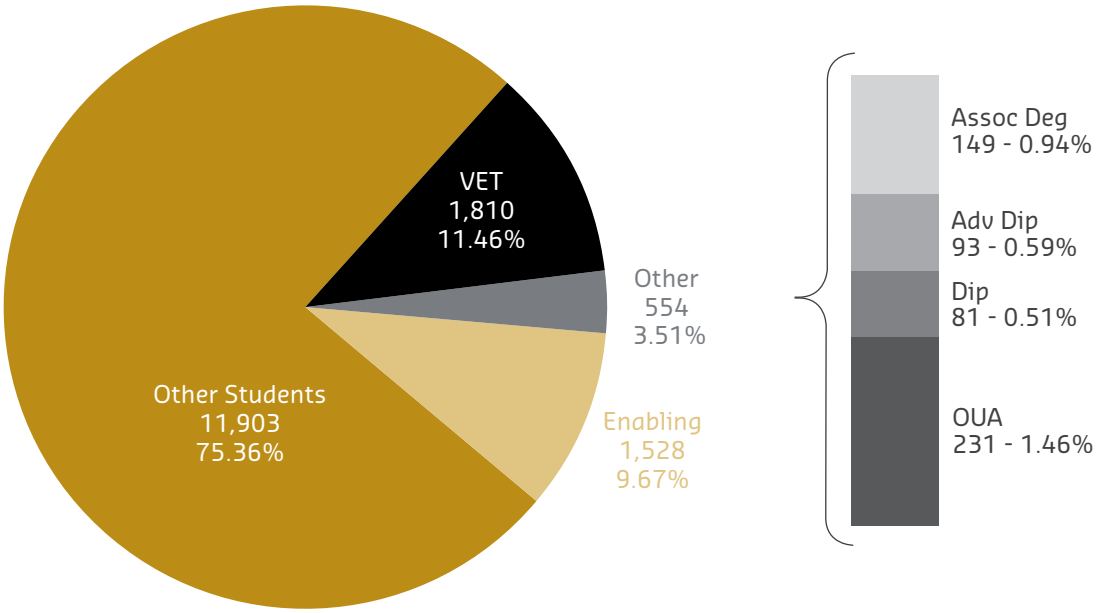


Figure 21: Number of students with disability in bachelor-level studies by prior studies, 2009-2013 combined numbers

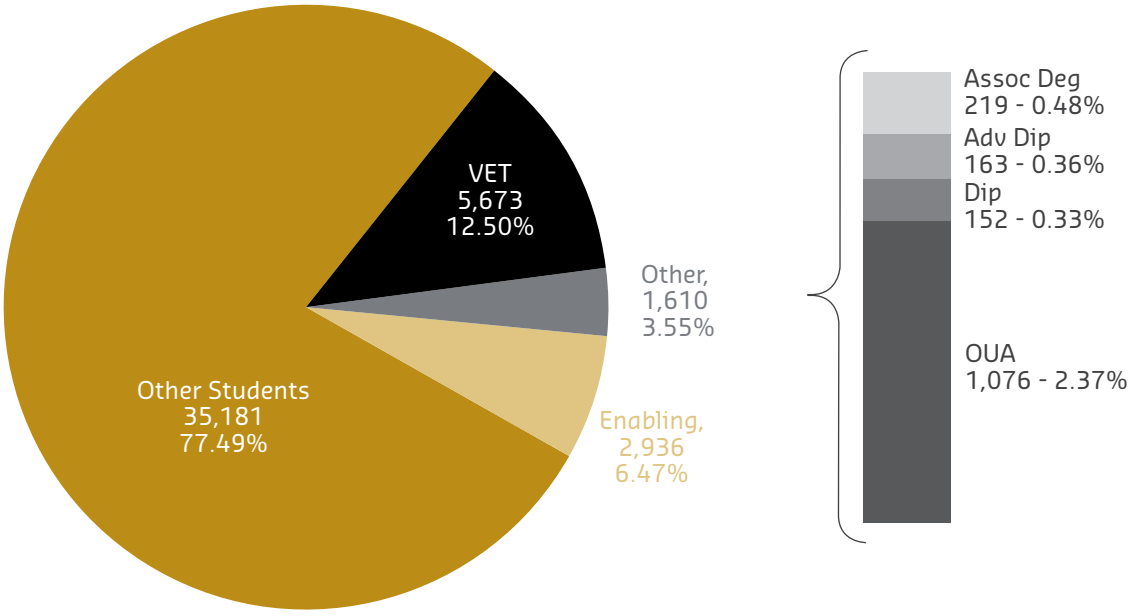


Figure 22: Number of non-English speaking background (NESB) students in bachelor-level studies by prior studies, 2009-2013 combined numbers

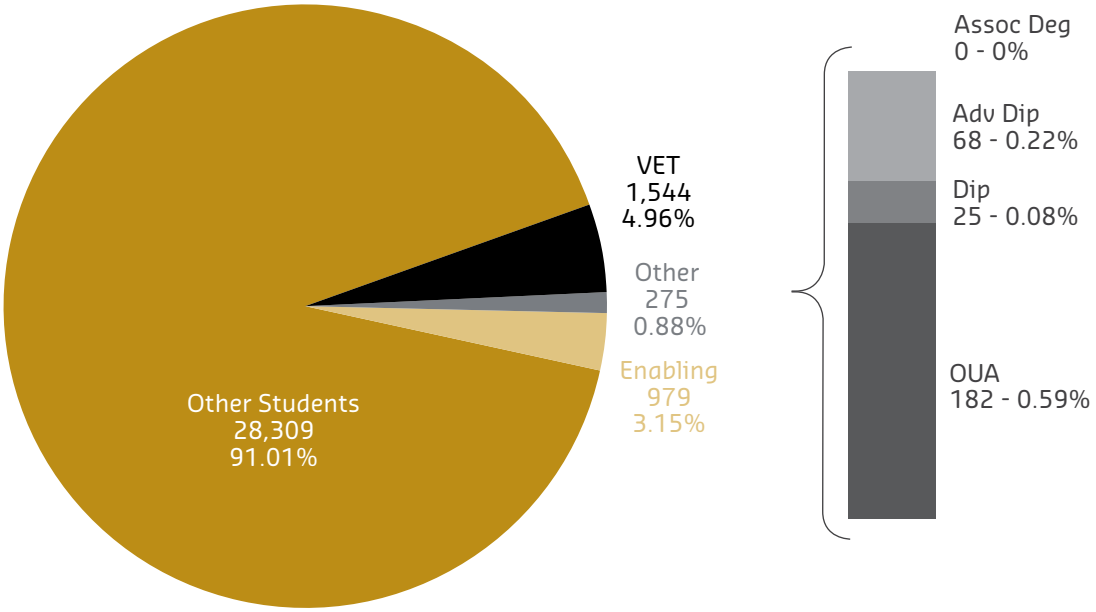
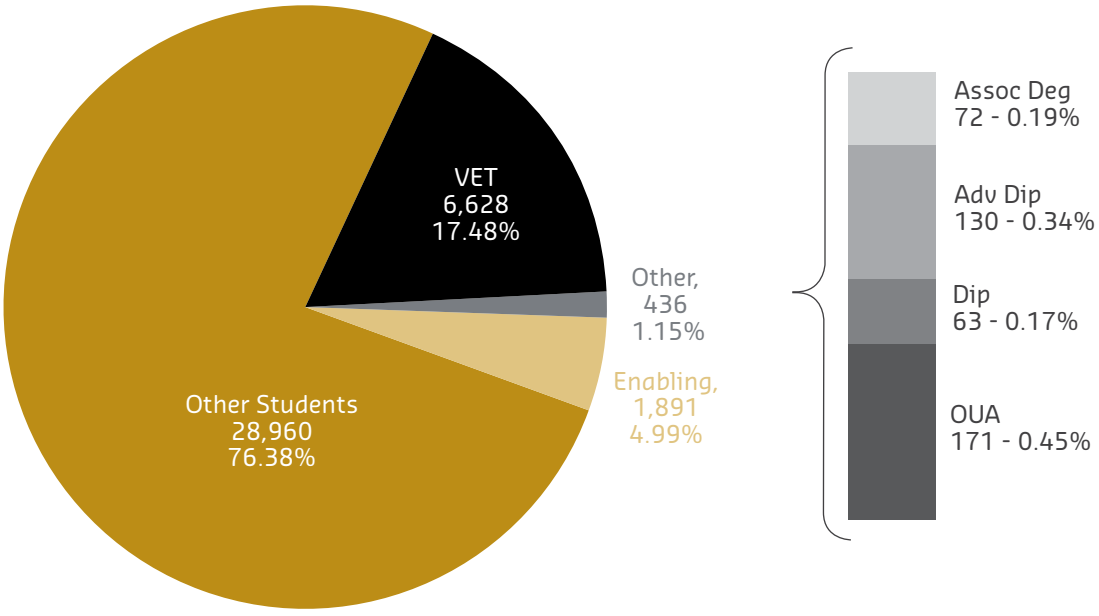


Figure 23: Number of women in non-traditional areas of study (WINTA) students in bachelor-level studies by prior studies, 2009-2013 combined numbers



5. Statistical Analysis of Retention and Success Data (continued)

5.4 Findings

The findings from the quantitative analysis are indicative rather than conclusive, due to:

- Being able to control only for the pathway into the Bachelor-level studies;
- Small samples sizes in some sub-bachelor cohorts; and
- The majority of results being not statistically significant.

Therefore, the findings are expressed as being characteristic, not definitive, of the sub-bachelor groups.

In terms of retention:

- Generally speaking, enabling programs resulted in better retention rates for equity-group students than the VET and OUA pathways, but worse retention rates for the Advanced Diploma pathway.
- The results for the Associate Degree and Diploma pathways were mixed.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in particular experience positive retention outcomes when transitioning through enabling programs. These students' retention rates outperform all but the Advanced Diploma pathway students.
- Students transitioning via the Advanced Diploma pathway generally experienced the best retention rates across all equity groups, compared to all other sub-bachelor pathways.

In terms of success:

- Generally speaking, enabling programs resulted in better success rates for equity-group students than the OUA pathway.
- Low-SES students, students from non-English speaking backgrounds, women enrolled in non-traditional areas of study transitioning via enabling programs also experienced better success rates, generally, than those articulating via VET.
- Across all equity groups, students transitioning via the Associate Degree, Advanced Diploma and Diploma pathways generally experienced better success rates than those transitioning via enabling programs. The exception was the students from non-English speaking background group, which had mixed results in the Associate Degree pathway.

In terms of volume:

- Enabling programs transition more equity-group students than the Associate Degree, Advanced Diploma, Diploma and OUA pathways combined.
- VET transitions more equity-group students in terms of raw numbers, however enabling programs transition more in proportional terms (see Section 5 of this report).

Taken in conjunction with the retention findings, one inference could be that enabling programs engender equity-group students with greater resilience or 'stickability' but their academic preparation needs to be improved in the enabling program itself and/or further supported throughout their undergraduate studies. These success rates remind us that, disadvantage does not disappear after the enabling pathway has been completed. Many equity-group students still require ongoing academic support in their undergraduate studies, regardless of 'sub bachelor' academic skills preparation. A factor not fully controlled for within the analysis for which additional research is recommended is the difference that specific types of enabling programs have on success and retention. The Department data does not distinguish between students that completed enabling programs of a specific duration or delivery mode, and there may be refinements to enabling pedagogy and curriculum that would deliver both improved retention and improved success rates.

It is perhaps unsurprising that the enabling pathway provides better preparation for university studies than the VET pathway. Unlike an enabling program, the primary purpose of a VET qualification is towards the relevant vocation itself, not as a pathway to university. This is a fact born out in the findings of the student survey, in the following section. However, not all VET qualifications are equal. More nuanced research needs to be conducted to examine VET-articulating retention rates on the basis of the exact VET qualification studied (e.g. Cert IV, Diploma, etc.). For example, the findings of this research project seem to align with the work by conducted by Griffin for the NCVER and published in 2014 (Griffin, 2014), as cited in Section 4 of this report. Griffin's research determined that disadvantaged learners re-engaging with the education sector were more likely to enrol in lower-level VET qualifications. Furthermore, it could be that VET-articulating students cannot, or do not, access first-year university support programs since they are often transferring directly into the second year on the basis of credit (cf. Delly, 2013). This is also an issue that is worthy of greater investigation.

Although most equity groups of students appear better served by the enabling pathway than the VET pathway, it is a fact that the VET pathway is currently able to deliver much greater volume than the enabling pathway. Based on the data provided for this study, VET-articulating students outnumber enabling-articulating students by almost ten to one. This is an important consideration in parts of Australia where enabling places are scarce, such as many regional and remote communities. It should be noted, however, that the exception to this appears to be for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, who utilise enabling programs at an almost identical rate to VET qualifications to progress to undergraduate studies.

Finally, what this study has revealed is that the way in which data are collected for higher education statistical reporting should be improved in relation to prior VET studies. Currently, students in Bachelor-level studies who articulated via VET can only be analysed in the aggregate, meaning that the performance of students with prior Certificate IV, Diploma, Advanced Diploma and Associate Degree level studies cannot be analysed separately at the national level. The only time this level of disaggregation can be examined is when a higher education institution delivers both the sub-bachelor and Bachelor-level program for the student. As this represents a small minority of these students, generalising these results is not recommended. Further research needs to be conducted to establish whether or not the trends identified in this study, relating to Diploma, Advanced Diploma and Associate Degree level studies delivered by higher education institutions remain true when the programs are delivered by the wider VET sector.

6. National Survey

Table 17 details the number of students contacted per institution and the approximate numbers per cohort. This shows that more than twice as many VET-cohort students were invited to participate, than were enabling-cohort students. This was to be expected, given the relative populations of these students in the higher education sector. Female students were over-represented by a ratio of approximately 1.27 to 1; identical to their over-representation in the national population at a rate of 1.27 to 1[13].

Table 17: National survey invitation numbers

Institution	Enabling cohort invited		VET cohort invited	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Curtin University	815	802	764	1,349
Edith Cowan University	560	261	1,373	804
Federation University Australia	64	75	326	617
Flinders University of South Australia	269	425	550	354
La Trobe University	178	236	641	1,155
The University of New South Wales	111	89	389	362
The University of Newcastle, Australia	1,421	1,923	1,772	1,706
University of Tasmania	97	161	402	793
University of the Sunshine Coast	276	528	317	702
University of Western Sydney (now Western Sydney University)	1,000	1,724	4,018	5,262
University of Wollongong	176	227	463	739
TOTAL	**4,967**	**6,451**	**11,015**	**13,843**

A total of 2,593 students participated in the national survey (a response rate of 7.97%). For the Curtin pilot survey, 125 students participated (a response rate of 3.4%). Response rates per institution ranged from less than 3% to over 30% for any given cohort. This was a reflection of the significantly different size of the institutional cohorts, which ranged from less than 130 enabling students from Federation University Australia, to more than 9,000 VET students from University of Western Sydney (now Western Sydney University).

Once the data were cleaned a total of 2211 valid responses were included in the SPSS analysis, comprising 981 enabling and 1230 VET survey participants. In the following discussion, the focus is on results that were considered by the project team to be significant. The general inference (or null hypothesis) was that there would be no difference between enabling and VET students. On this basis, results were considered to be significant where the p value for the Pearson Chi-Square statistics was less than 0.05; and (where applicable) less than 20% of the cells had an expected count of less than 5.

[13]Measuring total student load in public institutions, based on 2013 Student summary tables, Department of Education and Training Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2013 Student Data.

6.1 Post-Pathway Destinations and Study Preferences

Enabling programs were preferred (in the sense of being used successfully more often) over VET studies as a pathway to Natural and Physical Science courses, and Health courses. Conversely, VET studies were the preferred pathway into Management and Commerce courses.

Students who transitioned via an enabling program were more likely to be studying fulltime in their subsequent undergraduate degree, compared to those transitioning via a VET program (85.4% compared to 76.3%).

Students who transitioned via a VET program were more likely to be studying externally (e.g. distance education, online) in their subsequent undergraduate degree, compared to those transitioning via an enabling program (13.1% compared to 3.9%).

6.2 Representations of Student Equity Groups in the Survey

It is important to note that the representations detailed below relate to the survey student population, not the overall student population in the enabling programs and VET courses. A more accurate figure for national representation of equity-group students in enabling programs is provided in Section 5.7 of this report. Some caution should be used when considering these findings, as the national survey was distributed by eleven universities whose equity enrolments differ quite significantly per institution and per individual equity group. Universities with large numbers of enabling enrolments are generally institutions which have higher than average proportions of equity-group students in their general student population. For example, The University of Newcastle Australia accounted for more than a third of survey respondents and has low SES enrolments approaching one quarter of their domestic undergraduate student population[14]. Nonetheless, the survey analysis is helpful in providing a comparison between the enabling and VET pathways and the findings point to issues of significance, in both a specific, statistical sense of the term as well as more generally.

The enabling pathway was more utilised by students with a disability, who made up 7.2% of the enabling survey cohort, compared to 6.3% of the VET survey cohort.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students also appeared to prefer the enabling pathway (2.7%, compared to 1.7% for the VET cohort). This was an expected finding, given the prevalence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific enabling programs in the higher education sector.

NESB students more commonly transitioned via VET (13.7% compared to 10.2%). However it is important to note that the Department of Education and Training uses a very specific definition of NESB[15], whereas the survey asked this question more broadly. It is therefore likely that some survey participants who self-identified as NESB students would not be considered such for the purposes of equity reporting. However given that this qualification applies to all survey participants, this would probably not affect the comparison between the two survey cohorts, only the raw numbers/ percentages.

[14]Using Department of Education data: Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2014 Student Data: Appendix 2 equity groups (All Domestic Undergraduate Students)
[15]For higher education statistical collection purposes, NESB is defined as a student who has come from a non-English speaking country in the previous ten years.

6. National Survey (continued)

The findings for the low SES survey population were statistically non-significant, indicating that for the low-SES students neither pathway (enabling or VET) was preferred.

The VET pathway was more utilised by regional and remote students. In the VET cohort, 21.9% of respondents were from a regional area and 0.6% were from a remote location. In contrast, regional students comprised 17.6% of the enabling cohort and remote students accounted for 0.5% of the enabling cohort.

It was not possible to draw precise findings regarding women enrolled in non-traditional areas (WINTA) for two reasons. First, the Departmental definition of WINTA includes the narrow field of Education (Economics and Econometrics). The survey design did not allow this nuance to be captured. Second, women were disproportionately represented in the survey, making up almost three-quarters of all respondents. This may have had the effect of magnifying the perceived positive influence of both the enabling and VET pathways in terms of increasing WINTA enrolments. However, a direct enabling/VET comparison of the individual, broad fields of study identified in this survey revealed:

- The VET pathway appeared to offer more transitions to the broad field of Management and Commerce for women (60.6% of enrolments, compared to 23.2% for enabling). This was also true for Architecture, Environment and Related Studies, though to a lesser magnitude (11.8% for VET compared to 10.7% for enabling).
- The enabling pathway appeared to offer more transitions to the broad fields of Natural and Physical Sciences (47.3% compared to 23.6%); Engineering and Related Technologies (9.8% compared to 1.6%); and Information Technology (8.9% compared to 2.4%).

In addition to the abovementioned, officially recognised equity groups:

- Students who were first in their family to attend university used the enabling pathway more than the VET pathway (43.6% compared to 37.4%).
- Children of single parents used the enabling pathway more than the VET pathway (12.3% compared to 8.9%).
- Single parents used the VET pathway more than the enabling pathway (10.9% compared to 9.7%).
- People who came to Australia as a refugee used the VET pathway more than the enabling pathway (2.9% compared to 2.2%).

It was observed that all student equity groups were over-represented in the survey, compared to their representation in the higher education sector. Table 4 below illustrates this point.

Table 18: Representation of equity groups

Equity group	Representation in higher education sector[16]	Representation in national survey (enabling cohort)	Representation in national survey (VET cohort)
Non-English speaking background students	3.5%	10.2%	13.7%
Students with disability	5.8%	7.2%	6.3%
Women in non-traditional areas of study	17.3%	N/A	N/A
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students	1.5%	2.7%	1.7%
Low SES students[17]	15.7%	28.1%	25.5%
Regional and remote students[18]	20.9%	21.1%	22.5%

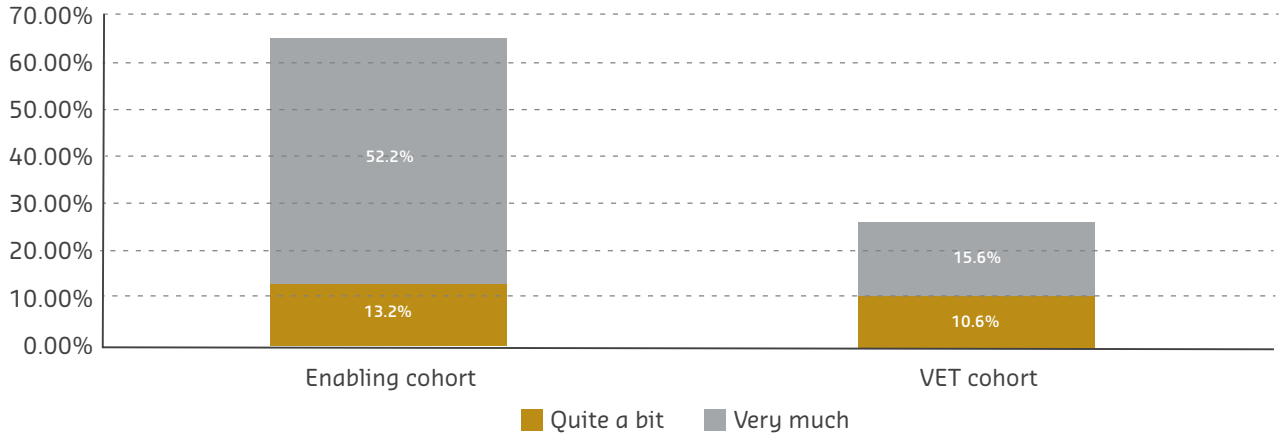
[16]Using Department of Education data: Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2014 Student Data: Appendix 2 equity groups (All Domestic Undergraduate Students).
[17] SA1 measure.
[18]2011 ASGS measure.

6.3 Quantitative Data Analysis

6.3.1 Motivations for Choosing Pathway

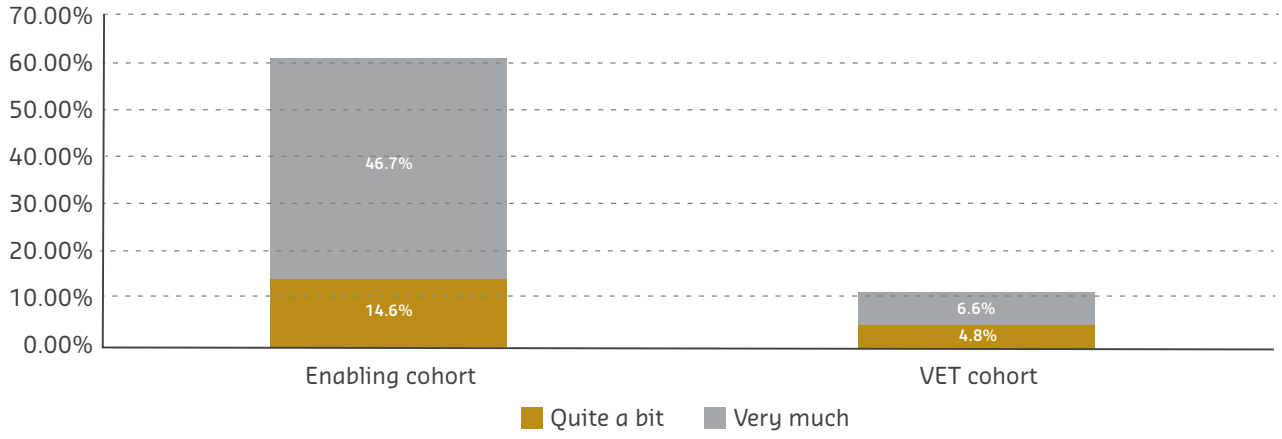
Cost was a much stronger motivating factor for students choosing an enabling program as an alternative pathway to university. Almost two-thirds of the enabling cohort stated the free or low-cost nature of the pathway was a factor that influenced their decision quite a bit or very much. In contrast, only a quarter of the VET cohort felt the same. This finding is supported by the aggregate costs reported by the students, as discussed in Section 9.5.

Figure 24: Motivation: pathway as free or relatively inexpensive



It was important for more than 60% of the enabling cohort that the program was offered on the campus of the university they were aiming to enrol into. For the VET cohort, this was an issue for approximately only one-in-ten students. However this finding needs to be contextualised against the fact that the majority of the VET cohort did not undertake VET studies with the express intention of articulating to university studies (see section 9.4 below).

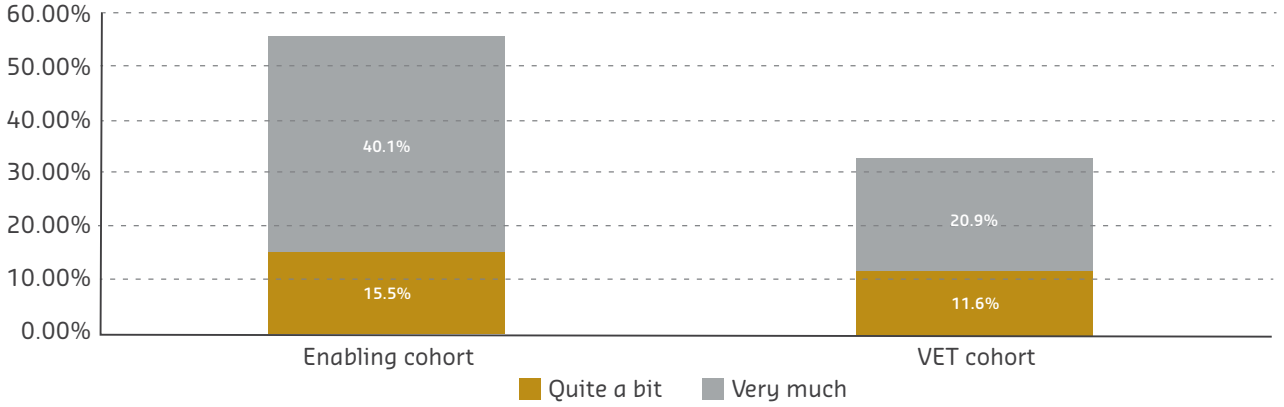
Figure 25: Motivation: it was offered on campus of university



More than half of the enabling cohort felt that they weren't ready for university studies at the time and required further preparation. For the VET cohort this was a consideration for only one-in-three students. Again, this finding requires the context of primary motivation for undertaking VET studies i.e. for the VET qualification itself, rather than as a pathway to university.

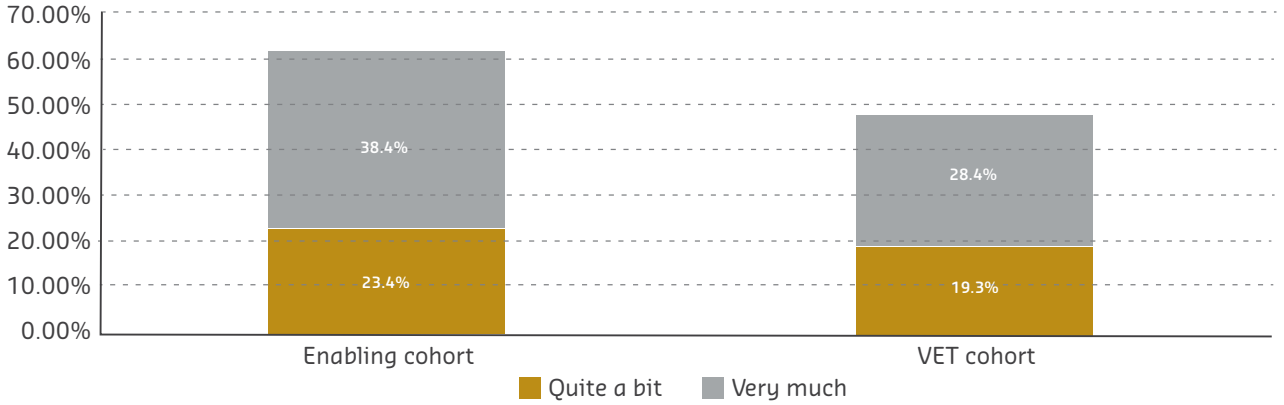
6. National Survey (continued)

Figure 26: Motivation: I thought I wasn't ready for university studies; needed to prepare myself



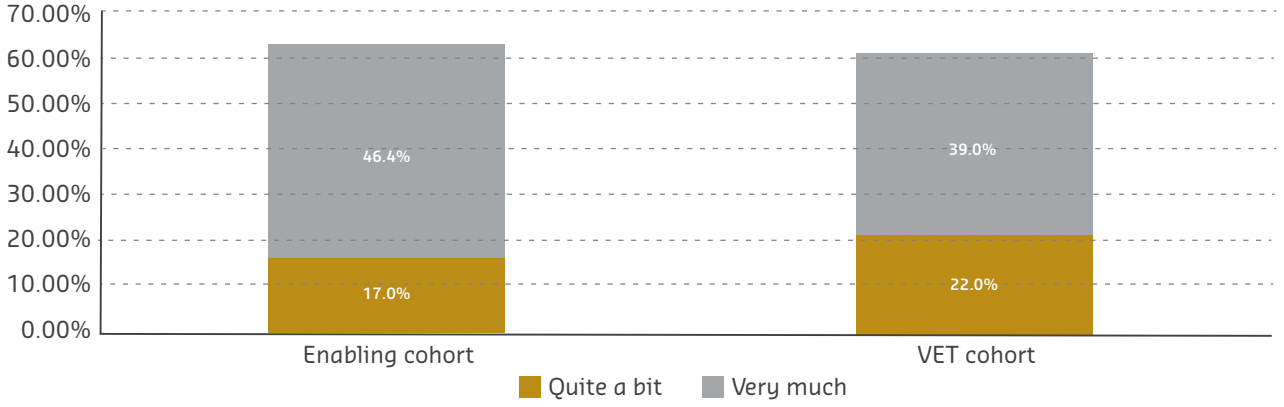
More than 60% of the enabling cohort cited ease of enrolment as a factor that quite a bit or very much motivated them to choose the pathway. For the VET cohort, this was a similar consideration for less than half the students.

Figure 27: Motivation: ease of enrolment



In terms of motivation, the convenience of the pathway to the student's lifestyle was an important consideration – almost in equal measure – for both cohorts.

Figure 28: Motivation: pathway was convenient to lifestyle



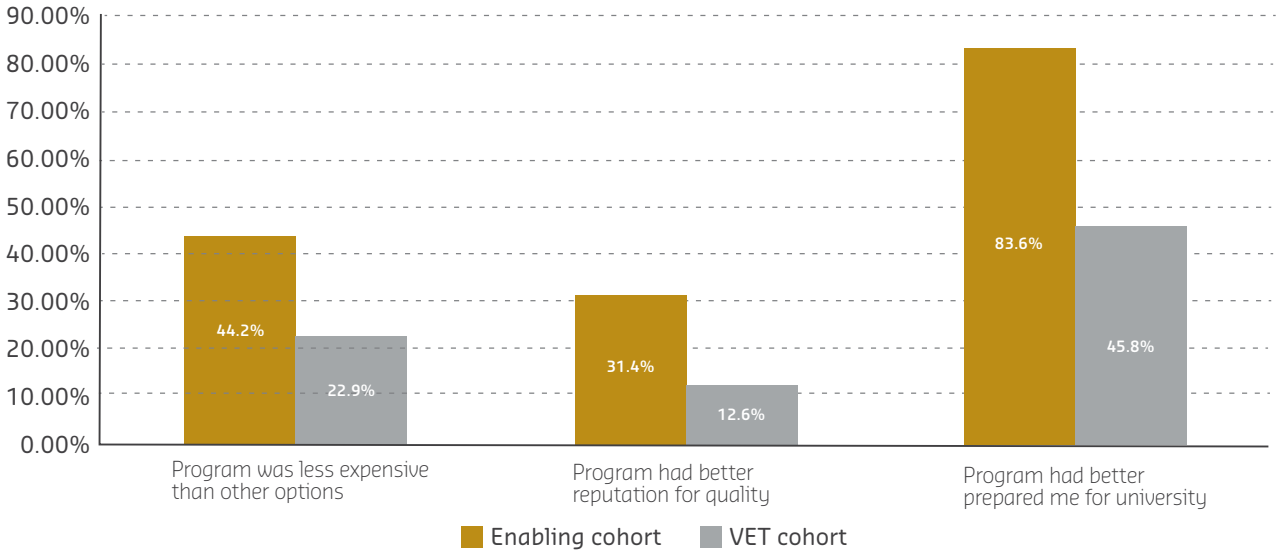
6.3.2 Factors Influencing the Choice of Pathway Taken

Enabling students were significantly more likely to consider options before deciding on this pathway. 27.9% of enabling students considered taking an alternative pathway to university, compared to only 17.4% of VET students. Two factors probably underpin this finding. First, it was more common for enabling students to be directed to this pathway, than VET students to theirs. When asked whether enrolling in an enabling program was a pre-requisite to undergraduate enrolment, 72.6% of the enabling cohort indicated this was quite a bit, or very much, a factor. By contrast, only 17.3% of the VET cohort took this pathway because it was a pre-requisite. Second, a VET qualification was generally seen as a motivation in itself, whereas the enabling pathway is mostly a means to university enrolment. 66.2% of the VET cohort chose vocational studies for the studies themselves, with future undergraduate enrolment a later consideration.

For those enabling and VET students who considered alternatives but ultimately decided on committing to their respective pathway, certain factors had stronger influences on the enabling cohort:

- A perception that their chosen pathway was less expensive was a greater factor for the enabling cohort, with 44.2% of them citing costs as a consideration, compared to only 22.9% of the VET cohort.
- More of the enabling cohort (31.4%) believed that their pathway had a better reputation for quality than did the VET cohort (12.6%)
- Students transitioning via an enabling program believed much more strongly that it would prepare them for university studies (83.6% compared to 45.8% for the VET cohort).

Figure 29: After consideration, why student chose pathway

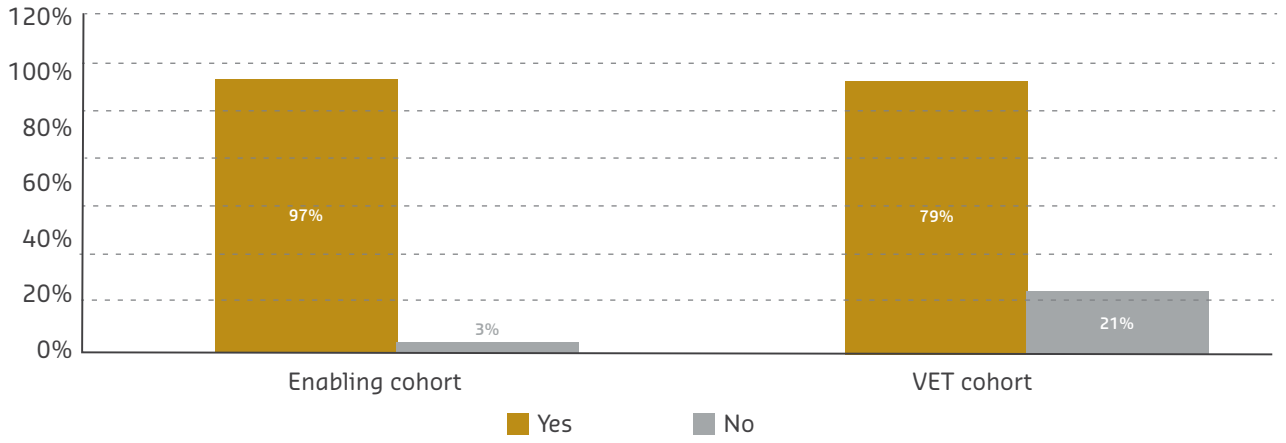


Again, these findings need to take into consideration the reality that generally speaking, students enrol in an enabling program because they intend to study at university, whereas those who undertake a VET qualification are more likely to view university studies as a secondary consideration. It is therefore not surprising that far greater proportions of the enabling cohort critically examined the fitness-for-purpose aspects of the pathway.

However, once the decision had been taken to undertake an undergraduate degree, students from the VET cohort were more likely to consider their pathway as the right choice in terms of preparation. When asked to reflect on the final choice they had made, 96.9% of the enabling cohort believed they had made the right choice in preparing for university studies. This satisfaction rate was considerably lower for the VET cohort, where only 79.1% of respondents believed they had chosen the best option for university studies.

6. National Survey (continued)

Figure 30: Was the pathway the best option to prepare for university studies?

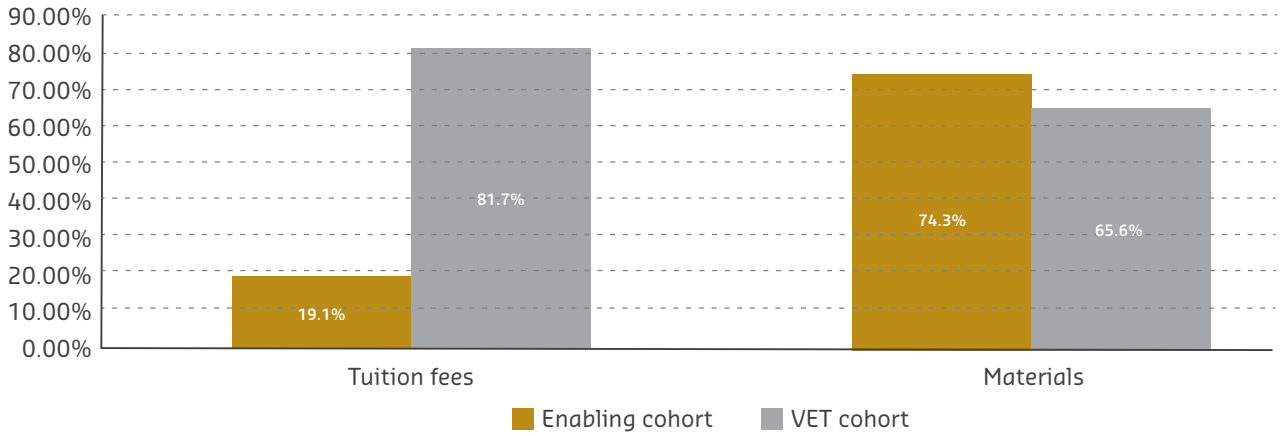


6.3.3 Costs Associated with the Pathway

As was expected, most of the VET cohort (81.7%) identified course fees as being involved in taking their pathway. It was surprising however that almost one in five (19.1%) of the enabling pathway also identified tuition fees as an associated cost, when by definition enabling programs are tuition-free for domestic students. One possible reason for this might be other compulsory costs being perceived by the student to be a tuition-type fee. For example, some universities require that enabling students pay the Student Services and Amenities Fee. Similarly, costs for materials might have been understood by some enabling students as a tuition-type fee.

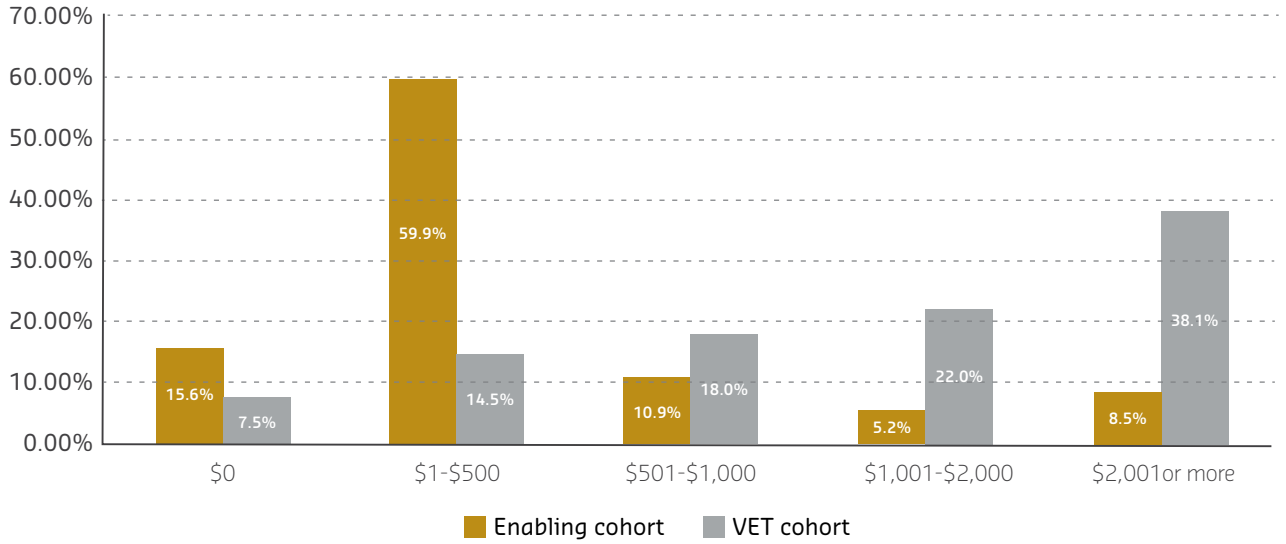
Materials (e.g. books, equipment, consumables) were more commonly an identified associated cost by the enabling cohort (74.3% compared to 65.6% of the VET cohort). One possible reason for the lower response rate for the VET cohort might have been that in some cases, the vocational provider subsumed the costs of the materials into their course fees.

Figure 31: Identified costs



The majority (59.9%) of the enabling cohort estimated their total associated costs to be $500 or less. For the VET cohort, 38.1% estimated associated costs to be over $2,000 and 22% estimated costs to be between $1,001 and $2,000. Alternatively it could be said that more than three-quarters of the enabling cohort estimated their costs to be $500 or less. In contrast, more than 60% of the VET cohort estimated their costs to be in excess of $1,000.

Figure 32: Estimated costs to complete program



6.3.4 Skills Development

Whilst there were some marked differences in responses across the two cohorts, in many cases the responses were quite similar. For this reason we have separated the responses according to the positive bias (i.e. greater agreement) across the two highest responses levels (e.g. "quite a bit" or "very much"):

- Group one includes the responses where the enabling cohort had a positive bias of 5% or greater;
- Group two includes the responses where the VET cohort had a positive bias of 5% or greater; and
- Group three includes the responses where there was less than a 5% bias in towards either group.

NB: There is no particular statistical significance of the 5% bias margin;

rather this was used as a means of investigating distinctions between the two cohorts.

Areas in which the enabling cohort had a greater than 5% difference of agreement than the VET cohort that the relevant skill had been developed "quite a bit" or "very much" were:

- Feeling of belonging in the university (+35%);
- Confidence to undertake university studies (+26.9%);
- Written communication skills (+19.4%); and
- Critical thinking (+15.5%).

Areas in which the VET cohort had a greater than 5% difference of agreement than the enabling cohort that the relevant skill had been developed "quite a bit" or "very much" were:

- Ability to work with others (+15.3%); and
- Spoken communication skills (+6.2%).

Areas in which there was less than a 5% difference between the cohorts were:

- Confidence to learn independently (+4.6% for the enabling cohort);
- Knowledge of the field(s) now studying (+4.0% for the VET cohort); and
- Ability to solve complex problems (+3.7% for the enabling cohort).

6. National Survey (continued)

Figure 33: Developed: feeling of belonging in the university

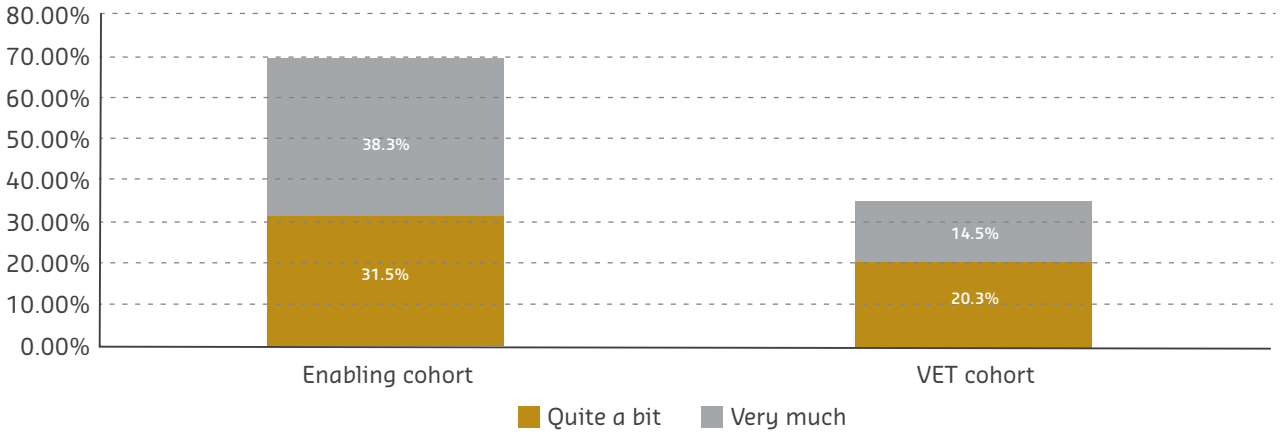


Figure 34: Developed: confidence to undertake university studies

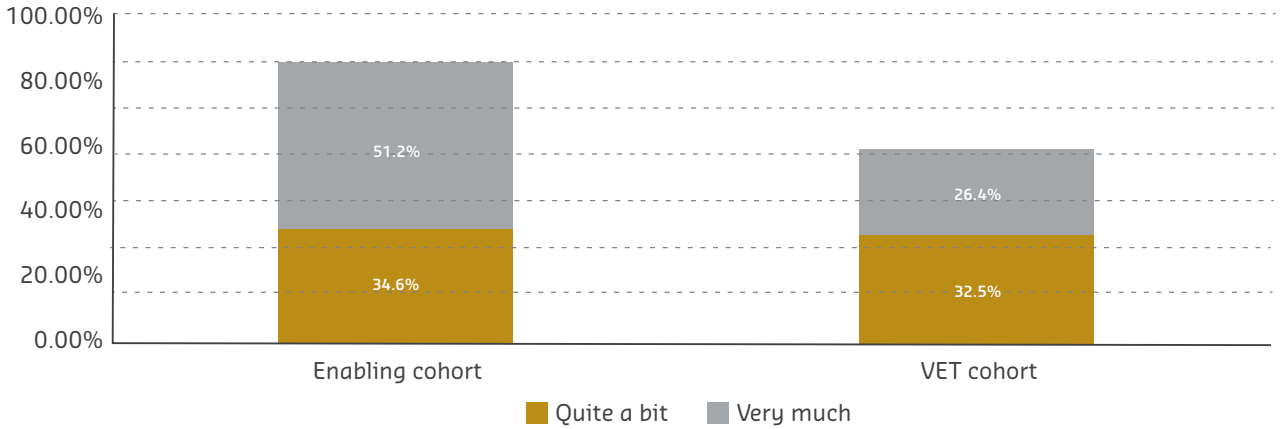


Figure 35: Developed: written communication skills

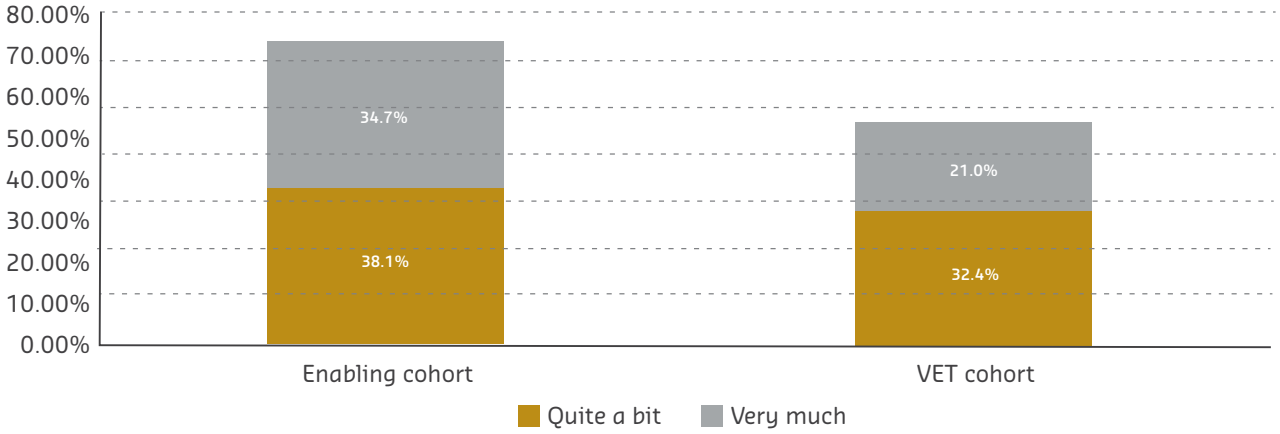


Figure 36: Developed: critical-thinking skills

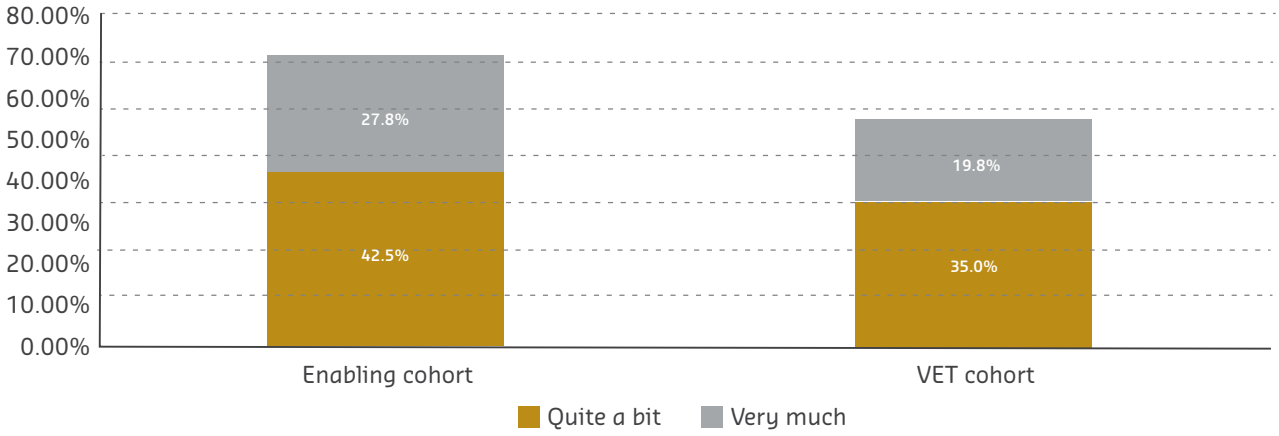


Figure 37: Developed: ability to work with others

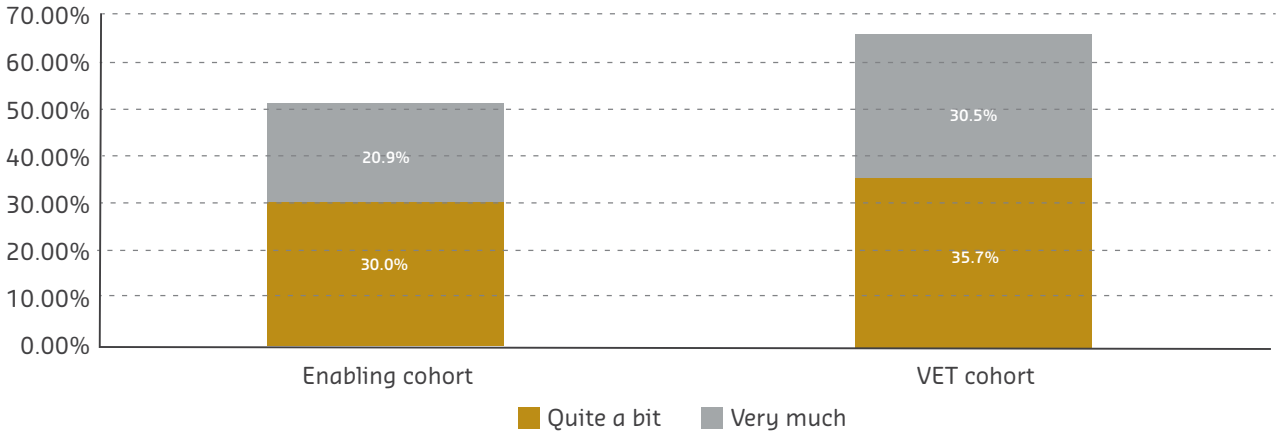
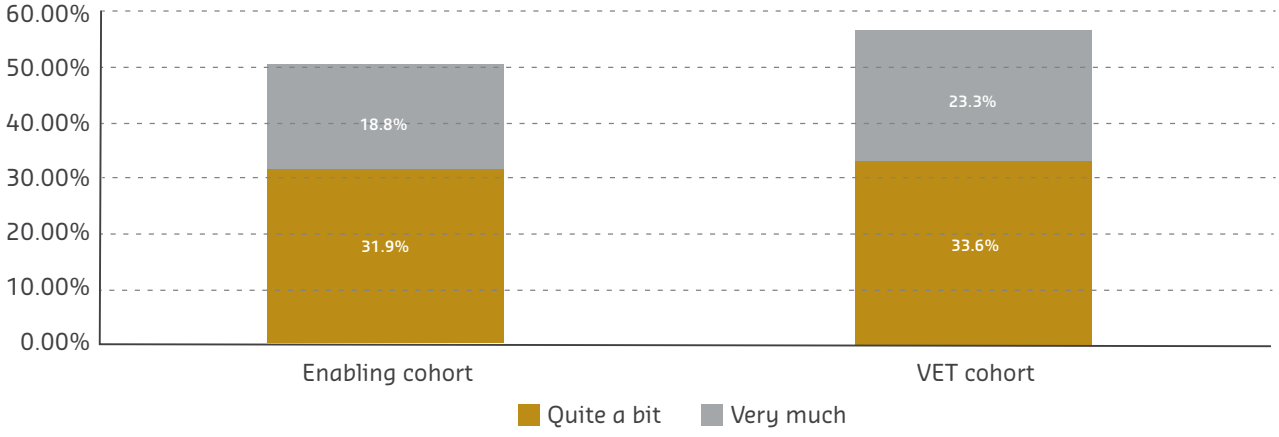


Figure 38: Developed: spoken communication skills



6. National Survey (continued)

Figure 39: Developed: confidence to learn independently

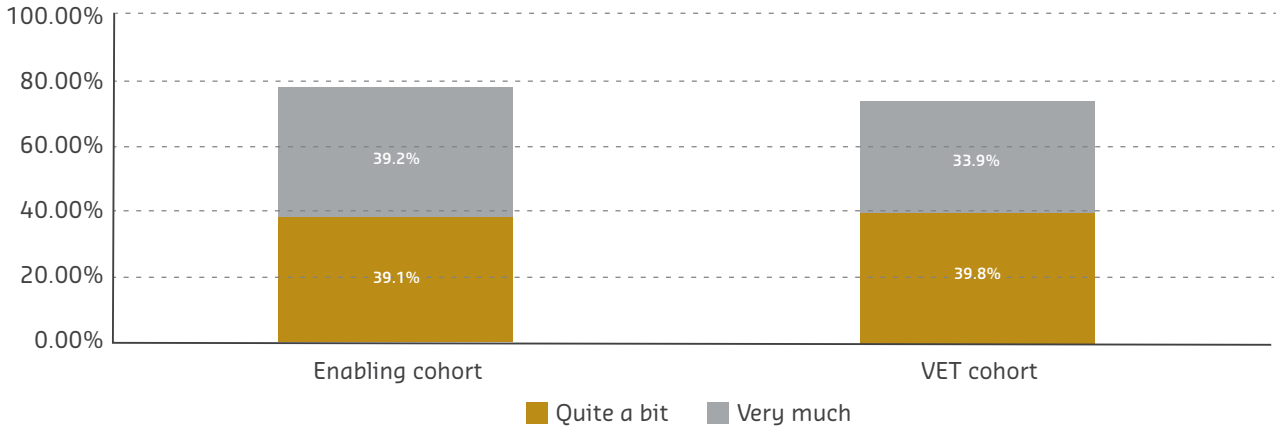


Figure 40: Developed: knowledge of field(s) now studying

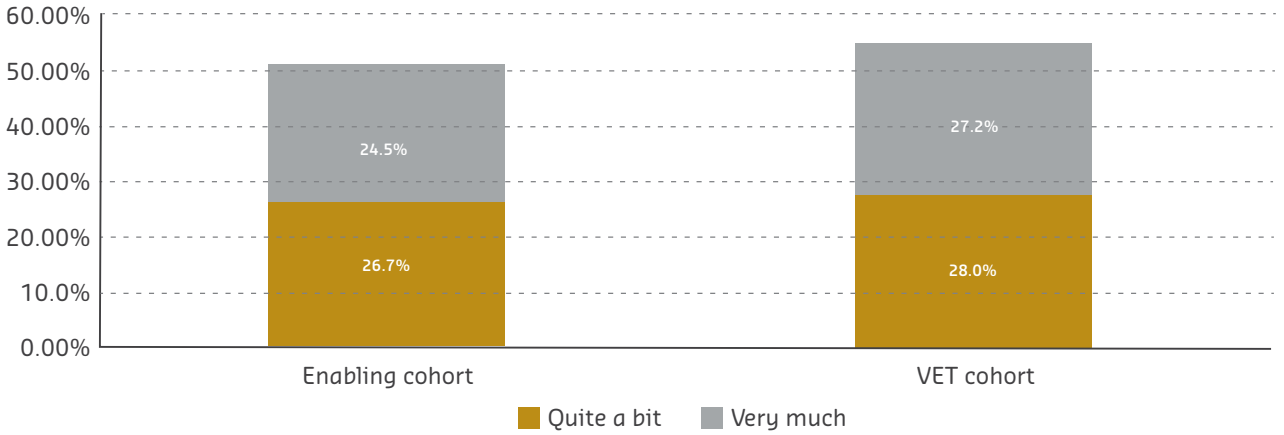
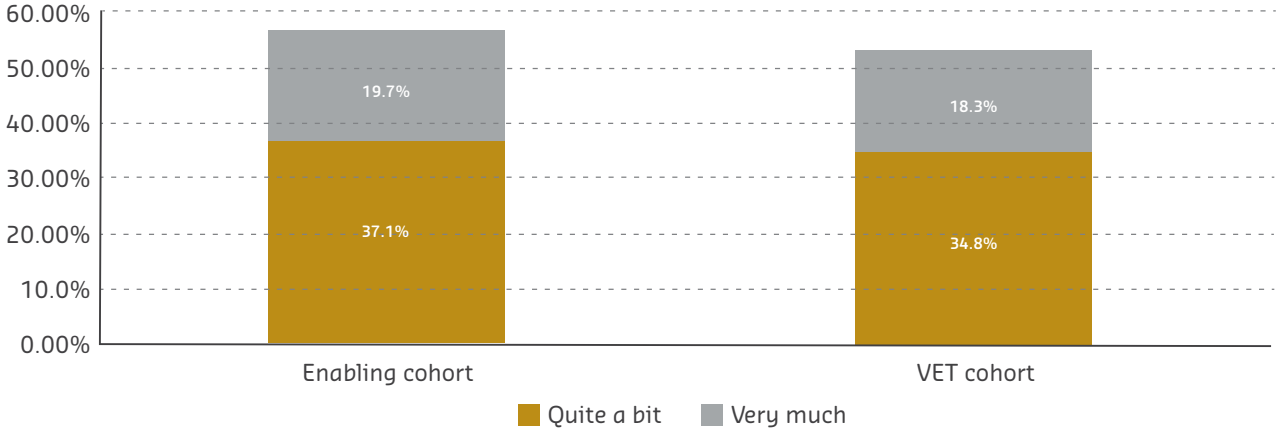
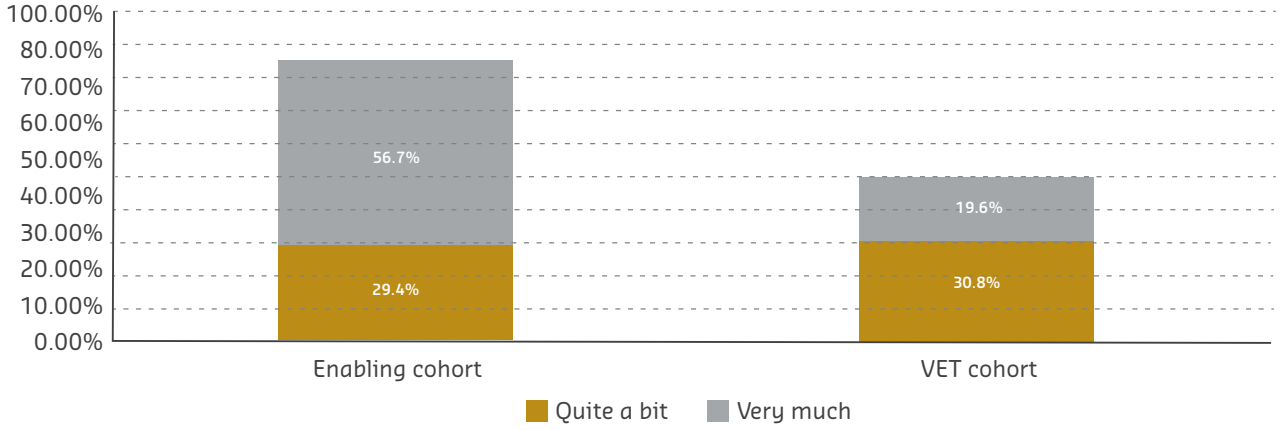


Figure 41: Developed: ability to solve complex problems



Overall, the enabling cohort had much stronger agreement with the proposition that their pathway had effectively prepared them for university studies than did the VET cohort. Although an almost identical number on each cohort believed the pathway was "quite a bit" effective in transitioning them to university, a significantly greater proportion of the enabling cohort agreed with this statement very much (56.7% compared to 19.6% of the VET cohort).

Figure 42: Was the pathway effective as a transition to university?



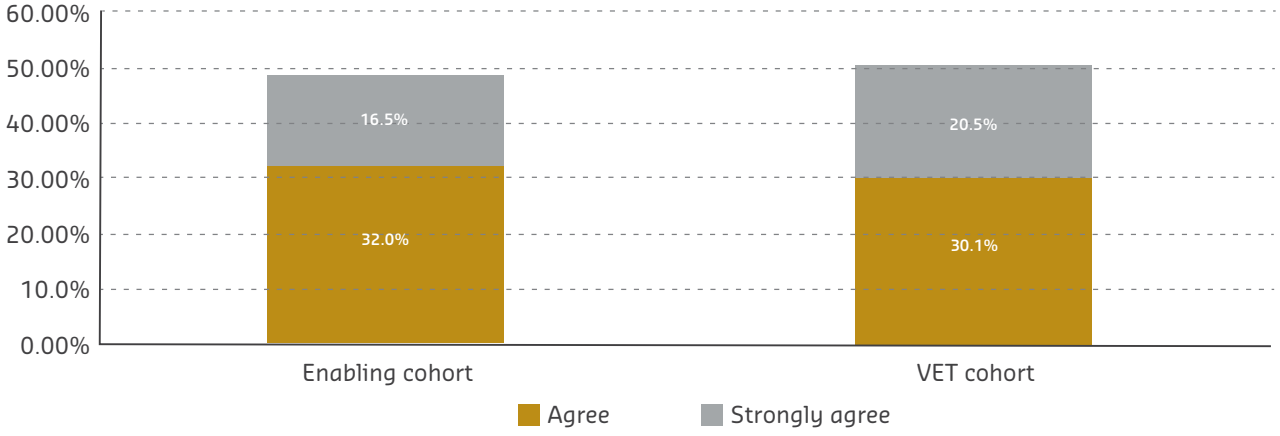
6.3.5 Work Status and Financial Pressure Whilst Transitioning to University

More students in the VET cohort than the enabling cohort were in full-time work whilst enrolled in their pathway (28.0% compared to 15.7%). Students enrolled in enabling programs were more likely to be not working at all (33.2% compared to 20.3% for VET students).

In regards to financial pressures: there was little difference between the responses between the two cohorts, as in all cases the difference between the two cohorts was less than 5%. With that caveat in mind, in general, students enrolled in VET studies perceived themselves to be under more financial pressure than students enrolled in enabling programs. Those in the VET cohort showed stronger agreement with the following statements:

- Whilst enrolled, regularly missed classes because needed to attend paid work (+4.4%);
- Whilst enrolled, regularly went without food and other necessities (+3.5%); and
- Whilst enrolled, financial situation was often a source of worry (+2.1%).

Figure 43: Whilst enrolled, financial situation was often a source of worry



6. National Survey (continued)

Figure 44: Whilst enrolled, regularly went without food and other necessities

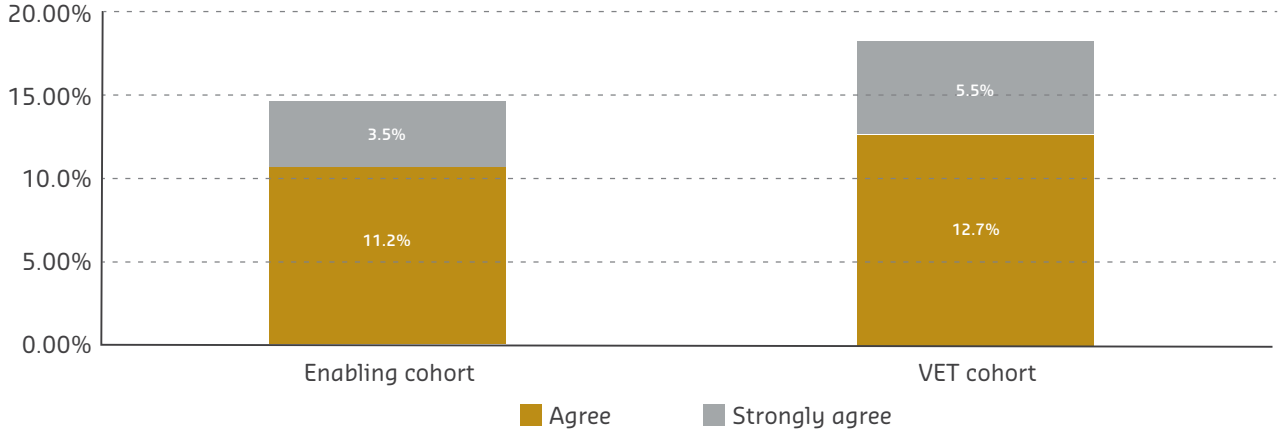
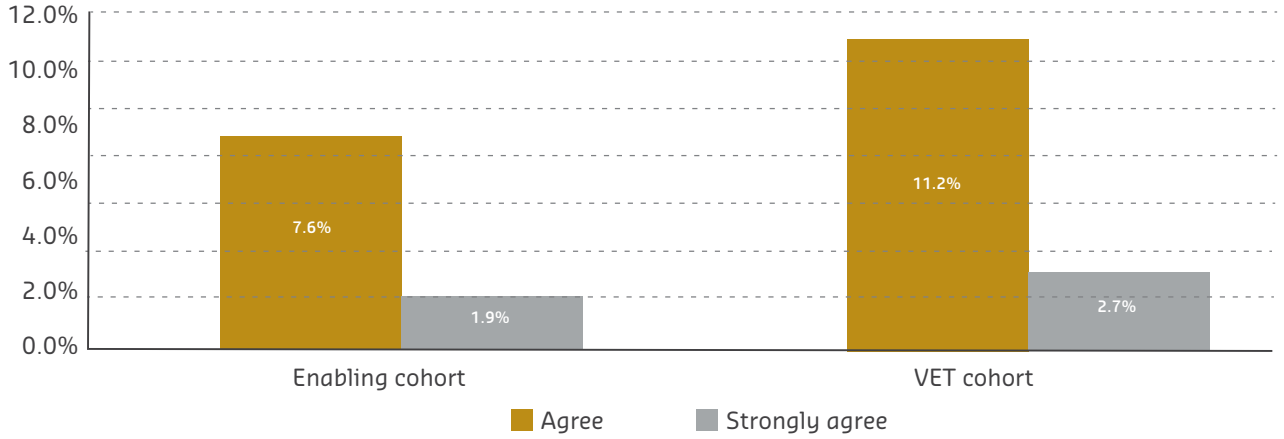


Figure 45: Whilst enrolled, regularly missed classes because needed to attend paid work



6.4 Qualitative Data Analysis

This section presents the findings to emerge in relation to:

1. factors influencing students' decision to enrol; and
2. ultimate deciding factor.

6.4.1 Reasons for Enrolling in the Chosen Pathway: Enabling Students

total of 332 enabling students responded to this question, indicating the reasons/factors which influenced their decision to enrol in the enabling program. Table 19 details the top 10 responses.

Table 19: Factors influencing the decision to enrol in an enabling program

Influencing Factors	Number of Students (out of 332)
To better prepare for university	40
Mature age student – re-familiarising with study	33
Program recommended to student	28
Changing/pursuing new career path	24
Low ATAR	20
To gauge if equipped to handle university	17
Only way to access university	17
Distance to travel – close to home	16
To advance oneself	13
Finances – It was government funded	12

As the table shows, the most frequently cited reason for choosing the enabling pathway related to being better prepared for university. Students noted:

"This is probably one of the best things I could have done, the extra guidance offered by the course prepared me in many ways for university life."

"The 'jump' from school straight to university seemed difficult ... to go from such a structured learning environment to university where you are independent adult completely responsible for you own learning especially just turning 17. The idea of the enabling program seemed like a good choice as I thought it would "ease" me into university without it being such a large jump."

The second most cited reason for choosing an enabling program came from mature-age students who pointed to it as a way to re-familiarise themselves with study and "ease" themselves into university. One student stated, the enabling program gave them the confidence to believe they 'could achieve university as a mature student. This was developed quite a bit...' Another said:

"It really gave me the confidence to apply to uni. I felt like at 45 I was too old. Working with others my age and older made me see it's normal. I couldn't have done it without a bridging course."

Others trusted the recommendations of other students and teachers at their high schools claiming, "It was recommended to me by other students who had completed the enabling course successfully and who had appreciated the encouragement and infrastructure of the enabling programme." Some pursued the enabling program as their intention was to change or pursue a new career path.

"I always wanted to go back to ... university to better myself and finish the education I did not have. My dream is to become a paramedic and this was the only way to get started was first do the University Preparation Program, then I could get the entry that was necessary, and also a wonderful platform for University."

Some students saw the enabling pathway as a "litmus test" to gauge if they were equipped to handle university.

"Since I am originally from South Africa and English is my second language, I thought it will be a good indicator if I would be able to cope in University."

"The course was also a fantastic way to test the waters and see if I could handle full-time study and being back in the classroom after ten years."

6. National Survey (continued)

Others chose to enrol in the enabling program as they saw it as the only way to access university or because it was close to home. Some saw the enabling program as a way for them to advance themselves and 'excel' at university, particularly as many felt 'ill-prepared' for university without the enabling program.

"I felt this was fundamental to my aspirations of being enrolled at university."

"I always wanted to go back to school one day mostly university to better myself and finish the education I did not have."

"I come from a family where not many members hold a university education and it is something that has been instilled in me my entire life, to better myself and gain a proper education and make something of myself."

Enabling students also identified the following as factors in their decision to choose the enabling program over other potential pathways to higher education: it was government funded, it was not too long or too short in terms of its duration, it enabled the student to learn academic expectations, the flexibility of its delivery options ensured students were better able to balance work and study, and it guaranteed entry to university.

6.4.2 Reasons for enrolling in the chosen pathway: VET students

While both groups were motivated by similar factors in their reasons to undertake their chosen pathway, VET students attributed different influencing factors, including mandatory/work related requirements, as well as vocational and practical skills-based outcomes. Table 20 details the top 10 most frequently cited reasons for enrolling in a VET program.

Table 20: Factors influencing the decision to enrol in the VET program

Influencing Factors	Number of Students (out of 508)
Career development	66
Interested in course, field of study	51
Work requirement	46
Was a way to access university	43
Finances	37
To gain employment	28
Work supported/funded course	27
Certification	23
Changing/pursuing new career path	22
Wanted to improve skills	20

Table 20 demonstrates that the reasons for choosing the VET pathway focused on practical, vocational and skills-based outcomes. The VET pathway provided a way to enhance existing careers, change careers, or respond to current job requirements as the quotes below demonstrate:

"I realized that I needed to change the work I enjoyed, and needed to continue to prepare for the fact that I had a mortgage and couldn't think of retiring until I was into my seventies."

"The enrolment was mandatory for my Traineeship at the time."

Despite its vocational focus, for some, the motivating factor was to access university and be better prepared for university. One student stated:

> *"[I] was advised by someone ... to try a TAFE course that might prepare me for university and strengthen my application. In hindsight, this was extremely good advice, as I believe doing the TAFE course gave me a great opportunity to transition back into education, particularly as I finished high school some 18 years ago."*

Others chose the VET pathway for its practical, hands-on experience, while some saw it as their only option because university seemed "unappealing" or "out of reach".

> *"I thought TAFE would be more practical and prepare me for the workforce."*

> *"The practical nature of the VET training attracted me. I am a kinaesthetic learner and find that tertiary education is not designed for people with my learning style."*

> *"I very much felt that university was not an option to me due to skills and finances."*

Overall, both enabling and VET students shared similar motivating factors/reasons for choosing the pathway that they did. The distinction between the two was found in that enabling students were seeking a way to access and prepare foremost for university, while this was a secondary reason, if there at all, for most VET students who were seeking vocational skills or access to a specific vocation.

6.4.3 How Students Could be Better Prepared by the Chosen Pathway

Enabling and VET students were asked the ways in which their chosen pathway could have better prepared them for university. A total of 623 enabling students and 1227 VET students responded to this question. Overall, their responses were similar and comparative, with a few marked differences outlined below. Significantly, 237 enabling students (38 per cent) indicated that the pathway they pursued could not have better prepared them, while only 111 VET students (9 per cent) said the same. This indicates that a significant proportion of enabling students were satisfied with their enabling program as a pathway to university, while a higher proportion of VET students saw room for greater improvement. Student comments further supported this distinction:

> *"I feel the enabling program prepared me perfectly for university life." - Enabling Student*

> *"A university preparation course may have been more suitable." - VET student*

Despite the overall satisfaction of a large proportion of enabling students, they still provided ideas for ways to improve this pathway. The key themes to emerge relating to the recommendations from both enabling and VET students as to how to improve the respective programs as pathways to university are provided below.

6. National Survey (continued)

6.4.3.1 Relevance to Content in Degree, Specific/Tailored to University Course

A total of 77 enabling students (12 per cent) suggested the need for greater relevance in relation to their subjects and the overall content of what is studied in their enabling programs compared to that in their degrees. A total of 46 VET students (4 per cent) felt the same. Enabling students commented:

"More subjects that related better to the intended university course, some were very relevant and others had nothing to do with nursing at all."

"It could have been more focused on, and relevant to, the general skills required for university rather than touching on a variety of topics. The enabling program focused quite a lot on giving students a taste of every field of study, which I found to be quite irrelevant to my studies."

VET students also suggested their preparation studies were 'irrelevant to the course' and would have been more beneficial had they been 'more specific' and more 'relevant' to university courses.

6.4.3.2 Workload

Both enabling and VET students pointed to the need for the pathway programme to have a workload comparative to that experienced at university. Thirty-eight enabling students provided a range of reasons for this:

"..the workload is nowhere near that of my current full time studies."

"I feel as though the work load was not as intense as a university course, so the work load should be increased to better prepare students for university study."

"The workload differences between the preparation program and university degree courses are quite substantial. The preparation program could have given a more clear indication of the workload that would be expected once enrolled at uni."

Similarly, 31 VET students pointed towards the need for comparative workload expectations and standards, commenting that the course provider could have 'made the workload harder' and 'more comprehensive'. Another said, '... the workload at TAFE does not compare to the workload of Uni.'

6.4.3.3 Requirements/Standards/Level of Difficulty Should be the Same as Those at University

Both cohorts of students believed that the requirements, standards and overall level of difficulty in the pathway programme should be comparative to those that they would encounter at university. a total of 34 enabling students (5.5 per cent) stressed the need for this, while 72 VET students (6 per cent) foregrounded it as a major issue.

"A higher difficulty level of the foundation program would have been appreciated as actual university course work was much more rigorous and difficult and came as a surprise in comparison to the foundation program." - Enabling student

"..students that can handle more are not really challenged enough. I didn't feel as though there was enough emphasis on pushing yourself academically, and the grading system doesn't encourage you to do your very best." - VET student

Other enabling students stressed the need of "Being held to the same standards as university assignments," and stated that the program, "Could be more challenging." One simply stated it "..was quite easy, maybe too easy??''

6.4.3.4 Academic Skills

Both cohorts of students pointed to the need for greater development of academic skills, particularly in relation to academic writing, referencing, research, time management, digital literacy and library skills. Significant numbers of both enabling (130 students – 21 per cent) and VET students (196 – 16 per cent) stressed that a greater focus on academic writing could have better prepared them for university. Students commented:

"The expectations of academic writing were significantly different between what was taught in the enabling program, and what is actually required as an undergrad. I feel that they should be more in line as this created quite a bit of confusion at the start of my undergrad." - Enabling student

"If TAFE and universities would have the same academic style teachings it would really help students in first year university. Nowhere ... did I ever get shown how to write an essay and read academically." - VET student

6. National Survey (continued) Referencing was found to also be important with 104 VET students and 23 enabling students commenting on how they could have been better prepared. In relation to research skills, again more VET students (37) than enabling students (10) pointed to this as a way to improve the pathway program.

Both cohorts of students also pointed to the need for greater development of time management and organisational skills. Illustrative quotes include:

"Course could focus more on ... how to organise time and scheduling study time." - Enabling student

"There is a lot more work involved at university, you need a lot more time to study and the assessments are much more complex at uni than in the vocational course." - VET student

Many students indicated that they also struggled with digital literacy skills and online learning skills upon entering university. Their responses point to a need for both enabling and VET pathways to develop these skills and build the digital capacity of students.

"So I guess learning a bit more about the online aspect of uni." - Enabling student

"University is very online based, which I wasn't prepared for." - VET student

Students also indicated their library skills could also have been better developed in the pathway programme. One enabling student suggested a simple "workshop on how the library system works online" could have better prepared them for university.

Overall, in relation to academic skills, the results indicate that VET students were overwhelmingly more insistent on the need for greater preparation in relation to academic writing, referencing and research skills. This would seem to indicate that the enabling pathway is perceived to be more focused on delivering these skills to build capacity for successful study in higher education.

6.4.3.5 Mimicking University Systems, Structures and Processes

Large proportions of students indicated the need for the pathway programme to mirror the overall "set-up," operations and academic processes of university. This related to assignments and assignment processes, independent study, the flexibility like that offered at university, and greater variety of options in terms of classes and subjects to choose from. Students also indicated that having tutorials and lectures - like the structure at university - in the pathway programme would have made their transition easier.

A total of 22 enabling and 52 VET students desired assignment processes to be like those at university in terms of having more assignments, the difficulty level, and grading systems (that is, not just pass or fail). One enabling student stated graded assessments should be 'harder' in order to "avoid over confidence and to keep the difficulty of high grades consistent with that of grading in degree course"'. A VET student suggested, the pathway programme needs to "Closer mimic university standard"' in assessment while another said, assignments just generally need to be "more similar to university studies."

The variation in expectations surrounding independent study were noted by 12 enabling and 47 VET students. Their responses in the survey point a clear disparity between levels of autonomous learning expected at the sub-bachelor pathway level compared to the bachelor level.

"We were quite spoon fed – real uni is not like that!" - Enabling student

"The students were much more dependent on the teachers which did not prepare us for complete independent study." - VET student

One VET student suggested that their transition into university would have been more seamless "If they had of not spoon fed us as much; they pretty much gave us answers for everything without us being able to really solve it on our own."

6. National Survey (continued)

Flexibility was also seen as key factor to improving pathway programmes. Students called for "Flexible hours like University offers students", and programs that are "more time friendly with the schedule of classes to allow more opportunity to work ... part time." This was particularly key for those students from low socio-economic status backgrounds who were balancing work with study. In line with the need for greater flexibility, students also recommended more options to replicate the options available at university in terms of classes and subjects.

These statements suggest a need for the pathway programs to more effectively mimic university. As one student concluded, "It should have simulated university a little more."

6.4.3.6 Greater Information

Both enabling and VET students were insistent about the need for greater clarity and information about higher education, and particularly degree/university pathways that were available to them. Enabling students suggested that instructors might clarify how the enabling programme differed to university:

> *"Maybe a lesson or two about how this program is different from an undergraduate program."*

Others said the pathways and options available to them were not made explicit which made it difficult to make informed choices:

> *"The actual structure of education pathways through under to grad to hons etc. was not explained and would be very useful to have it clearly explained from the get go."*

> *"I wasn't aware at the time that there was an education assistant prep course. I would have done that instead of the general one I completed."*

VET students called for greater clarity on and "knowledge of other degrees on offer", and discussion surrounding the "options available if wanting to transition into university and how to go about them".

Other factors that were touched on by both enabling and VET students in relation to improving pathway programs included:

- More supportive teaching staff;
- Provided more foundational knowledge for degrees;
- Duration of course could have been improved;
- Expectations made explicit;
- Support services made explicit to students; and
- Development of critical thinking skills.

Significantly, 54 VET students commented that the program could not be improved as its intention and focus was vocational and that it was not designed to be a pathway to university per se. One student explained that their VET course had nothing to do with their decision to ultimately pursue tertiary education, claiming, "I feel they had little relation to each other."

7. Conclusion

In relation to their reasons for choosing the pathway they did, both enabling and VET students shared similar motivating and driving factors. The distinction between the two was evident in that enabling students were primarily seeking a way to access and prepare for university, while this was a secondary consideration for most VET students who were seeking vocational skills or access to a specific vocation. When asked how their chosen pathway could have been improved, the majority of enabling students were satisfied with the enabling program and how it prepared them for university, while VET students were less satisfied with their pathway and saw room for improvement. Both cohorts pointed to the following as key factors in improving enabling pathways for disadvantaged groups:

- improving the relevance to content in degree and making it more specific/tailored to university;
- workload and requirements/standards/level of difficulty should be made similar to that of university level;
- there should be greater academic skills development;
- university systems, structures and processes should be mimicked in the pathway program; and
- there should be more transparent information.

In regard to the aspects they found most helpful and useful in their chosen programs, both cohorts of students valued academic writing skills, time management/organisational skills and generally being prepared to handle academic study at university level. Both cohorts of students suggested their pathways made them feel more confident and, at times, inspired. Points of difference included 'practical experience', 'certification/qualification' and 'passion for learning' which enabling students did not mention but were significant characteristics in VET students' responses.

The final question sought to determine which pathway was the best option according to students. While 19 per cent of enabling students believed they should have done a TAFE course instead, 32 per cent of VET students indicated an enabling program would have been the better option. In both data sets, many students stated they should have gone directly to university and applied themselves more at high school. Again, many VET students were keen to stress they did not attend their programs as a pathway to university.

Overall, students articulating via an enabling program expressed greater satisfaction with their experience in comparison with those using a VET pathway. This sentiment was more strongly expressed when participants were asked to consider how well the pathway had prepared them for university studies and whether or not it gave them the confidence to pursue, and a feeling of belonging in, these studies.

These self-reported perceptions accord with the quantitative data regarding retention rates. That is, equity group students using the enabling pathway tended to have higher retention rates than the same type of equity-group students utilising the VET pathway. However the relationship between the findings and those of the quantitative data regarding success rates are less clear.

A key finding from the national survey was confirmation that for a significant majority (66.2%) of those transitioning via a VET qualification, university studies was a secondary motivation for enrolling in VET. Consequently, VET-pathway students (particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds) may be less prepared and require further support than many other students.

This further reinforces the reality that, by and large, the VET and enabling pathways serve distinct cohorts of students and act in a complementary, not contrasting fashion. It is a case of enabling and VET, not enabling or VET.

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Appendix A: List of Table A Providers

Australian Catholic University
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education
Central Queensland University
Charles Darwin University
Charles Sturt University
Curtin University of Technology
Deakin University
Edith Cowan University
Federation University Australia
Flinders University of South Australia
Griffith University
James Cook University
La Trobe University
Macquarie University
Monash University
Murdoch University
Queensland University of Technology
RMIT University
Southern Cross University
Swinburne University of Technology
The Australian National University
The University of Adelaide
The University of Melbourne
The University of Newcastle, Australia
The University of Queensland
The University of Sydney
The University of Western Australia
University of Canberra
University of New England
University of New South Wales
University of South Australia
University of Southern Queensland
University of Tasmania
University of Technology, Sydney
University of the Sunshine Coast
University of Western Sydney (Western Sydney University)
University of Wollongong
Victoria University

Appendix B: Typology of Enabling Programs

Institution	Program	Age requirements[19]	Citizenship requirements[20]	Eligible students[21]	Minimum academic level[22]	Associated costs[23]	Courses accessed[24]	Provider[25]	Attendance mode(s)[26]	Minimum time to complete full-time
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education	Preparation for Tertiary Success Program	18+	AUS	ATSI	Yr. 10	US	NS	UNI	CLASS	6 months
Central Queensland University	Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies (STEPS)	18+	AUS NZ PR HUM	All	NS	US	SEL	UNI	CLASS ONLINE	4 months
Charles Darwin University	Tertiary Enabling Program (TEP)	18+	AUS NZ PR HUM	All	None	US	NS	UNI	CLASS ONLINE	8 months
	Preparation for Tertiary Success PTS	18+	AUS	ATSI	Yr. 10	NS	SEL	UNI	CLASS	18 months
Curtin University	UniReady Enabling Program	20+	AUS NZ PR HUM	All	NS	US	SEL	UNI	CLASS ONLINE	5 weeks
	Enabling course (Science, Engineering & Health)	NS	AUS NZ PR HUM	All	TEST	US	SEL	COMB	CLASS	12 months
	Indigenous Tertiary enabling program (Centre for Aboriginal Studies)	17+	AUS	ATSI	Yr. 11	NS	SEL	UNI	CLASS ONLINE	6 months
Edith Cowan University	(UniPrep) University Preparation Course	SL	NS	All	None	NS	NS	UNI	CLASS ONLINE	9 weeks
	Indigenous University Orientation Course	18+	AUS	ATSI	Yr. 12	NS	NS	UNI	CLASS ONLINE	12 months

[19]NS = Not specified PC = Post-compulsory school-leaving age SL = school leaver

[20]AUS = Australian citizen NZ = New Zealand citizen PR = Holder of a permanent (Australian) visa HUM = Humanitarian visa NS = not specified.

[21]All = all students ATSI = Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students DIS = disadvantaged students

[22]TEST = Test required NS = Not specified.

[23]NS = not specified US = unspecified costs indicated SC = costs indicated and specified

[24]SEL = Selected courses NS = Not specified ALL = All courses can be accessed

[25]UNI = University ENT = university-owned entity COMB = combination of university and third-party provider.

[26]CLASS = face-to-face (classroom) mode ONLINE = online mode NS = Not specified.

Institution	Program	Age requirements[19]	Citizenship requirements[20]	Eligible students[21]	Minimum academic level[22]	Associated costs[23]	Courses accessed[24]	Provider[25]	Attendance mode(s)[26]	Minimum time to complete full-time
Federation University Australia	Foundation access studies program (FAST)	18+	AUS	All	Yr. 10	US	SEL	UNI	CLASS	12 weeks
Flinders University	Newstep	NS	AUS NZ PR	All	None	NS	SEL	COMB	CLASS	7 months
Griffith University	GUPP - Griffith University Preparation Program	16+	AUS NZ PR	All	Yr. 10	US	SEL	UNI	CLASS	26 weeks
James Cook University	Tertiary Access Course	18+	NS	All	TEST	SC	NS	UNI	CLASS	6 months
La Trobe University	Tertiary Enabling Program (TEP)	18+	AUS NZ PR	All	NS	SC	SEL	UNI	CLASS	17 weeks
Monash University	Monash Access program	21+	AUS NZ PR HUM	All	NS	US	SEL	UNI	CLASS	6 months
	Indigenous Non-Award Pathway (INAP)	All	AUS	ATSI	Yr. 12	NS	SEL	UNI	CLASS	12 months
	Indigenous Enabling Program (IEP)	All	AUS	ATSI	Yr. 12	NS	SEL	UNI	CLASS	6 months
Murdoch University	OnTrack Program	NS	NS	All	None	INC	ALL	UNI	CLASS	14 weeks
	OnTrack Sprint Program	NS	AUS NZ PR HUM	All	Yr. 12	NS	SEL	UNI	CLASS	4 weeks
	K-Track Course	NS	AUS	ATSI	NS	NS	SEL	UNI	CLASS ONLINE	14 weeks
Southern Cross University	Preparing for Success at SCU Program (PSP)	NS	DOM	All	TEST	US	SEL	ENT	CLASS ONLINE	12 weeks

Appendix B: Typology of Enabling Programs (continued)

Institution	Program	Age requirements[19]	Citizenship requirements[20]	Eligible students[21]	Minimum academic level[22]	Associated costs[23]	Courses accessed[24]	Provider[25]	Attendance mode(s)[26]	Minimum time to complete full-time
University of Adelaide	University Preparatory Program UPP	17+	AUS NZ PR HUM	All	None	US	SEL	UNI	CLASS	12 months
	Wirltu Yarlu University Preparatory program	17+	AUS	ATSI	TEST	NS	NS	UNI	CLASS	12 months
University of Queensland	UQ College Tertiary Preparation Program (TPP) – 28 weeks;	19+	AUS	All	None	NS	SEL	ENT	CLASS	28 weeks
The University of Western Australia	UWA Smart Start	18+	AUS NZ PR	All	TEST	US	NS	UNI	CLASS	12 months
	Aboriginal Orientation Course	NS	AUS	ATSI	NS	NS	NS	UNI	CLASS	12 months
University of Canberra	UC PREP	21+	AUS NZ PR	All	None	SC	SEL	COMB	CLASS	12 weeks
	UC-CONNECT	SL	NS	All	Yr. 12	SC	SEL	UNI	CLASS	14 weeks
	ATSI Foundation Program	NS	AUS	ATSI	NS	NS	NS	UNI	CLASS	6 months
University of New England	UNE Pathways Enabling Course PEC	NS	NS	All	None	NS	SEL	UNI	ONLINE	6 months
	TRACKS	NS	AUS	ATSI	None	US	NS	UNI	CLASS ONLINE	6 months
University of New South Wales	University Preparation Program (UPP)	20+	AUS NZ PR	All	None	NS	SEL	UNI	CLASS	6 months
	UNSW Prep	17-19	AUS NZ PR	DIS	Yr. 12	SC	SEL	UNI	NS	12 months
	Indigenous Pre Program	All	AUS	ATSI	None	NS	SEL	UNI	CLASS	4 weeks

Institution	Program	Age requirements[19]	Citizenship requirements[20]	Eligible students[21]	Minimum academic level[22]	Associated costs[23]	Courses accessed[24]	Provider[25]	Attendance mode(s)[26]	Minimum time to complete full-time
The University of Newcastle Australia	Newstep	18-20	NS	All	None	US	SEL	UNI	CLASS	12 months
	Open Foundation	20+	AUS PR	All	Yr. 10	SC	SEL	UNI	CLASS ONLINE	12 months
	Yapug pathway program (Wollotuka Institute)	18+	AUS	ATSI	None	US	ALL	UNI	CLASS	12 months
University of South Australia	Foundation studies	18+	AUS NZ PR HUM	All	None	US	SEL	UNI	CLASS ONLINE	12 months
University of Southern Queensland	Tertiary Preparation Program TPP (Non Award)	18+	AUS NZ PR HUM	All	TEST	NS	SEL	UNI	CLASS ONLINE	6 months
	Tertiary Preparation Program Intensive	Yr. 12	NS	All	Yr. 12	NS	SEL	UNI	CLASS	12 weeks
	Indigenous Higher Education Pathways Program (IHEP)	NS	AUS	ATSI	NS	NS	NS	UNI	ONLINE	6 months
University of Tasmania	University Preparation Program (UPP)	NS	NS	All	Yr. 10	US	NS	UNI	CLASS ONLINE	12 months
	Murina Pathway Program	18+	AUS	ATSI	NS	NS	NS	UNI	NS	12 months
University of the Sunshine Coast	Tertiary Preparation Pathway (TPP)	17+	AUS NZ PR HUM	All	TEST	NS	NS	UNI	CLASS	6 months
University of Western Sydney (now Western Sydney University)	Domestic University Foundation Studies	NS	AUS	All	NS	NS	SEL	ENT	NS	4 months

Appendix B: Typology of Enabling Programs (continued)

Institution	Program	Age requirements[19]	Citizenship requirements[20]	Eligible students[21]	Minimum academic level[22]	Associated costs[23]	Courses accessed[24]	Provider[25]	Attendance mode(s)[26]	Minimum time to complete full-time
University of Wollongong	STEP (Special Tertiary Entrance Program) to UOW	17+	AUS NZ PR HUM	All	Yr 12*[27]	NS	SEL	ENT	CLASS	28 weeks
The University of Notre Dame Australia	Foundation Year (Education, Nursing & Health Science)	PC	NS	All	None	NS	NS	UNI	NS	12 months
	Tertiary Enabling Program	NS	NS	All	None	NS	SEL	UNI	NS	6 months

[27]Excepting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, for whom there is no minimum academic requirement.

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