

# Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth

## Research Report 40

### **The First Year Experience: The Transition from Secondary School to University and TAFE in Australia**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examined the experiences of young people during their first year of tertiary education. The data used in this report are drawn from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), which study the progress of cohorts of young Australians as they make the transition from secondary school to work and further education and training, beginning in Year 9. The group of young people who were in Year 9 in 1998, and who first entered tertiary education during 2002, are the focus of this report.

Three sets of questions form the basis of the report:

- How satisfied are university and TAFE (non-Apprenticeship) students with their initial experiences of tertiary education? What areas of their transitions have been difficult?
- Who is the most likely to change course, or institution, or defer study or withdraw? What are their reasons for doing so?
- Are the outcomes and experiences of the “equity target groups” - those students from backgrounds that historically have been under-represented in higher education - different from the experiences of other students?

The first year experience can have a major impact on later study options and participation, and institutions and governments have a clear interest in ensuring a successful transition from school to tertiary study.

The LSAY program offers considerable advantages in studying these questions as it collects extensive educational and background information each year from national samples of young people as they move through the education and training systems. This is the first national study that has analysed the first year experience of both university and TAFE students within the same framework. The data used in this report were obtained from students in the fifth wave of LSAY interviews, towards the end of 2002. The average age of the participants at that time was 18 years. The satisfaction, difficulties and outcomes of first year tertiary students at universities and TAFE institutions were compared in order to investigate potential differences in the experiences of students attending different types of institutions. Relationships between first year experiences and outcomes and other characteristics, such as students’ gender, plans for post-school study, course load and employment status were also examined.

The major findings of the investigation of the satisfaction and difficulties reported by first year tertiary students are:

- Overall, the vast majority of students agreed or strongly agreed that they liked being a student (94%), that tertiary student life suited them (87%), they enjoyed the atmosphere on campus (88%), and that they had made close friends at their tertiary institution (89%). Over eighty per cent (82%) indicated that the tertiary experience had lived up to their expectation.
- University and TAFE students reported similar levels of satisfaction with their experiences of tertiary study. A greater proportion of university students than TAFE students, however, reported that they had difficulty juggling work and study commitments (50% compared to 35%). A greater proportion of TAFE students, compared to university students, reported that they had faced no major difficulties during their first year.
- Juggling work and study was the most commonly nominated main area of difficulty across all students, at 26%. Twenty-one per cent of the sample indicated that their first year had been without major difficulty.
- Students at regional universities reported more difficulties paying course fees than students at other universities, and students with higher depth of curiosity scores reported fewer problems than lower scoring students with finding the course more difficult than they had expected. There were no associations, however, between the main area of difficulty and gender, or between main area of difficulty and plans for further study as recorded during secondary school.

The major findings from the investigation of the outcomes of first year students are:

- Most students remained in their initial course at their initial institution at the end of their first year. Relatively small proportions of students changed course or institution (2% and 1%, respectively), while greater numbers withdrew or deferred from study (6% and 4%, respectively).
- There were significant associations between these changes to initial enrolments and a number of individual, background and current environment characteristics. For example, students who were studying part-time were more likely to have *changed institution* during their first year than students who were studying full-time; students who had not planned to participate in post-school study or who were studying at a TAFE college were less likely to have *changed course* than other students; students who did not score highly on attitudes to school scales or who were working full-time were more likely to *defer* and to *withdraw* from study.
- Overall, the reason most frequently nominated as the main reason for changing institutions was that the second institution provided better quality education than the initial institution, a reason that can be interpreted as predominantly positive. For those who changed course, the most commonly reported main reason for the change was that they had simply not liked the first course. For both those students who had withdrawn from study and those who had deferred their study, the reason most frequently nominated as the main reason for their decision was that their course had turned out to be not what they wanted.

The major findings from the investigation of the experiences and outcomes of the six target equity groups are:

- Students from most of the equity groups tended to report similar or higher agreement with the satisfaction items than other students.
- In terms of difficulties faced during their first year of tertiary study, students from remote or isolated location backgrounds nominated paying fees or other study-related costs as their main source of difficulty more often than other students.
- Indigenous students reported conflict between study and caring for children or other family members, as well as financial difficulties, more often than non-Indigenous students.
- Indigenous students were more likely to withdraw from study during their first year, compared to non-Indigenous students. The most commonly reported main reason for doing so was the same as that reported by other students: their course turned out to be not what they wanted.

Overall, the majority of first year tertiary students reported predominantly positive experiences of tertiary study: they were satisfied with many aspects of their lives as students and, although they may sometimes have faced difficulties, they remained committed to continuing their education. There are some students, however, who appeared to be having trouble maintaining a balance between education and work commitments, between the need for income and the need for time to study and learn, as evidenced by lower levels of satisfaction and an increased likelihood of terminating their study. With the majority of tertiary students combining study with paid employment, further research and monitoring are needed to clarify the impact of paid work on the transition to tertiary education.

Careful monitoring of the experiences, difficulties and first year outcomes of some of the equity target groups, particularly students from an Indigenous Australian background, is also required. Results suggest that although these students have made the first step in accessing tertiary education, they may still face relatively high difficulties in continuing with their studies.



# **The First Year Experience: The Transition from Secondary School to University and TAFE in Australia**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **The importance of the first year**

The first year of tertiary education has been the subject of research in Australia since the 1950s, with each wave of expansion in student enrolments generating more interest in the area. Today, with larger student populations from increasingly diverse backgrounds, research into the experience of students in Australian universities and TAFE colleges is more important than ever. But why the first year over any other year? For individual students, the first year is a significant transition point, one that may affect the development of attitudes towards continuing learning at tertiary education and beyond. There is a strong emphasis now on the need for lifelong learning, and research indicates that the early experiences with tertiary education are pivotal in establishing values, attitudes, and approaches to learning that will endure throughout their tertiary experience, beyond the undergraduate years (McInnis & James, 1995). As the final years of secondary schooling become more stressful and competitive for many students, the first year of tertiary education may also be a time to evaluate how prepared they really are, and whether they need to be better supported in their tertiary studies.

The first year has also been identified as the year in which the greatest amount of academic failure and attrition from study occurs (McInnis, 2001; Williams, 1982). In the view of some researchers, completion of the first year is 'more than half the battle' in persistence to degree completion (Tinto, 1988, p. 49). The processes by which young people come to identify with, and become members of, a study community have been likened to the processes by which individuals ascend from youth to full adult status in traditional societies, or by which migrant peoples are accepted into a new community: the stages of separation (from the previous group), transition (interaction with the new group), and finally incorporation or integration into the new group. It is during these first two stages—separation and transition—that the first year tertiary student may be at greatest risk in terms of withdrawing from study altogether or from a particular institution (see Tinto, 1988 for a detailed discussion of these stages).

This is not to say that all attrition from study is disastrous and to be avoided at all costs. For some students, the trying-on of new values and behaviours that embodies the transition stage may bring a realisation that the social and intellectual communities of their tertiary institution are not to their liking, and they may choose then to withdraw and seek membership of other groups: at other institutions, in other educational settings, in the labour force, or elsewhere. The difficulty lies in ensuring that the decision to withdraw has been carefully considered as the cost to individual students can be high. It can lead to 'considerable loss of face and sense of personal failure in having to leave ... after entering with such high hopes' (Elliot, 2002, p. 5), particularly when it is linked to academic failure.

The successful integration of first year students must, then, occur in both social and academic domains, as it is highly likely that difficulties in adjusting to one will impact on the other domain. Social integration and academic performance have both been identified as strong predictors of attrition from study, as has satisfaction with university life (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; Rickinson & Rutherford, 1995). Information on young people's experiences and perceptions of their first year of tertiary education is therefore of great importance to investigations of both course attrition and transfer, and the development of lifelong learning. Given that the costs of tertiary study and course changes for students can be high, it is important to identify the factors that shape the first year experience.

Effective transitions to tertiary study are also important for the institutions. High levels of student attrition may be viewed as a waste of institutional resources, particularly in a climate of limited financial, and other, resources in many institutions. Unhappy initial experiences for students and high levels of attrition can damage the reputations of individual institutions (Ramsay, Tranter, Sumner, & Barrett, 1996). Many tertiary educational institutions have responded to the separation and transition difficulties faced by first year students by introducing orientation and other support programs. There are questions, however, as to whether the content and length of some programs are sufficient to address these issues in depth.

### **Australian research on the first year experience**

Williams (1982) conducted a broad examination of the first year experience of students in Australian universities in the early 1980s. The report focused on background characteristics, such as gender, secondary school sector, secondary school achievement, family experience of education, financial support and living arrangements, of first year students in 15 universities in 1980, and the relationships between these characteristics and students' experiences and satisfaction with university life. Williams reported that female students reported higher satisfaction on scales measuring the quality of education they received, their opportunities for social interaction and their level of participation in decision making than male students across all institutions surveyed. Students in Arts courses were more satisfied with the level of interaction they had with staff than students in Science or Economics courses, while students attending smaller universities tended to report higher satisfaction with most areas surveyed than students at larger campuses. Due to the suggested relationship between size of institution and student satisfaction, Williams (1982) concluded that regular data collection at national levels was needed to better inform policies for higher education and to monitor trends.

Much of the Australian research of the first year experience before and after Williams' (1982) report was restricted to single-institution or even single-faculty evaluations of current transition programs (for example Elliot, 2002; Latham & Green, 1997; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001). While this research has its uses—informing institutions as to the intake characteristics of their student population and thus informing planning, and evaluating programs that may have been introduced to ease the transition to tertiary education—a broader focus is needed to examine national trends in enrolments and experiences of students in tertiary education.

In 2000, some of these issues were addressed with research from the Centre for the Study of Higher Education reporting five-year trends in the experiences of first year university students. This report, *Trends in the first year experience in Australian universities*, followed previous research by the same authors (McInnis & James, 1995; McInnis, James, & Hartley, 2000). Results from the two studies indicated that despite the majority of students reporting a high level of satisfaction with their first experiences of university life, a considerable number have an 'uncertain' start—reporting a desire to change courses after their first year and feeling unprepared to choose a course or undertake study—and that this proportion has remained stable over time (McInnis et al., 2000).

Results also suggested a decrease in the level of engagement with university life over the five years in between cohorts: With increased numbers of students combining full-time study with part-time employment and an increase in the average hours worked each week, students were spending less time on campus. One quarter of those surveyed indicated that they had not made close friends at university and had generally kept to themselves. This trend towards decreased engagement and affiliation with other tertiary students is of concern, as the authors note that the 'social nature of the university experience has the potential for contributing positively to academic performance, and more generally should influence the individual's sense of competence' (McInnis & James, 1995). Such findings are also of concern in terms of young people's later engagement in work environments and society more broadly.

In 1983, Williams extended his research into the first year experience to include an investigation of the experiences of first year students at Australian colleges of advanced education (CAEs), many of which became universities at a later date (Williams & Pepe, 1983). Since that time, little research into the first year experience in institutions other than universities has been published, although some small-scale studies of TAFE students exist (Gerber, Lankshear, & Bishop, 1997). The present study aims to fill these gaps by providing national data on the first year experience of both university and TAFE students in Australia.

A second theme, that of equity in education beyond secondary school, has also informed much of the research into the experiences of students in tertiary study (McInnis, 2001). Governments, institutions and the public in general are concerned that diversity in national populations be reflected as much as possible by diversity in student populations. In 1990, the Commonwealth identified six groups which historically had been under-represented in higher education and which should be targets for interventions to increase participation in further study:

- People from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds;
- People from rural and isolated areas;
- People with disabilities;
- People from non-English speaking backgrounds;
- Women (especially women in 'non-traditional' areas of study); and
- Indigenous Australians.

A report entitled *Analysis of Equity Groups in Higher Education 1991-2002* was commissioned from the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE) to examine past equity performance and to consider improved definitions of equity target groups. This report advocated some additions to the six groups listed above, including monitoring of the participation and completion of tertiary education of those from low-SES backgrounds in rural and remote areas, males from rural and remote areas, and males in non-traditional areas of study, such as Nursing, Education, and Society and Culture (James, Baldwin, Coates, Krause, & McInnis, 2004).

### **The current report**

The data used in this report are drawn from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY). The focus of the report is the Year 9 class of 1998, and the experiences of those who entered first year tertiary education in 2002, when most were aged 18 years.

The report has three broad aims:

- To document and analyse the 'first year experience' impressions and difficulties for current university and TAFE (excluding New Apprenticeships) students. How do they feel about their experiences? What areas of their transitions have been problematic?
- To identify the 'outcomes' of first experience of tertiary study—rates of deferral, withdrawal, course and institution change or persistence with first course of study for the entire sample and by various characteristics. Who is the most likely to change courses, institutions or withdraw? What are the reasons they give for changing?
- To analyse the first year outcomes and experiences of those students belonging to the target groups for increased participation in higher education.

The following chapter, Chapter 2, provides information on the data and methods of analysis that were employed to describe and analyse the experiences of first year tertiary students. The results of these analyses are presented in Chapters 3 through 5, and a discussion of the findings along with implications for policies regarding young people in tertiary study, is presented in Chapter 6. Detailed information on the data used in the study is provided in Appendices 1-3.

## 2. DATA AND METHODS

### Data

Data for this report are based upon a cohort of students who were in Year 9 in 1998 and who form part of the LSAY program. The sampling design for LSAY's 1998 Year 9 cohort was a two-stage cluster sample, with schools selected with a probability proportional to size in each State and Territory, and whole classes of students randomly selected within each participating school. The initial sample included 14,117 students from approximately 300 government, Catholic and independent schools (see Long & Fleming, 2002 for details).

The students were first surveyed in their schools in 1998, where they completed a questionnaire about themselves and their families. Further data on educational, training and labour market activities have been collected from the sample members on an annual basis: by mail questionnaire in wave 2, and by computer-assisted telephone interviews in subsequent waves. Questions pertaining to the first year of tertiary education experience were included in the 2002 telephone interview (see Appendix 2 for details).

At the time of the 2002 data collection, the modal age of the 7762 continuing cohort members was 18 years. For most respondents, this was their first interview after finishing their secondary studies. The sample for this report consisted of 4026 young people who had successfully completed a Year 12 qualification and had gone on to participate in post-secondary study at either a university or TAFE that would lead to a recognised qualification, such as a certificate, diploma or degree, and excluding those who were participating in apprenticeships, traineeships and single module or short course study.

#### *Sub-groups of students*

A number of sub-groups of first year tertiary students exist, including those who remain in their first course, those who change course, those who change institution and those who withdraw, defer or complete the course.

**Table 1 First year experiences, by initial institution, 2002**

	University		TAFE		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
First course at first institution	2521	87	740	65	3261	81
First course at second institution	6	<1	7	1	13	<1
Second course at first institution	54	2	4	<1	58*	1
Second course at second institution	21	1	5	<1	26	1
Withdrew from first institution	127	4	130	11	256	6
Withdrew from second institution	0	0	1	<1	1	<1
Deferred from first institution	141	5	20	2	161	4
Deferred from second institution	1	<1	1	<1	2	<1
Completed while at first institution	13	1	228	20	242	6
Completed while at second institution	0	0	1	<1	1	<1
Total	2884	100	1141	100	4026**	100

Note: Numbers are weighted to account for sampling and attrition.

\* One student withdrew from second course, one completed.

\*\* Five respondents were prematurely skipped out of the questionnaire section pertaining to tertiary education without providing full information on their first year experiences, including current study status.

These groups of students were asked sets of questions regarding their experience of tertiary education. The questions were based upon those developed by McInnis and James (McInnis & James, 1995) and the *Course Experience Questionnaire* (Ramsden, 1991).

### *Variables*

The relationships between students' experiences of their first year of tertiary study, including levels of satisfaction and difficulties, and a number of student characteristics were explored in this report. Some, such as student gender, secondary school sector, their employment status, parents' education, the type of institution the student is attending, their field of study and course load, have been identified by previous research as being influential in shaping students' early experiences of tertiary education (see (McInnis & James, 1995; McInnis et al., 2000; Williams, 1982).

Other variables included here, such as students' earlier achievement in literacy and numeracy, their plans for post-school study, their depth of curiosity and other attitudes towards school, have not been investigated previously but may be expected to have some influence on young people's experiences of tertiary study. Students do not enter tertiary education as a *tabula rasa*; rather, they bring with them attitudes towards learning and formal education, such as a thirst for new information and understanding, study-skills, and previous experiences of success or failure that may also shape their attitudes towards tertiary education.

In wave 1 of the surveys, when participants were in Year 9, information was collected on their gender, the sector of the secondary school they were attending (that is, whether they were attending a government, Catholic, or Independent school), whether they planned to participate in further study after leaving school, and the highest level of education achieved by their mother and father. At the time, the students also participated in short tests of their literacy and numeracy skills, and answered a number of questions on their attitudes towards secondary school. These questions form a number of scales that measure different attitudes, such as Interest-Motivation (e.g. 'The work we do [*at school*] is interesting'), Opportunity (e.g. 'The things I learn will help me in my adult life'), and Achievement Orientation (e.g. 'I know that I can do well enough to be successful').

In wave 4 of the surveys, when participants were in Year 12, they responded to six questions gauging their level of interest in learning new things and understanding why or how things happen. These questions were based on the Ainley Curiosity Scales (1987), which measure Depth of Curiosity—the desire to know and understand *why* and *how*—and Breadth of Curiosity—a desire for a wide range of experiences and new sensations.

In wave 5 of the surveys, one year after the majority of participants had finished secondary school, those who had gone on to tertiary study provided information on the institution they were attending, their broad field of study and their course load (whether they were studying full-time, part-time, or a combination of these). They also provided information on how many hours per week they worked, if they were in paid employment. The information on institutions was used to determine whether students were attending a university or a TAFE (or similar education provider). Universities were divided into four groups: the Group of Eight, the Australian Technology Network, Regional institutions, and all other universities. TAFE colleges were divided into metropolitan and non-metropolitan institutions.

The current definitions for higher education equity groups and the means used to identify these students in the LSAY tertiary education sample are described in Chapter 5. A detailed description of all variables and their construction is included in Appendix 1.

The proportions of students who changed course or institution but were still studying at the time of the interview, who had withdrawn, deferred or completed their initial course (outcome of first year of tertiary study) are presented in Table 2 by the variables described above.

### **Methodology**

In Chapter 3, percentages are used to describe the satisfaction of first year tertiary students in terms of their levels of agreement with a number of statements about their experiences. Group differences in satisfaction are not tested statistically. Percentages are also used to discuss the problems faced by tertiary students during their first year. Chi-squared analyses are then used to investigate whether the problems nominated by students as their *main* area of difficulty differ between various sub-groups of students.

In Chapter 4, cross-tabulations and chi-squared analyses are used to assess whether a range of factors are associated with changes to initial enrolments. Percentages are then used to describe the reasons students give for changes to their enrolments.

Chapter 5, which investigates the first year experiences of the higher education equity groups, applies techniques used in both of the previous chapters; cross-tabulations and chi-squared analyses are used to assess whether members of equity groups experience more changes to their initial enrolments than other students, and percentages are used to describe their reasons for changes. Percentages are again used to describe satisfaction with aspects of student life of members of equity groups who remain in tertiary study throughout the first year. Chi-squared analyses are used to investigate whether the main area of difficulty nominated by members of various equity groups differ from those nominated by students who are not members of the equity groups.

The chi-squared test of independence is a non-parametric analytical technique that is used to determine whether two categorical variables are related. It compares the frequency of cases found in the categories of one variable across the different categories of another variable (often presented as a cross tabulation of one variable against another). This technique can be used to answer research questions such as: Is the proportion of students who withdraw during their first year of tertiary education compared to those who do not withdraw the same for male students as for female students? Or expressed more simply: Do more male students than female students withdraw from their first year of tertiary study?

**Table 2 Outcomes of initial enrolments in first year of tertiary study**

	<i>n</i>	Current students				Other students*		
		1st course at 1st institution	1st course at 2nd institution	2nd course at 1st institution	2nd course at 2nd institution	Withdrawn from study	Deferred study	Completed first course
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Gender</b>								
Male	1783	81	<1	2	1	6	3	6
Female	2237	81	<1	1	1	6	5	6
<b>Year 9 achievement (Literacy and Numeracy)</b>								
Low group	606	74	<1	1	1	8	2	15
Middle group	1966	79	<1	2	1	6	5	6
High group	1436	86	<1	2	<1	6	4	2
<b>Student's post-school study plans</b>								
Didn't plan to study	468	76	--	<1	--	8	5	12
Planned to study	3553	82	<1	2	1	6	4	5
<b>Depth of Curiosity</b>								
High curiosity	1191	85	--	2	1	5	4	4
Other group	2830	80	1	2	1	7	4	7
<b>Interest/Motivation attitude scale</b>								
High interest/motivation	1050	85	--	2	1	5	3	5
Other group	2971	80	<1	1	1	7	5	6
<b>Opportunity attitude scale</b>								
High opportunity	1125	84	<1	2	1	5	3	5
Other group	2896	80	<1	1	1	7	5	6
<b>Achievement attitude scale</b>								
High achievement	1012	87	--	1	1	5	3	4
Other group	3009	79	<1	2	1	7	4	7
<b>Parents' education</b>								
Neither parent university	2456	79	<1	1	1	7	4	7
One parent university	858	83	<1	1	1	6	4	5
Both parents university	707	85	<1	3	1	4	5	3
<b>School sector during Year 12</b>								
Government	2352	80	<1	1	<1	7	4	8
Catholic	960	81	1	2	1	6	5	5
Independent	708	86	--	2	1	5	3	2
<b>Broad fields of study</b>								
Natural and Physical Sciences	469	87	--	3	1	4	3	2
Information Technology	315	79	1	2	<1	6	4	8
Engineering and related technologies	269	82	--	1	1	6	3	7
Architecture and Building	79	73	--	3	1	12	2	9
Agriculture, Environmental and related studies	79	86	--	--	--	4	--	10
Health	368	85	--	1	1	5	4	4
Education	179	91	--	3	--	3	3	1
Management and Commerce	820	77	1	2	1	7	4	9
Society and Culture	825	83	1	1	<1	8	5	3
Creative Arts	448	79	--	1	1	8	6	6
Food, Hospitality and Personal Services	108	60	--	--	--	5	2	33

	Current students					Other students*		
		1st course at 1st institution	1st course at 2nd institution	2nd course at 1st institution	2nd course at 2nd institution	Withdrawn from study	Deferred study	Completed first course
	<i>n</i>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Course load</b>								
Studying full-time	3771	82	<1	2	1	6	4	5
Studying part-time	250	60	1	1	1	14	3	19
<b>Initial institution</b>								
University	2883	87	<1	2	1	4	5	1
TAFE	1138	65	1	<1	<1	12	2	20
<b>University groups</b>								
Group of Eight	729	89	<1	1	1	5	3	1
Australian Technology Network	538	83	--	3	1	7	6	<1
Regional	539	88	--	3	<1	3	6	<1
Other	1078	88	<1	1	1	4	5	<1
<b>TAFE college location**</b>								
Metropolitan	594	67	1	1	1	11	3	17
Non-metropolitan	324	60	1	--	<1	13	1	24
<b>Employment status</b>								
Working part-time	2350	85	<1	2	1	5	3	5
Working full-time	439	46	1	1	1	24	13	14
Looking for work	26	66	--	--	--	17	--	17
Not looking for work	1206	86	1	2	1	4	3	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>4021</b>	<b>3261</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>243</b>

\* Although these students may have gone on to participate in another course, it is not considered to be part of their *first* experience of tertiary education

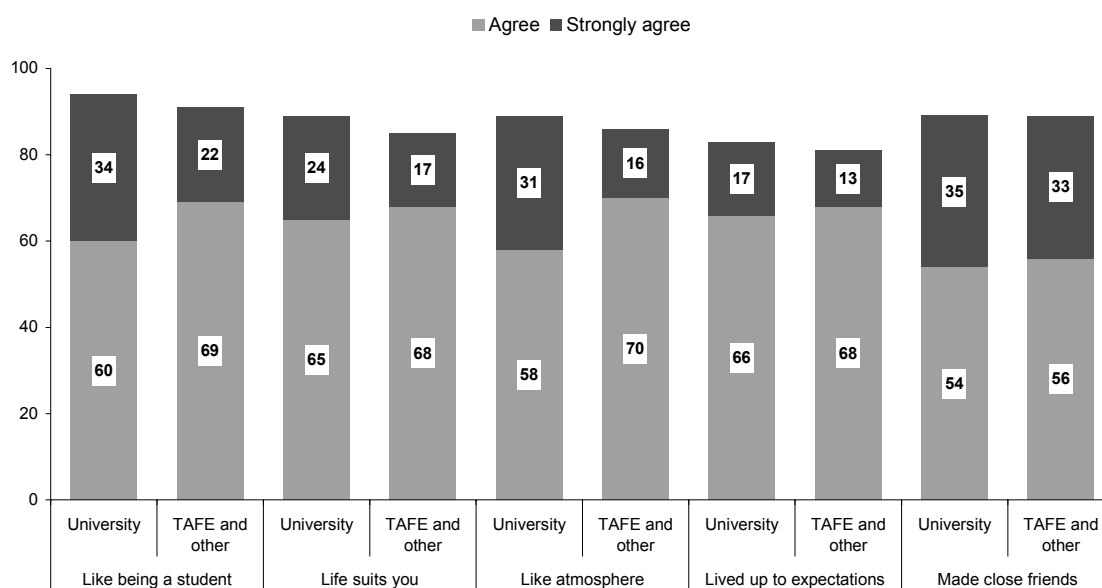
\*\* 224 students at TAFE institutions and other providers could not be coded as metropolitan or non-metropolitan due to multiple locations and/or limited information as to the institution's location.



### 3. FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCES OF TERTIARY STUDENTS: SATISFACTION AND DIFFICULTIES

As discussed in Chapter 1, research has indicated that the early experiences of students entering tertiary education are integral to the development of positive attitudes towards further study and education that encourage young people to persevere with their learning through their undergraduate years and beyond (McInnis & James, 1995). In the current study, students who remained enrolled at a tertiary institution throughout their first year were presented with a number of questions regarding their impressions of student life and whether they had integrated into the student community (see Appendix 2). They were also asked to nominate, from a list of difficulties identified by previous research as problematic during the first year of tertiary study, those areas that had been difficult for them and, if more than one area was identified, the one area that had been most problematic. This chapter presents the students' responses to these questions.

The proportions of university and TAFE students who agreed or strongly agreed to the satisfaction with aspects of student life items are presented in Figure 1. There were some small differences in the responses of university and TAFE students to the satisfaction items: 94% of university students agreed that they liked being a student, compared to 91% of TAFE students, 89% and 85% of university and TAFE students, respectively, agreed that student life suited them, 89% and 86% of university and TAFE students, respectively, agreed that they liked the atmosphere and 83% and 81% of university and TAFE students, respectively, agreed that tertiary study had lived up to their expectations. University and TAFE students reported similar agreement to the item 'I have made close friends'.



**Figure 1** Satisfaction with aspects of student life, by type of tertiary institution

One half of university students and over a third of TAFE students identified juggling work and study commitments as a difficulty they had experienced during their first year of tertiary study. Balancing study with personal relationships and other commitments were also commonly nominated sources of difficulty. Table 3 presents the proportions of students who indicated that they had experienced difficulty with one of the areas listed, along with the proportion who indicated that an area had been their major source of difficulty.

**Table 3 Difficulties experienced during first year of tertiary study-multiple responses and main area of difficulty, by institution type**

Area of difficulty	University %	TAFE %	All respondents %
<b>Was a difficulty</b>			
Paying fees or any other study costs	25	20	24
Juggling work and study commitments	50	35	47
Course was more difficult than expected	34	27	32
Conflict between family commitments and study	17	12	16
Caring for children or other family members	4	4	4
Balancing personal relationships with study	31	19	29
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	10	6	9
Finding time for other commitments	44	29	40
Other	4	2	4
<b>Main area of difficulty</b>			
No real difficulties	17	34	21
Paying fees or any other study costs	12	13	12
Juggling work and study commitments	27	21	26
Course was more difficult than expected	11	12	11
Conflict between family commitments and study	1	2	1
Caring for children or other family members	<1	<1	<1
Balancing personal relationships with study	11	5	9
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	1	1	1
Finding time for other commitments	16	11	15
Other	3	2	3

Further analysis indicated that there were significant differences between the main areas of difficulty nominated by university and TAFE students ( $\chi^2_{(9)} = 87.22$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). A greater proportion of TAFE students than university students reported that they had experienced no real difficulties during their first year (34% and 17%, respectively), while smaller differences were also noted in the proportions of students indicating that balancing personal relationships with study had been their greatest difficulty, with 11% and 5% of university and TAFE students nominating this area.

Student characteristics such as gender and age, background characteristics such as parental education, school sector and ethnicity, and environmental issues such as field of study, employment status and home situation may all be related to how well students adapt to tertiary education (McInnis & James, 1995). Previous research has examined the relationships between various characteristics and first year experiences, but with a focus on students attending universities only. The following sections report on the experiences of various groups of students, as discussed in Chapter 2, separately by institution type (university or TAFE) where possible, in order to gain an insight into the different experiences of students in each of these sectors.<sup>1</sup>

### Gender

There were few differences in the levels of agreement reported by male and female students at universities. The proportion of females agreeing to most of the items was higher than the proportion of males by 1 or 2%; the only item to which male students responded more favourably was 'University has lived up to my expectations'—84% of males and 82% of females agreed to

<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, the student's institution is the institution at the time of the interview, rather than the institution at which the student first enrolled.

this item. For students at TAFE colleges, 82% of female students agreed that tertiary study had lived up to their expectations, compared with 79% of males, while 91% of males and 88% of females agreed that they had made close friends at their institution (see Table A 1, Appendix 4).

The difficulties experienced during their first year reported by male and female students at universities and TAFE colleges are presented in Table 4. When identifying multiple problems, there was a tendency for more female students than male students (at both universities and TAFE colleges) to report that balancing personal relationships with study, and juggling work and study had been difficulties they had faced in their first year, although these differences were not substantial.

**Table 4 Difficulties experienced during first year of tertiary study -multiple responses and main area of difficulty, by gender**

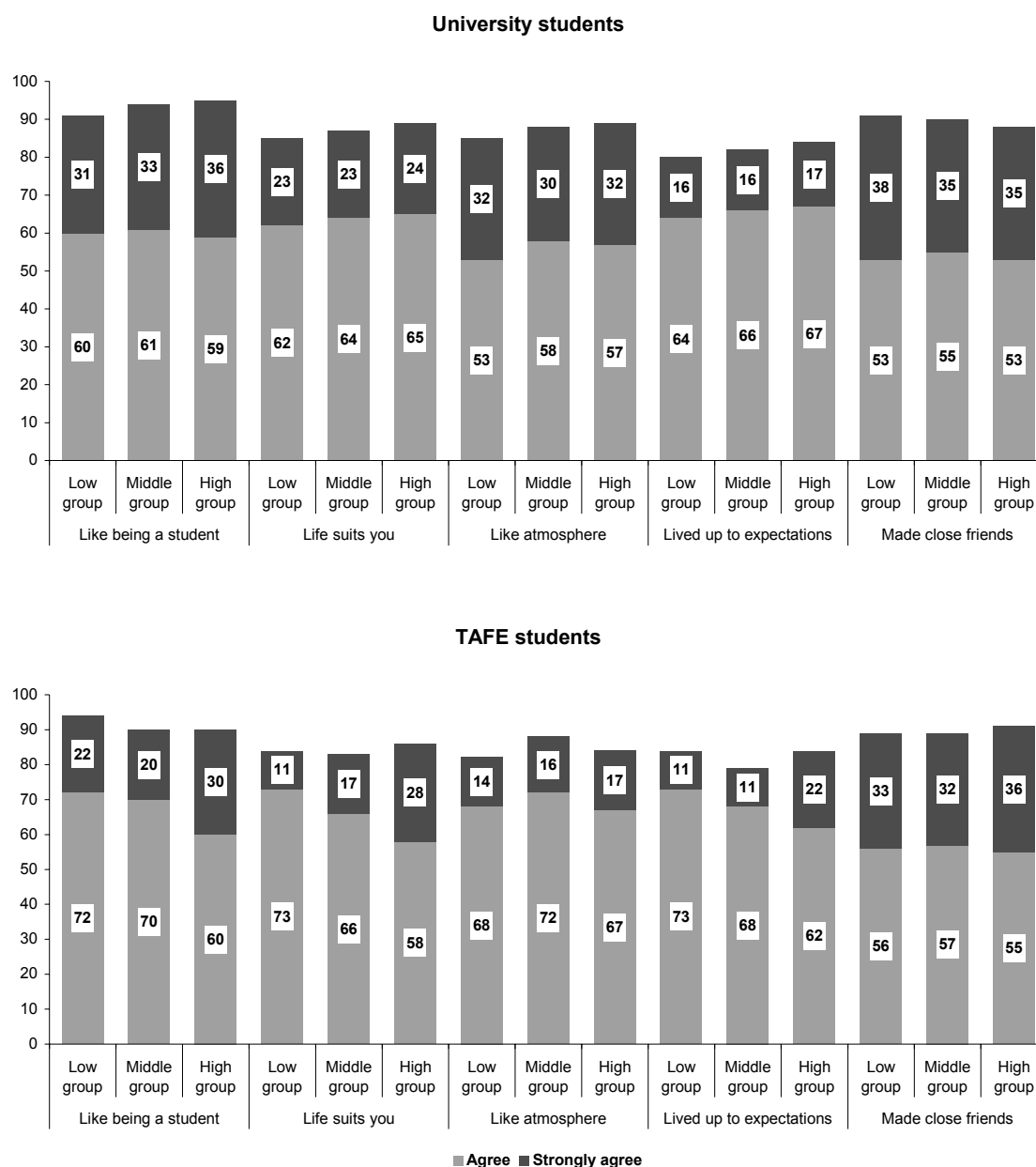
Area of difficulty	University students		TAFE students	
	Males %	Females %	Males %	Females %
<b>Was a difficulty</b>				
Paying fees or any other study costs	24	26	19	22
Juggling work and study commitments	48	51	34	38
Course was more difficult than expected	34	34	26	26
Conflict between family commitments and study	17	17	13	12
Caring for children or other family members	4	4	3	5
Balancing personal relationships with study	28	33	18	23
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	9	11	9	6
Finding time for other commitments	42	43	35	31
Other	5	4	2	2
<b>Main area of difficulty</b>				
No real difficulties	20	17	29	34
Paying fees or any other study costs	12	13	15	12
Juggling work and study commitments	26	28	20	25
Course was more difficult than expected	12	11	12	9
Conflict between family commitments and study	1	1	1	2
Caring for children or other family members	<1	<1	-	<1
Balancing personal relationships with study	9	12	5	5
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	1	1	1	1
Finding time for other commitments	16	15	15	10
Other	3	3	2	2

There were no gender differences in main problems nominated by the students; a chi-squared analysis of the main source of difficulty nominated by male and female students at universities and TAFE colleges failed to reach statistical significance.

### Achievement in Year 9

University students who had been in the high achieving group in Year 9 appeared to be more satisfied with life as a tertiary student than those who had been in the middle and low achievement groups, reporting higher levels of agreement with most items, while those in the middle achievement group tended to report slightly higher agreement than those in the low achievement group (Figure 2). Although the pattern was apparent for all items (apart from 'I have made close friends'), the relative differences were small.

For TAFE students, however, this pattern was not apparent at all. Differences between the achievement groups were again small—84% of TAFE students who had been in the low achievement group agreed that student life suited them, compared to 83% and 86% of those who had been in the middle and high achieving groups, respectively. A somewhat larger difference was apparent in agreement that students liked the atmosphere on campus: 88% of those in the middle achievement group agreed to this item compared to 82% of the low achievement group and 84% of the high achievement group.



**Figure 2** Satisfaction with aspects of tertiary student life, by achievement in Year 9

When reporting multiple problems during their first year, students at both universities and TAFE colleges who had been in the low achievement group reported fewer difficulties than other students with areas such as paying course fees, balancing personal relationships and study, and finding time for other commitments.

**Table 5 Difficulties experienced during first year of tertiary study -multiple responses and main area of difficulty, by achievement group in Year 9**

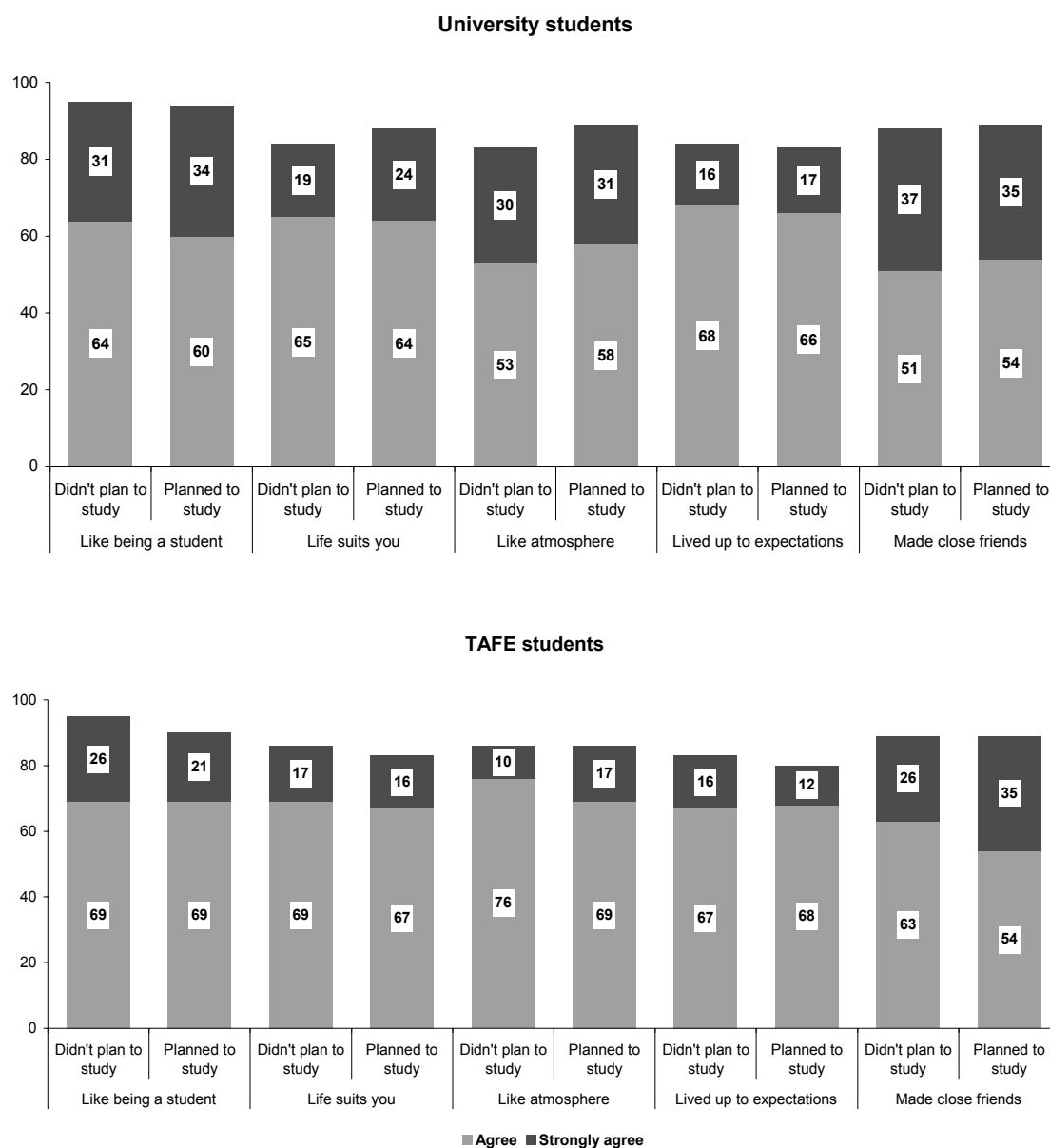
Area of difficulty	University			TAFE		
	Low %	Middle %	High %	Low %	Middle %	High %
<b>Was a difficulty</b>						
Paying fees/other study costs	23	26	24	17	22	26
Juggling work and study	46	50	50	30	43	28
Course was more difficult than expected	36	35	33	24	28	25
Conflict between family commitments and study	16	18	16	14	12	11
Caring for children/other family	7	4	3	4	3	6
Balancing personal relationships with study	25	31	32	18	23	20
Fitting in and making friends	9	11	9	6	9	5
Finding time for other commitments	37	42	43	28	35	36
Other	5	3	5	2	2	1
<b>Main area of difficulty</b>						
No real difficulties	20	18	19	37	26	37
Paying fees/other study costs	13	13	11	13	13	15
Juggling work and study	25	28	27	19	26	15
Course was more difficult than expected	14	12	11	9	13	6
Conflict between family commitments and study	1	1	1	3	1	1
Caring for children/other family	-	<1	<1	<1	<1	-
Balancing personal relationships with study	11	11	10	6	4	6
Fitting in and making friends	-	1	1	1	<1	2
Finding time for other commitments	13	14	17	9	13	18
Other	3	3	4	2	2	1

Chi-squared analyses of the main source of difficulty reported by students who had been in different achievement groups were conducted for university and TAFE students separately (Table 5). The analysis for university students failed to reach significance, finding no association between achievement group in Year 9 and problems faced during the first year of tertiary study.

For TAFE students, however, there were significant differences in the main areas of difficulty nominated by students that were associated with achievement levels in secondary school ( $\chi^2_{(18)} = 36.48, p = 0.000$ ). Those TAFE students who had been in the middle achievement group in Year 9 were less likely to indicate that they had experienced a trouble-free first year, with 26% indicating that they had experienced no problems, compared to 37% of the low achievement and high achievement groups. Some smaller differences were also noted in the proportion of TAFE students reporting that their greatest difficulty had been that the course was more difficult than they had expected (low achievement 9%, middle achievement 13%, and high achievement group 6%), and finding time for other commitments (low achievement 9%, middle achievement 13%, high achievement 18%).

### Student post-school study plans

The post-secondary education plans of students did not appear to be related to their satisfaction with their first year experiences. For students at TAFE colleges, 95% of those who had not planned to participate in post-secondary study agreed that they liked being a student compared to 90% of those who had planned to study. Smaller differences were also noted in agreement to the items 'Student life suits you' and 'Tertiary study has lived up to your expectations', in favour of those who had not planned to study (Figure 3).



**Figure 3** Satisfaction with aspects of tertiary student life, by Year 9 plans for post-school study

There were some small differences in the responses of university students also: 89% of those who had planned on continuing their education agreed that they enjoyed the atmosphere on campus, compared to 83% of those who had not planned to study, and 88% of those who had planned to study agreed that student life suited them, while 84% of those who had not planned to study agreed with this item.

**Table 6 Difficulties experienced during first year of tertiary study -multiple responses and main area of difficulty, by Year 9 plans for post-school study**

Area of difficulty	University		TAFE	
	Didn't plan to study %	Planned to study %	Didn't plan to study %	Planned to study %
<b>Was a difficulty</b>				
Paying fees or any other study costs	26	25	22	20
Juggling work and study commitments	51	49	38	36
Course was more difficult than expected	29	34	21	28
Conflict between family commitments and study	19	17	17	12
Caring for children or other family members	7	4	4	4
Balancing personal relationships with study	34	31	22	20
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	14	10	10	6
Finding time for other commitments	42	43	32	33
Other	4	4	3	2
<b>Main area of difficulty</b>				
No real difficulties	19	18	34	31
Paying fees or any other study costs	14	12	17	12
Juggling work and study commitments	30	27	19	23
Course was more difficult than expected	10	12	8	11
Conflict between family commitments and study	2	1	4	1
Caring for children or other family members	<1	<1	-	<1
Balancing personal relationships with study	9	11	6	5
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	2	1	-	1
Finding time for other commitments	12	16	11	13
Other	3	3	2	2

When nominating multiple areas of difficulty, 34% of university students who had planned to participate in post-secondary study and 28% of TAFE students with similar plans reported finding their course more difficult than they had expected, compared to 29% and 21% of university and TAFE students who had not planned to study, respectively (Table 6).

Despite the apparent differences in the multiple-response difficulties nominated by students who had planned to study and students who had not planned to study, chi-squared analyses of the main source of difficulty, conducted separately for university and TAFE students, failed to reach significance.

### Depth of curiosity

University and TAFE students who scored high on the depth of curiosity scale agreed more frequently that student life suited them and that they enjoyed the atmosphere on campus. Responses to the other items showed very little difference in levels of agreement (see Table A 2, Appendix 4).

Students who had higher depth of curiosity scores reported difficulties with juggling work and study commitments and finding time for other commitments more frequently than students with lower curiosity scores when reporting multiple areas of difficulty (Table 7). TAFE students with higher curiosity scores also reported more problems with finding time for other commitments, but fewer problems balancing personal relationships and study and conflict between family commitments and study than TAFE students with lower curiosity scores.

**Table 7 Difficulties experienced during first year of tertiary study-multiple responses and main area of difficulty, by depth of curiosity**

Area of difficulty	University		TAFE	
	High depth of curiosity %	Other %	High depth of curiosity %	Other %
<b>Was a difficulty</b>				
Paying fees or any other study costs	25	24	22	20
Juggling work and study commitments	53	48	35	37
Course was more difficult than expected	32	35	26	26
Conflict between family commitments and study	16	17	8	14
Caring for children or other family members	4	4	2	5
Balancing personal relationships with study	31	31	14	23
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	10	10	5	8
Finding time for other commitments	44	42	34	32
Other	5	4	1	2
<b>Main area of difficulty</b>				
No real difficulties	16	19	30	32
Paying fees or any other study costs	12	12	14	13
Juggling work and study commitments	29	26	22	22
Course was more difficult than expected	9	13	11	11
Conflict between family commitments and study	2	1	1	2
Caring for children or other family members	<1	<1	<1	<1
Balancing personal relationships with study	11	10	3	6
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	1	1	2	<1
Finding time for other commitments	17	14	16	12
Other	4	3	1	2

There were significant differences for students at university ( $\chi^2_{(9)} = 23.82, p = 0.005$ ); however, the analysis for TAFE students failed to reach significance. University students with higher depth of curiosity scores nominated conflict between family commitments and study as being their main problem more frequently than students with lower curiosity scores, although this was not a commonly reported problem overall (2% and 1% of those with high depth of curiosity and lower scorers, respectively). Differences were also apparent in the proportions of students who nominated finding the course more difficult than they expected as their main problem, those with lower curiosity scores reporting this problem more frequently than those with high depth of curiosity scores (13% and 9%, respectively).

### Attitudes to secondary school

#### *Interest/Motivation*

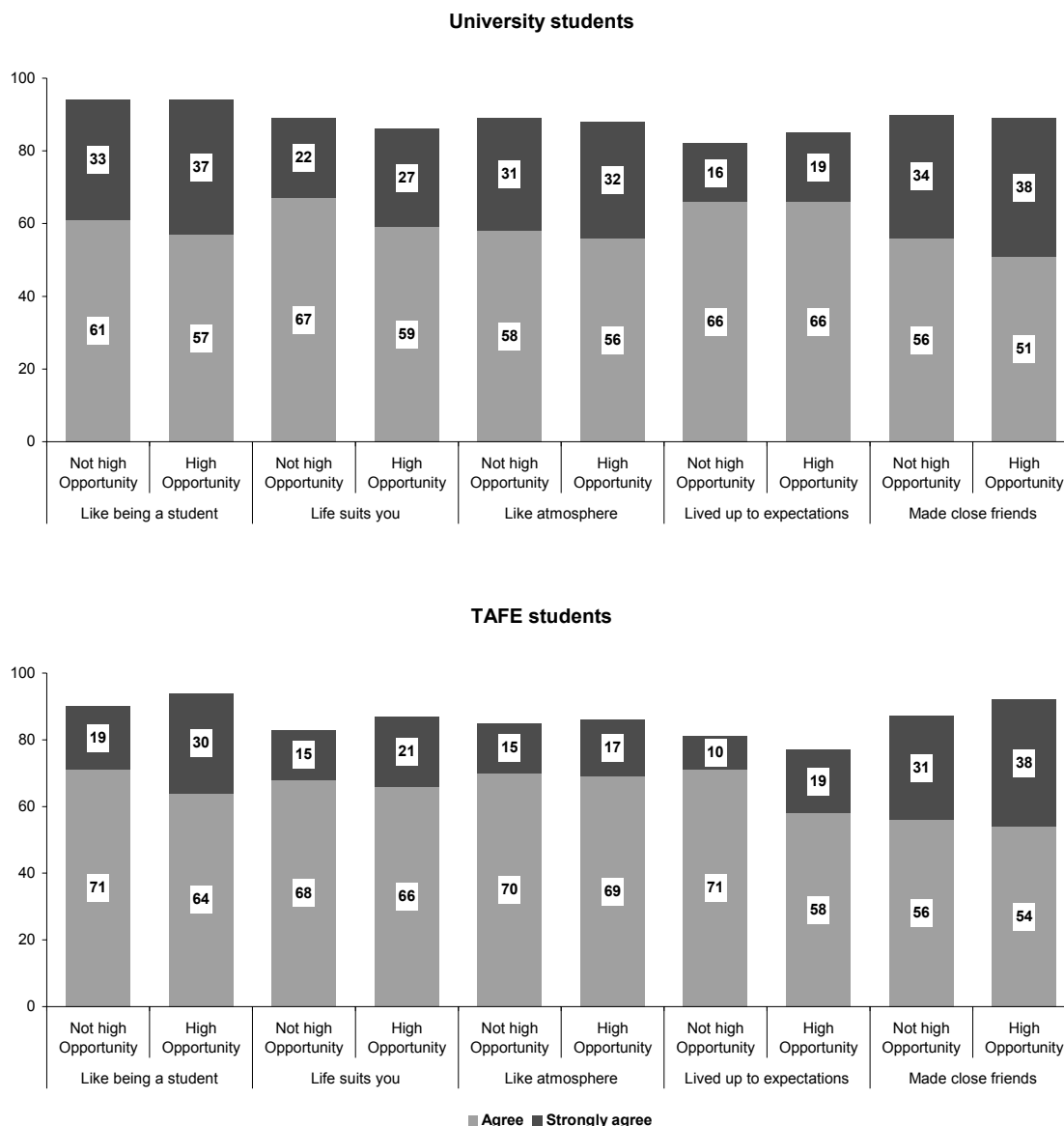
Overall, there were no differences in levels of agreement to the satisfaction items reported by those students, at either university or TAFE, who had scored high on the Interest/Motivation in learning attitude scale and those who had not scored as high. Ninety-one and 92% of university and TAFE students, respectively, who scored high on this scale agreed that they had made close friends at their institutions, compared with 89% and 88% of university and TAFE students who had not scored high on the Interest/Motivation scale (see Table A 3, Appendix 4).

#### *Opportunity*

For those attending university, students who had scored high on the Opportunity attitude scale (a belief in the relevance of learning) did not differ greatly from other students in their levels of agreement to the satisfaction items (Figure 4). Eighty-six per cent of those who had scored high



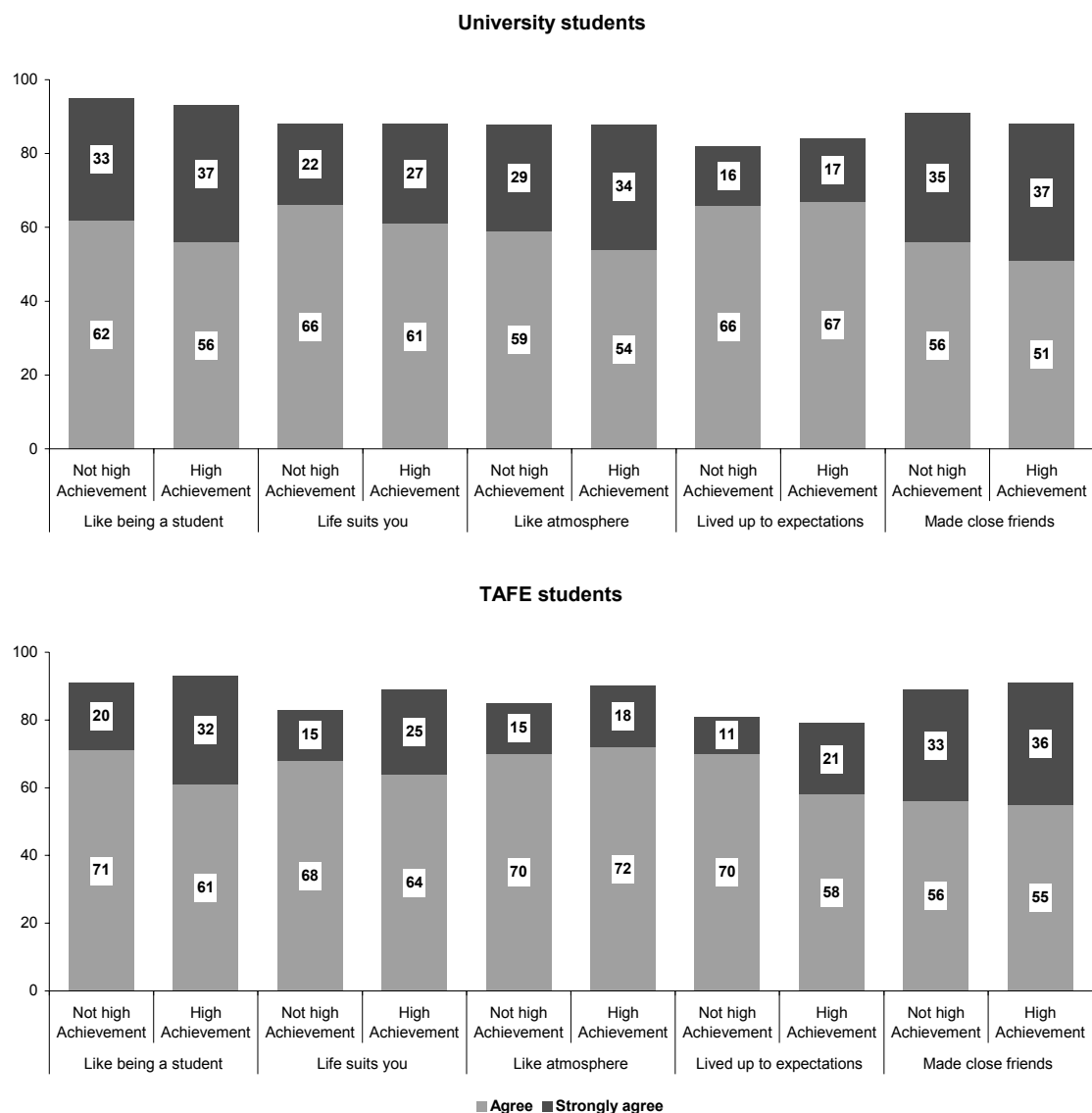
on the Opportunity scale agreed that student life suited them, compared with 89% of those with lower Opportunity scores. Differences in levels of agreement were more apparent among the TAFE students—those with higher Opportunity scores reported higher agreement on most items apart from ‘Student life has lived up to your expectations’ and ‘You like the atmosphere on campus’.



**Figure 4** Satisfaction with aspects of tertiary student life, by opportunity score

#### *Achievement orientation*

Figure 5 shows the levels of agreement with the satisfaction aspects of student life items for university and TAFE students who were high-scorers on the Achievement orientation attitude scale and those who were not. For university students, there was very little difference in the levels of agreement of those who had scored high on Achievement Orientation and those who had not. For TAFE students, differences in agreement to two items were noted—89% of high Achievement orientation scorers agreed that student life suited them, compared with 83% of those with lower scores, and 90% of high scorers agreed that they liked the atmosphere on campus, compared with 85% of those with lower scores on the Achievement Orientation scale.



**Figure 5** Satisfaction with aspects of tertiary student life, by achievement orientation

The areas of difficulty nominated by university and TAFE students who were high scorers on the three attitude scales—Interest/Motivation, Opportunity and Achievement Orientation—are presented in Table 8. For university students, the multiple responses show no differences in the difficulties nominated by students who scored high on the QSL scales and those who did not score as high. For students at TAFE colleges, those who had scored high on the Interest/Motivation and Achievement Orientation scales reported more problems with balancing personal relationships with study and finding time for other commitments.

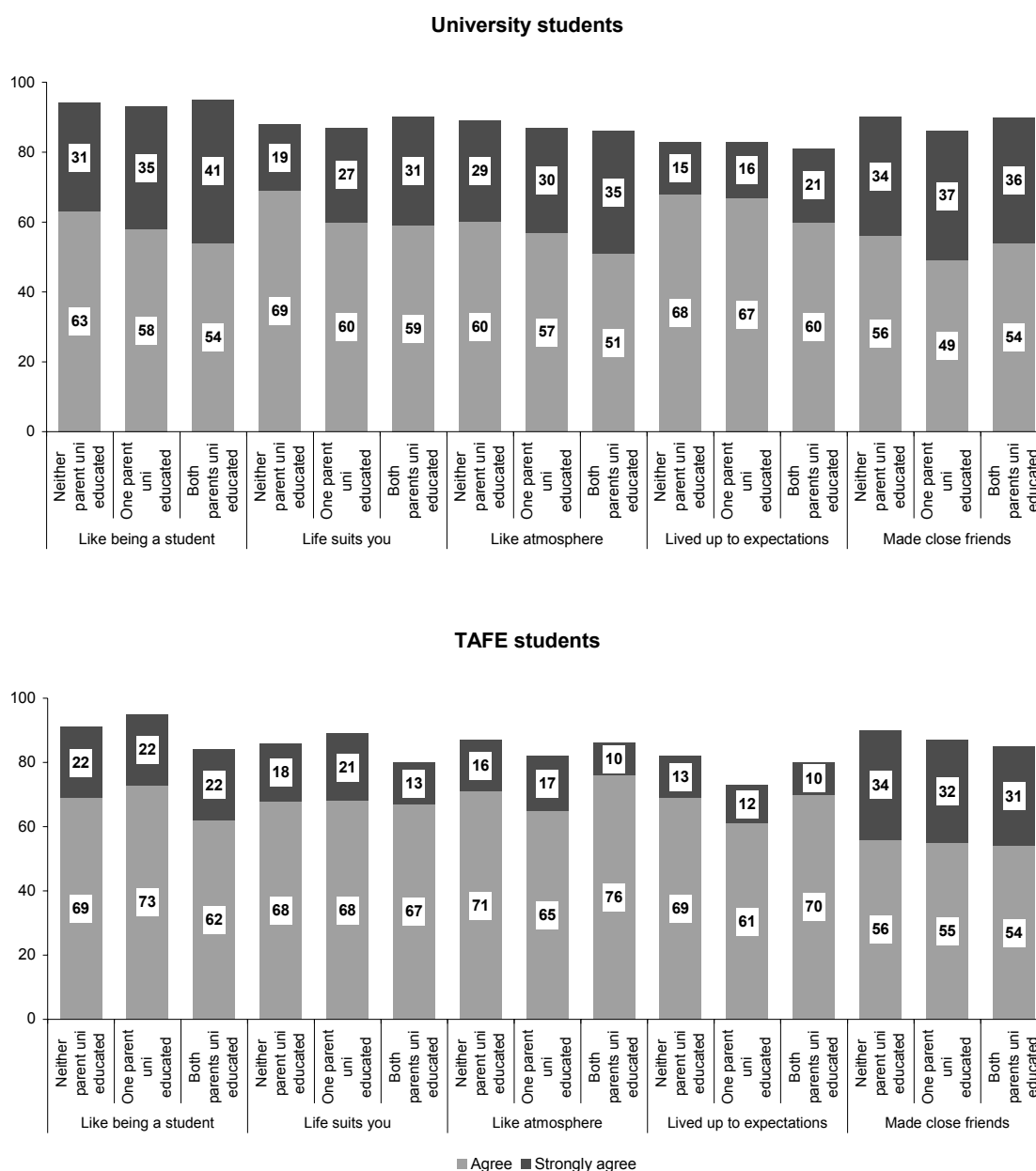
**Table 8 Difficulties experienced during first year of tertiary study-multiple responses and main area of difficulty, by attitudes to secondary school scales**

Area of difficulty	University students						TAFE students					
	High Interest %	Other %	High Opportunity %	Other %	High Achievement %	Other %	High Interest %	Other %	High Opportunity %	Other %	High Achievement %	Other %
<b>Was a difficulty</b>												
Paying fees/other study costs	25	25	23	25	23	25	14	22	18	22	17	21
Juggling work and study	51	49	50	50	50	49	36	36	38	36	35	36
Course was more difficult than expected	35	33	36	33	34	34	28	26	28	26	24	27
Conflict between family and study	17	17	17	17	18	17	12	13	9	14	9	13
Caring for children/other family	5	4	3	5	4	4	1	5	2	5	2	4
Balancing personal relationships with study	28	32	32	31	31	31	24	20	21	20	24	20
Fitting in and making friends	10	10	9	10	9	11	7	7	8	7	6	7
Finding time for other commitments	43	42	45	42	44	42	34	32	35	32	37	31
Other	4	4	3	4	5	4	3	2	2	2	4	2
<b>Main area of difficulty</b>												
No real difficulties	17	19	17	18	18	18	30	32	33	32	31	32
Paying fees /other study costs	13	12	11	13	11	12	7	15	11	14	10	14
Juggling work and study	29	26	27	27	27	27	24	22	22	22	28	21
Course was more difficult than expected	10	12	11	12	9	12	14	10	11	11	8	11
Conflict between family and study	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	-	2	-	2
Caring for children /other family	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	-	<1	-	<1	-	<1
Balancing personal relationships with study	9	11	12	10	11	10	9	4	5	5	7	5
Fitting in and making friends	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Finding time for other commitments	17	15	17	15	18	14	13	13	17	11	13	13
Other	3	3	3	4	3	3	2	2	1	2	3	2

Further analyses of the main problems faced by university and TAFE students with high scores on the attitude scales compared to other students failed to reach significance, indicating that there were no significant differences in the main areas of difficulty identified by those students with high scores on Interest/Motivation, Opportunity or Achievement Orientation scales and other students at university or TAFE.

### Parents' education

University students who reported that both of their parents had attended university agreed more readily than other students (those reported one parent attended university and students who reported that neither parent had attended university) that they liked being a student and the life suited them, but the differences were not large (Figure 6).



**Figure 6** Satisfaction with aspects of tertiary student life, by parents' education

**Table 9 Difficulties experienced during first year of tertiary study-multiple responses and main area of difficulty, by parents' education**

Area of difficulty	University			TAFE		
	Neither parent went to university %	One parent went to university %	Both parents went to university %	Neither parent went to university %	One parent went to university %	Both parents went to university %
<b>Was a difficulty</b>						
Paying fees /other study costs	27	26	18	21	21	16
Juggling work and study	50	52	47	34	46	36
Course was more difficult than expected	34	37	30	26	31	23
Conflict between family commitments and study	18	18	13	14	11	4
Caring for children/other family	5	5	2	4	2	3
Balancing personal relationships with study	32	33	27	21	22	20
Fitting in and making friends	10	11	11	7	6	6
Finding time for other commitments	44	41	40	30	43	36
Other	4	5	3	2	3	-
<b>Main area of difficulty</b>						
No real difficulties	17	17	21	33	24	33
Paying fees/other study costs	13	12	9	14	14	10
Juggling work and study	27	29	26	20	33	27
Course was more difficult than expected	12	12	10	12	6	6
Conflict between family commitments and study	1	2	1	2	1	-
Caring for children /other family	<1	<1	<1	<1	-	-
Balancing personal relationships with study	11	10	10	5	4	5
Fitting in and making friends	1	1	2	1	-	-
Finding time for other commitments	15	13	18	11	18	20
Other	3	3	3	2	1	-

In contrast, 84% of TAFE students who reported that both parents had attended university agreed that they liked being a student, compared with 95% of those with one university-educated parent and 91% of those who reported that neither of their parents had attended university. TAFE students with one parent or neither parent who had attended university also reported higher agreement to the item 'Student life suits you' than those with two university-educated parents.

The multiple responses in Table 9 suggest that university students who reported that both of their parents had attended university may experience fewer problems than other university students, apart from difficulties with fitting in and making new friends. TAFE students who reported that both of their parents had attended university also reported fewer (multiple) problems than other TAFE students, except in finding time for other commitments.

Further analyses of the main problems reported by university and TAFE students with different parental education backgrounds were significant, indicating that the main areas of difficulty were

associated with students' parents' educational backgrounds ( $\chi^2_{(18)} = 33.65$ ,  $p = 0.014$ ; and  $\chi^2_{(18)} = 33.21$ ,  $p = 0.016$  for university and TAFE students, respectively).

For university students, this result was largely driven by differences in the proportions of students reporting fitting in and making friends as their main problem. University students with two parents who had attended university reported this difficulty more frequently than students with one parent who had attended university and students with no parent who had attended university (2%, 1% and 1%, respectively). Differences were also apparent in the proportions of students nominating difficulty in paying fees and other study-related costs as their main problem—university students with two parents who had attended university were less likely than other students to identify this as their main problem.

For TAFE students, those with one university-educated parent were more likely to identify juggling work and study commitments as their main source of difficulty than other TAFE students. Some smaller differences were also noted in the proportions of students who identified finding time for other commitments as their greatest source of difficulty during the year.

### **Secondary school sector**

For university students, levels of agreement on the satisfaction items did not vary greatly by secondary school type. TAFE students who had attended an independent secondary school reported lower levels of agreement with 'you like the atmosphere on campus' (77%) and 'student life has lived up to your expectations' (76%) than students who had attended government schools (87% and 83% agreement to these items, respectively - see Table A4, Appendix 4).

When reporting multiple areas of difficulty, university students who had attended independent secondary schools appeared to have experienced fewer difficulties than other university students in most areas (Table 10). For TAFE students, the results were more varied—a slightly greater proportion of those who had attended independent schools reported problems with finding the course more difficult than they had expected and fitting in and making friends.

Further analysis of the main problems reported by university and TAFE students who had previously attended government, Catholic and independent secondary schools indicated that there was a significant association between the problems reported by university students and the sector of secondary school they had attended ( $\chi^2_{(18)} = 82.87$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), but no association between secondary school sector and main problems reported by TAFE students.

University students who had attended independent secondary schools were more likely than other students to report that they had not experienced any difficulties during their first year (26% compared to 18% of Catholic secondary students and 15% of government secondary students). Those who had attended independent secondary schools also reported fewer problems in paying for course fees and other study related expenses than students who had attended Catholic or government secondary schools.

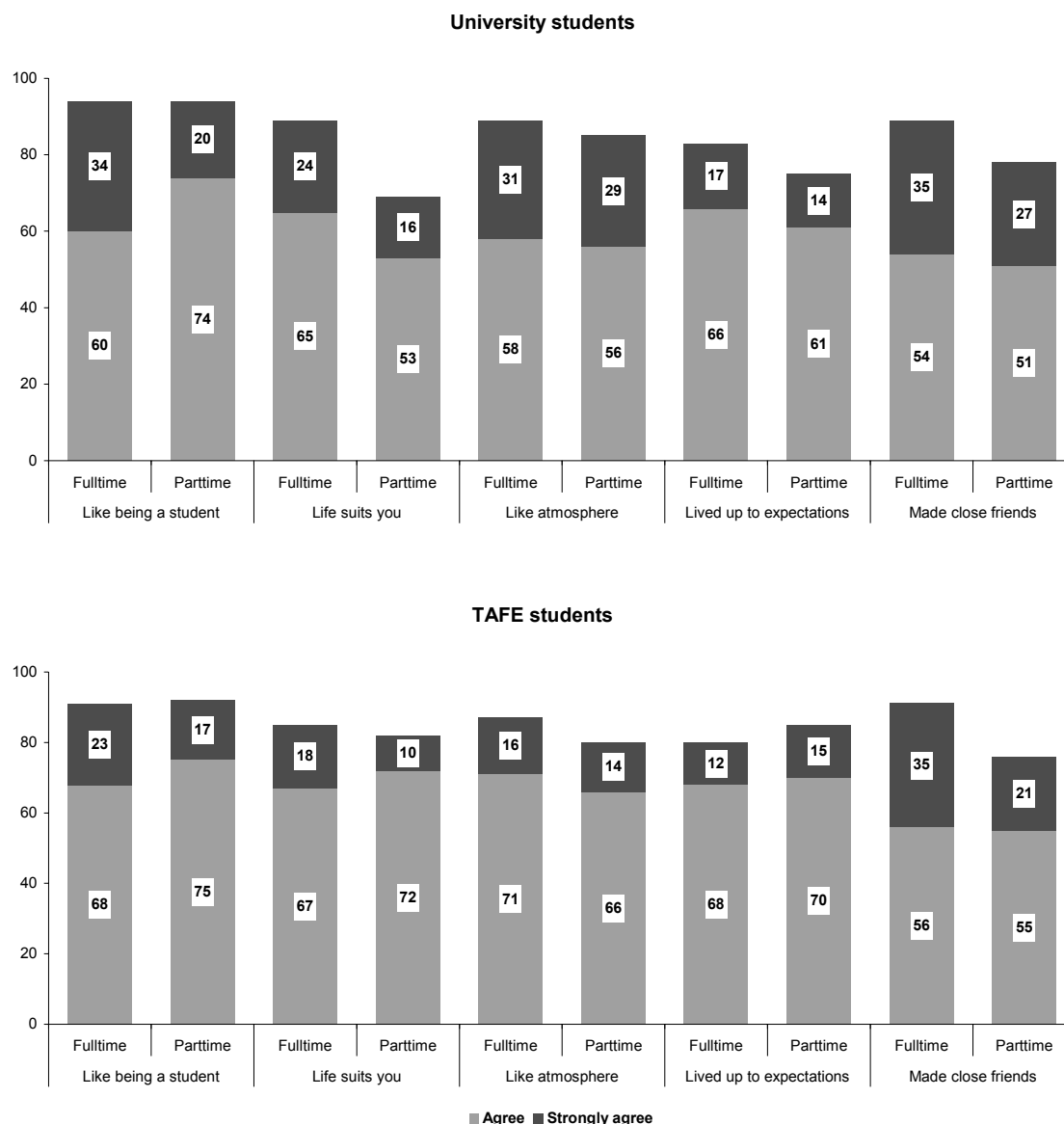
**Table 10 Difficulties experienced during first year of tertiary study-multiple responses and main area of difficulty, by Year 12 secondary school sector**

Area of difficulty	University students			TAFE students		
	Government %	Catholic %	Indep. %	Government %	Catholic %	Indep. %
<b>Was a difficulty</b>						
Paying fees or any other study costs	27	25	18	21	19	21
Juggling work and study commitments	53	47	44	35	42	33
Course was more difficult than expected	34	34	34	26	26	29
Conflict between family commitments and study	20	15	13	12	15	11
Caring for children or other family members	5	3	3	4	3	4
Balancing personal relationships with study	32	32	26	21	19	22
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	10	12	8	6	9	10
Finding time for other commitments	47	38	38	33	33	30
Other	4	4	5	2	<1	3
<b>Main area of difficulty</b>						
No real difficulties	15	18	26	31	31	35
Paying fees or any other study costs	15	11	6	14	11	12
Juggling work and study commitments	28	27	24	23	24	16
Course was more difficult than expected	10	12	14	11	10	10
Conflict between family commitments and study	1	1	1	1	3	2
Caring for children or other family members	<1	<1	1	<1	<1	-
Balancing personal relationships with study	11	10	9	6	4	4
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	1	2	2	<1	1	2
Finding time for other commitments	16	15	14	11	15	16
Other	3	4	4	2	1	3

### Tertiary course load

University students who were studying full-time reported higher agreement than part-time students to a number of items. Eighty-nine per cent of full-time students agreed that student life suited them, compared with 69% of part-time students, and 89% of full-time students agreed that they had made close friends, compared with 78% of part-time students. TAFE students who were studying full-time also reported higher agreement than part-time students to the items regarding making friends and liking the atmosphere on campus (Figure 7).

Responses to the item 'Study has lived up to your expectations' differed for university and TAFE students. University students who were studying full-time agreed more to this item than part-time university students (83% and 75%, respectively), while TAFE student who were studying part-time reported slightly higher agreement than full-time TAFE students (85% and 80%, respectively).



**Figure 7** Satisfaction with aspects of tertiary student life, by tertiary course load

When nominating multiple areas of difficulty during their first year, university students who were studying part-time reported more problems juggling work and study and balancing personal relationships with study than students who were studying full-time. TAFE students who were studying part-time reported fewer problems than full-time students with finding the course more difficult than they had expected (Table 11).

Chi-squared analyses of the main problems reported by full- and part-time students found no association between course load and the main problems reported by university students. A significant difference between the problems reported by full-time and part-time students at TAFE, however, was found ( $\chi^2_{(9)} = 25.97, p = 0.002$ ).



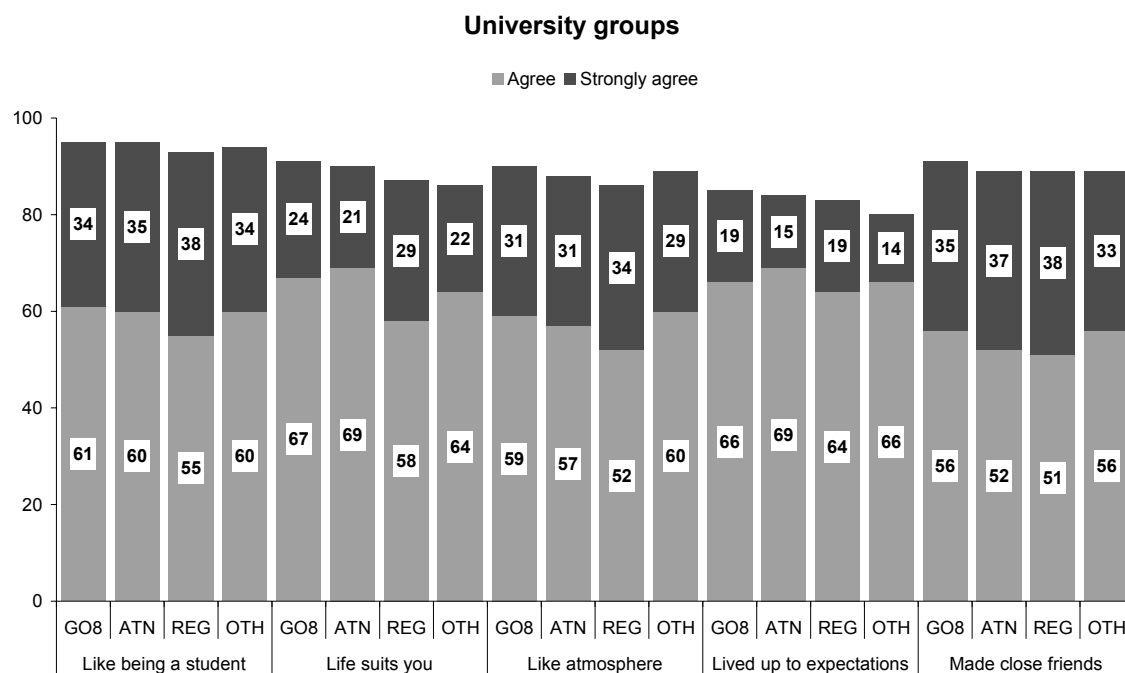
**Table 11 Difficulties experienced during first year of tertiary study-multiple responses and main area of difficulty, by tertiary course load**

Area of difficulty	University students		TAFE students	
	Studying full-time %	Studying part-time %	Studying full-time %	Studying part-time %
<b>Was a difficulty</b>				
Paying fees or any other study costs	25	12	21	20
Juggling work and study commitments	43	64	36	35
Course was more difficult than expected	34	25	28	15
Conflict between family commitments and study	17	17	13	11
Caring for children or other family members	4	8	4	4
Balancing personal relationships with study	31	46	21	20
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	10	12	7	8
Finding time for other commitments	43	36	32	35
Other	4	7	2	1
<b>Main area of difficulty</b>				
No real difficulties	18	14	30	42
Paying fees or any other study costs	12	3	13	16
Juggling work and study commitments	27	41	23	17
Course was more difficult than expected	11	10	12	4
Conflict between family commitments and study	1	-	1	6
Caring for children or other family members	<1	-	<1	0
Balancing personal relationships with study	10	14	6	2
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	1	1	1	-
Finding time for other commitments	15	13	13	13
Other	3	5	2	1

Part-time students at TAFE were more likely to report conflict between family commitments and study than full-time students (6% and 1%, respectively), and were also less likely to report that the course had been more difficult than they had expected (4% of part-time students and 12% of full-time students).

### University groups

There were not great differences across the university groups in the levels of agreement to items such as 'You like being a student' or 'You have made close friends'. Of students attending Regional (REG) universities and Other (OTH) universities, around 87% agreed that student life suited them, compared with over 90% of students from Australian Technology Network (ATN) and Group of Eight (GO8) universities (Figure 8).



**Figure 8 Satisfaction with aspects of tertiary student life, by university groups (university students only)**

Table 12 presents university students' responses to questions pertaining to areas of difficulty in the transition to tertiary education by the university group of their current institution.<sup>2</sup> Overall, the most common difficulty reported by university students, when listing multiple areas of difficulty, was juggling work and study commitments, slightly more so for students attending Regional and Other universities.

There was a significant association between university group and problems reported by university students in their first year of study ( $\chi^2_{(27)}=46.88, p=0.010$ ). This finding was driven largely by the greater proportion of students at Regional universities than students at other universities reporting payment of course fees or other study-related costs as their main source of difficulty. Students at Group of Eight universities were less likely to indicate that paying for fees had been their greatest problem during the year.

<sup>2</sup> In the next chapter, a student's initial institution is used to allow measurement of change from original enrolment. This chapter uses current institution so as to measure students' satisfaction and level of difficulty after any changes to enrolment were made.

**Table 12 Difficulties experienced during first year of tertiary study-multiple responses and main area of difficulty, by university groups**

Area of difficulty	Group of Eight %	ATN %	Regional %	Other %
<b>Was a difficulty</b>				
Paying fees /other study costs	21	23	32	24
Juggling work and study	47	47	51	52
Course was more difficult than expected	33	37	33	34
Conflict between family commitments and study	15	16	22	17
Caring for children/other family	4	3	6	4
Balancing personal relationships with study	31	29	32	31
Fitting in and making friends	11	11	10	9
Finding time for other commitments	44	41	38	45
Other	5	6	3	4
<b>Main area of difficulty</b>				
No real difficulties	18	20	16	18
Paying fees /other study costs	9	12	18	11
Juggling work and study	26	24	29	28
Course was more difficult than expected	12	11	11	12
Conflict between family commitments and study	1	1	1	1
Caring for children/ other family	<1	1	0	<1
Balancing personal relationships with study	12	10	10	10
Fitting in and making friends	1	2	2	1
Finding time for other commitments	17	16	10	16
Other	4	4	3	3

Note: Australian Technology Network (ATN).

### Employment status

The majority of students were employed part-time during their first year of tertiary study. Only 17 students were looking for employment when they were interviewed. Due to the size of this group, university and TAFE students were not considered separately.

Ninety per cent of students who were not looking for work agreed that student life really suited them, compared to 88% of those working part-time and 81% of those working full-time. Those students who were looking for work tended to report lower levels of agreement with most items than other students, although it should be noted that they formed a small group (see Table A 5, Appendix 4).

In terms of the multiple responses to the problems questions, 30% of students who were also working part-time and 31% of students working full-time reported difficulties balancing their personal relationships with study, compared to 26% of students who were not working and not looking for work. Over 40% of students who were looking for work reported difficulty paying for fees or other study costs, compared with less than 25% of students who were working (full-time and part-time) and students who were not looking for work (Table 13).

**Table 13 Difficulties experienced during first year of tertiary study-multiple responses and main area of difficulty, by employment status**

Area of difficulty	Working part-time %	Working full-time %	Looking for work %	Not looking for work %
<b>Was a difficulty</b>				
Paying fees or any other study costs	23	22	44	24
Juggling work and study commitments	52	51	31	36
Course was more difficult than expected	32	32	32	33
Conflict between family commitments and study	16	16	32	17
Caring for children or other family members	4	3	33	4
Balancing personal relationships with study	30	31	35	26
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	10	10	0	9
Finding time for other commitments	41	42	37	39
Other	4	6	0	3
<b>Main area of difficulty</b>				
No real difficulties	20	22	36	24
Paying fees or any other study costs	12	8	20	14
Juggling work and study commitments	30	31	22	18
Course was more difficult than expected	10	10	7	14
Conflict between family commitments and study	1	2	10	2
Caring for children or other family members	<1	<1	0	<1
Balancing personal relationships with study	9	9	6	9
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	1	2	0	<1
Finding time for other commitments	15	13	0	16
Other	3	5	0	3

There was a significant association between the employment status of students and the main difficulties they reported during their first year of tertiary study [ $\chi^2_{(27)} = 100.04, p = 0.000$ ]. This result was driven largely by the varying proportions of students who indicated that juggling work and study commitments had been the greatest source of difficulty during the year. Students who were not working were, unsurprisingly, less likely to nominate this area as their main source of difficulty than other students. It is of interest that there was little difference in the proportions of those students who were working part-time and those who were working full-time who nominated this 'juggling act' as being their greatest area of difficulty (median hours worked per week for part-time and full-time workers was 12 and 38 hours, respectively). Some smaller differences were also noted in the proportions of students who indicated that they had found the course more difficult than expected: students who were not looking for employment were more likely than other students to nominate this as their greatest source of difficulty.

### Summary

The vast majority of students agreed or strongly agreed that they liked being a student (94%), that tertiary student life suited them (87%), they enjoyed the atmosphere on campus (88%), and that they had made close friends at their tertiary institution (89%). Over 80% indicated that the tertiary experience had lived up to their expectation.

In terms of the difficulties faced by first year tertiary students, multiple responses indicated that the most common problems were ones of 'time press' and balance: 47% of students reported difficulties juggling work and study, 40% reported problems finding time for other commitments, and 29% reported difficulties balancing personal relationships with study. When asked to nominate their area of greatest difficulty, juggling work and study commitments was still the most commonly nominated area at 26%, but problems with balancing personal relationships and

study or finding time for other commitments were less common. Twenty-one per cent of the sample indicated that their first year had been without major difficulty.

The main area of difficulty nominated differed across various sub-groups of students, for example students at regional universities reported more difficulties paying course fees than students at other universities, and students with higher depth of curiosity scores reported fewer problems than lower scoring students with finding the course more difficult than they had expected. There were no associations, however, between the main area of difficulty and gender, and between main area of difficulty and plans for further study as recorded during secondary school.

Overall, the satisfaction levels reported by university and TAFE students were quite similar, with only a few percentage points difference (slightly more university students agreed or strongly agreed with the items, such as 'I like being a student'). Some differences were noted in the difficulties students had faced during their first year of tertiary study; a greater proportion of university students than TAFE students reported that they had difficulty juggling work and study commitments (50% compared with 35%). A significantly greater proportion of TAFE students, compared to university students, reported that they had faced no major difficulties during their first year.

There were some indications that the students' cultural capital, as indicated by parents' educational background and the type of secondary school students had attended, may act differently in different institutional settings. For instance, university students who reported that both of their parents had attended university agreed more readily than students who reported that one parent had attended university and students who reported that neither parent had attended university that they liked being a student and the life suited them. TAFE students with two university-educated parents tended to report lower levels of agreement to these items than other students. TAFE students who had attended an independent secondary school also tended to report lower satisfaction on a number of items than students who had attended government schools. University students who had attended independent secondary schools were more likely than other students to report that they had not experienced any difficulties during their first year than other students. They also reported fewer problems in paying for course fees and other study related expenses than students who had attended Catholic or government secondary schools. For TAFE students, the results were more varied—although there were no significant differences in the main area of difficulty reported, a slightly greater proportion of TAFE students who had attended independent schools reported problems with finding the course more difficult than they had expected and fitting in and making friends.

There were no differences in the experiences of university and TAFE students of different gender, and very few differences associated with previous school achievement, plans for post-school study and attitudes towards school.

#### 4. ENROLMENT CHANGES IN THE FIRST YEAR OF TERTIARY STUDY

##### Outcomes of initial enrolments

The first year of tertiary study has been identified by previous research as the year in which the greatest amount of transfer between courses and cessation of study occur (McInnis, 2001; Williams, 1982). This is not to say that change is a bad thing for all students; students may enrol in a course or institution with the intention of transferring to a more preferred course or facility at the end of a semester, or may be required to have undertaken a course in order to be eligible for enrolment in another. Withdrawal from study and deferral of study, however, are less likely to be viewed as a positive outcome of a student's initial experiences of tertiary study.

The first section of this chapter contains analyses related to the outcomes of the 4026 students who initially enrolled in tertiary study—whether students remained in their first course at their first institution, changed course or institution, withdrew or deferred from study, or completed a course. The second section presents the reasons given by students for changes to their original enrolments.

All those who had enrolled in a tertiary course at a TAFE or university responded to a number of questions about their progress through this course and any subsequent courses to which they had transferred. Overall, a number of student characteristics, background details and current environmental situations appeared to be associated with differential outcomes of the first experience of tertiary study (see Table 2). The significance of these apparent associations was tested using chi-square techniques.<sup>3</sup> Results in which the association was significant are listed in the table below.

**Table 14 Influences on changes to initial tertiary enrolments**

Student characteristic	Outcome for which significant difference found	Group for whom significant difference found
Year 9 achievement groups	Deferral	Low achievement group
Student post-school study plans	Change of course	Students who didn't plan to study
Interest/Motivation scale	Withdrawal	
	Deferral	
Opportunity scale	Deferral	High Opportunity group
Achievement scale	Withdrawal	High Achievement group
Parents' education	Withdrawal	Both parents attended university
School sector	Change of course	Students from Government schools
Course load	Change of institution	Part-time students
	Withdrawal	Part-time students
Initial institution	Change of course	TAFE students
	Withdrawal	TAFE students
	Deferral	TAFE students
University groups	Withdrawal	Australian Technology Network and Regional universities
	Deferral	Group of Eight universities and Australian Technology Network universities
Employment status	Withdrawal	Students working full-time
	Deferral	Students working full-time

<sup>3</sup> Completion as an outcome of initial enrolment was not tested, as it is limited by type and length of the qualification in which students are enrolled.

Those students who were studying part-time were more likely to have *changed institution* during their first year than students who were studying full-time (2% and 1%, respectively). Students who had not planned to participate in post-school study, had attended government secondary schools, or were studying at a TAFE were less likely to have *changed course* than students in their comparison groups; 2% of students who had planned to study, 3% of students from Catholic and independent schools and 3% of university students changed course during their first year.

Those students who were not in the highest scoring group on the literacy and numeracy tests in Year 9, did not score high on the Interest/Motivation or Opportunity attitude scales, were studying at a university, or were working full-time were more likely than their counterparts to have *deferred* their studies during the first year. For students at university, those at a Group of Eight university were less likely to have *deferred* their studies during the year (3% of Group of Eight students), while those at an Australian Technology Network university were slightly more likely to have *deferred* their studies (more than 6% of ATN students). Characteristics associated with *withdrawing from study* included lower scores on Interest/Motivation or Achievement scales, neither parent had attended university, studying part-time, attending a TAFE or other provider, attending an Australian Technology Network university (for those studying at university), and working full-time.<sup>4</sup>

There were no significant associations between the outcomes tested (changing course, changing institution, deferring study or withdrawing from study) and students' gender, depth of curiosity score or location of TAFE institution (for those attending a TAFE or other provider).

### Reasons for changes to initial enrolments

All students who indicated a change to their initial enrolment were asked to indicate, from a list of potential factors, those that had been an influence on their decision and the one that was the main reason for their change. The outcomes listed in Table 2 were re-grouped to identify those who changed institution during their first year of tertiary study (regardless of whether they changed course or continued with the original course), those who changed course (regardless of whether they also changed institution or continued at the original institution), those who withdrew from study and those who deferred from study (regardless of whether they had changed course or institution beforehand). The reasons given by the students in these groups are presented and discussed below.

#### *Those who changed institution*

A total of 43 students, around 1% of the tertiary sample, indicated that they had changed institution during their first year. The reasons given by these students for their decision to change institutions are presented in Table 15. The most frequently nominated reason for changing institution, that the course at the first place was not exactly what the students wanted, suggests that those who change institution may be seeking a different curriculum or course focus, rather than being turned off by lack of facilities or access. The reason most commonly nominated as the *main* reason for changing institution was that the second institution provided better quality education than the initial institution.

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that the association between withdrawing and deferring from study and working full-time is a correlation and thus cannot comment on the direction of the relationship. It may be equally as likely that those who withdraw or defer from study then seek full-time employment as it is that those who are already working full-time decide to reduce their load by withdrawing or deferring from their study.

**Table 15 Reasons for changing institution, multiple responses and main reason**

Reason for changing institution	A consideration % agree	Main reason % agree
<b>Interests and course preferences</b>		
The course at the first place wasn't exactly what you wanted	60	14
The place you went to provides better quality education	58	29
The place you moved from wasn't your first choice	28	3
The course you wanted wasn't available at the first institution	42	21
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>68</i>
<b>Results</b>		
You had been getting poor results	5	0
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>0</i>
<b>Other</b>		
Because of easier access or better transport to new institution	23	12
Because of health or personal reasons	12	0
Other	-	21
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>33</i>

When nominating their main reason for changing institutions, 32% of female students indicated that better quality education available at the second institution was the prime motivation for changing institutions, compared with 25% of male students, while 19% of male students indicated that the course at their first institution was not what they had wanted, compared with 9% of female students.

For those who had initially enrolled in a TAFE institution, the most commonly nominated reason for changing institutions was that their preferred course was not available at their first institution (32%). For those who had initially enrolled at a university, the most commonly nominated reasons for their changes were better quality education at the second institution or some other reason (34% and 22%, respectively).

Whether students were studying part-time or full-time had been found previously to be related to their likelihood of changed institutions, and although the number of part-time students who changed institutions was small, proportionally more of them indicated that their main reason for changing institutions was that the course they wanted to do was not available at the first institution (47% of part-time students and 17% of full-time students).

#### *Those students who changed course*

A total of 84 students, representing 2% of the tertiary sample, indicated that they had changed course during their first year. The reasons given by these students for their decision to change courses are presented in Table 16.

Overall, the reasons given for changing courses were related to students' interest and course preferences, with the most frequently nominated reasons being that the student really would have preferred to do the second course or that the first course turned out to be not what the students wanted. The popularity of these responses suggests that students are actively seeking courses that fit with either their interests and/or ambitions, rather than switching to lower-cost or lower demand courses.



**Table 16** Reasons for changing course, multiple responses and main reason

Reason for changing course	A consideration % agree	Main reason % agree
<b>Interests and course preferences</b>		
You didn't like the first course	76	32
First course turned out to be not what you wanted	83	23
Would have preferred to do the second course	84	18
The first course was a pre-requisite for the second course	1	1
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>74</i>
<b>Career and work</b>		
Better career prospects from the second course	53	9
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>9</i>
<b>Study load and results</b>		
The study load was too heavy	14	2
Had been getting poor results	12	0
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>2</i>
<b>Finances</b>		
Course costs were too high in the first course	1	0
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>0</i>
<b>Other</b>		
Health or personal reasons	8	0
Other		16
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>16</i>

Eleven per cent of male students, compared to 6% of female students, reported that career considerations—better career prospects from the second course—was the prime reason for changing courses during the first year.

Those students who were in the high Achievement Orientation group were also proportionally more likely to nominate better career prospects as their main reason for changing courses than those who were not in the high score group for this scale (18% and 6%, respectively).

Overall, simply not liking the first course was the most popular reason for changing courses during the first year of tertiary study. This was the reason for changing courses most commonly nominated by students from all three secondary school sectors—31% of government school students, 37% of Catholic school students and 26% of independent school students. A slightly higher proportion of former Catholic school students than former government and independent school students indicated that their main reason for changing was that they really would have preferred to do the second course (22% of Catholic students, 14% and 18% of government and independent students).

#### *Those who withdrew from study*

A total of 257 students, around 6% of the tertiary sample, withdrew from study during their first year, including those who dropped out without formally informing the institution of their intention to leave and those who failed their studies and left. The reasons given by these students for their decision to withdraw from their courses are presented in Table 17.

Some of these students went on to enrol in another course of study after their withdrawal, but this second course was not considered to be part of their first experience of tertiary study. The pathways of students who withdraw and enrol in other study are discussed in McMillan (2005).

**Table 17 Reasons for withdrawing from study, multiple responses and main reason**

Reason for withdrawing from study	A consideration % agree	Main reason % agree
<b>Interests and course preferences</b>		
The course turned out to be not what you wanted	77	39
Lost interest, never really wanted to study	54	19
Never really intended to complete the course	11	1
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>59</i>
<b>Career and work</b>		
Wanted to get a job, apprenticeship or traineeship	34	11
Problems juggling study and work commitments	23	4
Course wouldn't have led to a good job or career	22	1
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>16</i>
<b>Study load and results</b>		
The study load was too heavy	23	4
Had been getting poor results	18	1
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>5</i>
<b>Finances</b>		
Financially, couldn't afford to continue	20	4
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>4</i>
<b>Other</b>		
Problems with access or transport	17	4
Health or personal reasons	19	9
Other		3
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>16</i>

The most popular reason for withdrawing from study for male and female students was that the course was not what they had wanted (33% of males, 43% of females). For male students, the next most popular reason given was that they had lost interest or never really wanted to study (32%), while for female students the next most popular reason was health or personal matters (13%).

Thirteen per cent of students who had been enrolled at a TAFE nominated a desire to get a job, apprenticeship or traineeship as their main reason for withdrawing from study, compared with 9% of university students.

Six per cent of students who were working full-time nominated problems juggling work and study as their main reason for withdrawing from study, compared with 2% of those working part-time. In contrast, 5% of part-time workers nominated 'The course load was too heavy' compared to 2% of those working full-time.

#### *Those who deferred from study*

A total of 163 students, 4% of the tertiary sample, deferred from study during their first year. In this instance, those who deferred had started their study before electing to discontinue for that year, rather than deferring before classes started, as is usually the practise of those young people who choose to travel or work while their study place is reserved for them. The reasons given by these students for their decision to withdraw from their courses are presented in Table 18.

The proportion of male students who reported their main reason for deferral as being that they wanted to get job, apprenticeship or traineeship was greater than the proportion of females student who nominated this reason (20% compared to 6%), while female students were more likely than male students to indicate that the course turned out to be not what they wanted (32% compared to 16%).

**Table 18** Reasons for deferring from study, multiple responses and main reason

Reason for deferring from study	A consideration % agree	Main reason % agree
<b>Interests and course preferences</b>		
The course turned out to be not what you wanted	58	26
Lost interest, never really wanted to study	43	18
Never really intended to complete the course	6	1
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>45</i>
<b>Career and work</b>		
Wanted to get a job, apprenticeship or traineeship	37	12
Problems juggling study and work commitments	20	4
Course wouldn't have led to a good job or career	13	2
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>18</i>
<b>Study load and results</b>		
The study load was too heavy	28	3
Had been getting poor results	11	<1
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>3</i>
<b>Finances</b>		
Financially, couldn't afford to continue	21	6
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>6</i>
<b>Other</b>		
Health or personal reasons	24	16
Problems with access or transport	12	1
Other		11
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>28</i>

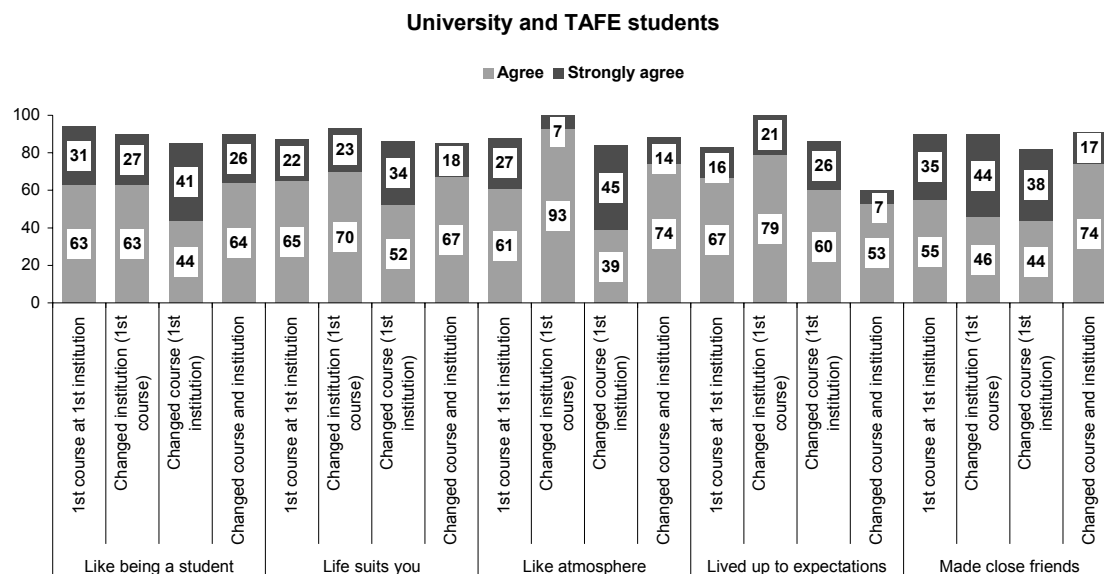
Twenty-three per cent of students who had not planned to participate in post-secondary study indicated that they left because they wanted to get a job, apprenticeship or traineeship, compared with 10% of those who did plan to study.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, 38% of students who had initially enrolled at TAFE cited a desire for employment or an apprenticeship or traineeship as their main reason for deferring study compared to 8% of university students, although it should be noted that deferral was relatively uncommon among TAFE students.

### Changes during first year - satisfaction and problems

Those students who were still studying were classified as having remained in their first course at their first institution (no change, n=3260), changed institution (n=12), having changed course (n=57), or changed both course and institution during their first year of study (n=27). Due to the small numbers in some of these groups, a comparison between students at universities and TAFE colleges and other providers was not possible. The comparison of the satisfaction and problems faced by these groups of students should be interpreted with caution. The levels of agreement with satisfaction items of these different groups are displayed in Figure 9.

It is interesting to note that although it would be expected that those students who did not experience any change to their enrolment would have had more time to settle in and meet their fellow students, the highest levels of agreement to the item 'You have made close friends' was reported by the group of students who had changed both course and institution. This group of students also reported the lowest levels of agreement to the item 'Student life has lived up to your expectations'—given the significant changes these students had undergone in their first year of tertiary education it is not surprising that they should report lower satisfaction with this aspect of their experience.



**Figure 9** Satisfaction with aspects of tertiary student life, by changes to first year enrolment

When reporting multiple sources of difficulty during the year, 9% of students who had remained in their first course at their first institution (no changes) reported problems with fitting in and making friends compared with 16% of students who had changed course and 13% of students who changed course and institution. Twelve per cent of students who had changed course and institution reported problems with paying fees, compared to 18% of students who had changed course and 24% of those who had remained in their first course at their first institution.

A chi-squared analysis of the main problems nominated by students who remained in their first course at their first institution, changed course, changed institution or changed both course and institutions found a significant association between these changes and problems reported by students in their first year of study ( $\chi^2_{(27)} = 55.66, p = 0.001$ ).

This finding was driven largely by the greater proportion of students who had changed course than other students who reported other problems as their main source of difficulty (12% of those who changed course, compared with 5% of those who changed course and institution, 3% of those who had no changes, and none of those who changed institution – Table 19). Students who changed institution were more likely than other students to indicate that they had experienced no real difficulties during the year (62%, compared with 21% of those with no changes, 23% of those who changed course, and 26% of those who changed course and institution). Students who changed institution formed a small group and, as discussed previously, the most common reason given by them for moving to another institution was the better quality education provided by the second institution, a predominantly positive reason for change that is in line with their reports of no major difficulty during their first year.

**Table 19 Difficulties experienced during first year of tertiary study-multiple responses and main area of difficulty, by changes to first year enrolment**

Area of difficulty	No change %	Changed institution %	Changed course %	Changed course and institution %
<b>Multiple responses</b>				
Paying fees or any other study costs	24	0	18	12
Juggling work and study commitments	47	27	43	44
Course was more difficult than expected	32	0	43	19
Conflict between family commitments and study	16	0	17	13
Caring for children or other family members	4	0	9	0
Balancing personal relationships with study	29	8	29	27
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	9	0	16	13
Finding time for other commitments	41	8	33	34
Other	4	0	6	13
<b>Main area of difficulty</b>				
No real difficulties	21	62	23	27
Paying fees or any other study costs	13	0	7	10
Juggling work and study commitments	26	27	16	22
Course was more difficult than expected	11	0	12	14
Conflict between family commitments and study	1	0	4	0
Caring for children or other family members	<1	0	2	0
Balancing personal relationships with study	9	8	14	11
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	1	0	4	0
Finding time for other commitments	15	0	8	10
Other	3	0	12	5

## Summary

The results presented in the first section of this chapter showed that the vast majority of first year tertiary students remained in their initial course at their initial institution. Relatively small proportions of students changed course or institution (2% and 1%, respectively), while greater numbers withdrew or deferred from study (slightly more than 6% and 4%, respectively). There were significant associations between these changes to initial enrolments and a number of individual, background and current environment characteristics, such as plans for post-secondary education, parents' educational attainment and type of university attended. There were no significant associations between the outcomes tested (changing course, changing institution, deferring study or withdrawing from study) and students' gender.

The second section reported on the reasons given by students for changes to their initial enrolments (changing course or institution) and for cessation of study (withdrawal or deferral of study) during their first year. Overall, the reason most frequently reported as being the main reason for changing institutions was that the second institution provided better quality education than the initial institution, a reason that can be interpreted as predominantly positive. For those who changed course, the most commonly reported main reason for the change was that they had simply not liked the first course. For both those students who had withdrawn from study and those who had deferred their study, the reason most frequently nominated as the main reason for their decision was that their course had turned out to be not what they wanted. It is of concern that these students have elected to withdraw from study or defer rather than seek an alternative course or institution, although they may return to study that is more in line with their interests and expectations at some later point in time.

## 5. THE FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATION EQUITY GROUPS

This chapter examines the first year experiences of six groups of students, previously nominated by the Commonwealth as the targets for equity planning due to their history of disadvantage in further education, particularly in relation to access and participation at universities. These groups are:

- students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds;
- students from rural and isolated areas;
- students with disabilities;
- students from non-English speaking backgrounds;
- women (especially women in ‘non-traditional’ areas of study); and
- Indigenous Australians.

### Students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds

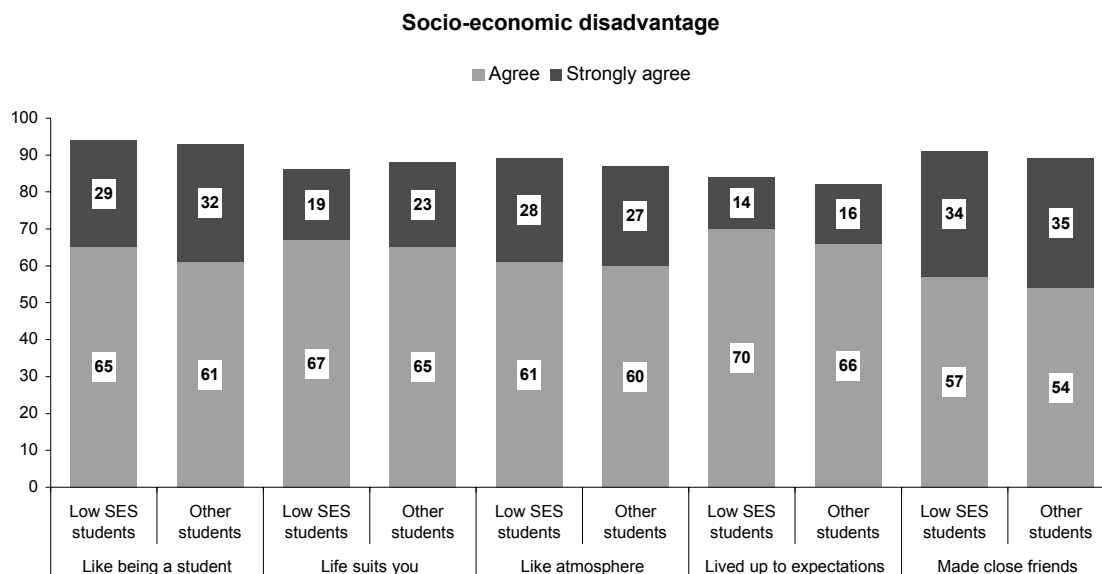
For equity purposes, institutions identify the socio-economic status of students using the postcode of the student’s permanent home residence upon enrolment. Postcodes that fall within the lowest quartile of the Index of Education and Occupation (SEIFA) are defined as being socio-economically disadvantaged. For the current report, home postcodes provided during the first wave of the survey in 1998 were used to identify those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. There were 895 students who met the criteria for socioeconomic disadvantage, representing slightly more than 20% of the tertiary sample. The outcomes of the initial enrolments of these students are presented in Table 20.

**Table 20 Outcomes of first year enrolments, by socio-economic disadvantage**

Outcome of enrolment in first year		Students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds	Other students
		%	%
Current first year students	Remain in first course at first institution	79	82
	First course at second institution	<1	<1
	Second course at first institution	1	1
	Second course at second institution	1	1
Non-current students	Withdrew from study	6	6
	Deferred from study	4	4
	Completed initial course	8	6

Chi-squared analyses found no significant differences in the outcomes of first year enrolments for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, although there may be some small differences in the proportion of these students who had completed their first course, which may be related to the level of qualification they were studying towards.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> As noted previously, ‘completion’ as an outcome of initial enrolment was not tested, as it is limited by type and length of the qualification in which the student is enrolled.



**Figure 10 Satisfaction with aspects of tertiary student life, by socio-economic disadvantage**

Students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds did not appear to be any less satisfied with their experiences during their first year of tertiary study than other students. The small differences in levels of agreement with the satisfaction items shown in Figure 10 were mostly in the low socio-economic status students' favour—for instance 91% of students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds agreed that they had made close friends, compared to 89% of other students.

Students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds reported difficulties in most areas more frequently than other students when reporting multiple difficulties during their first year (Table 21). However, a chi-squared analysis of the main problem nominated by students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds compared with other students failed to reach significance; there was no association between the main problem reported by these students and their socio-economic background despite an apparent trend for more of those students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds to indicate that their main area of difficulty had been financial—paying course fees and other study-related expenses.

**Table 21 Difficulties experienced during first year of tertiary study-multiple responses and main area of difficulty, by socio-economic disadvantage**

Area of difficulty	Students from a socio-economically disadvantaged background	Other students
	%	%
<b>Was a difficulty</b>		
Paying fees or any other study costs	27	23
Juggling work and study commitments	47	47
Course was more difficult than expected	33	32
Conflict between family commitments and study	20	15
Caring for children or other family members	4	4
Balancing personal relationships with study	30	28
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	11	9
Finding time for other commitments	42	40
Other	3	4
<b>Main area of difficulty</b>		
No real difficulties	22	21
Paying fees or any other study costs	16	11
Juggling work and study commitments	24	27
Course was more difficult than expected	10	12
Conflict between family commitments and study	1	1
Caring for children or other family members	0	<1
Balancing personal relationships with study	9	9
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	1	1
Finding time for other commitments	14	15
Other	3	3

### Students from rural and isolated backgrounds

For equity purposes, students defined as being from rural and/or isolated locations are those students whose permanent home address (supplied upon enrolment) is identified as rural or isolated according to one of two classification systems—the Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas Classification (RRMAC 1991 Census Edition), or the RRMA 1996 classification of postcodes.

In the current report, students whose home postcode in 1998 was classified as a large Provincial city, small Provincial city, other Provincial area or Remote (including very remote) according to a classification system developed by Jones (2002) were regarded as coming from a rural or isolated location background.<sup>6</sup> In total, 1050 students had home postcodes in these classifications, representing 26% of the tertiary sample. The outcomes of initial enrolments for students from rural and isolated location backgrounds are presented in Table 22.

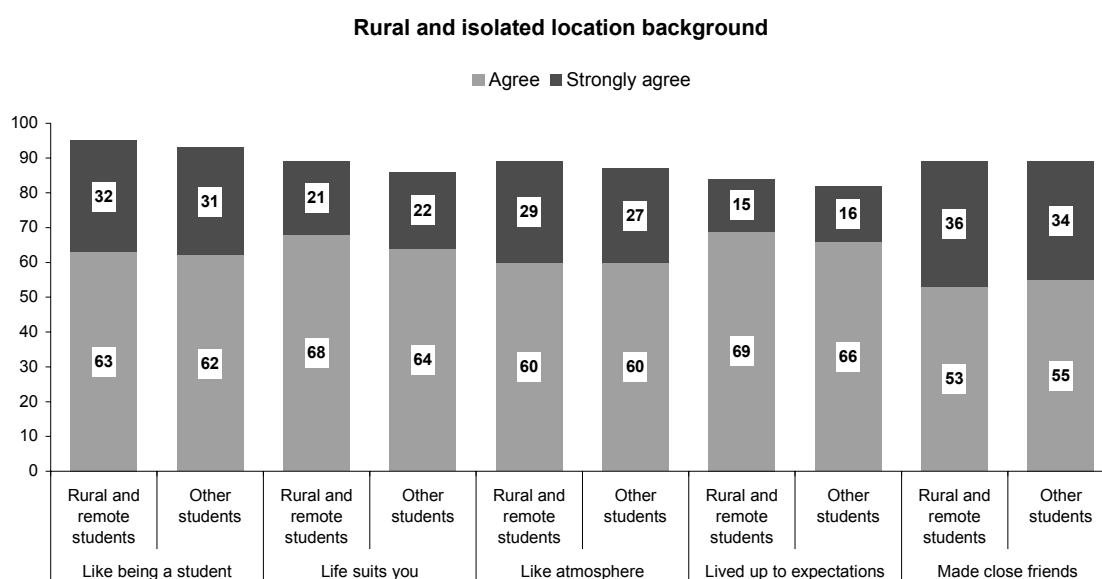
<sup>6</sup> These classifications correspond to the RRMA population limits for rural and remote zones.



**Table 22 Outcomes of first year enrolments, by rural and isolated location background**

Outcome of enrolment in first year		Students from rural and isolated backgrounds	Other students
		%	%
Current first year students	Remain in first course at first institution	81	81
	First course at second institution	<1	<1
	Second course at first institution	2	1
	Second course at second institution	<1	1
Non-current students	Withdrew from study	6	7
	Deferred from study	4	4
	Completed initial course	7	6

Although the differences in Table 22 appear quite small, further analyses indicated that students from a rural or isolated background were significantly less likely than other students to change institutions during their first year ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 4.709$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ). It should be noted that while this difference is statistically significant, considering the small number of students who changed institution overall, it is unlikely to be a substantial difference. Differences in the rates of changing courses, withdrawing or deferring from study were not significant.

**Figure 11 Satisfaction with aspects of tertiary student life, by rural and isolated location background**

Ninety-five per cent of students from a rural and isolated location background agreed that they liked being a student and 89% agreed that student life suited them (Figure 11). For students not in this equity group, the corresponding levels of agreement to these items were 93% and 86%, respectively. Levels of agreement to the item 'You have made close friends' were the same for rural and isolated students and other students.

In terms of the difficulties they may have faced during their first year of tertiary study, 28% of the rural and isolated students nominated paying for course fees or other study-related expenses and 43% reported problems finding time for other commitments when reporting multiple difficulties during their first year, while 33% of the non-rural students indicated that they had found that the course was more difficult than they had expected (Table 23).

**Table 23 Difficulties experienced during first year of tertiary study-multiple responses and main area of difficulty, by rural and isolated location background**

Area of difficulty	Students from a rural and isolated location background	Other students
	%	%
<b>Was a difficulty</b>		
Paying fees or any other study costs	28	22
Juggling work and study commitments	47	47
Course was more difficult than expected	29	33
Conflict between family commitments and study	17	16
Caring for children or other family members	4	4
Balancing personal relationships with study	29	28
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	9	10
Finding time for other commitments	43	39
Other	3	4
<b>Main area of difficulty</b>		
No real difficulties	19	22
Paying fees or any other study costs	15	11
Juggling work and study commitments	24	27
Course was more difficult than expected	9	12
Conflict between family commitments and study	2	1
Caring for children or other family members	<1	<1
Balancing personal relationships with study	10	9
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	1	1
Finding time for other commitments	16	14
Other	3	3

A chi-squared analysis of the main problems nominated by students who were from rural or remote location backgrounds and by other students was significant ( $\chi^2_{(9)} = 26.05, p = 0.002$ ). As might be expected from the multiple problems nominated by these two groups of students, a greater proportion of students from rural or remote location backgrounds than other students reported problems paying their course fees or other study-related costs as their main source of difficulty (15% of rural or remote students, compared with 11% of those from other areas). Students from rural or remote location backgrounds were also less likely than other students to indicate that finding the course more difficult than they had expected had been their main problem (9% and 12%, respectively).

### Students with disabilities

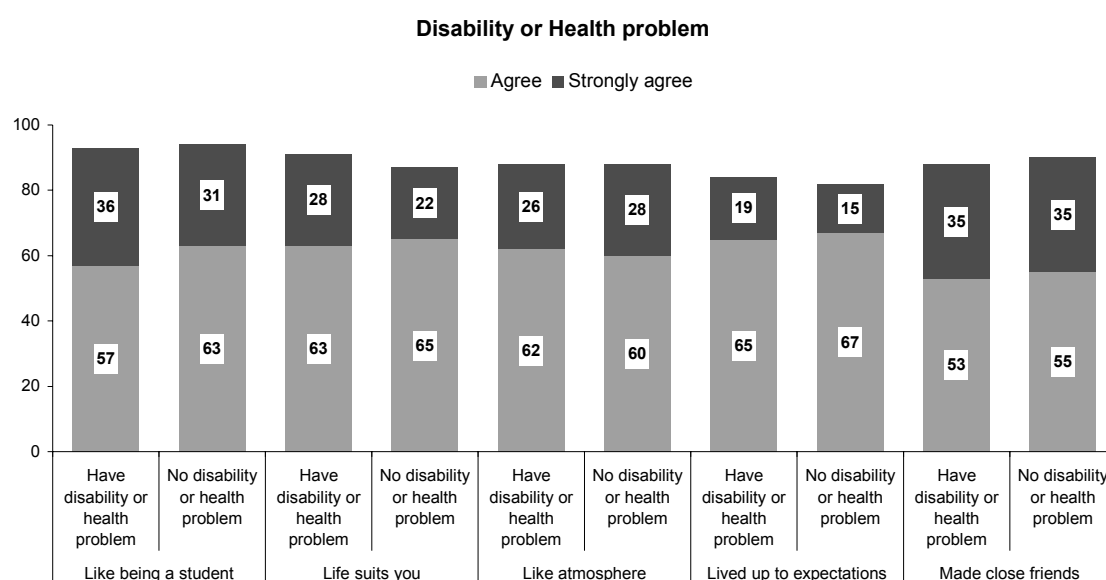
Students participating in higher education who have a disability are defined using a self-identification question upon enrolment, rather than by meeting stringent criteria as is the case in primary and secondary school. For the current report, inclusion in this equity group was based on students' responses to a question regarding whether they suffered from a disability or health problem that limits the amount or type of work they are able to do.<sup>7</sup> Five per cent of the tertiary sample (219 students), indicated that they had a disability or chronic health problem, which is slightly higher than the access share reported in James *et al* (2004). The first year outcomes for these students are presented in Table 24.

<sup>7</sup> The student enrolment forms typically ask whether students have a disability, impairment or long-term medical condition that may affect their studies.

**Table 24 Outcomes of first year enrolments, by disability status**

Outcome of enrolment in first year		Students with disabilities %	Other students %
Current first year students	Remain in first course at first institution	83	81
	First course at second institution	<1	<1
	Second course at first institution	2	1
	Second course at second institution	0	1
Non-current students	Withdrew from study	5	7
	Deferred from study	2	4
	Completed initial course	8	6

There were no significant differences in the outcomes of first year enrolments for students with disabilities, although there was a trend towards fewer students in this group to defer from study.

**Figure 12 Satisfaction with aspects of tertiary student life, students with disabilities**

In terms of their satisfaction with various aspects of student life, students with disabilities did not differ greatly from other students in their agreement with the items 'You like being a student' or 'You have made close friends'. The small difference noted in responses to the other satisfaction items suggested that students with disabilities may be slightly more satisfied with their first year experiences than other students; for instance, 91% of students with a disability agreed that student life suited them, compared to 87% of other students.

**Table 25 Difficulties experienced during first year of tertiary study-multiple responses and main area of difficulty, by disability status**

Area of difficulty	Students with a disability or chronic health problem	Other students
	%	%
<b>Was a difficulty</b>		
Paying fees or any other study costs	32	23
Juggling work and study commitments	54	46
Course was more difficult than expected	30	32
Conflict between family commitments and study	22	16
Caring for children or other family members	9	4
Balancing personal relationships with study	21	28
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	14	9
Finding time for other commitments	47	40
Other	4	4
<b>Main area of difficulty</b>		
No real difficulties	18	21
Paying fees or any other study costs	15	12
Juggling work and study commitments	28	26
Course was more difficult than expected	9	11
Conflict between family commitments and study	3	1
Caring for children or other family members	0	<1
Balancing personal relationships with study	8	9
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	1	1
Finding time for other commitments	16	15
Other	3	3

As shown in Table 25, when reporting multiple problems, 54% of students with a disability or chronic health problem reported difficulties juggling work and study commitments, 47% with finding time for other commitments, and 32% with paying course fees. For other students, the proportions reporting problems with these same areas were 46%, 40% and 23%, respectively.

A chi-squared analysis of the main problems nominated by students with a disability or health problem and other students failed to reach significance, indicating that there was no association between membership of this particular equity group and the main problems faced by students during their first year. It may be that the list of difficulties presented did not include areas that are more likely to be problems for students with a disability or health problem, such as missing classes and getting behind in work, physical access to buildings or transport, or finding helpful note-takers and 'study buddies'.

### Students from non-English speaking backgrounds

The definition of non-English speaking background in terms of higher education equity groups differs from that commonly used in the media and in LSAY research into educational and labour market outcomes.<sup>8</sup> In order to be considered as coming from a non-English speaking background for equity purposes, a student must:

- be born in a country other than Australia (regardless of whether that country is predominantly English-speaking or not);
- speak a language other than English at home; and

<sup>8</sup> Although the term 'language background other than English' is the preferred term, the term non-English speaking background is used here to correspond with the terms and definitions used in the identification and review of the equity groups.

- have been in Australia for less than ten years at the time of their commencement of higher education (meaning for this sample that those who arrived in Australia prior to 1992 would not be considered as coming from a non-English speaking background).

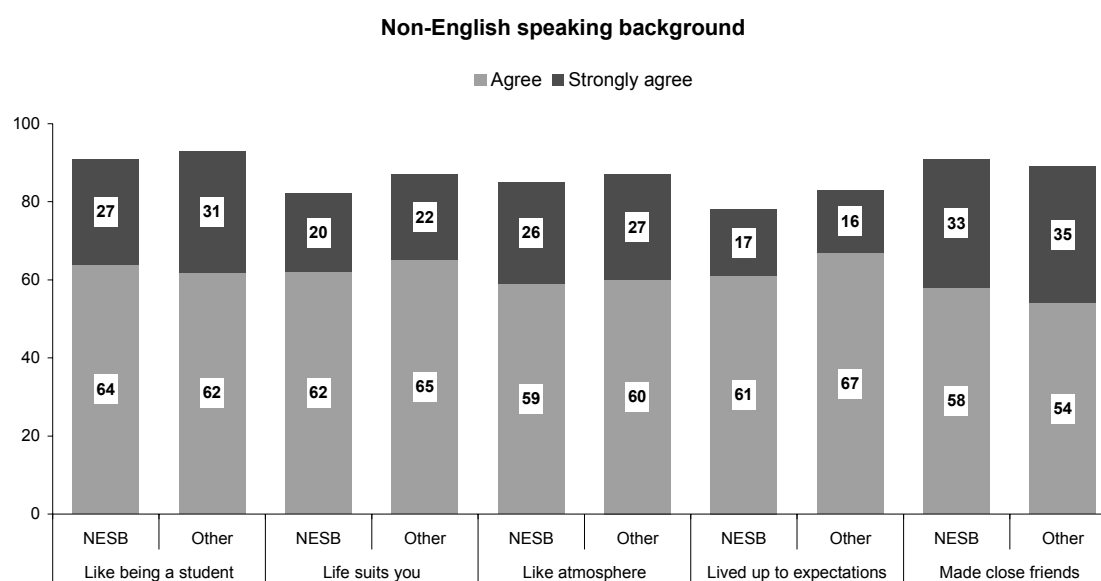
For this group of young people, this resulted in 103 students being identified as coming from a non-English speaking background, close to 3% of the tertiary sample. Outcomes of their initial enrolments in tertiary education are presented in Table 26.

**Table 26 Outcomes of first year enrolments, by language background status**

Outcome of enrolment in first year		Students from non-English speaking backgrounds	Other students
		%	%
Current first year students	Remain in first course at first institution	91	81
	First course at second institution	0	<1
	Second course at first institution	0	2
	Second course at second institution	1	1
Non-current students	Withdrew from study	3	7
	Deferred from study	1	4
	Completed initial course	5	6

A greater proportion of students from non-English speaking backgrounds than of other students had not experienced any changes to their original enrolments, remaining in their first course at their first institution. It appeared that more students who were not from non-English speaking backgrounds had withdrawn from study during their first year, although subsequent analyses indicated that this difference was not statistically significant.

The high retention in original enrolments of students from non-English speaking backgrounds relative to their English-speaking background peers has been reported in other analyses (see James et al, 2004). This finding is of particular interest in light of the results of the satisfaction items. Although students from non-English speaking backgrounds may be more likely to remain in their initial course and their initial institution, they do not appear to be more satisfied with their experiences, reporting slightly lower levels of agreement with all satisfaction items apart from 'You have made close friends' (Figure 13).



**Figure 13 Satisfaction with aspects of tertiary student life, by language background status**

**Table 27 Difficulties experienced during first year of tertiary study-multiple responses and main area of difficulty, by language background status**

Area of difficulty	Students from a non-English speaking background %	Other students %
<b>Was a difficulty</b>		
Paying fees or any other study costs	25	24
Juggling work and study commitments	36	47
Course was more difficult than expected	37	32
Conflict between family commitments and study	10	16
Caring for children or other family members	2	4
Balancing personal relationships with study	19	29
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	11	9
Finding time for other commitments	30	41
Other	3	4
<b>Main area of difficulty</b>		
No real difficulties	24	21
Paying fees or any other study costs	12	12
Juggling work and study commitments	24	26
Course was more difficult than expected	17	11
Conflict between family commitments and study	1	1
Caring for children or other family members	0	<1
Balancing personal relationships with study	6	9
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	2	1
Finding time for other commitments	12	15
Other	3	3

When reporting multiple difficulties during their first year, 30% of students from non-English speaking backgrounds reported difficulties finding time for other commitments and 19% reported problems balancing personal relationships with study, compared with 41% and 29% of other students, respectively (Table 27). A chi-squared analysis of the main problems nominated by students from non-English speaking backgrounds and other students, however, failed to reach significance, indicating that there was no association between membership of this equity group and the main problems faced by students during their first year.

### **Female students in non-traditional fields of study**

Although female participation in higher education is now higher than that of males, enrolments in TAFE colleges, and in some broad fields of study are not as equal. Females enrolled in broad fields of study in which the proportion of female enrolments was less than 40% (15% for Engineering, where enrolments were extremely low) were targeted as an equity group. For the current tertiary sample, this included 141 female students enrolled in the broad fields of study of Agriculture, Environment and Related Studies (37% female enrolment), Architecture and Building (30% female enrolment), Engineering and Related Technologies (10% female enrolment) and Information Technology (19% female enrolment).

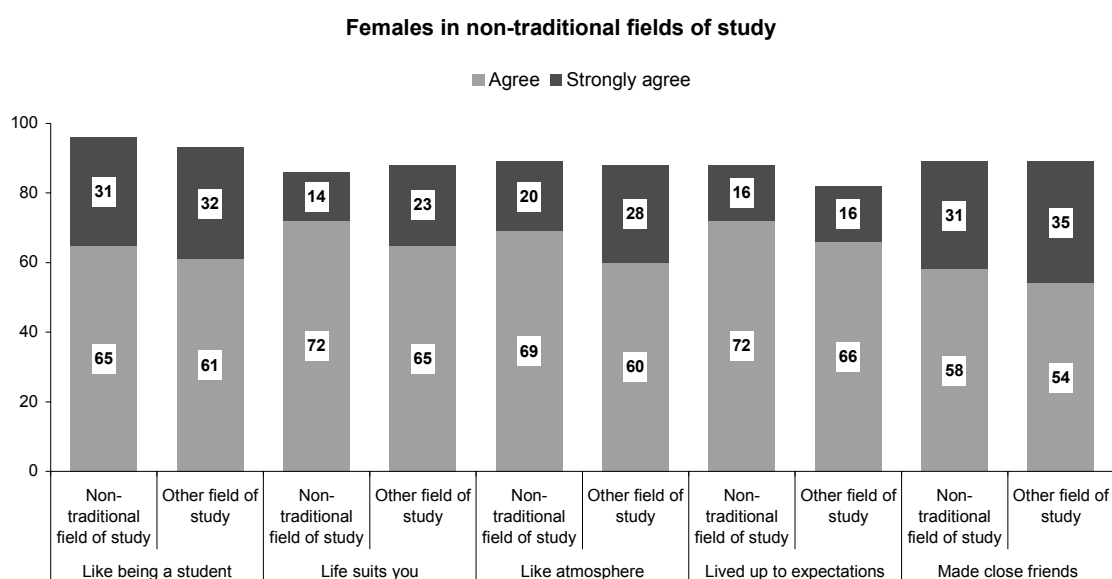
**Table 28 Outcome of first year enrolments for female students in non-traditional fields of study**

Outcome of enrolment in first year		Female students in non-traditional fields of study %	Other female students %
Current first year students	Remain in first course at first institution	85	81
	First course at second institution	2	<1
	Second course at first institution	1	1
	Second course at second institution	0	1
Non-current students	Withdrew from study	7	6
	Deferred from study	3	5
	Completed initial course	3	6

Although there appeared to be a tendency for fewer female students enrolled in non-traditional fields of study to defer their study, further analyses found no statistically significant differences between the outcomes of the two groups of female students.

The greater proportion of females enrolled in more traditional fields of study who completed their initial course is likely to be related to where they were studying—female enrolments in TAFE courses (typically of shorter duration than university courses) are generally higher in areas such as Food, Hospitality and Personal Services (85% of female enrolments in this field of study were at a TAFE).

In terms of their satisfaction with various aspects of student life, 96% of female students in non-traditional fields of study agreed that they liked being a student and 88% agreed that study had lived up to their expectations, compared with 93% and 82%, respectively, of other female students (Figure 14). These differences, in combination with the lack of a difference in agreement to the item ‘You have made close friends’ suggests that female students who are enrolled in non-traditional fields of study are not finding their minority status particularly onerous; on the whole, they are enjoying student life and are fitting in with their fellow students.

**Figure 14 Satisfaction with aspects of tertiary student life, females in non-traditional fields of study**

**Table 29 Difficulties experienced during first year of tertiary study-multiple responses and main area of difficulty for female students in non-traditional fields of study**

Area of difficulty	Female students in non-traditional fields of study %	Other female students %
<b>Was a difficulty</b>		
Paying fees or any other study costs	20	25
Juggling work and study commitments	45	49
Course was more difficult than expected	34	32
Conflict between family commitments and study	19	16
Caring for children or other family members	5	4
Balancing personal relationships with study	32	31
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	12	10
Finding time for other commitments	40	40
Other	4	3
No real difficulties	23	21
<b>Main area of difficulty</b>		
Paying fees or any other study costs	9	13
Juggling work and study commitments	21	28
Course was more difficult than expected	13	10
Conflict between family commitments and study	1	1
Caring for children or other family members	0	<1
Balancing personal relationships with study	12	10
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	0	1
Finding time for other commitments	17	14
Other	4	3

There were no large differences in the multiple problems reported by female students in non-traditional fields of study and those in more traditional fields of study. Twenty per cent of female students in the areas of Agriculture and Environment, Architecture and Building, Engineering and Information Technology reported problems in paying fees or other costs, compared with 25% of other female students.

A chi-squared analysis of the main problems nominated by female students in Agriculture and Environment, Architecture and Building, Engineering and Information Technology courses and other female students failed to reach significance; the main problems reported by female students in Agriculture and Environment, Architecture and Building, Engineering and Information Technology courses did not differ from the main problems reported by female students in more traditional fields of study.

#### *Male students in non-traditional fields of study*

In their review of the higher education equity groups James et al (2004) highlighted growing concern at the dwindling enrolments of male students in some fields of study, particularly in Education and Health, with Nursing courses of special concern. They suggested that male students in these fields also be considered an equity group, particularly in light of the Australian Government's identification of these areas as priority fields for recruitment. In the current tertiary sample, there were 97 males enrolled in Health courses (26% of enrolments) and 35 in Education (20% of enrolments).<sup>9</sup> Of the male students in the Health courses, only 6 were enrolled in Nursing, resulting in a total of 41 male students in non-traditional areas.

<sup>9</sup> Examinations of gender differences in the enrolments in the broad field of study of Health have traditionally been complicated by the fact that this area encompasses such courses as Medicine and Dental studies which have tended to be male-dominated, while other courses, such as Nursing, Public Health and Complementary Therapies, have been more female-dominated.



**Table 30 Outcome of first year enrolments, males in non-traditional fields of study**

Outcome of enrolment in first year		Male students in non-traditional fields of study %	Other male students %
Current first year students	Remain in first course at first institution	86	81
	First course at second institution	0	<1
	Second course at first institution	0	2
	Second course at second institution	0	1
Non-current students	Withdrew from study	9	6
	Deferred from study	5	3
	Completed initial course	0	7

None of the males in non-traditional fields of study had changed course or institutions, but not all of them continued to study. Although a slightly greater proportion of the male students in non-traditional fields of study than other male students withdrew from study during their first year, further analyses indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between the outcomes of the two groups of male students.<sup>10</sup>

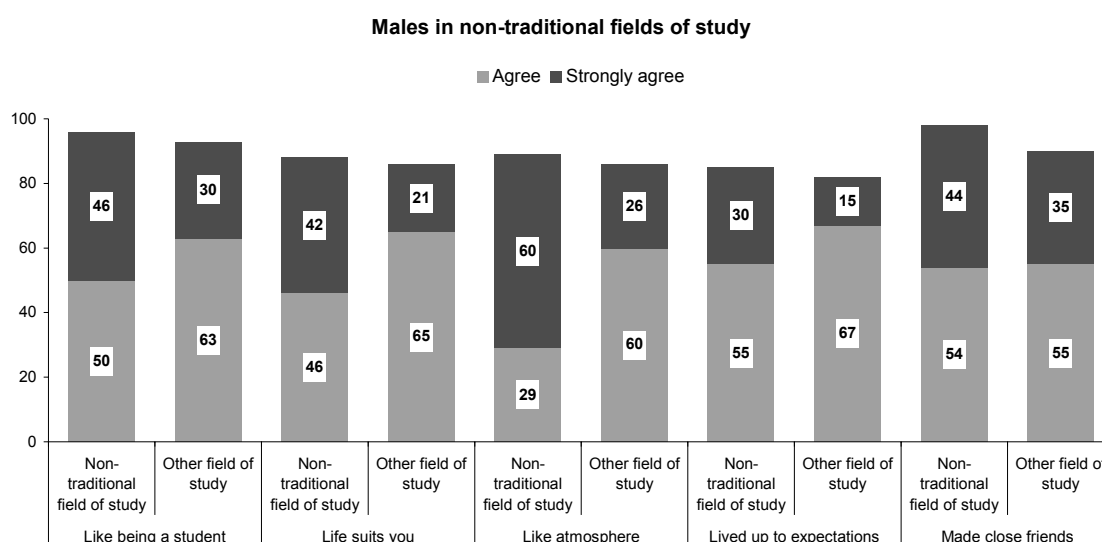
**Figure 15 Satisfaction with aspects of tertiary student life for male students in non-traditional fields of study**

Figure 15 shows the level of agreement on the satisfaction with aspects of student life items for male students in non-traditional fields of study (Education and Nursing) compared with male students in other fields of study. Some small differences in favour of male students in non-traditional fields of study are noted on all of the items, with males in these areas reporting higher levels of agreement than other male students. The greatest difference is in agreement with the item 'You have made close friends', with 98% of males in Education and Nursing course agreeing or strongly agreeing to this item, compared to 90% of males in other, more traditional fields of study.

<sup>10</sup> Given the small number of male students in non-traditional fields of study, it is not surprising that relatively small differences failed to reach significance.

**Table 31 Difficulties experienced during first year of tertiary study-multiple responses and main area of difficulty for male students in non-traditional fields of study**

Area of difficulty	Male students in non-traditional fields of study %	Other male students %
<b>Was a difficulty</b>		
Paying fees or any other study costs	33	22
Juggling work and study commitments	49	44
Course was more difficult than expected	29	33
Conflict between family commitments and study	45	15
Caring for children or other family members	22	3
Balancing personal relationships with study	43	26
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	18	9
Finding time for other commitments	60	40
Other	4	4
<b>Main area of difficulty</b>		
No real difficulties	5	22
Paying fees or any other study costs	7	12
Juggling work and study commitments	40	24
Course was more difficult than expected	8	12
Conflict between family commitments and study	9	1
Caring for children or other family members	0	<1
Balancing personal relationships with study	12	8
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	0	1
Finding time for other commitments	17	16
Other	3	3

Forty-five per cent of male students in the areas of Education and Nursing reported difficulties with conflict between family commitments and study, and 43% with balancing personal relationships and study when reporting multiple areas of difficulty during their first year of study. For male students in more traditional fields of study, 15% reported difficulties with conflict between family commitments and study, and 26% with balancing personal relationships and study (Table 31).

A chi-squared analysis of the main problems reported by male students in non-traditional fields of study and other male students was significant ( $\chi^2_{(9)} = 23.52, p = 0.005$ ), although the small number of male students in non-traditional areas should be taken into consideration when interpreting such differences. This finding was driven largely by the different proportions of male students in Education and Nursing and male students in other areas of study who nominated conflict between family commitments and their study as their main problem (9% and 1%, respectively). Male students in non-traditional fields of study also reported having no real problems during the year less often than other male students.

### **Students with an Indigenous background**

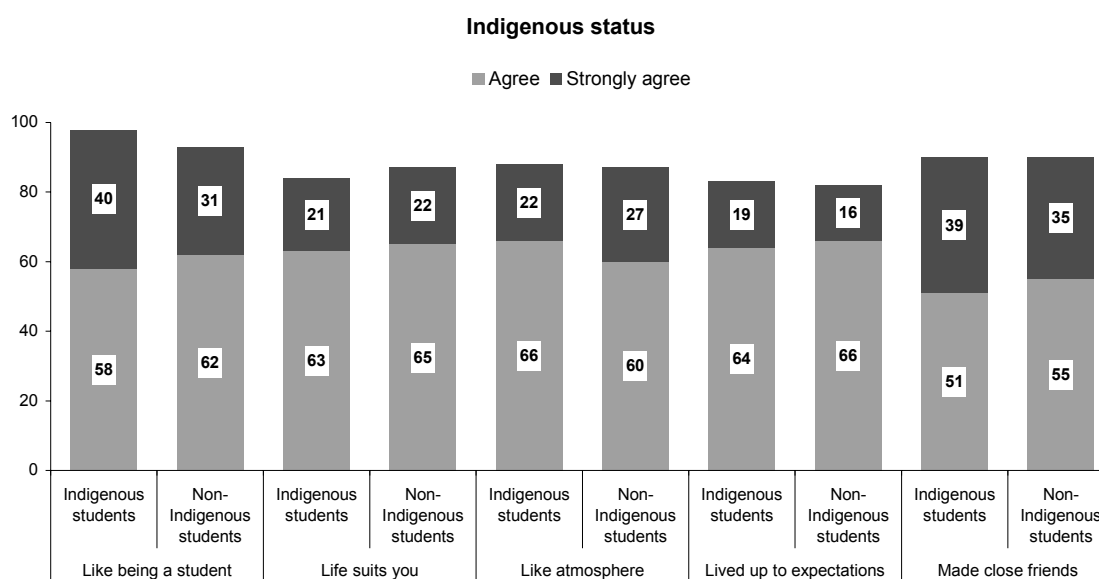
Although apparent retention rates for secondary school students with Indigenous backgrounds have increased over the past few years (ABS, 2004), Indigenous students continue to be underrepresented in tertiary education and are ‘the most disadvantaged in relation to school completion, and among the most disadvantaged in relation to progression to higher education’ (McMillan & Marks, 2003, p. 24). The most recent review of equity groups did not include analysis of the access and performance of Indigenous students (James et al, 2004). Definition of

Indigenous status is based on students' self-identification. In the current tertiary sample, 51 students reported an Indigenous background, representing one per cent of the sample.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 32 Outcome of first year enrolments, by Indigenous status**

Outcome of enrolment in first year		Indigenous students	Non-Indigenous students
		%	%
Current first year students	Remain in first course at first institution	76	81
	First course at second institution	0	<1
	Second course at first institution	0	2
	Second course at second institution	0	1
Non-current students	Withdrew from study	17	6
	Deferred from study	4	4
	Completed initial course	4	6

None of the Indigenous students reported changing courses or institutions during their first year of tertiary study; however proportionally more of the Indigenous students had withdrawn from study over the year (Table 32). Chi-squared analyses indicated that this difference was statistically significant ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 10.374, p = 0.001$ ). Of the nine Indigenous students who withdrew from study, one-third nominated 'The course turned out to be not what you wanted' as their main reason for withdrawing, a proportion similar to that of all students who withdrew from study (see Table 17, Chapter 3).



**Figure 16 Satisfaction with aspects of tertiary student life, by Indigenous status**

Few differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in responses to the satisfaction items were found, although 98% of Indigenous students agreed that they liked being a student, compared with 93% of non-Indigenous students (Figure 16).

<sup>11</sup> At one per cent, the proportion of Indigenous students participating in tertiary study is lower than has been reported in other studies. This may be related to differential attrition from the original sample. Readers interested in these issues are referred to the LSAY Technical Paper, *Attrition Bias in the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth* (Rothman, *in press*).

**Table 33 Difficulties experienced during first year of tertiary study-multiple responses and main area of difficulty, by Indigenous status**

Area of difficulty	Indigenous students %	Non-Indigenous students %
<b>Was a difficulty</b>		
Paying fees or any other study costs	39	23
Juggling work and study commitments	40	47
Course was more difficult than expected	29	32
Conflict between family commitments and study	7	16
Caring for children or other family members	2	4
Balancing personal relationships with study	18	29
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	7	9
Finding time for other commitments	50	40
Other	4	4
<b>Main area of difficulty</b>		
No real difficulties	14	22
Paying fees or any other study costs	24	12
Juggling work and study commitments	21	26
Course was more difficult than expected	4	11
Conflict between family commitments and study	2	1
Caring for children or other family members	2	<1
Balancing personal relationships with study	1	10
Fitting in with other students and making new friends	0	1
Finding time for other commitments	28	14
Other	4	3

When reporting multiple sources of difficulty during their first year, 39% of Indigenous students reported difficulties in paying course fees and other study-related costs, and 50% reported problems finding time for other commitments, compared to 23% and 40%, respectively, of non-Indigenous students (Table 33).

There was a significant association between the main difficulties identified by students and their Indigenous status ( $\chi^2_{(9)} = 23.13, p = 0.006$ ). This association between Indigenous status and main source of difficulty was driven largely by differences in the proportions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students who were caring for dependent children or other family members: Indigenous students nominated difficulties in caring for children or other family members as their main problem more often than non-Indigenous students (2% and 0.3% of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, respectively). Differences were also noted in the proportions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students who nominated paying fees and finding time for other commitments as their main source of difficulty, although these differences made smaller contributions to the chi-squared statistic.

The financial difficulties faced by Indigenous students in their transition to tertiary education may be related to dual equity group membership. James et al (2004) reported that over a third of Indigenous students in higher education were members of two equity groups, most commonly combining an Indigenous background with coming from a rural or isolated location or from a low socioeconomic background. For the current sample, eight of the Indigenous students were from low socioeconomic backgrounds (16%) and 19 also met criteria for inclusion in the rural/isolated background equity group (37%). The overlap between the Indigenous and socio-economically disadvantaged equity groups is the second largest for this sample, surpassed only by the overlap between the remote or isolated students and those coming from a socio-economically

disadvantage background (close to 40% of low SES group were also from a remote or isolated location background). Due to the small size of these groups, further analysis of the satisfaction, difficulties and first year outcomes of students who met criteria for multiple equity group membership was not possible. A situation can easily be imagined, however, in which a student from a low socioeconomic background and rural location must move to a new community in order to attend the tertiary institution of their choice. Costs involved in living away from home, in addition to study-related costs, may lead to financial stress, while leaving behind friends and family and difficulty finding time to study, work and make new friends can combine to make the transition to tertiary education a difficult one for these students.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented information on the first year experiences, outcomes, satisfaction and problems, of six groups of young people identified as being underrepresented in further education, particularly at universities.

Significant differences in the outcomes of first year enrolments were found for two of the student groups: Students from rural and isolated location backgrounds were less likely to change institutions during their first year of tertiary study than other students (although this difference was not large), and Indigenous students were more likely to withdraw from study during their first year, compared to non-Indigenous students.

Students from most of the equity groups tended to report higher agreement with the satisfaction items than other students, although these differences were not tested for statistical significance. Some small differences in areas of greatest difficulty nominated by students in the equity groups were also noted, including differences for students from rural or remote location backgrounds and Indigenous students.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The current report used data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth to focus on the experiences of those young Australians who go on to further study at universities or TAFE colleges (in non-apprenticeship courses) immediately after completing Year 12. The focus was the Year 9 class of 1998, and their entry to the first year of tertiary education in 2002. This is the first national study that has analysed the first year experience of both university and TAFE students within the same framework. The broad aims were three-fold:

- to describe the first year experience impressions, satisfaction and areas of difficulty for students at universities and TAFE institutions.
- to analyse the ‘outcomes’ of first experience of tertiary study—rates of deferral, withdrawal, course and institution change or persistence with first course of study for the entire sample and by various student characteristics.
- to analyse the outcomes and experiences of those students belonging to higher education equity groups — the six groups nominated by the Commonwealth as target groups for increased participation rates.

### High overall levels of satisfaction

The picture painted by those who remain in tertiary education at the end of their first year is largely positive: the vast majority of students agreed or strongly agreed that they liked being a student, that tertiary life suited them, that they enjoyed the atmosphere on campus, and that they had made close friends at their tertiary institution. A slightly lower proportion, although still over 80%, indicated that their tertiary experiences had lived up to their expectations. Of course, this highly positive picture of the first year experiences of the majority of tertiary students is skewed by the fact that the surveys were conducted towards the end of the academic year and those who had withdrawn completely from study by this time did not respond to these questions. Nonetheless, other surveys of first year students, conducted during the first semester, have found similar results (see McInnis & James, 1995; McInnis *et al.*, 2000). In terms of the difficulties reported by first year tertiary students, the positive theme continues, as 21% of current students indicated that they had had a relatively trouble-free first year, reporting no real areas of difficulty.

### Areas of difficulty

Despite these largely positive findings, there were some groups of students for whom satisfaction with aspects of their tertiary experiences was lower and who reported greater difficulty in their transitions. The related issues of paid employment and student finances, and the impact these have on the first year experiences of tertiary students, noted by previous research, were evident in the current findings. In general, higher satisfaction was expressed by those students who were not working and not looking for work, as well as by those who were working part-time, compared to students who were combining study with full-time employment.

University and TAFE students who were studying their course full-time reported a higher level of integration into the tertiary community than part-time students. This difference is likely to be driven by the greater amount of time, especially free time, that full-time students can spend on campus, interacting with their fellow students. This is in line with the argument, raised in McInnis and James (1995) and McInnis *et al* (2000), that those students who combine their study with long hours of paid employment may be missing out on the non-academic, informal benefits of tertiary study. Research in the United States by Tinto (1988) went even further, suggesting that a failure to connect socially may impede the transition and eventual incorporation of young people into the tertiary student community, placing these students at greater risk of attrition from study.

### **Juggling study and employment**

Problems juggling work and study commitments was the most commonly reported difficulty for first year students, with more than one in four students nominating this as their major source of difficulty during the year. This finding most probably reflects the prevalence of paid employment among tertiary students, with slightly more than 60% of the current sample combining their studies with part-time work and a further 6% with full-time work. Although these students have identified combining work and study as a source of difficulty during their first year, they were still enrolled which suggests that this has not, as yet, forced them to sacrifice participation in education. Financial difficulties, such as paying course fees or other study-related costs, were also a relatively common experience for this sample of tertiary students, and for certain groups of students in particular. However, it was not commonly nominated as the *main* source of difficulty faced by students in their first year of study. University students who reported that both of their parents had attended university were less likely than other university students to indicate that they had experienced financial difficulties during their first year, while such problems were more commonly reported by Indigenous students and students attending regional universities.

There is evidence of a relationship between financial stress and finding time for paid employment while remaining in study. Students who were looking for work reported more financial difficulties, such as paying course fees and other study-related costs, than students who were employed (although one in four student-workers still cited financial difficulties as their major source of difficulty). Student-workers, however, reported more difficulties in juggling work and study commitments. It is, indeed, a difficult balance to find. Tinto (1982) suggested that financial matters are likely to be a problem in terms of *if* (do I go at all?) and *where* (what can I afford?) for students. This can be a problem when the institution that is more affordable does not meet other needs or requirements of the student. 'When students' experiences are positive, they are more likely to accept greater financial burdens in order to continue attendance than when experiences are unsatisfactory' (Tinto, 1982, p. 690). In other words, paying course and other fees, purchasing books and other materials, and managing accommodation and transport costs are burdens that most students are willing to shoulder, provided that they are satisfied with their learning, mixing well with other students and feel that they are a member of a community.

Although many students may be willing and able to balance their need for an income with their need for time to learn and study, there appear to be some who find it more difficult and stressful to strike this balance, particularly during their first year of tertiary study. Further research and monitoring are needed to clarify the impact of paid employment on the transition to tertiary education and to establish how this can be addressed.

### **Withdrawal and deferral**

The results reported here suggest an association between full-time employment and withdrawal or deferral from study during the first year; however, at this point it is not possible to determine the direction of this relationship. Even where an overlap in time exists in which a student is studying full-time and working full-time, it would be difficult to claim without doubt that the employment prompted the cessation of study. It may be that some students who withdraw or defer do so for reasons unrelated to overload, investing their time in greater hours of employment in the time leading up to terminating their study so that they would have a job to go to afterwards. Although proportionally more of those students who were working full-time than those who were working part-time indicated that their main reason for withdrawing or deferring from study was difficulty in juggling study and work commitments, this was still not the main reason most commonly cited for withdrawing or deferring, even among those who were combining full-time employment and full-time study. A small proportion of students are combining study with full-time employment and are considered to be under time pressure because of this; a small proportion of this group

withdraw during their first year of study, and an even smaller proportion indicated that the time pressure—juggling work and study commitments—was their reason for doing so.

An issue perhaps of greater concern is the group of young people who terminate their education prematurely for reasons such as having lost interest in their study or having entered with no clear intention of completing. For both those students who had withdrawn from study and those who had deferred their study, the reason most frequently nominated as the main reason for their decision was that their course had turned out to be not what they wanted. Although this may, in some cases, be a positive discovery for the student, especially if they go on to find employment or education elsewhere in an area more in line with their strengths and interests, there are the matters of those students who were simply ill-prepared for the challenges of tertiary study and of the potentially high individual and institutional costs involved in withdrawal to be considered. Other research has reported that many students feel that they were not well-prepared for tertiary study, nor were they ready to choose a course (McInnis et al., 2000). This suggests that a number of young people are not making the right choice in entering their courses. Some are perhaps biding their time while waiting for a job opportunity, while others may have settled for a course in an area they are not particularly interested in or suited for and then realised their error. These issues raise questions about the suitability of the preparation and selection of students for tertiary study, and ways for both schools and tertiary institutions to better prepare, advise, select and support students.

On the other hand, attrition researchers argue that we must not overreact when faced with student attrition from further study, suggesting that a system of education that distinguishes ‘between those with the competence or interest, motivation, and drive to finish given courses of study and those who, for a variety of reasons, do not or simply will not seek to complete their courses’ is not inherently flawed, but is serving a function (Tinto, 1982, p. 695). Indeed, the current study found that there was an association between measures of interest, motivation and achievement orientation in secondary school and deferral or withdrawal from tertiary study. Withdrawal from study or from a particular institution, then, is not necessarily a failure of the system or of the individual, but can be a discovery that is in a student’s own best interests. The trick lies in ensuring that educational judgements are discriminating, not discriminatory, and that the decision to withdraw from further study is not based on marginalisation from the tertiary experience, other students or membership of a particular group.

### **Students from the equity target groups**

There has long been concern in Australia to improve enrolment levels of students from groups that traditionally have been under-represented in higher education: students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, students from rural and isolated areas, students with disabilities, students from non-English speaking backgrounds, female students in ‘non-traditional’ areas of study, and Indigenous students. Overall, this study found that the first year experiences of these groups of students, in terms of their satisfaction with various elements and the difficulties they reported, were very similar to those of other first year students. Although these groups of students may be underrepresented in terms of access to and participation in TAFE and university, once there, they appear to have experiences similar to those of other students.

The analyses indicate that, while in general the experiences of many of these young people are similar to those of other students, inequalities remain.

Differences in the outcomes of first year students from rural and isolated location backgrounds and Indigenous students are of particular concern. The results suggest that, although these students have made the first step in accessing tertiary education, they face challenges in continuing with their studies. As policy makers and institutions attempt to make tertiary education more accessible, the problems of meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student



population will increase. All students need ‘the support and help needed to ensure a reasonable chance of success’ (Power, Robertson, & Baker, 1987, p. 3), and for some students the level of support and help required may be higher than for others. This is likely to be particularly the case for those students who meet criteria for inclusion in more than one equity group, as is the case for many Indigenous, rural and low socio-economic background students. Such young people must often overcome financial difficulties in order to gain access to tertiary education, as well as facing cultural and social challenges in integrating into the tertiary education community and remaining there to complete their chosen qualifications.

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## APPENDIX 1: DESCRIPTION OF VARIABLES

*Gender:* The dichotomous variable measuring gender was derived from the respondents' self-reports in wave 1. Male respondents were coded as 0 and female respondents were coded as 1. Among the tertiary student sample, 44% were male and 56% were female.

*Year 9 Achievement:* The measure of Year 9 achievement is based on the respondents' performance on the literacy and numeracy tests that were part of the first wave of the survey. Combined scores on the literacy and numeracy tests of the entire Y98 wave 1 cohort were divided into quartiles. Those in the first quartile were coded as being in the Low achievement group, those in the second and third quartiles as Middle and those in the fourth quartile as being in the High achievement group. Fifteen per cent of the tertiary student sample were in the Low group, 49% were in the Middle group and 36% were in the High achievement group.

*Post-school study plans:* This dichotomous measure is based on respondents' replies to a question in wave 1 as to whether they had planned, at any time after leaving secondary school, to participate in further study. Those who indicated that they intended to study were coded 1, those who indicated that they had no plans to participate in further study (or who did not respond to the question) were coded 0. Eighty-eight per cent of the tertiary sample had planned to participate in some form of further study, while 12% had had no plans for further study.

*Depth of curiosity:* In wave 4 of the survey, a number of questions based on items on the Depth scale of the Ainley (1987) Curiosity questionnaire were introduced. These questions are included in Appendix 2. The cut-off for inclusion in the High Depth of curiosity group was set at a total score of 25, slightly less than the mean plus one standard deviation but corresponding to strong level of reported interest on at least five of the six questions. A dichotomous measure of High Depth was created by coding total scores at or above 25 as 1, and scores below this as 0. Thirty per cent of the tertiary sample were in the High Depth of curiosity group.

*Quality of School Life scales—Interest/Motivation, Opportunity and Achievement:* In wave 1 of the survey, respondents were presented with items from the Quality of School Life questionnaire. The items load on five scales, three of which were used in the current report. Items loading on the relevant scales are included in Appendix 2. The scores for the relevant items were summed, and the mean and standard deviation of the total score for the wave 1 cohort were established. The dichotomous measures of High Interest/Motivation, High Opportunity and High Achievement Orientation were calculated as being the mean plus one standard deviation, with respondents coded as 1 if their score was above this cut-off and 0 if it was not. In the tertiary sample, 26% were in the High Interest/Motivation group, 28% of respondents were in the High Opportunity group, and 25% were in the High Achievement Orientation group.

*Parent's education level:* This measure of parents' education was derived from respondents' reports of the qualifications held by their parents in wave 1. Those respondents who indicated that both their mother and father held a university degree or diploma were coded as 2, those who indicated that either their mother or their father held such a qualification were coded as 1 and those who indicated that neither of their parents held a university degree or diploma were coded as 0. Among the sample of tertiary students, 18% reported that both parents held a university qualification, 21% that one of their parents held a university qualification and 61% that neither parent held a university qualification.

*Secondary school sector:* Information on the school system of each respondent was collected in wave 1 of the survey. In each successive wave, respondents indicate whether they have changed secondary schools and if so, the name of the new school. For this measure, the school sector was taken from the year the respondents were in Year 12. Those who attended government secondary schools were coded 1, those in Catholic secondary schools 2, and those in non-government, non-

Catholic ('independent') secondary schools were coded as 3. In the tertiary sample, 56% had attended a government secondary school, 24% a Catholic secondary school and 18% had attended an independent secondary school for Year 12.

*Broad fields of study:* Respondents provided information on their main area of study in their tertiary course. This information was then coded using the Australian Standard Classification of Education for fields of study, as published by Australian Bureau of Statistics (2000).

*Course load:* This measure was based on respondents' indications as to whether their initial tertiary study load was full-time or part-time. The measure was coded as 1 if the load was full-time and 2 if the load was part-time. Ninety-four per cent of the tertiary sample were enrolled full-time.

*Institution:* This measure was based on information provided by respondents on the names of institutions they were attending. Respondents were coded as attending a university or a TAFE (or similar provider of further education). For analyses of outcome of initial tertiary experiences, respondents' initial institution (the institution in which they were first enrolled in tertiary education) is used. For analyses of the first year experiences in terms of satisfaction with aspects of student life and problems experienced, the most current institution (if respondents had changed their initial enrolment) was used. Using the most current institution, 72% of the tertiary sample were attending a university and 28% were attending a TAFE or similar institution.

*University groups:* This measure was created for respondents who were attending universities only, based on the names of their institutions. Respondents were coded as attending one of four groups of universities—the Group of Eight (Sydney University, University of New South Wales, University of Melbourne, Monash University, University of Queensland, University of Adelaide, University of Western Australia, and the Australian National University); the Australian Technology Network (University of Technology-Sydney, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Queensland University of Technology, University of South Australia, and Curtin University of Technology); Regional universities (Charles Sturt University, University of New England, Wollongong University, Deakin University, James Cook University, University of Tasmania, Northern Territory University, Southern Cross University, University of Ballarat, Central Queensland University, University of Southern Queensland, and University of the Sunshine Coast); and Other Universities (Macquarie University, University of Newcastle, La Trobe University, Griffith University, Flinders University, Murdoch University, University of Western Sydney, Victoria University, Edith Cowan University, University of Canberra, Australian Catholic University, Avondale College, Marcus Oldham College, Swinburne University of Technology, University of Notre Dame-Australia, Australian Maritime College, Batchelor College, and Bond University). Eighteen per cent of the tertiary sample were attending a university in the Group of Eight, 13% were at an Australian Technology Network university, 13% at a Regional university and 27% were attending a university in the Other group.

*Metropolitan and non-metropolitan TAFE institutions:* A measure was created that distinguished between TAFE institutions that were located within capital city limits—metropolitan institutions—and those outside capital city limits—non-metropolitan institutions. However, because of multiple campus institutions and the limited information available for other institutions, a large number of respondents were not able to be coded. Fifteen per cent of the tertiary sample were attending a metropolitan TAFE institution, 8% were attending a non-metropolitan TAFE institution and 5.5% of the tertiary sample were not able to be coded. The initial enrolment outcomes of the metropolitan and non-metropolitan TAFE groups are included in Table 2; however, due to the substantial proportion of uncodeable respondents, further analyses using this measure were not conducted.

*Employment status:* Respondents answer questions on their labour force participation each wave of the survey. Those who indicated that they were employed and working less than 30 hours per week were coded as 'working part-time', those who were working 30 hours or more as 'working full-time'. Those who were not employed were coded as 'looking for work' if they indicated that they were looking for a job and 'not looking for work' if they were not seeking employment. Of the tertiary student sample, 58% were employed part-time, 11% were employed full-time, less than 1% were looking for work and 30% were not looking for work.

*Equity group definitions:* The definitions used to identify these groups for funding purposes do not correspond exactly to the definitions regularly used in the LSAY program. For instance, Non-English-speaking background (NESB) students in universities are generally defined as those students who were born in any country overseas (regardless of official spoken language of said country), and who speak a language other than English at home and who have been in Australia for less than ten years. In the LSAY program, language background other than English status is assigned to any student who indicates that a language other than English is the main language spoken at home, regardless of country of birth or length of residence in Australia. Socio-economic background in universities has been determined using home postcode, often leading to large overlap between this category and size of location (metropolitan versus rural and remote). In other LSAY reports, socioeconomic background is usually determined using information on parental occupation and/or education.

However, the LSAY data do allow a close match to these definitions, which can be used to provide information on the first year experiences of these groups of young Australians, how they view their transition to tertiary education and problems they may have experienced during their transition.

## APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS PERTAINING TO FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCES

Those respondents who indicated that they had changed course or institution during their first year of tertiary education were asked their reasons for changing, e.g.:

CC8 I am going to read out a list of reasons why people might change from one course to another. For each one please tell me whether it was a factor in your decision to make the change from Qual1 to Qual2

1. Course costs were too high in the first course
2. The first course was a pre-requisite for the second
3. You didn't like the first course
4. The first course turned out to be not what you wanted
5. There were better career prospects from the second course
6. You had been getting poor results
7. The study load was too heavy
8. You would really have preferred to do the second course
9. Because of health or personal reasons

CA30 I am going to read out a list of reason why people might change from one institution to another. For each one, please tell me whether it was a factor in your decision to make the change.

1. The place you moved from wasn't your first choice
2. The place you went to provides better quality education
3. You had been getting poor results
4. The course at the first place wasn't exactly what you wanted
5. The course you wanted wasn't available at the first institution
6. Because of easier access or better transport
7. Because of health or personal reasons

Those who stopped studying (including those who withdrew or deferred AFTER the start of the academic year, but not those who deferred prior to enrolment) were asked to provide reasons for their decision, e.g.:

CA26 I am going to read out a list of reason why people might defer or withdraw from a course of study. For each one, please tell me whether it was a factor in your decision.

1. You had problems juggling study and work commitments
2. You wanted to get a job, apprenticeship or traineeship
3. Financially, you couldn't afford to continue
4. You just lost interest; you never really wanted to study
5. The course turned out to be not what you wanted
6. It wouldn't have led to a good job or career
7. You had been getting poor results
8. The study load was too heavy
9. You never really intended to complete the course
10. Because of problems with access or transport
11. Because of health or personal reasons

Those who completed a qualification or course of study during the year were asked to comment on their experience, e.g.:

CA25 I'm going to read out some statements about your Qual1. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with each one.

1. The study or training developed my problem solving skills
2. The study or training sharpened my analytic skills
3. It helped me develop my ability to work as a team member
4. As a result of the study or training, I feel confident about tackling unfamiliar problems
5. It improved my skills in communication
6. It helped me to develop the ability to plan my work
7. Overall, I was satisfied with the quality of the study or training
8. It has improved my career prospects

All of those who were still studying at the time of the survey, regardless of changes to course or institution, were asked to comment on their experience of tertiary education, e.g.:

C93 The next questions are about your impressions of life as a student. For each of the statements I read out please tell me whether you agree or disagree.

- a you really like being a university/TAFE student
- b you think university/TAFE life really suits you
- c you really like the atmosphere on campus
- d University/TAFE has lived up to your expectations
- e You've made close friends at university/TAFE

C94 I will read out a list of difficulties that sometimes affect students in their first year of tertiary study. For each of them, please tell me whether it been a problem for you in your first year.

- a Paying fees or any other study costs
- b Juggling work and study commitments
- c You found the course more difficult than you expected
- d Conflict between family commitments and study
- e Caring for children or other family members
- f Balancing personal relationships with studies
- g Fitting in with other students and making new friends
- h Finding time for other commitments such as sporting, church or voluntary groups
- i Have you faced other difficulties during your first year of tertiary study?
- j (SPECIFY\_\_\_\_\_)
- k None of the above

C95 Which of those would you say has been your main area of difficulty.

- a Paying fees or any other study costs
- b Juggling work and study commitments
- c You found the course more difficult than you expected
- d Conflict between family commitments and study
- e Caring for children or other family members
- f Balancing personal relationships with studies
- g Fitting in with other students and making new friends
- h Finding time for other commitments such as sporting, church or voluntary groups
- i Others – (SPECIFY\_\_\_\_\_)

### APPENDIX 3: DEPTH OF CURIOSITY AND QUALITY OF SCHOOL LIFE ITEMS

#### *Depth of Curiosity*

The following items, based on the Depth of curiosity questions from the Ainley Curiosity Scales (Ainley, 1987), were presented during the 2001 telephone interview.

- J5 The next question is about how people feel about learning new things.  
For each statement I read out, please tell me whether you have no interest, only a little interest, some, a lot, or a great deal of interest.
- How much interest do you have in the prospect of learning new things?
  - How much interest do you have in thinking about why the world's in the state it is?
  - In finding out why something happened the way it did?
  - In finding out more about things that you don't understand?
  - How much interest do you have in finding out more about a new idea?
  - In finding out how something works?
  - In improving your skills after you have started work?
  - Learning new skills after you have started work?

For each, the response set was:

- None (scored as 1)
- A little (scored as 2)
- Some (scored as 3)
- A lot (scored as 4)
- A great deal (scored as 5)

A score for Depth of curiosity was calculated as a simple total for the five items.

#### *Attitudes to Secondary School Items*

A total of 30 items measuring attitudes to secondary school, based on the Quality of School Life questionnaire, were presented in the 1998 self-completion questionnaire. The following items contribute to the scales of *Interest/Motivation*, *Opportunity*, and *Achievement Orientation* used in this report.

My school is a place where ...

- The work we do is interesting (Interest/Motivation)
- the things you learn are important to you (Opportunity)
- I have learnt to work hard (Achievement Orientation)
- I achieve a standard in my work which I consider satisfactory (Achievement Orientation)
- the work I do is good preparation for the future (Opportunity)
- I like to ask questions (Interest/Motivation)
- I have acquired skills that will be of use to me when I leave school (Opportunity)
- I like to do extra work (Interest/Motivation)
- I enjoy what I do in class (Interest/Motivation)
- the things I learn will help me in my adult life (Opportunity)
- I know how to cope with the work (Achievement Orientation)
- I get excited about the work we do (Interest/Motivation)
- I am given the chance to do work that really interests me (Opportunity)
- I know that I can do well enough to be successful (Achievement Orientation)
- The things I am taught are worthwhile learning (Opportunity)
- I am a success as a student (Achievement Orientation)



For each, the response set was

- Strongly agree (scored as 4)
- Agree (scored as 3)
- Disagree (scored as 2)
- Strongly disagree (scored as 1)

A score for each scale was computed as the total of the contributing items, divided by the number of contributing items with a valid response.

## APPENDIX 4: SUPPLEMENTARY TABLES

**Table A 1 Satisfaction with aspects of student life, by gender and institution**

Satisfaction items		University students		TAFE students	
		Males	Females	Males	Females
		%	%	%	%
Like being a student	Strongly agree	32	36	25	19
	Agree	62	59	66	72
Student life suits you	Strongly agree	22	25	19	15
	Agree	65	64	66	69
Like the atmosphere	Strongly agree	30	31	17	15
	Agree	57	58	69	71
Lived up to expectations	Strongly agree	16	17	14	11
	Agree	68	65	65	71
Made close friends	Strongly agree	35	36	36	31
	Agree	54	54	55	57

**Table A 2 Satisfaction with aspects of student life, by depth of curiosity and institution**

Satisfaction items		University students		TAFE students	
		High curiosity score	Not high score	High curiosity score	Not high score
		%	%	%	%
Like being a student	Strongly agree	38	32	30	19
	Agree	57	62	62	72
Student life suits you	Strongly agree	27	22	24	14
	Agree	63	65	64	69
Like the atmosphere	Strongly agree	32	30	17	15
	Agree	57	58	70	70
Lived up to expectations	Strongly agree	18	16	18	11
	Agree	65	67	63	70
Made close friends	Strongly agree	36	35	35	33
	Agree	54	55	55	56

**Table A 3 Satisfaction with aspects of student life, by interest/motivation score and institution**

Satisfaction items		University students		TAFE students	
		High Int/Mot score	Not high score	High Int/Mot score	Not high score
		%	%	%	%
Like being a student	Strongly agree	38	32	34	19
	Agree	56	62	58	72
Student life suits you	Strongly agree	29	22	25	14
	Agree	61	66	62	69
Like the atmosphere	Strongly agree	35	29	17	15
	Agree	55	59	69	70
Lived up to expectations	Strongly agree	20	15	20	11
	Agree	65	67	61	70
Made close friends	Strongly agree	37	35	38	32
	Agree	54	54	54	56

**Table A 4 Satisfaction with aspects of student life, by secondary school sector and current tertiary institution type**

Satisfaction items		University students			TAFE students		
		Gov. school	Catholic school	Indep. school	Gov. school	Catholic school	Indep. school
		%	%	%	%	%	%
Like being a student	Strongly agree	34	31	37	21	17	34
	Agree	60	64	56	72	71	55
Student life suits you	Strongly agree	21	24	29	15	12	31
	Agree	67	64	59	69	73	52
Like the atmosphere	Strongly agree	32	28	31	16	13	18
	Agree	57	61	55	71	73	59
Lived up to expectations	Strongly agree	16	16	18	11	14	20
	Agree	66	68	64	72	62	56
Made close friends	Strongly agree	37	32	36	32	34	37
	Agree	54	55	54	57	56	52

**Table A 5 Satisfaction with aspects of student life, by employment status**

Satisfaction items		All students			
		Work full-time	Work part-time	Looking for work	Not looking for work
		%	%	%	%
Like being a student	Strongly agree	26	31	23	34
	Agree	69	62	66	61
Student life suits you	Strongly agree	20	22	20	23
	Agree	61	66	53	66
Like the atmosphere	Strongly agree	25	27	24	28
	Agree	60	60	46	62
Lived up to expectations	Strongly agree	15	15	14	17
	Agree	69	66	72	68
Made close friends	Strongly agree	34	35	18	35
	Agree	48	54	64	56

**Table A 6 Influences on changes to initial enrolments, Pearson's chi-square and significance statistics**

Characteristic	Outcome for which significant difference was found	Pearson's chi-square statistic	Degrees of freedom	p-value (two-sided)
Year 9 achievement groups	Deferral	12.663	2	0.002
Student post-school study plans	Change of course	9.091	1	0.003
Interest/Motivation (QSL)	Withdrawal	5.548	1	0.018
	Deferral	7.019	1	0.008
Opportunity (QSL)	Deferral	4.317	1	0.038
Achievement (QSL)	Withdrawal	4.747	1	0.029
Parents' education	Withdrawal	11.639	2	0.003
School sector	Change of course	11.601	2	0.003
Course load	Change of institution	4.472	1	0.034
	Withdrawal	28.097	1	0.000
Initial institution	Change of course	13.125	1	0.000
	Withdrawal	68.182	1	0.000
	Deferral	20.040	1	0.000
University groups	Withdrawal	8.407	3	0.038
	Deferral	8.170	3	0.043
Employment status	Withdrawal	252.382	3	0.000
	Deferral	106.651	3	0.000