TNS

QILT WEBSITE
REFINEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH

A MARKETING RESEARCH REPORT

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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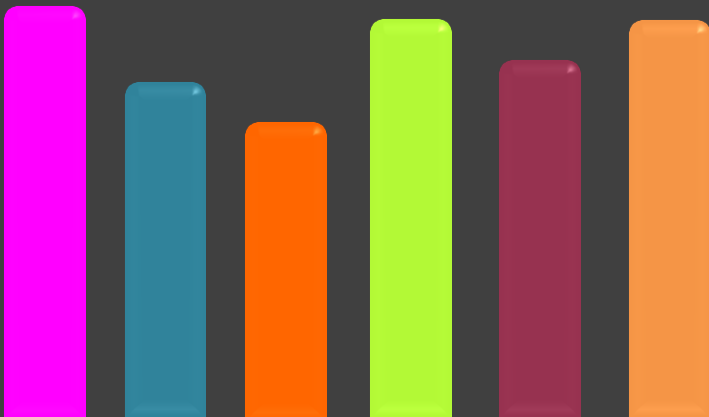David Elston
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Executive Summary

This report presents the main findings of the QILT website research conducted amongst students (school leavers, undergraduate students, postgraduate students and mature aged students), parents of school leavers, undergraduate and postgraduate students, employers and career advisors. The objectives for this research were to understand student preferences in using websites to inform university choices and how can this understanding be used to support the refinement and future development of the upgraded QILT website.

The research consisted of a qualitative phase, utilising an online forum with students and in-depth telephone interviews with career advisors, and a quantitative phase, using an online survey for students, parents and employers.

The key findings were as follows:

Current behaviour and perceptions

Online dominates and university websites are by far the most visited source
Most students start with a Google search of their course or area of interest within their local area or in the location where they would like to study, and then explore the direct university websites for more detailed information.

Offline sources also play a role in students' decision making process
School leavers use career advisors / teachers at the school as a key source of information. Schools play a large role in providing information resources e.g. career days, distributing Tertiary Admissions Centre (TAC) booklets, organising university visits etc.

The role of 'others' (parents, friends, siblings) becomes increasingly important as students get closer to making their tertiary education choices, and these students seek recommendations, testimonials and guidance from others who are familiar with the process or have experience in this area.

Different sites are visited for different purposes
University websites are visited to find detailed information on universities and university courses. Comparison sites (MyUniversity and AustralianUniversities) were found to be useful, and information websites such as TAC websites assisted with providing specific requirement / application information.

Students expect simplicity with detailed information content
Current information sources are considered to be helpful and informative, however are often too broad, complex or contain too much information.

Student expectations of the QILT website was that it should be easy to navigate, simple to understand and should include detailed information the content such as:
- Three out of five (60%) students wanted to find information on the course structure / content and the costs;
- 58% wanted details on the course duration, prerequisite / entry requirements and the study options available e.g. full / part time, distance learning vs. on campus.

First impressions of the website were extremely positive

Positive impressions of the QILT website were driven by its simplicity, ease of use and its design – these are **closely aligned** to students' expectation which explains the positive response. 89% of students, have positive impressions of the website, with almost three in five students (55%) with high appeal (rating it between 8 – 10 on a 10 point scale).

The **search function** on the home page and the **ability to compare** institutions or study areas had extremely high appeal and were two key areas of strength of the website.

- Three in five (68%) students cited the websites **easy navigation**;
- Just under half (45%) mentioned the **website's layout**; and
- Two in five (40%) its **visual appeal** (mainly driven by the colours for 26% of students).

The website was perceived by each target group to be intended for those of a similar age to themselves. This trend occurred across the student groups indicating broad appeal across ages, and is viewed to particularly target potential students.

There is a need for more information content

The data available on the experience of students and employers has high appeal and is of interest (particularly as this type of information is not readily available). However, this was not perceived to be enough – 40% of students considered there to be 'too little' information available on the website. The student and employer experience data is wanted in **combination** with detailed university and course information.

The purpose of the website and its role in the decision making process needs to be clearly communicated

The concept of having student and employer experience data was well received; however there was some uncertainty as the **purpose** of the website and what this information means for students. The student and employer experience information was found to be useful to students; however additional descriptions / explanations are required to indicate what data is included, where it comes from and how this can be used to assist students in their tertiary education choices.

Feature enhancements

As previously mentioned the search function and ability to compare universities and study areas are fundamental to driving student preferences. Students suggested enhancing the search function to enable a more refined search by **study area,** by **location** (to allow users to filter down to a lower level) and to allow filtering by **study option** to view for example full time versus part time courses, or those courses offered on campus versus through distance learning.

The name of the website

'Uni Compare' was the most commonly suggested and rated name tested.

Should the word 'uni' not fit with the vision of the website moving forward, retaining compare could work well as this was the most commonly cited *theme-word* suggested by students and best reflects one of the key **benefits** of the website.

Refinement and development areas

The key areas suggested for refinement have been summarised and provided below in a hierarchy according to short, medium and long term development areas.

Development recommendation hierarchy

SHORT TERM	**CONTENT**	1. Greater prominence on communication of the purpose of the website
	CONTENT	2. Inclusion of descriptions / explanations on survey data
	FUNCTIONALITY	3. Capability of the search function to search on options not included in the category lists
	LAYOUT	4. Improvement to the graphical display, specifically the number of graphs and size of graphs
	DESIGN	5. Inclusion of photos to bring the universities to life
	DESIGN	6. Consideration to modify colour scheme and 'blurred' photos
	CONTENT	7. Balance between data / graphs and 'written feedback' / informational text
MID TERM	**FUNCTIONALITY**	8. Increased ability to refine search criteria (location, study area)
	FUNCTIONALITY	9. Additional filter criteria (study options)
	DESIGN	10. Inclusion of maps for each university location
	CONTENT	11. Additional 'qualitative' information on student experiences (stories / quotes)
LONG TERM	**CONTENT**	12. Inclusion of detailed university, study area and course information
ONGOING	**LAYOUT**	13. Keep the layout simple, tidy and uncluttered (consideration if further content is added)

Research Overview

1.   Research Overview

1.1 Background

As part of the 2014-2015 Budget, the Australian Government announced the Upholding Quality – Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching measure. The Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) will provide a suite of government endorsed surveys for higher education, that cover the student life cycle from commencement to employment (i.e. the Student Experience Survey, Graduate Outcomes Survey, Employer Satisfaction Survey [currently under re-development], as well as current surveys which include the University Experience Survey, Graduate Destination Survey, Course Experience Survey.

The results from these surveys will provide data for the upgraded website (due for release by September 2015).

The aim of the upgraded website is to assist students in making informed decisions regarding their study options, and therefore aims to provide a trustworthy and timely source of information, and the ability to select and compare higher education institutions and courses, and a platform to share opinions regarding institutions and courses.

The fundamental need for research

The research was therefore required to reveal what target audiences *know* and what they would like to *know more* about, what their *attitudes* are, what *preferences* they have, and *what action* they are likely to take.

The results of the research will be used to inform the **refinement** of the initial release of the new QILT website, and to inform the **continued development** of the website over the next five years.

The research was required to provide the department with an understanding of current behaviour, attitudes and preferences regarding:

- what information is considered most useful to informing study option choices (institution and course);

- what process do they go through, which mediums are used, and when during the process do they utilise online resources;

- which websites are currently used as an information source, and what aspects do they like and not like;

- what website presentation and features resonate most (and what are some examples of these websites where this has been done well);

- how much weight is given to online resources, government websites or other sources of information; and

- which potential names for the new QILT website have appeal.

Background (continued)

The **primary target audiences** for the research were:

Students:

- School leavers (males and females aged 15 – 17 years, planning to studying at university either directly after school or within the next 5 years)

- Undergraduate students (males and females aged 18 – 23 years, currently studying an undergraduate degree or are planning to within the next 5 years)

- Postgraduate students (males and females aged 18 – 40 years, currently studying a postgraduate degree or have completed their undergraduate degree and are planning to study a postgraduate degree within the next 5 years)

- Mature-aged students (males and females aged 24 – 40 years, currently studying an undergraduate degree or are planning to within the next 5 years)

Student influencers:

- Parents (of children aged 15 – 17 planning to go to university and parents of children currently studying an undergraduate or postgraduate degree)

- Career advisors (those involved in providing advice to students on their tertiary education; this included both those working at schools and career advisory organisations)
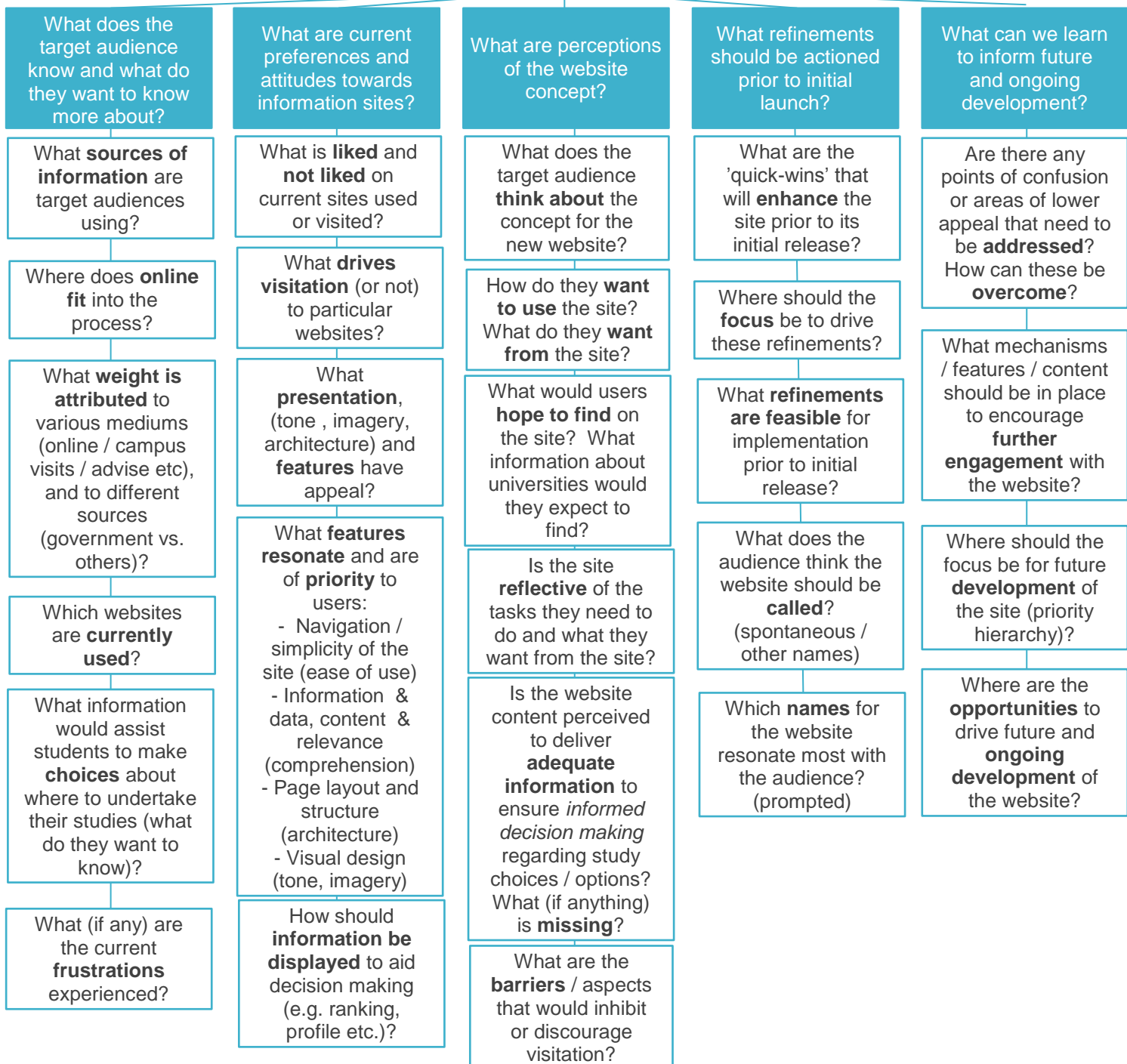
Secondary target audiences included in the research were:

- Employers (of organisations who employ graduates and are personally responsible for another employee(s), and who are involved in the recruitment / hiring process)

- Special audiences – culturally and linguistically diverse audiences (CALD), people from Indigenous backgrounds, and international students.

1.2 Research Objectives

Our approach was designed to answer the fundamental research question …what are student preferences in using websites to inform university choices? This evidence base will be used by the Department to guide and support the refinement and development of the new QILT website. The methodology for the research was inclusive of both qualitative and quantitative elements to facilitate detailed exploration as well as prioritisation as follows:

The overarching question: What are student preferences in using websites to inform university choices and how can this understanding be used to support the refinement and future development of the upgraded QILT website?

What does the target audience know and what do they want to know more about?	What are current preferences and attitudes towards information sites?	What are perceptions of the website concept?	What refinements should be actioned prior to initial launch?	What can we learn to inform future and ongoing development?
What **sources of information** are target audiences using?	What is **liked** and **not liked** on current sites used or visited?	What does the target audience **think about** the concept for the new website?	What are the 'quick-wins' that will **enhance** the site prior to its initial release?	Are there any points of confusion or areas of lower appeal that need to be **addressed**? How can these be **overcome**?
Where does **online fit** into the process?	What **drives visitation** (or not) to particular websites?	How do they **want to use** the site? What do they **want from** the site?	Where should the **focus** be to drive these refinements?	What mechanisms / features / content should be in place to encourage **further engagement** with the website?
What **weight is attributed** to various mediums (online / campus visits / advise etc), and to different sources (government vs. others)?	What **presentation**, (tone , imagery, architecture) and **features** have appeal?	What would users **hope to find** on the site? What information about universities would they expect to find?	What **refinements are feasible** for implementation prior to initial release?	What mechanisms / features / content should be in place to encourage **further engagement** with the website?
Which websites are **currently used**?	What **features resonate** and are of **priority** to users: - Navigation / simplicity of the site (ease of use) - Information & data, content & relevance (comprehension) - Page layout and structure (architecture) - Visual design (tone, imagery)	Is the site **reflective** of the tasks they need to do and what they want from the site?	What does the audience think the website should be **called**? (spontaneous / other names)	Where should the focus be for future **development** of the site (priority hierarchy)?
What information would assist students to make **choices** about where to undertake their studies (what do they want to know)?		Is the website content perceived to deliver **adequate information** to ensure *informed decision making* regarding study choices / options? What (if anything) is **missing**?	Which **names** for the website resonate most with the audience? (prompted)	Where are the **opportunities** to drive future and **ongoing development** of the website?
What (if any) are the current **frustrations** experienced?	How should **information be displayed** to aid decision making (e.g. ranking, profile etc.)?	What are the **barriers** / aspects that would inhibit or discourage visitation?		

1.3 Methodology

The methodology for this research utilised a phased approach with both qualitative and quantitative components: comprising primarily of Online Forums and In-depth interviews, supported by Online surveys.

Qualitative phase:

 a) Online forum with students

Method

An online bulletin board was used to engage students. An online bulletin board is an online version of a focus group: a platform which participants are invited to join to answer questions and complete tasks given by a moderator.

A recruitment screener was developed to ensure a cross-section of the target audience was included. One board was run for each of the student target audiences i.e. school leavers, undergraduate students, postgraduate students and mature aged students. Participants were required to log on to the forum each day, for three days and participate for 20 minutes (or, longer if they wished to). The sample was over-recruited to account for any participants who didn't log in or 'dropped out' during the forum.

A discussion guide or 'engagement plan' was developed by TNS and finalised in conjunction with the Department. This included both questions and tasks for the participants across the 3 days. Participants were able to contribute to the board at a time and place convenient for them, allowing for more detailed and considered response, while retaining the richness and depth of qualitative insight. Participants were able to interact with each other (on questions which are noted as 'public'), as well as privately with the moderator through posting private messages.

Sample

A total of n=90 participants completed the online forum. This was structured as follows:

Online forum	
School leavers: *'Potential students' i.e. those who are planning to study at university either directly after school or within the next 5 years* Participants: n=20 All aged between 15 – 17 years Males n=11; Females n=9	**Postgraduate students:** *Students who are currently studying a postgraduate degree (current students) or plan to within the next 5 years (potential students)* Participants: n=25 All aged between 18 – 40 years Males n=13; Females n=12
Undergraduate students: *Students who are currently studying an undergraduate degree (current students) or plan to within the next 5 years (potential students)* Participants: n=19 All aged between 18 – 23 years Males n=7; Females n=12	**Mature-aged students:** *Students who are currently studying an undergraduate degree (current students) or plan to within the next 5 years (potential students)* Participants: n=26 All aged between 24 – 40 years Males n=9; Females n=17

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Participants were recruited from across Australia. Please note, the results have not been analysed by location due to the small sample sizes, however the inclusion of participant across states were included to ensure the feedback was not biased to a particular state.

b) In-depth interview with Career advisors

Method

Career advisors were requested to participate in an in-depth interviews (via telephone) lasting up to 45 minutes. These participants were included in the research to provide a detailed understanding of the interactions, perceptions and role of career advisors in guiding students through their university choices. A direct engagement approach was utilised with this audience (as opposed to an online forum) in order to offer a more personalised approach and manage the time constraints of this audience.

During recruitment an appropriate appointment time and date was schedule with the participant for the interview. Each interview was conducted by TNS consultant. A semi-structured discussion guide outline was designed, covering the key areas of focus (based on the objectives), while allowing top of mind issues to be elicited and explored without prompting. The participant was requested to log onto the QILT website during the interview to explore the site which was then discussed. As is standard research practice, all respondents were given a cash incentive for their participation in the research in the form of an EFTPOS card.

Sample

A sample of n=8 in-depth telephone interviews were conducted, and structured as follows:

In-depth Interviews

Career Advisors:

Those involved in providing advice to students on their tertiary education; this included both those working at schools(n=6)and career advisory organisations (n=2)

3 x New South Wales	*The interviews were*
2 x Victoria	*spread as follows:*
2 x Queensland	*5 in metropolitan and*
1 x Western Australia	*3 in regional locations*

The online forum and telephone in-depth interviews were recruited via Q&A Market Research.

The online forum with students were conducted on Tuesday 9 – Thursday 11 June, and the in-depth interviews with Career Advisors on Tuesday 9 – Wednesday 10 June.

Quantitative phase:

Method

The qualitative component of this research comprised the largest proportion of the research approach given the research objectives, and the nature of the subject matter. However, alongside this a short quantitative online survey was also included. This comprised of a 10-minute online survey with three key target audiences (via a national online panel) in order to quantify opinions around some of the key themes and preferences.

The target audiences included in the quantitative component of the research included students, parents and employers, and was structured as follows:

Online Survey		*Target group quotas*		**Target**	**Achieved**
Total		**Audience**	**Criteria**	**n=1500**	**n=1519**
Primary Audience	**Potential and current Students**	School leavers	Males & females (15-17)	*Minimum:* n=200	n=290
		Undergraduate students	Males & females (18-23)	n=200	n=239
		Postgraduate students	Males & females (18-40)	n=200	n=276
		Mature-aged students	Males & females (24-40)	n=200	n=269
	Parents	Parents of school leavers, undergraduate and postgraduate students	Parents (males & female) aged 36+	**n=400**	**n=344**
Secondary Audience	**Employers**	Employers responsible for managing someone and are involved in the hiring process	Males & females aged 25+	**n=100**	**n=101**
TOTAL n=1519					

Aboriginal Australians, people from culturally diverse backgrounds and those in regional / remote locations were included in a representative manner throughout the qualitative and quantitative stages.

The online sample was sourced via MyOpinions who are Australia's largest online research panel with over 450,000 active panellists.

The online surveys were conducted on Friday 12 – Wednesday 17 June.

Research Findings

2.   Research Findings

2.1. Introduction

The findings from both the qualitative phase (Online Forums and In-depth Interviews) and the quantitative phase (Online Survey) have been included within this report.

During the research, general behaviour and perceptions were covered upfront (i.e. sources used, websites visited, preferences etc.). Participants were then requested to visit the QILT website and to explore the website for a short period of time. Each participant was asked to consider what the pages look like, the different headings and menu options, the information it contains and the features it has. To ensure broad coverage of the website each participant was prompted to visit several different areas / pages of the website.

2.2. What does the audience know and what do they want to know?

Sources of information

Most students usually start by using a **Google search** to find university websites and use these to find out more information about the courses that are offered. Google is used particularly if location is important, as students can search for courses available at universities in their local area / where they want to study.

University websites were by far the most visited source across all student groups. Most start by searching on Google for their course/universities in their local area or area of interest, and then explore the university websites e.g. course prospectus, and everyone does this at some stage within their decision making process.
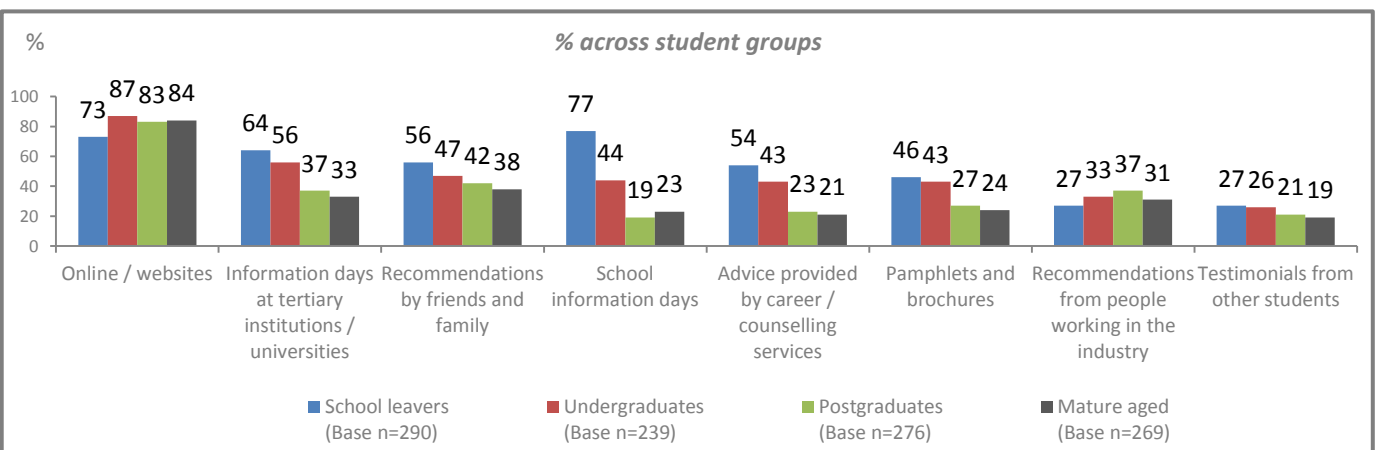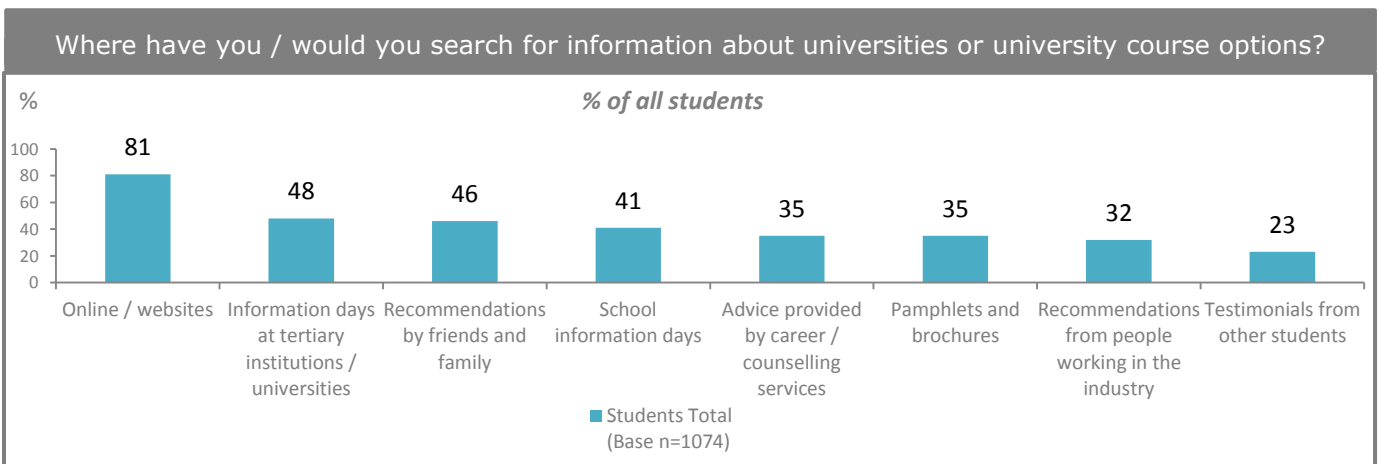
For school leavers (and undergraduates when they were in school), **career advisers / teachers** at the school are a key source of information. These are considered to be a useful source of information to guide which study area they should be considering, to discuss options or to direct them to specific sources of information (particularly in the early stages), including university websites, sites such as MyFuture.com, and handing out pamphlets or information booklets. **Tertiary Admissions Centre** (TAC) booklets are also used by some school leavers and undergraduate students (while at school) as these are provided by the schools. These were utilised by some mature aged students, however were not mentioned by Postgraduate students.

The role of '**others'** in the decision making process (parents, older friends, siblings etc.), was nominated by a few school leavers (in combination with internet searching and information provided by the schools). However this tends to become increasingly important as students get closer to needing to make their university choices i.e. undergraduates wanted to gain feedback from older friends and those familiar with the process, and an extra emphasis on importance of speaking to course coordinator or senior staff in the workplace/industry for postgraduate and mature aged students.

Usage of information sources

Qualitatively, online / websites are the most important information source for all students. **Information days** at tertiary institutions and advice from **career advisors** are more important to school leavers and undergraduate students, while **recommendations** and **testimonials** have higher importance to postgraduate and mature aged students. Pamphlets and brochures were least important across all student groups.

This was mirrored in the quantitative data, with online / website dominating (81% of students using online / websites), followed by information days for just under half of students (which has greater importance to school leavers and undergraduates) and recommendations from friends and family.

Where have you / would you search for information about universities or university course options?

% of all students

Students Total (Base n=1074)

% across student groups

School leavers (Base n=290) Undergraduates (Base n=239) Postgraduates (Base n=276) Mature aged (Base n=269)
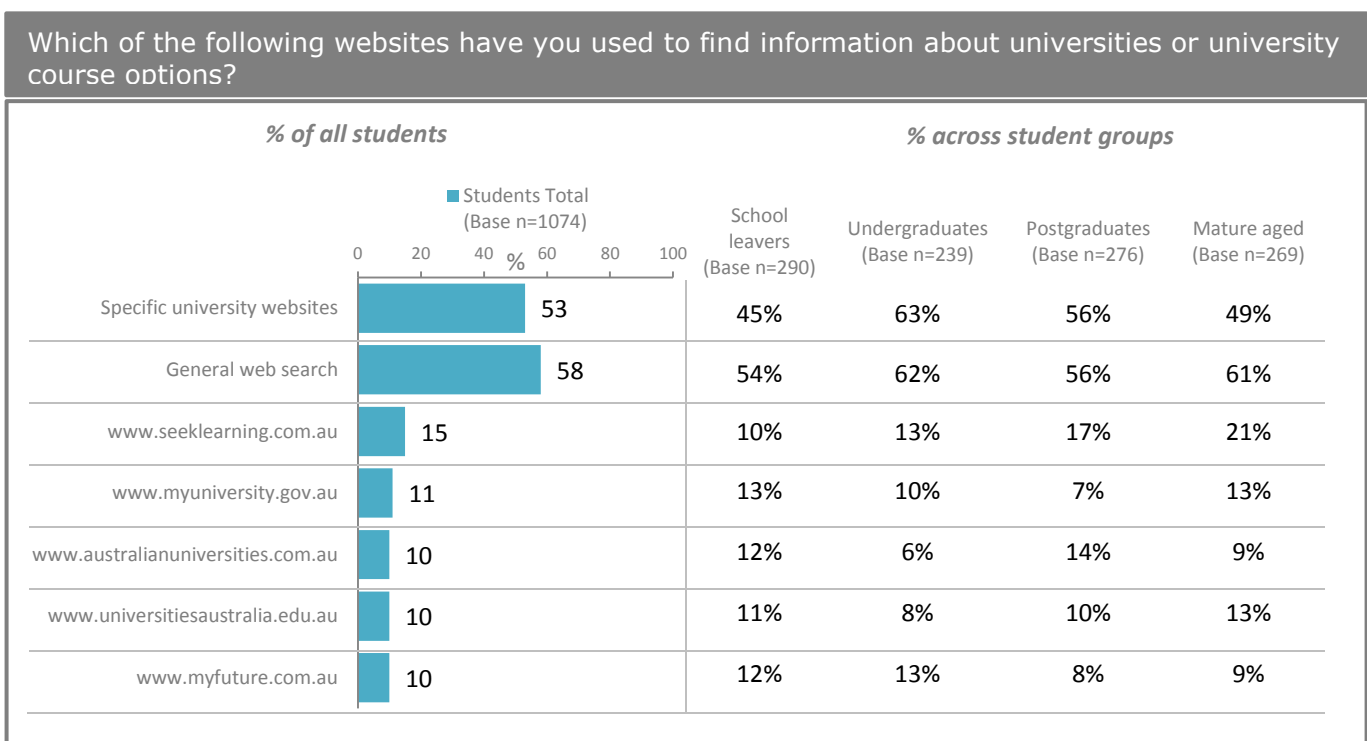
Online sources

In terms of the websites visited, **Google** is often used as a good starting point, for more general searches, and to help direct them to direct university sites and to determine which universities offer which courses. Visitation of websites is dominated by **university websites** to get detailed course and university information. Several mature aged students mentioned that there was often a limited choice of local universities and therefore were not too many sites to visit directly. In the quantitative research, a general search was done by 58% of students, and with just over half of students (53%) using specific university websites.

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Students also visited '**comparison sites**' such as http://myuniversity.gov.au; and http://australianuniversities.com.au (these were the two most commonly mentioned sites, and were used across all student groups). These types of sites were found to be useful to compare universities and degrees offered at different places throughout Australia, and provide a good summary of information on courses, cut-offs, fees etc. The quantitative research indicated that 11% of students used myuniversity.gov.au and 10% used australianuniversities.com.au.

In the qualitative research, school leavers mentioned they were more likely to visit websites such as http://myfuture.com.au; to assist them with making career / subject choices, while the State Tertiary Admission Centre sites (e.ge. QTAC, VTAC, UAC) were visited by several undergraduate students and mature aged students to get specific requirement / application information. There were several smaller mentions of using sites that contained student feedback / reviews / course ratings or sites to gain job opportunity information.

Which of the following websites have you used to find information about universities or university course options?					
% of all students	Students Total (Base n=1074)	**% across student groups**			
		School leavers (Base n=290)	Undergraduates (Base n=239)	Postgraduates (Base n=276)	Mature aged (Base n=269)
Specific university websites	53	45%	63%	56%	49%
General web search	58	54%	62%	56%	61%
www.seeklearning.com.au	15	10%	13%	17%	21%
www.myuniversity.gov.au	11	13%	10%	7%	13%
www.australianuniversities.com.au	10	12%	6%	14%	9%
www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au	10	11%	8%	10%	13%
www.myfuture.com.au	10	12%	13%	8%	9%

Need to know vs. nice to know

The in-depth interviews with career advisors highlighted that many students have very little knowledge on the tertiary education options and how to go about the decision making process. This was particularly true for school leavers aged 15 or 16 years of age, who are generally guided at the starting point due to subject selection. This was also cited by career advisors working for career advisory organisation who see this among mature aged students (e.g. parents wanting to re-enter the workforce) who for many are unsure of the information sources available.

The information students seek when choosing a university study area / course or a university identified during the qualitative research, can broadly be divided into:

Need to know information:

- Prerequisite / entry requirements
  - ATAR: Important to school leavers and undergraduate students
  - How and when to apply: Important for postgraduate and mature aged students
- Location
- Cost information
  - Payment options: Important to postgraduate & mature aged students
- Course structure / content
  - Course description and list of courses: Important to school leavers & undergraduates
- Course duration
- Study options (full time vs. part time, On campus vs. online / distance learning)
- Career pathways / opportunities
- Contact information
- University facilities
  - School leavers and undergraduate students were interested in sporting facilities, accommodation about campus life, the lecturers / tutors
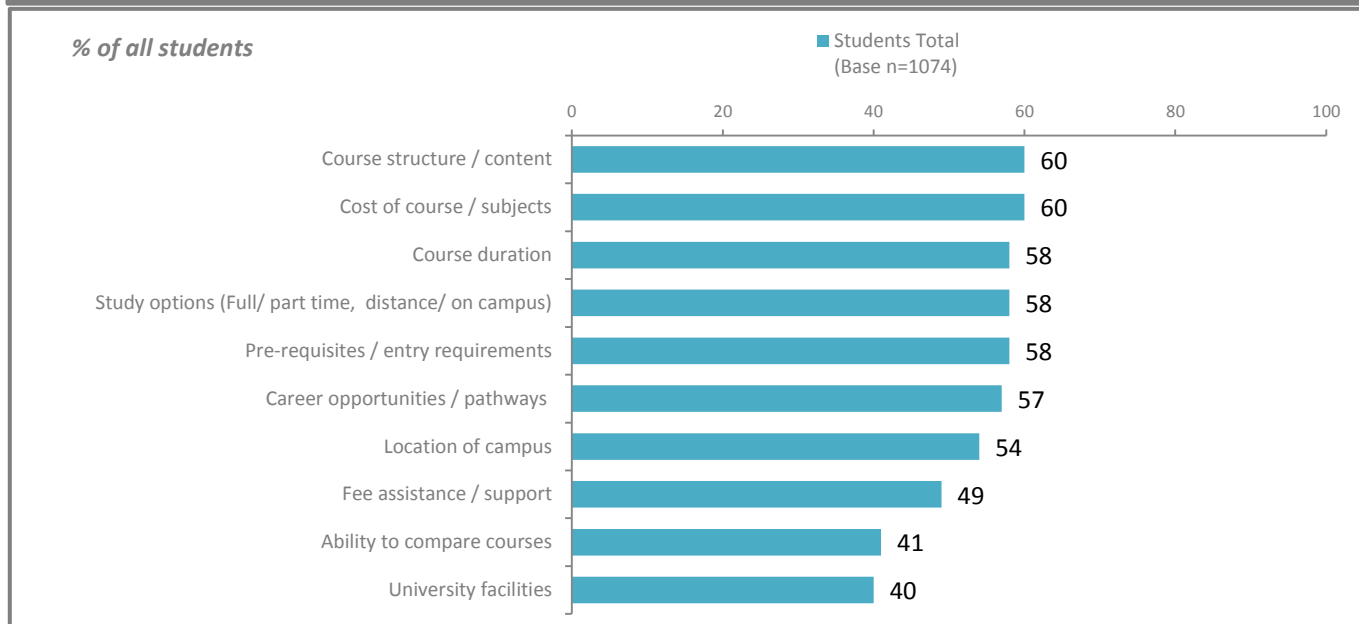
Nice to know information:

- Description of the university
- Student testimonials / reviews
- Number of students / size
- University grounds / local amenities
- Scholarship information
- Statistics (e.g. graduates finding a job / completion rates)

Alternative pathways to getting into universities are more important to school leavers and undergraduate students, as well as career advisors, particularly those from career advisory organisations as this often forms part of the guidance they are asked to provide.

This was confirmed in the quantitative data, with three in five students rating the course structure / content, costs (60%), course duration, study options and prerequisite information (58%) as being most useful.

If you needed to find information about universities or university courses, what information would be useful to you?

% of all students

Students Total
(Base n=1074)

Category	Value
Course structure / content	60
Cost of course / subjects	60
Course duration	58
Study options (Full/ part time, distance/ on campus)	58
Pre-requisites / entry requirements	58
Career opportunities / pathways	57
Location of campus	54
Fee assistance / support	49
Ability to compare courses	41
University facilities	40

The quantitative findings also confirmed that prerequisite information is of higher importance to younger students, while study option information (i.e. whether courses can be completed full time / part time, and on campus / distance learning) and fee assistance / support information is more likely to be of higher importance to those based in regional locations.

Trustworthy and reliable information sources

During the online forum, students were asked to identify websites they regarded as trustworthy and reliable. The most commonly cited websites included Tertiary Admissions Centre websites for their state e.g. QTAC, UAC, VTAC, australianuniversities, myuniversity, Google and direct university websites.

Students were also asked to provide the reasons why these sites are considered to be trustworthy and reliable, to understand what creates trust among this audience. Below is a list of commonly used words / reasons provided by students:

Trust = Objective, government affiliated (government suffix i.e. .gov / crest), comprehensive / detailed, contains facts, information is consistent (heard the same elsewhere), not affiliated to/run by a specific institution or university, prefix of edu.au, when it's recommended

Reliable = Up-to-date information, accurate, closest to the source (e.g. universities own website for course / university information, or the admissions centre for application info), detailed information, represents industry, from experience using it, accessible

2.3. Experiences (current & ideal)

Overall, there was a general view among career advisors that there is **adequate information** available for students to assist them in making their university and university course choices.

The websites used specifically for searching for information on universities and university courses were described by students as being *helpful* and *informative*, however in some cases were perceived to be **too general** or **broad**, or to contain too much information and often the information is located across multiple pages / links, making it difficult to find and due to information being displayed in different ways across each website, difficult to compare information.

Qualitatively, the content used by students in this area was described as:

Typically, most content in this area accessed …	
is …?	**and should be more…?**
Informative and helpful Too general / broad Too dense Biased / self-promoting Located across too many pages / confusing	Factual / Objective Concise Specific and detailed Laid out in a simple way / easier to navigate Easy to compare Key information contained in a single place (minimise need for scrolling)
"These sites can be daunting as they have so much information - especially if the website doesn't have a helpful layout." (Female Undergraduate)	*"For some of the information on the website, like units, course maps and majors for each of the individual courses, you have to navigate to so many different pages for all the information. It would be great if they could actually collect all that information in one place."* (Male Undergraduate)

There were several mentions among students regarding a **website's tone**, citing that it should be inviting, inspiring and motivating. Imagery and visual elements (including pictures and videos) were important, particularly among school leavers. Search functionality is key across all student groups; menu bars and filters were desired to assist with the simplicity of finding information and being able to 'quickly' find / get where they want to.

Career advisors / teachers mentioned this can be a stressful time for many students due to the decisions they need to make regarding their futures. Websites that are dense with information and complex to follow, can easily overwhelm students and results in students requiring guidance and assistance through this process.

Student preferences can be categorised into four main themes outlined below and each of these has been discussed in further detail:

1. Simplicity
2. Accessibility
3. Structure and relevance
4. Positive experience

Simplicity	Websites need to be user-friendly - easy to use and straightforward to follow. Presentation is important – it needs to be interesting / inviting, but clean and clear. Students get overwhelmed and uninterested by too much content. The content needs to be easy to read and written in simple, easily to understand language.
Accessibility	Students get frustrated when they are unable to find what they are looking for. There is a desire for immediate gratification among this audience. Students need to easily find what they are looking for. Search functions are therefore important as it allows students to pinpoint what they are looking for, quickly and efficiently.
Structure & Relevance	Students get frustrated by unnecessary / irrelevant information. They prefer for information to be logically categorised. This assists with easily being able to identify where you want to go. Menus / tabs allows them to visit / read the information that is important (do not need to wade through streams of content to get where you want to be). Drop down tabs help keep the website simple and uncluttered.
Positive experience	Students seek an enjoyable website experience. They enjoy websites that are visually appealing and are inviting or interesting to use – they seek interaction. This is an element of fear when making these choices. Websites need to provide positive reinforcement.

Website expectations

During the research, participants were informed that the Department of Education and Training is developing a new and upgraded website which contains information on tertiary institutions and courses available in Australia. Participants were asked to provide details on what they hoped to find on the site, and specifically what information they would expect to find.

Student expectations have been categorised into two main areas, namely the functional expectations they have as well as what information they expected to be available. These have been outlined below:

Functional expectations

- Easy to navigate
- Clear to read / no information overload on the first page
- Simple to understand
- Being up to date (accurate information)
- Unbiased

Content expectations

- Prerequisite information (overall position cut offs / ATAR requirements, alternative pathways)
- The university courses available and where these are offered (at which universities and in which locations)
- Course details (course description, course content, length of course)
- Links to university sites
- Brief summary of the university
- University facilities / local amenities
- Ability to compare universities (what they offer, university description, statistics, location)
- Career opportunities / what options are after school
- Costs / Fee assistance information
- Full time vs. part time options, on campus versus. Distance learning options
- Testimonials

"I'd expect to find university and course information; Uni location, contact details, open days, photos, link to Uni websites for more detailed info. Hopefully there's an example study pattern, ATAR cut-offs, other options if you don't meet the requirements, fees, info on HECS, etc." (Female Undergraduate)

"I would expect to find ATAR cut offs, prerequisites, available majors, fees, study options (part time, full time, double degree etc.), info about HECS. I'd hope to find a small paragraph about each of the majors, subjects/units available under the majors, past/present students opinions, scholarships and programs available for the course, and what kind of job the course can get you." (Female Undergraduate)

The overarching expectations are **similar** across the student groups with small variations to the type or importance of information required i.e. school leavers and undergraduates place higher importance on the prerequisites and would hope to find ATAR / overall position scores, while postgraduate and mature aged students want information on the alternative pathways to entry i.e. details on how to undertake certain courses by using credits from previous units, which units / courses can be matched to allow them to reach their end-point goal. This is also of particular importance to those working within career advisory organisations as they are often required to provide this information to their clients. Another example of this was the flexibility options (i.e. full time vs. part time courses), where this is particularly important for postgraduate or mature aged students who often are working or returning to the workplace.
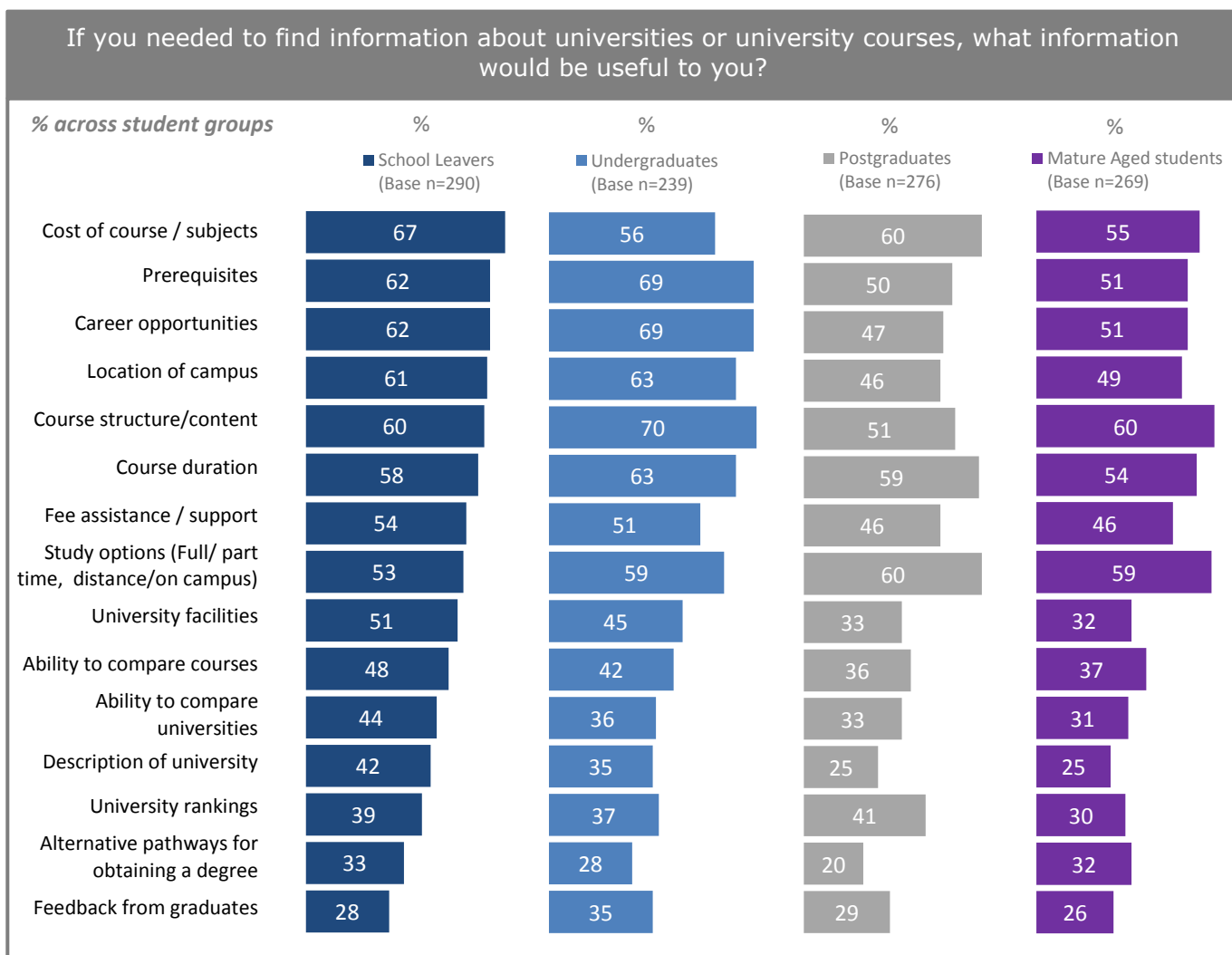
A small proportion of students also expressed (during the qualitative research) the desire for the **inclusion of TAFEs** into the website in order to provide a comprehensive information source on all options available to students (in one site), or links to TAFE websites in the event users realise or decide they would prefer to undertake a TAFE course.

Student expectations were quantified during the online survey, and revealed that 60% of students wanted to find information on the **course structure / content** and an equal proportion of students wanted information on the **cost of courses / subjects**. This was followed by 58% of students who wanted information on the **course duration**, **prerequisites** and **study options** available.

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When looking at the results across the student groups, the following were found to be most useful to each group:

- School leavers: course / subject costs (67%), prerequisite and career information (62%) was found to be most useful for school leavers;
- Undergraduates: the course structure / content (70%), prerequisites (69%) and career opportunities (69%) were rated as most useful;
- Postgraduates: the costs of the course / subjects (60%), the study options are available (60%) and the course duration (59%) were rated as most useful; and
- Mature aged students: the course structure / content (60%) and study options (59%) were of most value to mature aged students.

The results across the different student groups have been provided below:

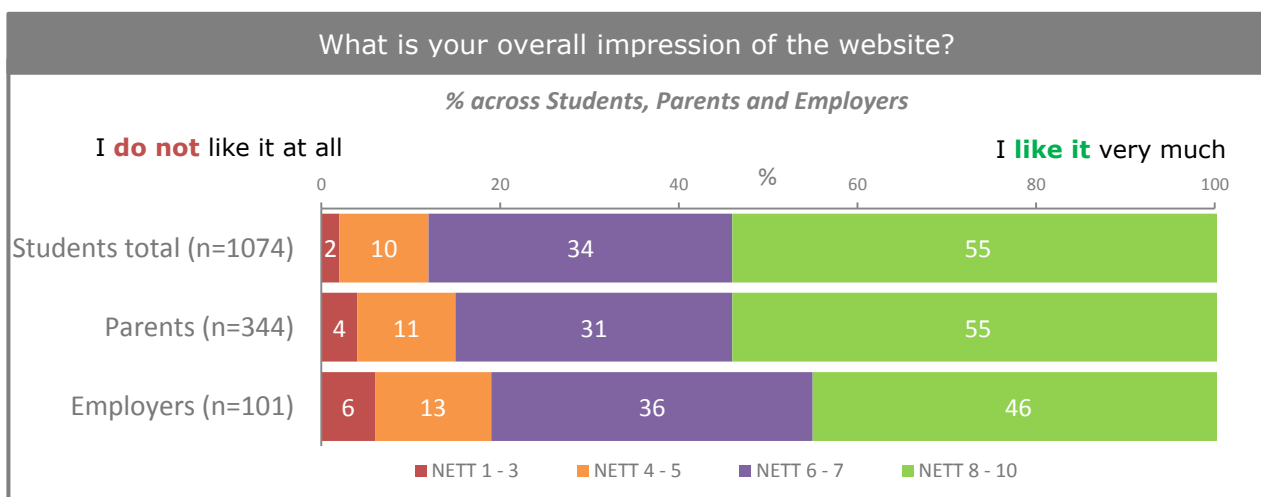| If you needed to find information about universities or university courses, what information would be useful to you?			
% across student groups	%	%	%	%
	School Leavers (Base n=290)	Undergraduates (Base n=239)	Postgraduates (Base n=276)	Mature Aged students (Base n=269)
Cost of course / subjects	67	56	60	55
Prerequisites	62	69	50	51
Career opportunities	62	69	47	51
Location of campus	61	63	46	49
Course structure/content	60	70	51	60
Course duration	58	63	59	54
Fee assistance / support	54	51	46	46
Study options (Full/ part time, distance/on campus)	53	59	60	59
University facilities	51	45	33	32
Ability to compare courses	48	42	36	37
Ability to compare universities	44	36	33	31
Description of university	42	35	25	25
University rankings	39	37	41	30
Alternative pathways for obtaining a degree	33	28	20	32
Feedback from graduates	28	35	29	26

2.4. Website perceptions

SOURCE: ONLINE FORUM – UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

Positive impressions of the QILT website are mainly driven by its **simplicity**, being **easy to use** and its **attractive design**. Several students were pleased after visiting the website in that it delivered aesthetically and was simple in its design and presentation.

A key component of the decision making process is researching universities and university course options, and by having these search functions available on the home page of the QILT website makes undertaking this process straightforward. The search functions on the home page were described as 'drawing the visitor into the site' as students naturally enter their search requirements and automatically begin engaging with the website.

89% of students, as shown below, have positive impressions of the website, with almost three in five students (55%) with high appeal (rating it between 8 – 10 on a 10 point scale).

What is your overall impression of the website?			
% across Students, Parents and Employers			

I **do not** like it at all   I **like it** very much

	NETT 1 - 3	NETT 4 - 5	NETT 6 - 7	NETT 8 - 10
Students total (n=1074)	2	10	34	55
Parents (n=344)	4	11	31	55
Employers (n=101)	6	13	36	46

There were significantly higher levels of appeal among:
- **School leavers aged 15 – 17** (61% rating the websites between 8 – 10 compared to postgraduate [52%] and mature aged [49%] students)
- **Females** (58% of females rated the website between 8-10 compared to 50% of males)

There were slightly lower levels of appeal among:
- Employers, with one in five (19%) rating the website between 1 - 5 on a 10 point scale
- Older students aged between 22 – 39 (with significantly lower proportions rating the website between 8 – 10 compared to younger students)
  - 61% of school leavers aged 15 – 17 rated the website 8-10, compared to 46% for those aged 22 – 24; 48% aged 25 – 29 and 53% aged 30 – 39 years)

The overall impressions of parents are very closely aligned to that of students, with 86% of parents having positive impressions of the website, and as seen with students, almost three in five parents (55%) rating the website highly (between 8 – 10 on a 10 point scale).

The initial exploration of the website identified the following **two key areas of strength**, namely the ability:

1. To **search** on study area and university (and how this is prominently displayed as you enter the website)

2. To **compare** different universities and university study areas (with multiple selections)

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During the quantitative evaluation, participants were asked to share their perceptions on both the positive and negative aspects of website:

- Three in five (68%) students cited the websites **easy navigation**;
- Just under half (45%) mentioned the **websites layout**; and
- Two in five (40%) its **visual appeal** (mainly driven by the colours for 26% of students).

The main likes and dislikes spontaneously mentioned during the quantitative evaluation were:

What are the things you liked / disliked about the website?							
likes …				**dislikes …**			
	Students	*Parents*	*Employers*		*Students*	*Parents*	*Employers*
Easy to navigate / follow / use / compare	(68%)	(67%)	(58%)	More information, courses/university	(13%)	(6%)	(8%)
Layout, clear, simple, well-presented	(45%)	(41%)	(44%)	Complex to compare/navigate	(9%)	(8%)	(14%)
				Colour scheme / dislike the colours	(8%)	(5%)	(1%)
The design, colours, inviting, easy to look at	(40%)	(21%)	(24%)	Survey data / what it means	(7%)	(4%)	(8%)
				Study area information/ too broad	(4%)	(2%)	(2%)
Content, information, comprehension	(27%)	(29%)	(27%)	No dislikes	(40%)	(56%)	(50%)

"It was all presented in a clear way. The graphs were easy to read. It used photos and bright colours that my first impression was 'this is actually a cool website'. It was easy to use and easy to compare universities." (School leaver)

"The homepage is a really good example of a simple, effective homepage that gives you all the information you need. You can basically do everything you need to from those two search boxes." (Mature Aged student)

"I disliked that it didn't have a great list of courses under each study area. I know the website is only supposed to serve as a tool to compare between universities' study areas, however it would be better if there was information on courses, or a link directing you to the university's page that has course information." (Undergraduate)
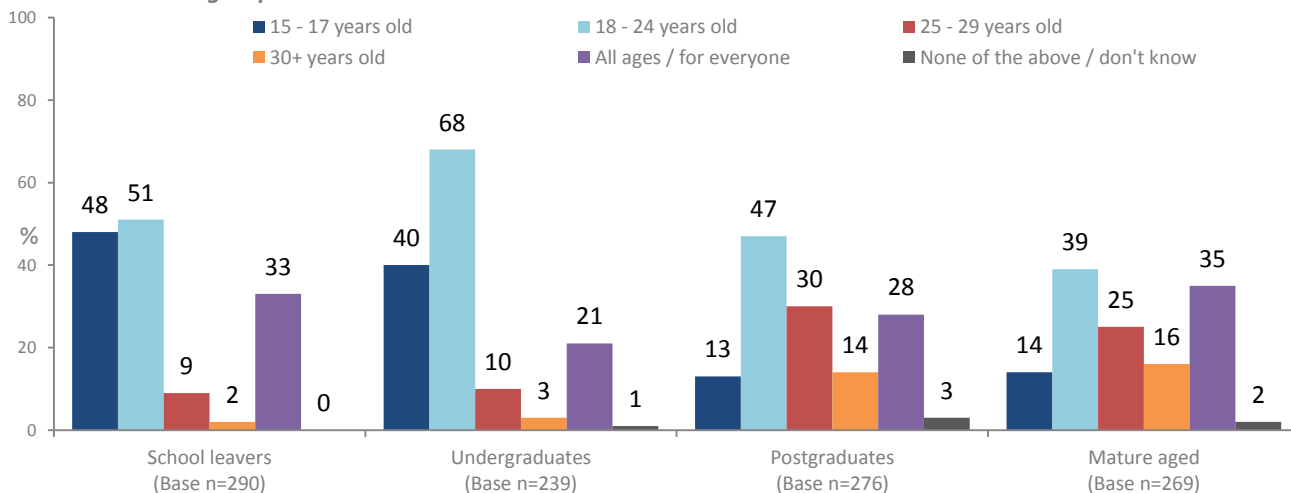
"Some of the graphs were a little hard to view and follow, it required quite a bit of scrolling." (Postgraduate)

40% of students spontaneously did not mention anything they disliked. The main area where participants do have a concern is regarding the websites content. Spontaneously, this was mentioned by 13% of students, who expressed the need for the website to include more information on universities and university courses. This is discussed in greater detail in the section to follow.

During the research students were asked who they considered the website to be aimed at in order to understand the extent the website appeals to different student audiences. The results indicate students within each of the target groups are likely to consider the website to be intended for those of a similar age to themselves. This trend occurred across the student groups (from school leavers to mature aged students) indicating **broad appeal across ages**.

What **age group(s)** do you think this website is aimed at?

% across student groups

Legend:
- 15 - 17 years old
- 18 - 24 years old
- 25 - 29 years old
- 30+ years old
- All ages / for everyone
- None of the above / don't know

Student group	15-17	18-24	25-29	30+	All ages	None/don't know
School leavers (Base n=290)	48	51	9	2	33	0
Undergraduates (Base n=239)	40	68	10	3	21	1
Postgraduates (Base n=276)	13	47	30	14	28	3
Mature aged (Base n=269)	14	39	25	16	35	2

The website was mainly considered to be targeted to school leavers planning to study and those looking to study an undergraduate degree i.e. most applicable for **potential** students. As shown below, 70% of students thought the website was targeted at school leavers, 65% at those looking to undertake an undergraduate degree and just under half (48%) at those looking to study a postgraduate degree. 60% of parents considered the website to be aimed at themselves and other parents.

Which **type of person** do you think this website is aimed at?

% of all Students and Parents

Type of person	Students Total (Base n=1074)	Parents (Base n=344)
School leavers planning to study	70	74
Those looking to study an undergraduate degree	65	63
Current undergraduate students	37	42
Those looking to study a postgraduate degree	48	50
Current postgraduate students	22	35
Professionals already working	17	22
Academics	23	23
Businesses / employers	14	28
Parents	36	60

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#2 On deeper investigation there becomes a realised need for more detailed information content

The inclusion of data based on the experience of current and graduate students, and from employers on their satisfaction with graduates (and the ability to compare institutions and study areas on this data) was perceived to be an interesting inclusion to their search criteria and something *new* that is not as readily available when researching universities and universities courses. The types of survey data which was most frequently mentioned (during the qualitative discussion) as useful for students included:

- The opportunity to learn about / gain information on student experiences
- Information on how students felt towards the education quality
- Employer outcome / satisfaction information
- Average salary data

While the availability of the experience data is found to be useful and interesting, it is not perceived to provide **enough** information as a basis for student decision making. This could limit the use of the website to either:

- **The early stages:** During the initial, broad information searching (one of many information sources used) as part of general search or to consider suitable institutions once a study area has been chosen; or
- **The final stages:** After the researching phase, used to assist in choosing between two institutions, to 'narrow down' choices

"This could be a good preliminary investigation and could assist in the early stages to determine what institutions offer the courses one is interested in, and would assist in creating a shortlist. The information offered is useful." (Parent of a Postgraduate)

"I would use it when I make my final decision on where I would be going, if I was stuck on the choice; perhaps comparing 2 or 3 universities." (Female School Leaver)

Students are generally seeking *detailed* course and university information, as previously seen in section 2.3 on Page 19, which creates the desire for the website to include:

Specific Course information - Course structure / content, costs of course units / subjects, course duration. The 'course structure / content' described by participants included:

- What the course entails (brief description of the course) – this is particularly helpful to school leavers in deciding which courses might be appropriate or of interest
- Course outline / subjects / units of the course
- Course activities / tasks / timetable

Pre-requisite information – Entry requirements, scores / cut off marks (this is particularly important for school leavers and potential undergraduate students)

Flexibility / options available – Information on full time / part time courses, distance learning / on campus options

Career opportunity / pathway information – Information on both future study options and employment opportunities

Location of campus – location is an extremely important criteria to determine not only campus accessibility / distance, but is also used by those who have a preference to study within a specific location

The inclusion of the student experience and employer outcome data / information is beneficial to students and was cited by several as being a useful inclusion. This type of information sets the website **apart** from other online information sources, however this is desired **in combination** with detailed university course information. As we know, students are utilising multiple sources of information, however are eager to simplify this process, both in terms of the number of sources visited and the time taken to gather the necessary information. There is an opportunity for the QILT website to provide a 'one-stop' information source to assist in their decision making process, and a source of information that can be used and referred to throughout the decision making journey.

In the quantitative evaluation, participants were asked what the website contained 'too much of' and what the website contained 'too little of'. 40% of students cited that there was too little information. The can be broken down as follows:

Students perceived there to be **too little**…

- Information *unspecified* (11%)
- Information on universities and study areas / courses (12%)
  - Course information / course structure information (8%)
  - Information about universities (4%)
  - Information on the study areas (2%)
- Explanations on the data / information content / what the graphs mean (4%)
- Qualitative / written feedback from students – not only data / numbers (4%)
- Detailed / in-depth / analytical data (3%)
- Fee / pricing information (2%)

#3 The purpose of the website and its role in the decision making process needs to be clearly communicated

The **concept** of the website to share information on the experience of students and employers to assist students in making their tertiary education choice was well received. There was some **uncertainty**, however, firstly as to the purpose of the website and secondly, what the information means for students. Students are highly engaged with the ability to compare universities and the study areas (which they readily do when visiting the site), however there is a risk in misinterpreting the data if they have not fully understood how this data is derived and what it represents.

Students have clearly communicated the importance of student reviews, testimonials and the desire to seek information from those who have **experience** in this area, reinforcing what the website has to offer. The website has a clear role to play and would benefit from communicating its purpose more clearly, and how this information can be used to assist students with their tertiary education choices. Students would like to be able to gain at glance, what the site does without having to invest too much time in finding out or searching for this information.

> The information below appears at the bottom of the home page and comparison pages. Unless users scroll down, this information can easily be missed. Users may go directly to the comparison page and begin to compare the data without fully understanding what it is that they are evaluating.

> Greater prominence needs to be given to explaining the purpose of the website.

The QILT website helps you compare official study experience and employment outcomes data from Australian higher education institutions. Create your own shortlist to compare different study areas and institutions.

The visual depiction of the survey data represented using graphs or the option of tables is well received, and perceived to be an easy way to display the data. Several spontaneous comments highlighted the need for **descriptions** or **explanations** on the survey information to assist in understanding what the data means and more evidence on where the data comes from. This was also discussed during the online forum with students, who more specifically referenced the need to understand each of the **surveys** e.g. *Experience of current undergraduate students* including a survey description / overview, methodology, sample base), and within this, to understand each of the **data categories** i.e. Teaching quality, learner engagement, learning resources etc. (as depicted below). The inclusion of explanations of the data will also attribute to the validity and credibility of the data.

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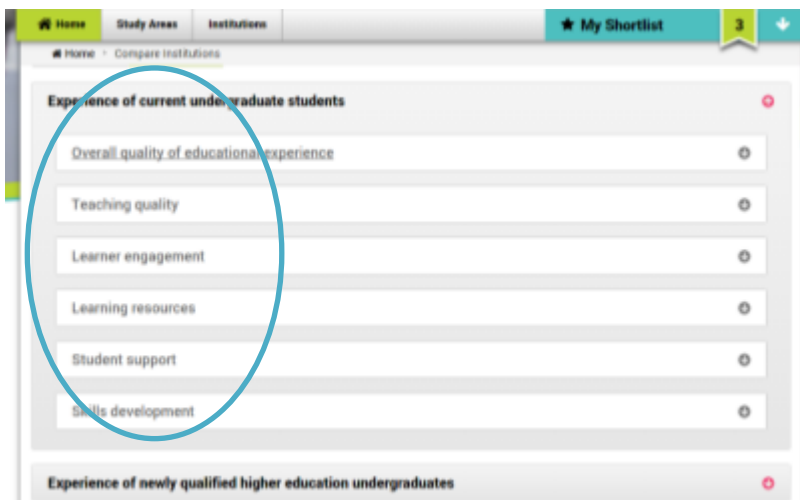
It was suggested that explanations / descriptions be included to aid understanding of the survey data. This could be achieved by including a description and explanation for each sub-heading e.g. 'teaching quality' by using an in*formation box* that appears when users hover over the icons to select each area of interest.
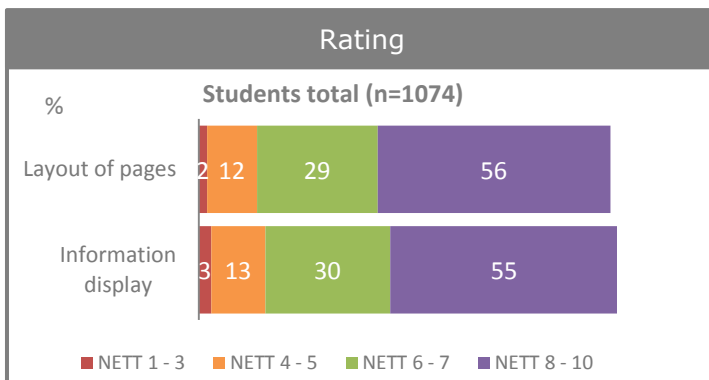

A description / explanation is required on each chart, to explain the data and what this means for students.

Students did not want to have to go into the pages where the survey data is described in more detail (and suggested than many users will not visit these pages), however would prefer a brief explanation directly on the comparison charts.

In addition to the inclusion of explanations of the survey data to enhance users understanding of the data and what this means for their decision making process, students expressed the desire for the inclusion of '**written feedback**'; students wanted the data to be supported by *informational text* on student stories, reviews and testimonials. This 'qualitative' information could provide additional weight and depth to the data (for example providing reasons to support the data e.g. reasons explaining why one particular university may outperform another on 'teacher quality').

The inclusion of 'written feedback' and the explanations / descriptions of the survey data will also provide a **balance** between the amount of data / graphs and written information text.

LAYOUT

Rating

% **Students total (n=1074)**

	NETT 1-3	NETT 4-5	NETT 6-7	NETT 8-10
Layout of pages	2	12	29	56
Information display	3	13	30	55

Overview

Over half of all students rated the website between 8 – 10 (on a 10 point scale) in terms of its **layout** (56%) and **information display** (55%).

45% spontaneously commented on the websites layout when asked what they liked about the QILT website.

The main factors contributing to levels of appeal are the websites simple and clean design. The website is not felt to be cluttered or overwhelming, particularly when arriving at the home page. The inclusion of logical and easy to follow headings and menus / tabs makes navigation intuitive and easy to move through different areas of the webpage. In terms of the experience survey data, students perceived the use of graphs and tables to be a good way to graphically represent the data making comparisons easy.

What works ...	What can be improved ...
▪ Simplicity, clear (12%) ▪ Heading / tabs / intuitive to navigate and move around (7%) ▪ Home page directs to search functions (7%) ▪ Graphs clearly display data (4%)	▪ Reduce amount of required scrolling ▪ Limit empty, wasted spaces ▪ Graphical data too big in its presentation ▪ More data displayed in one graph

Scrolling

The view on the left depicts the view of a graph when doing a comparison. In order to view the full graph the user needs to scroll down. The 'over-sized' graphs are perceived to be contributing to unnecessary scrolling.
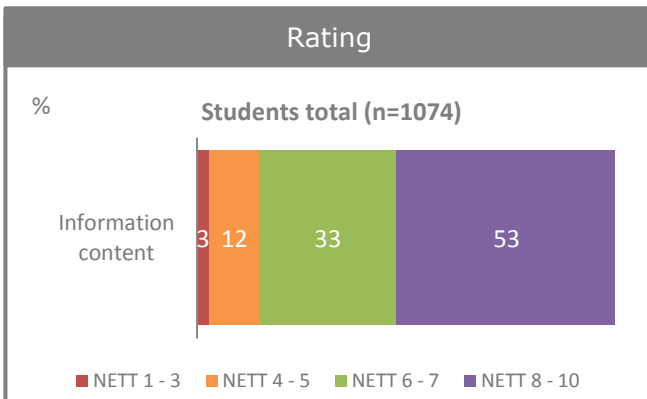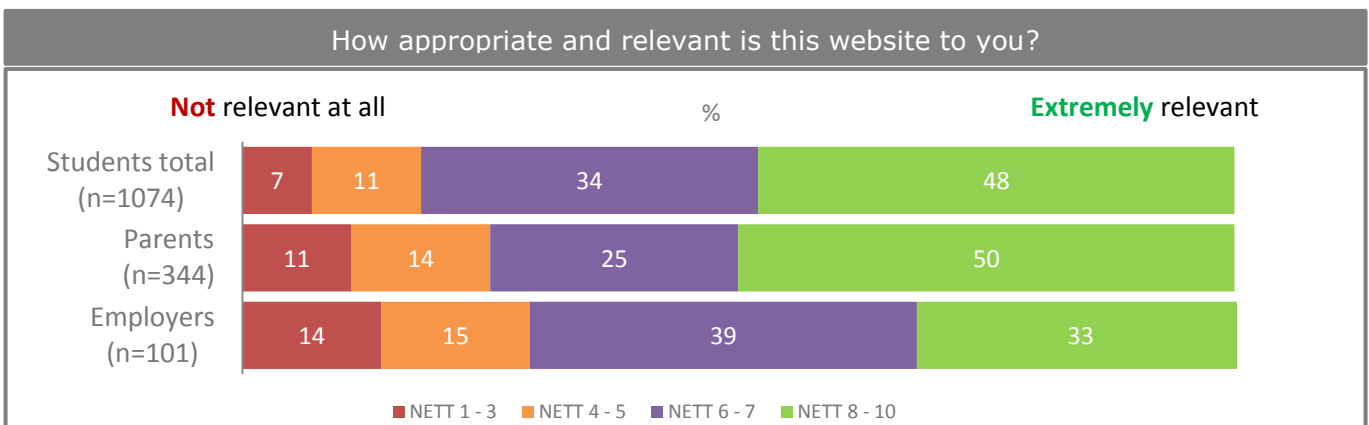
Amount of information

A reduction in the size of the graphs could allow for more information to be viewed on a single page, limiting the need to visit different pages or reduce the number of 'steps' to get the required information. Multiple graphs could also be displayed together.

Suggestions for improvement on the websites layout:
1. Keep the layout simple, tidy and uncluttered (consideration if further content is added)
2. Improvement to the graphical display, specifically the number and size of graphs

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CONTENT

Rating

Students total (n=1074)

%

Information content	NETT 1-3	NETT 4-5	NETT 6-7	NETT 8-10
	3	12	33	53

■ NETT 1 - 3   ■ NETT 4 - 5   ■ NETT 6 - 7   ■ NETT 8 - 10

Overview

Approximately half of the students (53%) rated the website highly in terms of its **information content** (rating it between 8-10 on a 10 point scale). Similar levels of appeal regarding the information on:

- Institutions (53%)
- Access to data / statistics (52%)
- Student experiences (51%)
- Study area (50%)

27% of students spontaneously commented on the websites layout when asked what they liked about the QILT website.

The importance of information content tended to **increase** with the level of degree and with age (e.g. there were 61% of school leavers who rated the information content between 8-10 compared to a significantly lower rating among postgraduate students (with 50%) and those aged 30 – 39 (with 46%).

The reasons driving appeal among students was the amount of content, specifically as it was not perceived to be overwhelming or 'text heavy'. The information was found to be **interesting** and **relevant** to students, particularly given the importance of *others* in the decision making process. As we know students seek advice and guidance from others who have been through the process or have experienced in this area, validating the value in this type of information in helping students make their tertiary education choices.

During the quantitative research, participants were asked on relevance of the website. Half of students overall (48%) rated the website as being extremely relevant, and this was highest among school leavers (62%) and lowest for undergraduate students (36%, there was lower relevance among current undergraduate students [33%] compared to [48%] potential students).

Employers were significantly less likely to see its relevance, with a quarter of employers (29%) finding the website not relevant (rating of between 1 – 5 on a 10 point scale). Some of the reasons spontaneously mentioned by those who rated it as having low relevance included *having no use for it*, or focusing more on the *applicants knowledge and experience* (rather than which university or course has been undertaken by the applicant).

How appropriate and relevant is this website to you?

Not relevant at all   %   **Extremely** relevant

	NETT 1-3	NETT 4-5	NETT 6-7	NETT 8-10
Students total (n=1074)	7	11	34	48
Parents (n=344)	11	14	25	50
Employers (n=101)	14	15	39	33

■ NETT 1 - 3   ■ NETT 4 - 5   ■ NETT 6 - 7   ■ NETT 8 - 10

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The amount of spontaneous positive feedback (27%) was considerably lower compared to other aspects of the website (such as navigation with 69% and design with 45%). This was most strongly driven by participants wanting access to more detailed information on universities and university courses.

What works …	What can be improved …
▪ Easy to read (3%) ▪ Not overwhelming / amount of information (9%) ▪ Study areas are sorted by categories ▪ Inclusion of experience data	▪ The need for more detailed information (13%) ▪ Inclusion of explanations / descriptions (7%) ▪ Inclusion of additional study areas / study areas are too broad (4%) ▪ Need for 'written' information

The 'wish list' of students would be for the QILT website to offer the same information that is typically accessed directly from university websites, in **combination** with student and employer experience data, and with the added benefit of being able to compare the data across universities, study areas and courses. This would provide students with a 'one-stop' site offering a valuable tool to assist students with their tertiary education choices. Student preferences would be to have all the course information included on the QILT website (to limit visiting multiple sites), or at least a link directly to the university website, preferably directly to the specific course page.

A longer-term of objective of the Department may be to collaborate with universities (and TAFEs should this be the direction of the strategy) to create a comprehensive information source where students can access information in one central place. The additional information content will have the added **complexity** of ensuring the information is kept **up to date**, **accurate** and **unbiased**.

One of the key strengths of the website is the ability for students to **search by study area**. Students liked how the study areas were grouped into categories, as this assisted in finding their area of interest. There was some concern however, that the study areas currently included were too broad and needed to be more 'granular'. Students wanted the ability to search on more defined study areas, or actual courses rather than on study area. Some examples of these provided by participants during the qualitative research included:
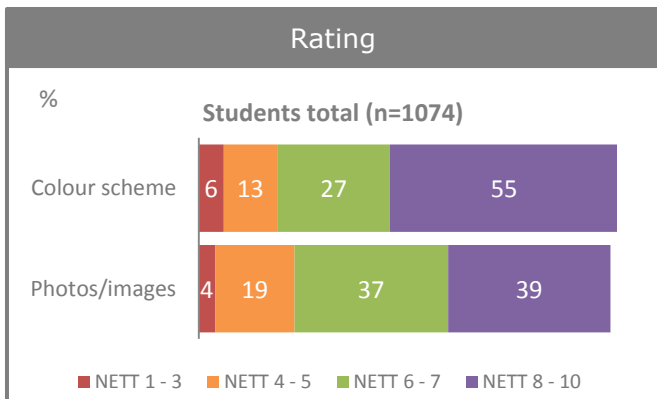
- ▪ Psychology – cited to be quite different to Arts
- ▪ Engineering – encompasses a broad spectrum and needs to be more defined
- ▪ Health services & support
- ▪ Science & mathematics

The '**Students tab**' created an element of confusion, and contained information that student did not expect to find under this section; the information contained within this section explains the data structure, rather than information related to future or current students. There was a suggestion this current information on the data structure is situated elsewhere on the website, and rather contains information on why the data is useful or how to use it.

Suggestions for improvement to the websites content:
1. Greater prominence on communication of the purpose of the website
2. Inclusion of detailed university, study area and course information
3. Additional 'qualitative' information on student experiences (stories / quotes)
4. Balance between data / graphs and 'written feedback' / informational text
5. Inclusion of descriptions / explanations on survey data

DESIGN

Rating

%

Students total (n=1074)

Colour scheme: 6 | 13 | 27 | 55

Photos/images: 4 | 19 | 37 | 39

- NETT 1 - 3
- NETT 4 - 5
- NETT 6 - 7
- NETT 8 - 10

Overview

The appeal of the design was mainly driven by the **colours** of the website, with over half (55%) rating it between 8–10, however liking of the **photos / images** used have significantly lower levels of appeal, with two out of five (39%) rating these between 8–10.

40% of students spontaneously commented on the websites design when asked what they liked about the QILT website.

The colour scheme has higher appeal among the younger audience, with 60% of 15 – 21 years compared to 48% of 30 – 39 years of age rating it between 8-10. The bright colours, and the green colour in particular, do however have the potential to be alienating for some students.

What works …	What can be improved …
▪ The colours; easy to look at, contrasting, vibrant (26%) ▪ Has a warm and inviting tone (6%)	▪ Need for increased visual material ▪ Mixed feelings towards the green colour / colour scheme (8%) and the 'blurred' photos

The online forum highlighted that younger students are looking for greater visual material, and suggested the inclusion of:
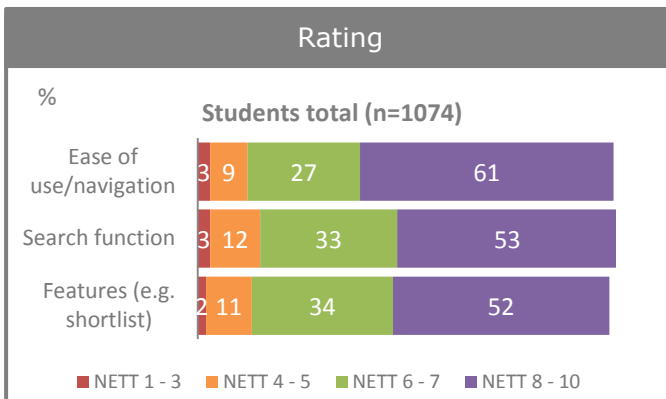
- Pictures of students
- Pictures of the universities and their facilities (the grounds, size of classes etc.)
- Maps would be extremely useful (particularly due to the importance of location)
- Videos

There were mixed views regarding the photo images used, in particular the 'blurred' photos, however these had relatively small mentions overall.

Suggestions for improvement on the websites design:
1. Inclusion of photos to bring the universities to life
2. Consideration of colour scheme and 'blurred' photos
3. Inclusion of maps for each university location

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SOURCE: B5. We want to find out your thoughts on the different aspects of the website. For each option below, please can you rate your overall opinion of each aspect of the website?

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NAVIGATION

Rating
% **Students total (n=1074)**

Ease of use/navigation: 3 | 9 | 27 | 61
Search function: 3 | 12 | 33 | 53
Features (e.g. shortlist): 2 | 11 | 34 | 52

■ NETT 1 - 3 ■ NETT 4 - 5 ■ NETT 6 - 7 ■ NETT 8 - 10

Overview

Six in ten students (61%) rated the **navigation** of the site as easy to use (rating this between 8 – 10 on a 10 point scale), and just over half of students strongly rating the **search function** (53%) and **features** of the website (52%).

68% of students spontaneously commented on the websites navigation when asked what they liked about the QILT website.

The ease of use and navigation is a key strength of the QILT website, strongly driving student preferences.

What works …	What can be improved …
▪ Ease of navigation (21%) ▪ Simple to use (16%) ▪ Ability for comparison (16%) ▪ Study areas are sorted by categories ▪ Shortlist function ▪ Search function [for two key elements are positioned on the home page] (9%) ▪ Menu / tabs aid navigation (7%)	▪ Search function (3%) ▪ Ability to refine location, study area and study option [Full / part time, campus / distance learning] (4%) ▪ Lack of awareness the logos link to the university websites ▪ Increased interactivity

The ability to search for institutions or by study area is extremely well liked, including the predictive drop down menu options.
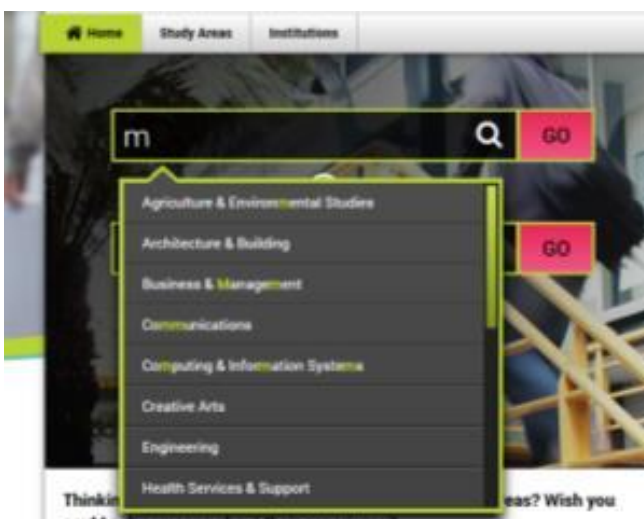
Enhanced search function

However, in instances where a search option was not included in the pre-defined category list, the search function tended to search for the closest alphabetical match / an incorrect category, or did not find any match related to the users search. Users of the website wanted a *genuine* search function to assist them in finding what they are looking for. E.g. one respondent cited they entered *Public Health* and were taken to *Business Management*, another entered *Software Engineering* and it did not provide a match.

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SOURCE: B5. We want to find out your thoughts on the different aspects of the website. For each option below, please can you rate your overall opinion of each aspect of the website?

32

University website links

There were several mentions during the research for the QILT website to include links to the direct university websites.

This is a current function of the website, however not all participants realised this option was available.
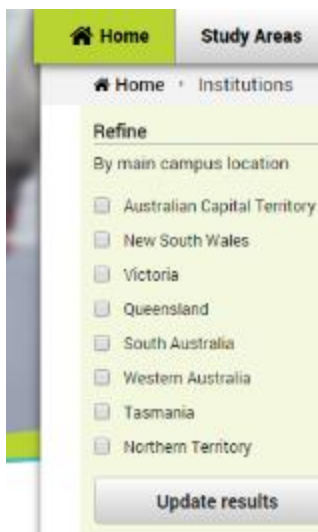
Refinement on location

The ability to filter the data by state, had high appeal, however students would like to be able to refine this further within state.

Location is very important to users and this functionality will assist students in refining their search to the specific location of interest and the distances they are willing to travel.
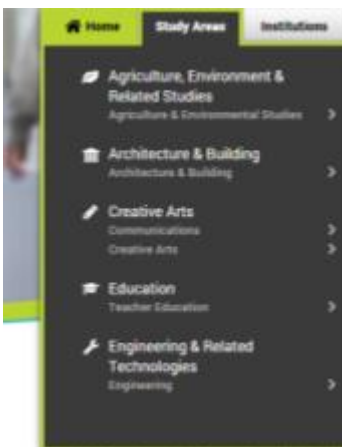
Refinement on study area

Categorisation by study area had high appeal. Students liked the ability to search (and be provided with a predictive list), however students identified the need for additional study areas to be included at a more 'granular' level / by course not study area.

Suggestions for improvement to the websites functionality:
1. Search function capability that allows for searching on items not currently supported in the categories available
2. Increased ability to refine search criteria by location and by study area
3. Additional filter criteria (study options)

WEBSITE NAME

In the qualitative phase of the research, students were asked to suggest a name for the website. The most common name suggested during the qualitative phase was '**Uni Compare**'.

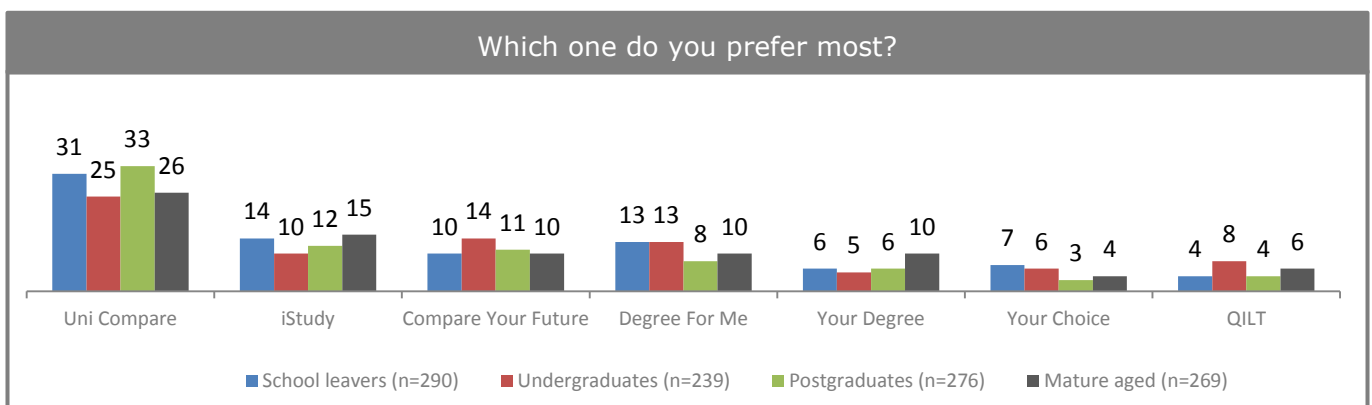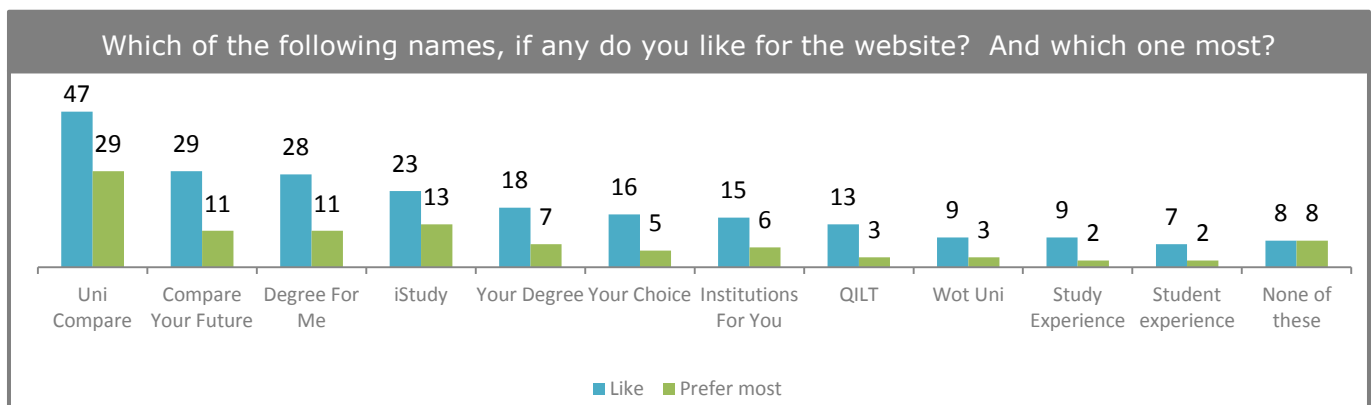Additional names suggested during the qualitative research included*:

School leavers	Undergraduates	Postgraduates	Mature Aged
Choose Your Course	AUSR- Australian Universities Surveys & rankings	AusUni Comparison	Australian University Compare
Choose your future with UNI	Compare a Uni	AusUni Match	Choose a path
Compare my Future	Compare study Australia	Check Your Uni	Choose to study
Compare Universities	Compare your degree	Compare the uni	Compare the uni
Compare Your Future	Connections	Course Compare	Decide my uni
Degrees Online	Future Connect	My choice	Degree diagnosis
Inside look Universities	My Uni	My Study	Edulearn
Institutions for you	Our Future	**QILT** - comparing student experiences	istudy
My Uni Path	Pathways	Rate My Uni	Moving Forward
New Direction	**QILT**	Savvy Study	My Study
Road2uni	QITE - Quality indicators for the Tertiary Experience	Study buddy	My Uni
Search and Study	Study Compare	Study finder	One stop uni info
Student Toolbox	Study Spot	Study my way	Rank a uni
Study right	UNI Check	Study Outcomes comparisons throughout Australia	Rate my Uni
Right Choice For You	Uni Compare	Uni Experience Compare	Scholar Me
Uni Compare	Uni-Plan	Uni for you	Study Compare
Uni Comparison	Uni Stats	Uni Mash	Study Select
Uni For Future	University Experience Survey Findings	Uni Compare	Tertiary Showdown
Uni for me	University Compare	Uni Stats	National Uni calculator
Uni for you	Your University	Universities Australia	Train My Brain
Uni to go		Your Future	U compare
Uni-4-Me		Your Study Headquarters	Uni Compare
Uni4u		Your University Guide	Uni Fit
Uni Decider			Uni Match
Uni Searcher			Uni Path
YourEducation yourUni			Uni Pick
			Uni Select
			Uni View
			Universities combined
			University Satisfaction Guide
			What To Do
			Which uni
			Which Uni for Me
			Why Study

The information above has been sourced from the qualitative data. Please view this data with caution due to the small sample sizes.

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'Uni Compare', along with 'Compare Your Future' and 'Institutions for You' were incorporated into a predefined list of names provided by the department and tested in the quantitative phase of the research.

Participants were then shown a list of names and asked which if any they like and which one they most prefer. 'Uni Compare' was liked by just under half the students (47%) and most preferred by just under a third (29%). QILT was quite a bit further down the list with 13% liking and only 3% who preferred it most.

'Uni Compare' also had the highest proportion of preference across all student groups.

Which of the following names, if any do you like for the website? And which one most?

	Like	Prefer most
Uni Compare	47	29
Compare Your Future	29	11
Degree For Me	28	11
iStudy	23	13
Your Degree	18	7
Your Choice	16	5
Institutions For You	15	6
QILT	13	3
Wot Uni	9	3
Study Experience	9	2
Student experience	7	2
None of these	8	8

Which one do you prefer most?

	School leavers (n=290)	Undergraduates (n=239)	Postgraduates (n=276)	Mature aged (n=269)
Uni Compare	31	25	33	26
iStudy	14	10	12	15
Compare Your Future	10	14	11	10
Degree For Me	13	13	8	10
Your Degree	6	5	6	10
Your Choice	7	6	3	4
QILT	4	8	4	6

At the end of the quantitative online survey, participants were asked to suggest one new name for the website which best reflects the purpose of the website. A wide variety of names were suggested, and upon grouping these into themes, suggested names with the word 'Compare' had the highest number of mentions (15%), and interestingly 'Uni Compare' was spontaneously suggested by 5% of students.

The top three names suggested were:

- Uni Compare (5%)
- Unihelp (3%)
- Compare universities (2%)

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SOURCE: C1. Which of the following names, if any, do you like for the website?
C2. Which one do you prefer most?

35

Other smaller names suggested (accounting for 1% each) included:

- Universities Compare
- Compare Uni/s
- Uni / Universities Comparison
- Study Compare
- Higher Learning
- Higher Education info
- Uni Find / finder
- Uni Info
- Uni Choice
- Uni Choice guide
- My Uni
- Australian Universities
- Uni search Australia
- Future
- Find / Find and Search
- The current name - QILT

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Comparisons with other websites

In the online forum, participants were asked to visit three different websites in addition to the QILT website, all of which offered a comparison of tertiary institutions. For each website, they were asked for their overall impression, what they liked, what they disliked, and how it compared with the QILT website. The three websites were:

Unistats (UK government)
- Students were fairly evenly split between liking and disliking the website
- They were also evenly split as to whether it is better or worse than the QILT website
- Key likes:
  - Comprehensive information on each course
  - Course assistant to filter on key features
  - Video guide
  - Easy navigation
- Key dislikes:
  - Messy, cluttered design e.g. homepage
  - Inconsistent design (sections look like ads)
  - Too much information at once
- Undergrads and postgrads tended to favour Unistats, whereas school leavers strongly favoured QILT

What Degree? Which University? (Australian student)
- Students were far more likely to like than dislike the website
- It was slightly preferred over the QILT website
- Key likes:
  - Visually appealing colour scheme and design
  - Covers lifestyle, housing, etc. as well as courses
  - Fun, personal, accessible style
  - Easy navigation
- Key dislikes:
  - Newsletter sign-up pop-up box
  - No comparison function and poor search
  - Too much on the homepage, needing to scroll
  - Information incomplete and unreliable
- All students except mature students preferred it to QILT; most popular site for school leavers

MyUniversity (current Australian government)

- Students were far more likely to like than dislike the website
- It was slightly preferred over the QILT website (*with approximately 40% of participants rating it as 'better')
- Key likes:
    o Filter and search options, comparison feature
    o Comprehensive information, including on fees
    o Easy navigation, including good summaries
    o Looks professional and trustworthy
- Key dislikes:
    o 404 Not Found error on homepage and some information out of date
    o Unattractive, boring, dated design
    o Overly formal, unfriendly

Liked a lot by undergrads and postgrads, but strongly disliked by school leavers (*62% of undergraduates preferred this site, compared to 32% of school leavers)

Please note small sample sizes as based on the qualitative findings

2.5 Cost information

Students and parents were asked quantitatively about their knowledge and concerns relating to higher education costs and loan programs.

A third of students (33%) had no concerns about cost of or payment for studies. School leavers and females (both 27%) were least likely to have no concerns, whereas undergraduates (39%) and males (40%) were most likely to have no concerns. The biggest student concerns related to:

- Study being too expensive (18%);
- HECS eligibility and debt repayment (9%);
- Having online information comparing fees and payment options (6%); and
- Uncertainty about how study will be funded (5%)

4 in 10 students (38%) felt they had a good knowledge on the costs of higher education and the options available to them, rating this between 8 and 10 (on a 10 point scale). A further third of students (34%) rated this as 6-7, indicating at least a fair level of knowledge. There were significantly lower levels of knowledge among 15-17 year olds, with 28% rating it as 8-10.
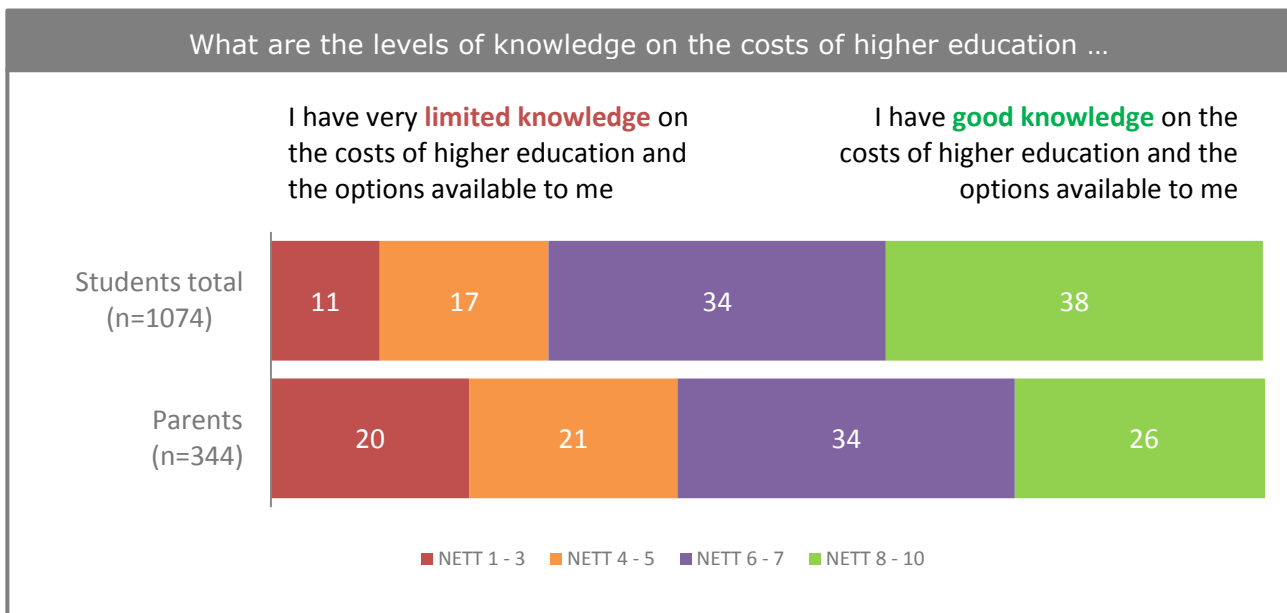
Respondents were prompted with a list of Higher Education Loan Programs and asked which of them they were aware of. Three quarters (76%) of students were aware of HECS-HELP, around 4 in 10 were aware of each of FEE-HELP and VET-FEE-HELP and 1 in 10 (8%) were aware of SA-HELPOS-HELP. Awareness of all four loan programs was substantially higher amongst undergraduates than on average, with as many as 89% of undergraduates aware of HECS-HELP and 17% still aware of SA-HELPOS-HELP. Mature-aged students were the most likely student group to be aware of VET-FEE-HELP (45%). School leavers had the lowest knowledge levels for all four loan programs, with only 7 in 10 (69%) aware of HECS-HELP. Awareness levels were also significantly higher amongst females than males.

Awareness of loan programs and sources of cost information						
Awareness of loan programs …				**Sources of cost information …**		
	Students	Parents			Students	Parents
HECS-HELP	(76%)	(80%)		Direct university websites	(69%)	(65%)
FEE-HELP	(41%)	(26%)		Contacting the university directly	(31%)	(38%)
VET-FEE-HELP	(35%)	(31%)		I don't know where to find this information	(12%)	(13%)
				Government websites	(6%)	(4%)
SA-HELPOS-HELP	(8%)	(4%)		None of the above / don't know	(9%)	(11%)

The dominant source of cost information for students was directly from the university, either from their website (69%) or by contacting them (31%). 1 in 10 (12%) were unsure where to find cost information and 6% would use a government website. The most commonly mentioned government websites were Centrelink.gov.au, ato.gov.au and Studyassist.gov.au, each mentioned by 1% of all students.

School leavers were more likely than other students to be unsure where to find the information (22%), and were therefore less likely to go to university websites (54%) or to contact universities (22%). Males were more likely than females to contact the university directly (35% compared with 27%).

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