

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2004-2005 SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES HEARING

Outcome: 2
Output Group: 2.1 Funding for Vocational Education and Training, and
2.4 Higher Education Funding

DEST Question No. E332_05

Senator Crossin provided in writing.

Question:

Do DEST have figures which show drop out rates for universities and for TAFE's and if so how do they compare?

Answer:

Universities

DEST has undertaken some analysis of higher education attrition rates, which measure the proportion of students in a particular year who neither graduate nor continue studying in an award course *at the same institution* in that year. That is, they provide one measure of the proportion of students who "drop out" of university from one year to another. Some work has also been undertaken on undergraduate completion rates.

The analysis shows that:

- In respect of the 1992 cohort of commencing students, 64% had completed an award at the same university by 1999. Around 33% had not completed an award and were not studying at the institution of commencement in 1999.
- Attrition rates in the first year after commencement of a course are around double that of those in the second year. For commencing undergraduate students the first year attrition rate was over 20% for all years 1994 to 2002. For the second year the attrition rate for these students was around 10% to 11%.
- Young domestic commencing undergraduate students (17 to 20 years) have much lower attrition rates than their older counterparts, regardless of whether they are new to higher education or have previously enrolled in another course, and regardless of the gender of the student. 2002 attrition rates for 17-20 year old commencing undergraduates were just under 18%. The rates for those aged 21-24 were around 24%. The rates for those aged over 25 years ranged from between 27.1% and 33.7% depending on age group and gender.

Analysis of data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) also provides some information on the experiences of young people in the first three years at university. In 1991, of the LSAY cohort that finished year 12 in 1998 and subsequently went to university in 1999 or 2000:

- 74% were still in the same course and same institution;
- 12% had changed courses (54% of these changed courses in the same institution);
and
- 14% had left the university sector.

TAFE's

Statistics for the TAFE system are compiled by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd using data submitted to the national VET database.

It is not possible to report drop-out rates for TAFE on the same basis as for universities or to make direct comparisons between the two sectors because the national VET database does not include the information needed to determine whether a student is undertaking a whole course leading to a recognised qualification or a selection of subjects (i.e. modules or units of competency) which provide specific skills but are not sufficient for eligibility for a recognised qualification. It would be wrong to assume that students who choose not to continue after undertaking a selection of subjects have dropped-out because they may never have intended to undertake a program of study leading to a recognised qualification. In fact, the patterns of participation in TAFE over many years suggest (without proving) that a majority of TAFE students enrol to obtain specific skills rather than a complete qualification.

Some statistics which indicate what students achieve from the TAFE system are:

- The proportion of subjects undertaken and successfully completed by TAFE students was 79.6% in 2002 and 80.6% in 2003 (successful completion comprises the subject outcomes Assessed - passed, Non assessed - satisfactory completion of class hours and Assessed - recognition of prior learning).
- The proportion of TAFE students who did not successfully complete any subjects in a given year was 13.7% in 2002 and 14.0% in 2003. NCVET commissioned research (to be published in 2005) indicates that some of these students successfully complete subjects in other years, so the proportion of TAFE students who do not complete any subjects in their years of study is lower than that indicated by the figures for a single year.
- In 2002 (the last year for which complete data are available) 18.8% of TAFE students became eligible for a qualification recognised under the Australian Qualifications Framework (it is believed that there are some students that are eligible for qualifications but are not reported by the jurisdictions, and therefore do not show up in these figures). It should be noted that some students continue and will become eligible for a recognised qualification in a later year. However, the proportion of TAFE students who ultimately complete a recognised qualification cannot be determined reliably from the data currently available.