



Australian Government

Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education

Undergraduate Applications, Preliminary Data 2012

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1. Preliminary Applications Data

This report looks at preliminary applications made to universities as part of the application process for the 2012 academic year. It provides data and analysis in relation to overall preliminary applications and trends and applicant demographics, as well as discussion of some of the factors that influence applications to universities.

The main application process runs from August to February each year for admission in the first semester of university study. The majority of applications for domestic undergraduate places at university are made during this period. For the purpose of this report, preliminary applications are those made up to 12 October 2011.

Data from previous years has shown that only a limited number of applications made directly to universities are received by early October. Accordingly, this preliminary report focuses on applications made through Tertiary Admission Centres (TACs). Data based on direct admissions activity is not collected until later in the admissions process and, as such, a comprehensive picture of direct admissions activity will not be available until April 2012.

Later data submissions in the applications process will include more detailed information on other characteristics of applicants, for example, their field of education preferences and offers and acceptances information. Final data for the 2012 academic year will include both applications made through TACs and direct applications. After the conclusion of the applications process in mid-2012, the information will be presented in a detailed report entitled *Undergraduate Applications, Offers and Acceptances 2012*.

Preliminary data for the 2008 and 2009 academic years were based on a reference date in November in the previous year while preliminary data for the 2010, 2011 and 2012 academic years were based on a reference date in October in the previous year. Further details on the data collection and methodologies can be found in the data qualifications section on page 15.

1.1 Overall preliminary applications and trends

TAC applications

As of 12 October 2011 there were 228 334 preliminary applications made through TACs for admission to university in 2012. Table 1 shows the number of preliminary applications in each state and territory in comparison with preliminary applications at the same time last year¹.

Table 1: Preliminary applications by state and territory, October 2011 and October 2012

| State | 2011 | 2012 | % change |
|------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|
| NSW and ACT | 72,674 | 74,361 | 2.3% |
| Vic. | 66,089 | 67,599 | 2.3% |
| Qld | 43,132 | 42,797 | -0.8% |
| WA | 17,236 | 16,107 | -6.6% |
| SA and NT | 20,353 | 20,937 | 2.9% |
| Tas. | 6,622 | 6,533 | -1.3% |
| Australia | 226,106 | 228,334 | 1.0% |

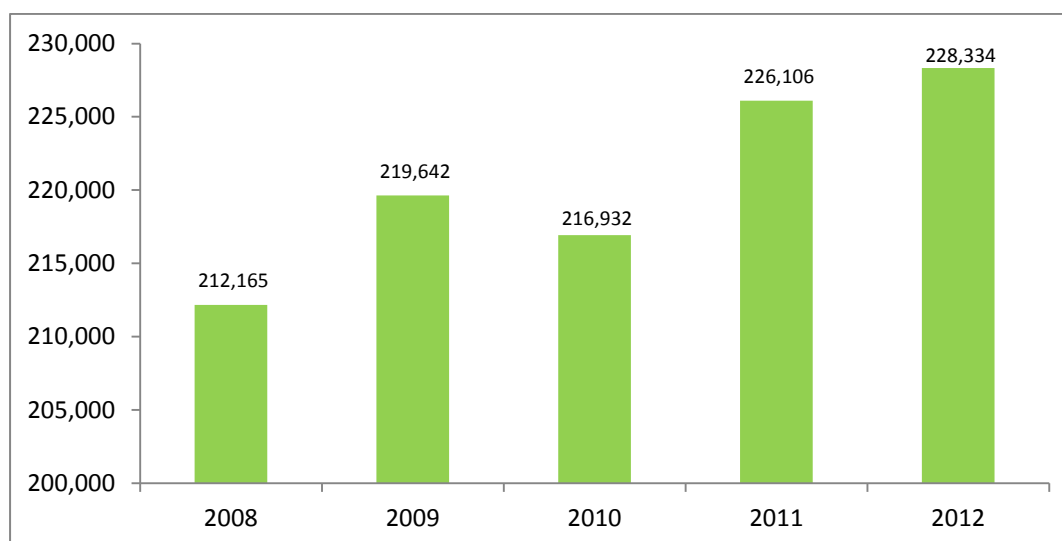
Overall, preliminary applications have risen by 1.0% compared with the same time last year. Over the academic years 2010 to 2012, preliminary applications have increased by 11 402 or 5.3% (Figure 1).

Growth in preliminary applications for the 2012 academic year varied among states. South Australia/Northern Territory (2.9%), New South Wales/ACT (2.3%) and Victoria (2.3%) recorded the strongest growth. The number of preliminary applications fell in Queensland (-0.8%), Tasmania (-1.3%) and Western Australia (-6.6%).

It should be noted that a small element of double counting with aggregated TAC data occurs due to students applying to the TAC in their home state and to TACs in other states.

¹ Figures for the 2011 academic year have been revised upwards to 226 106 from the 220 847 figure shown in the *Undergraduate Applications Preliminary Data 2011* report.

Figure 1: Preliminary Applications through TACs, 2008 - 2012 academic years^(a)



Notes:

(a) Preliminary data for the 2008 and 2009 academic years were based on a reference date in November in the previous year while preliminary data for the 2010, 2011 and 2012 academic years were based on a reference date in October in the previous year.

1.2 Further detail on Tertiary Admission Centre application data

Variations between preliminary data and final data

Preliminary data cited in this report refer to applications received by 12 October 2011. For TACs around 80% of applications are received by the end of September (the on-time cut off date), though they continue to receive applications thereafter. Although it is still quite early in the application process, preliminary data is generally a reliable lead indicator of movements in demand, particularly at the national level. Preliminary data for the 2011 admissions cycle showed a 1.8% increase in applications as published in the *Undergraduate Applications Preliminary Data 2011* report. By the end of the applications process in March however, the growth in applications between the 2010 and 2011 academic years fell slightly to 1.5%. October application data presented in this report, therefore, should be a reasonable indicator of demand, but should be interpreted with caution.

As noted previously, the main universities application process runs from August to February each year. While dates for applications and offers vary between the TACs, some key times for domestic undergraduate applications that influence applicant behaviour are the on-time cut off date, the release of Year 12 results and the offer rounds. Applicants can add, delete or change the order of their preferences up until the close of the main application round in late March.

The on-time cut off date provides a deadline for applications to be submitted without attracting any late fees. While prospective students can continue to submit applications after this date, applicants, especially current Year 12 students, are strongly encouraged to apply by the on-time deadline.

The release of Year 12 results in December also influences Year 12 students' application behaviour as it results in changes to preferences in view of the likelihood of gaining admission to various institutions or courses. Anecdotal evidence based on changes in the number of applications at various stages in the application process also suggests that a small number of applicants withdraw their applications at this point.

Offers are posted by TACs on behalf of the universities they represent. In most states and territories the offer of a place is to the highest preference course for which the applicant is eligible and competitively placed. The dates of each offer round and the number of offer rounds varies slightly by state. Some applicants may change their preferences depending on whether they get an offer in their preferred course in the first offer round.

Applicant demographics

The following section details TAC data by demographic characteristics such as current Year 12 status, age, gender, Indigenous status, region, interstate applications and socioeconomic status (SES). Later data submissions in the applications process from TACs will include more detailed information such as course preferences and offers. A more detailed breakdown of demographic characteristics by such variables will be included in the *Undergraduate Applications, Offers and Acceptances 2012* report.

Current Year 12 applicants

Nationally the majority of applications through TACs are from current Year 12 students (63.3%). This was also observed in all states and territories except Tasmania. The proportion varies somewhat by state and territory (Figure 2).

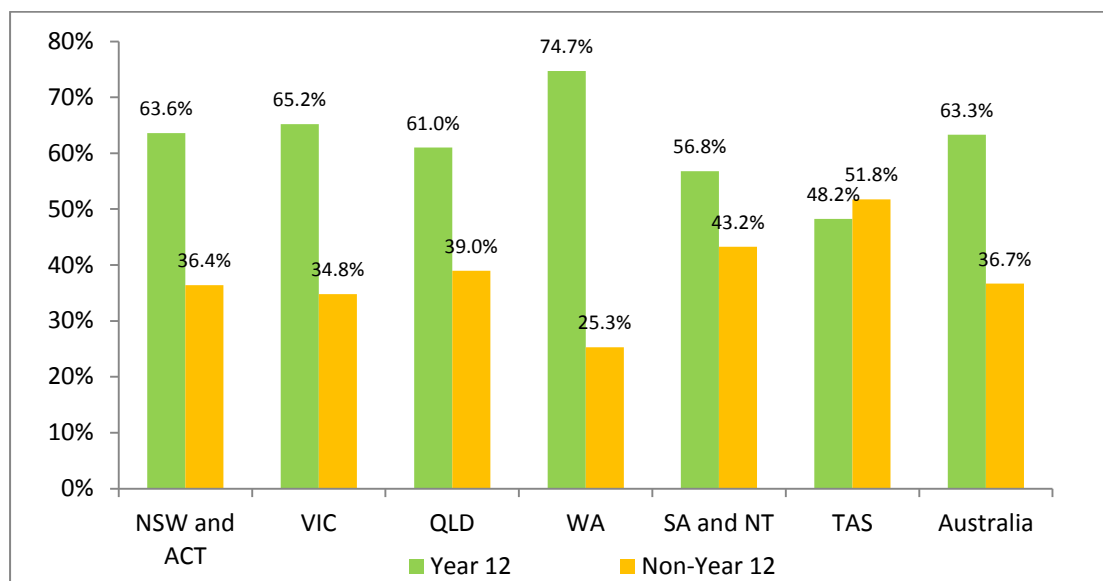
Nationally Year 12 applications increased strongly by 4.2%. South Australia/Northern Territory (7.7%), Queensland (5.1%) and Victoria (4.6%) recorded above-average Year 12 applications while Western Australia experienced slower growth at 1.1%. Tasmania recorded a fall of 1.4% in Year 12 applications.

In contrast, non-Year 12 applications fell across all states and territories, except in New South Wales. Non-Year 12 applications fell 4.1% nationally with a wide dispersion of outcomes among the states and territories. The decrease was largest in Western Australia (23.7%) consistent with the strong labour market conditions in that state followed by Queensland (8.8%).

Table 2: Applications by current Year 12 and non-Year 12 students, by state and territory, October 2010 and October 2011

| State | Current Year 12 | | | Non-Year 12 | | |
|------------------|-----------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| | 2011 | 2012 | % Change | 2011 | 2012 | % Change |
| NSW and ACT | 45,606 | 47,282 | 3.7% | 27,068 | 27,079 | 0.0% |
| Vic. | 42,114 | 44,066 | 4.6% | 23,975 | 23,533 | -1.8% |
| Qld | 24,838 | 26,115 | 5.1% | 18,294 | 16,682 | -8.8% |
| WA | 11,899 | 12,033 | 1.1% | 5,337 | 4,074 | -23.7% |
| SA and NT | 11,037 | 11,883 | 7.7% | 9,316 | 9,054 | -2.8% |
| Tas. | 3,196 | 3,152 | -1.4% | 3,426 | 3,381 | -1.3% |
| Australia | 138,690 | 144,531 | 4.2% | 87,416 | 83,803 | -4.1% |

Figure 2: Proportion of applications by state and territory, by Year 12 and non-Year 12, October 2011



Age

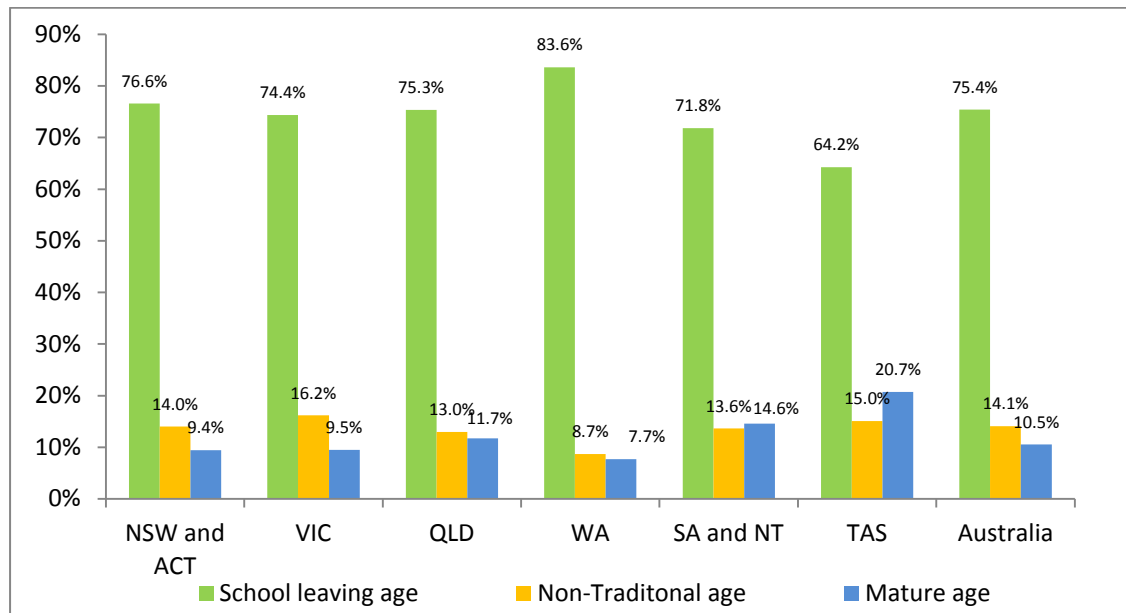
For the purposes of analysis of applicants in this report, applicants are divided into the following age categories:

- those aged 19 and under (the school leaver cohort)
 - those aged 16 and under (early achievers)
- those aged 20 to 24 years (non-traditional age)
- those aged 25 years and older (mature age)

Nationally, the majority (75.4%) of applications for the 2012 academic year were from the school leaver cohort. Those in the non-traditional age group accounted for 14.1% of applications and applications from mature age persons accounted for the remaining 10.5%. There was a small number of applications from persons aged under 16 (a total of 755 or 0.3% total applications). These proportions are broadly similar to those in the 2011 academic year (73.6% school leaver cohort, 14.7% non-traditional age, 11.4% mature age and 0.3% or 743 early achievers).

The share of applications by age group varies across states and territories (Figure 3). The school leaving age cohort ranges from 83.6% of the total in Western Australia down to 64.2% in Tasmania. The proportion of applications from persons in their early 20s varies less by state, with the lowest proportion in Western Australia (8.7%). Applications from mature age persons make up 20.7% of the total in Tasmania, 14.6% in South Australia/Northern Territory and 11.7% in Queensland.

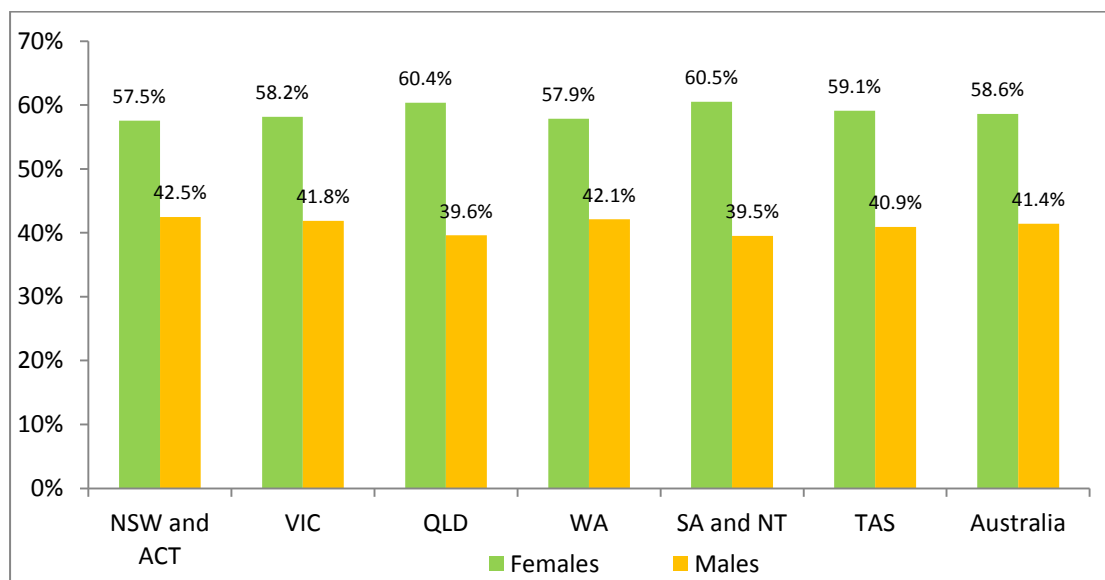
Figure 3: Proportion of applications by state and territory, by age, October 2011



Gender

As at October 2011, 58.6 % of applications to TACs for the 2012 academic year were from females and 41.4% were from males, similar to preliminary applications for the previous academic year. Figure 4 indicates that the gender breakdown was similar across states and territories.

Figure 4: Proportion of applications by state and territory, by gender, October 2011



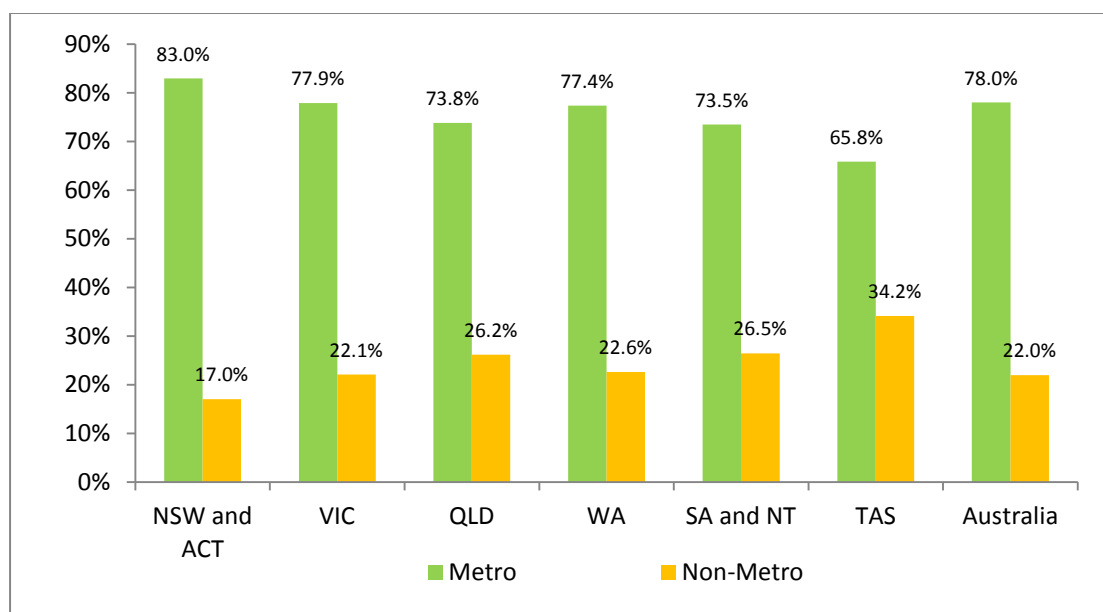
Indigenous status

Approximately 1.1% of preliminary TAC applications for the 2012 academic year were from persons who identified themselves as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin. This is similar to the previous academic year. Tasmania (1.7%) and Queensland (1.6%) and New South Wales (1.3%) had a higher than average number of applications from persons who identified themselves as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin while the corresponding figures for Victoria (0.5%) and Western Australia (0.8%) were below the national average. It should be noted that Indigenous status is a self-identification item on TAC application forms.

Regional status

Analysis of preliminary applications data indicates that the large majority of applications (78.0%) came from persons in metropolitan areas. Applying the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) remoteness categories to data collected as part of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census of Population and Housing in 2006, 71.4% of Australia's population lived in metropolitan areas (that is, mainland state capitals or major urban districts). Comparing applications from metropolitan areas (78.0%) and Australia's share of population in metropolitan areas (71.4%) shows that applications from metropolitan areas are over-represented. Figure 5 shows that there are variations observed across states and territories. Nationally, a similar proportion of metropolitan applications (77.7%) was recorded in the 2011 preliminary data.

Figure 5: Proportion of applications by state and territory, by region, October 2011

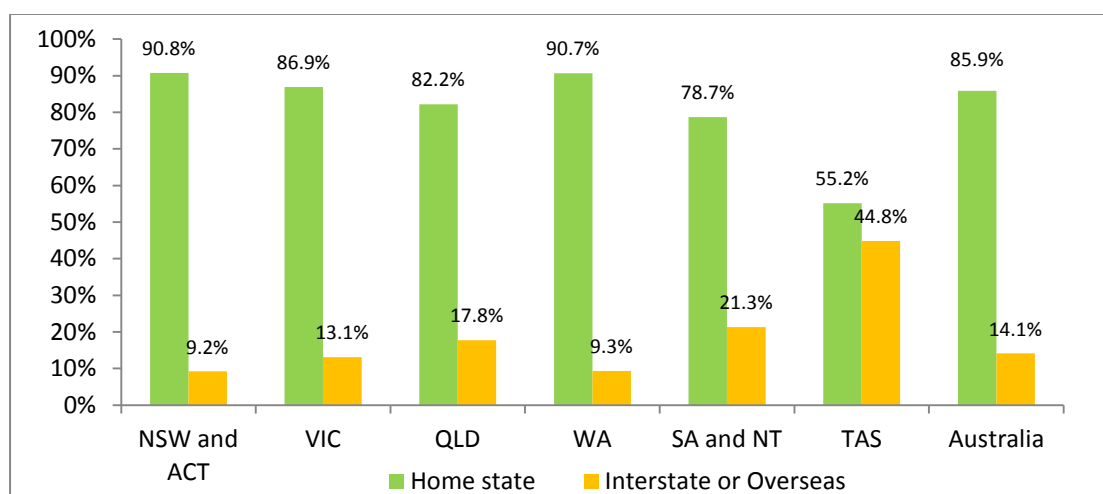


Interstate applicants

Based on the postcodes reported for permanent home residence by applicants, 14.1% of applications to TACs were from interstate applicants, similar to the 2011 preliminary applications data (14.0%).

Figure 6 shows the distribution of 2012 preliminary data by home state and interstate applications. The bulk of applicants apply to study in their home state. Applications from interstate ranged from a low of 9.2% in New South Wales/Australian Capital Territory to a high of 44.8% in Tasmania. Caution should be applied when interpreting proportions of interstate applications due to double counting resulting from applicants applying to multiple TACs in different states.

Figure 6: Proportion of home state applications by state and territory, October 2011



Note: Those with missing or invalid postcodes are included in the 'Interstate and Overseas' category.

Socioeconomic status

Postcodes reported for permanent home residence allows classification of applications by socioeconomic status (SES)². Of all applications, 4537 or 2.0% could not be assigned to an SES classification because they were living outside of Australia or in postcodes where SES could not be determined; or had not provided data on postcode.

High SES applications are over-represented among the pool of applications. For the 2012 academic year about 30.7% of applications are by persons from high SES backgrounds, defined as the top quartile of the postcodes rank ordered according to the ABS Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) Index of Evaluation and Occupation (IEO). Medium SES applications (defined as the middle two quartiles, that is, half of the population) represented 48.9% of domestic applications – roughly equivalent to their population share. People from low SES backgrounds were, on the other hand, under-represented. Only 18.4% of domestic

² DIISRTE uses two indicators of SES:

(1) Low SES postcode measure: SES is based on the students' postcode of permanent home residence, with the SES value derived from the 2006 ABS Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) Index of Education and Occupation (IEO) for postal areas, where postal areas in the bottom 25% of the population aged 15-64 being classified as Low SES. The historical postcode measure is used in both *applications* and *enrolment* data.

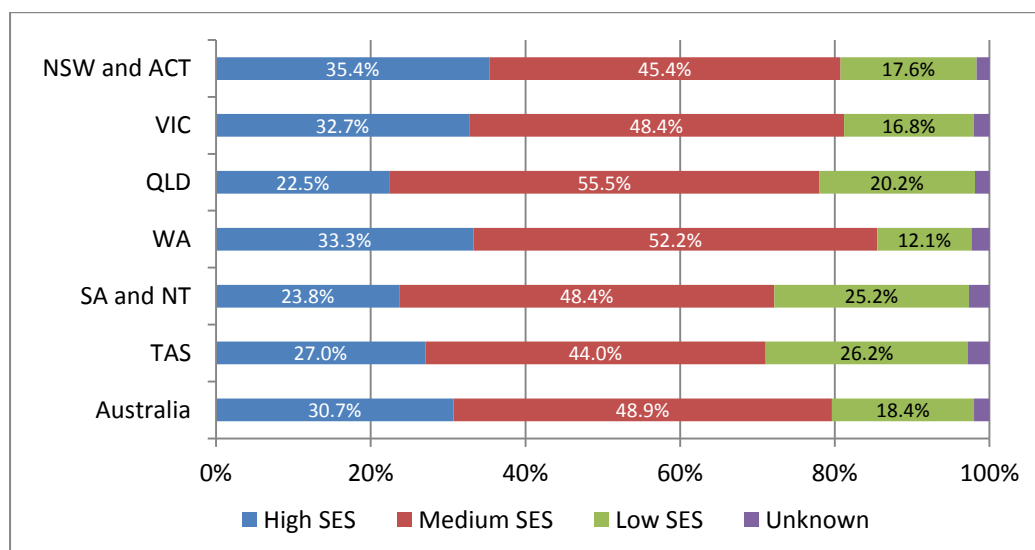
(2) Low SES interim indicator: Since 2009 DIISRTE also determines SES for student *enrolment* data based on the number of domestic undergraduate students with home addresses geocoded to Census Collection Districts (CDs) that belong to the bottom quartile of the ABS SEIFA IEO scores for the population aged 15 - 64 years, and the number of domestic undergraduate students who meet relevant eligibility criteria on selected Centrelink student income support payments.

applications are by persons from low SES backgrounds in comparison with their population share of 25%.

While applications by persons from low SES backgrounds remain under-represented, their numbers increased slightly faster than those from high SES backgrounds for the 2012 academic year (0.8% compared with 0.7%). Applications from medium SES persons increased by 1.3% in 2012. Applications from low SES students nationally for 2012 are estimated to be up by 12.9% since 2009, compared with increases of 10.7% for medium SES applications and 6.1% for high SES applications.

The pattern of distribution of applications by SES at the national level was also observed at the state level (Figure 7). High SES applications were over-represented in New South Wales/Australian Capital Territory (35.4%), Western Australia (33.3%) and Victoria (32.7%). Low SES applications made up 12.1% of the total in Western Australia, but 26.2% in Tasmania and 25.2% in South Australia/Northern Territory.

Figure 7: Share of total applications by socioeconomic status, by state and territory, October 2011



2. Discussion

Preliminary applications grew by 1.0% for the 2012 academic year, which represents a smaller growth compared with the 2011 academic year (1.8%). Factors that influence the number of preliminary applications include:

- trends in the Year 12 feeder population,
- students who complete Year 12 or equivalent, or Certificate II or above, and
- the state of the labour market.

Modest growth was expected for the 17 year-old population in 2011, the main feeder group to universities. The proportion of 15-19 and 20-24 year-olds attaining Year 12 or equivalent, or Certificate II or above decreased in 2011. The slight improvement in the labour market over the period October 2010 to October 2011 is also expected to have dampened demand for university places. On balance, the net result of these factors is that applications have increased by 1.0% for the 2012 academic year but at a slightly slower rate than the 1.8% growth reported in 2011.

More detail on each of these factors, including detailed data at the state level, is presented below.

2.1 Trends in the Year 12 Feeder Population

The main feeder group to universities are persons of school leaving age. ABS data presented in Table 3 shows that the number of 17 year-olds increased marginally by 0.2% at the national level in 2011. There is, however, wide variation across states and territories. For example, the feeder group increased by 1.4% in Western Australia but decreased by 4.3% in the Northern Territory.

Table 3: Estimated resident population, 17 year-old cohort, by state and territory, 2007-2011

| State | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | % change between 2010 and 2011 |
|------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------------------|
| NSW | 94,822 | 95,966 | 95,246 | 95,123 | 94,671 | -0.5% |
| Vic. | 71,215 | 72,078 | 71,461 | 71,816 | 72,288 | 0.7% |
| Qld | 59,116 | 60,792 | 62,039 | 62,464 | 62,800 | 0.5% |
| WA | 30,344 | 30,690 | 30,818 | 30,997 | 31,430 | 1.4% |
| SA | 21,426 | 21,435 | 21,663 | 21,425 | 21,148 | -1.3% |
| Tas. | 6938 | 7140 | 6955 | 6963 | 6985 | 0.3% |
| NT | 3317 | 3314 | 3310 | 3366 | 3220 | -4.3% |
| ACT | 4781 | 4774 | 4657 | 4610 | 4706 | 2.1% |
| Australia | 291,980 | 296,222 | 296,183 | 296,809 | 297,287 | 0.2% |

Source: ABS, Australian Demographic Statistics, June 2011 (Cat No 3101.0).

2.2 Students completing Year 12 or equivalent or Certificate II or above

The proportion of persons aged 15-19 and 20-24 year-olds attaining Year 12 or equivalent or Certificate II or above is likely to influence the number of preliminary applications. This proportion decreased slightly in 2011 for both age groups (as shown in Table 4).

Table 4: Proportion of 15-19 and 20-24 year-olds attaining Year 12 or equivalent, or Certificate II or above, 2001-2011, Australia

| Age | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 |
|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 15-19 | 31.4 | 34.1 | 32.9 | 33.4 | 33.7 | 34.3 | 33.7 | 33.3 | 32.8 | 35.3 | 34.4 |
| 20-24 | 79.1 | 80.0 | 80.4 | 81.3 | 81.2 | 81.9 | 83.5 | 84.2 | 84.5 | 85.6 | 84.1 |

Source: ABS Cat. No. 6227.0 Education and Work, Australia

2.3 Impact of Changes in Labour Market Conditions

Changes in labour market conditions can also influence demand for university places. In a strong labour market, there are more job opportunities. Wages and salaries tend to increase more quickly so that investment in post secondary education means that there are likely to be higher opportunity costs in foregone wages for people who leave work to study.

As shown in Table 5, following the global financial crisis labour market conditions softened noticeably and consequently the unemployment rate rose from 4.3% in October 2008 to 5.7% in October 2009. In response to the increase in unemployment preliminary application numbers to university for the 2010 academic year increased significantly by 8.1%.

As the national unemployment rate fell slightly by 0.1 percentage points to 5.2% in October 2011, it is expected that this would only marginally impact on applications in 2012.

Table 5: Unemployment rate by state and territory, October 2007 to October 2011

| State | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | % point change between 2010 and 2011 |
|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| NSW | 4.6% | 5.2% | 6.1% | 5.5% | 5.3% | -0.2 |
| Vic. | 4.4% | 4.4% | 5.6% | 5.5% | 5.3% | -0.2 |
| Qld | 3.7% | 3.8% | 5.9% | 5.5% | 5.7% | 0.2 |
| WA | 3.7% | 2.3% | 4.9% | 4.5% | 4.2% | -0.3 |
| SA | 5.4% | 5.4% | 5.2% | 5.7% | 5.3% | -0.4 |
| Tas. | 5.8% | 3.7% | 5.6% | 5.2% | 5.0% | -0.2 |
| NT | 4.9% | 3.5% | 3.6% | 2.8% | 4.1% | 1.3 |
| ACT | 2.5% | 2.7% | 3.7% | 3.2% | 3.8% | 0.6 |
| Australia | 4.4% | 4.3% | 5.7% | 5.3% | 5.2% | -0.1 |

Source: ABS, Labour Force, Australia, October 2011 (Cat No 6202.0)
Seasonally adjusted figures except for NT and ACT (trend).

2.4 A demand driven system

The Australian Government announced its response to the Bradley Review of Higher Education in March 2009. The Government adopted ambitious targets and a range of measures to support increased participation. In particular, targets for increased higher education attainment and increased participation by under-represented groups, together with the introduction of a demand driven funding system from 2012, are likely to have an impact on the demand for and supply of university places. In the transition to a demand driven funding system, the cap on over enrolments has been lifted from 5% in 2009 to 10% in 2010 and 2011.

The demand-driven system will enable a closer match between demand and supply and a more flexible and responsive allocation of university places. The modest increase in 2012 preliminary applications gives an early indication of growth in demand for higher education.

In 2011 there were 211 654 offers, an increase of 3.3% (or 6860) on 2010. Although the number of offers was modest, the offer rate increased to 78.1% - an increase of 1.4 percentage points on the offer rate recorded in 2010. The offer rate provides an indicator of the way which universities choose to respond to student demand. This represents a key indicator as universities transition to the introduction of the demand driven system from 2012.

3. Data Qualifications

The data referred to in this report are for applications for undergraduate university places received from TACs as at 12 October 2011. It should be noted that:

- The reference date for the data provided was 12 October 2011. For TACs, this included applications made before their agreed on-time closing date (30 September 2011) plus applications made up to 12 October. Applicants who submit their applications after the on-time date must pay late fees.
- The reference date for the age calculation is 31 December.
- A small proportion of applicants make applications to more than one TAC resulting in some double counting of applicants.
- The data does not include applications from overseas students.
- While completing Year 12 and gaining a tertiary entrance score is the most common way to gain entry to university, TACs and universities take a number of other qualifications into consideration, particularly for adults applying who have not recently completed Year 12. Some pathways to gaining entry to a university degree include sitting the Special Tertiary Admissions Test (STAT), articulating from certificate and/or diploma level studies in vocational education and training (VET), university bridging or foundation programs and previous higher education (completed or commenced).
- A preliminary applications time series is not produced due to methodological differences and significant changes in the data collection. Prior to 2008-09 preliminary applications data was assessed based on September rather than October/November data. Where possible, time series will be maintained when using the new Application and Offers Data Collection from the 2009 academic year onwards.
- The reference date for preliminary applications data for the 2009 academic year was 3 November and for the 2010 academic year was 2 November. For the 2011 academic year the reference date was brought forward to 11 October. For comparison purposes the TACs also provided a snap shot as at 12 October for the 2010 academic year. For the 2012 academic year the reference date was 12 October 2011.
- Data on offers is not yet available as the offer process had not yet begun. The bulk of offers are made in January, with further rounds occurring in February, and even March, in some states and territories.
- Commentators sometimes use early figures on the number of offers made as an indicator of the supply of university places. It is important to note, however, that the number of offers made does not necessarily equate to the number of places available. When offering places, higher education providers need to take into account that not all offers are accepted and that some applicants will wish to study part time.