



Australian Government

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Undergraduate Applications, Preliminary Data 2011



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Contents

1. Preliminary Applications Data	3
1.1 Overall preliminary applications and trends	4
TAC applications.....	4
1.2 Further detail on Tertiary Admission Centre application data.....	5
Variations between preliminary data and final data.....	5
Applicant demographics	6
2. Discussion	11
2.1 Trends in the Year 12 Feeder Population.....	11
2.2 Number completing Year 12	11
2.3 Impact of Changes in Labour Market Conditions	12
3. Data Qualifications	13

1. Preliminary Applications Data

This report looks at preliminary applications made to universities as part of the application process for the 2011 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 11 October 2010. This cut-off date for preliminary applications data is earlier than in previous years, reflecting a change to allow more time for analysis of the data to be undertaken prior to its release.

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 will focus 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 2011.

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 2011 academic year will include both applications made through TACs and direct applications. After the conclusion of the applications process in mid-2011, the information will be presented in a detailed report entitled *Undergraduate Applications, Offers and Acceptances 2011*.

In this report, preliminary data for the 2009 academic year and the 2010 and 2011 academic years are not directly comparable. As noted above the reference date for preliminary applications for the 2011 academic year has been brought forward from 2 November in 2009 to 11 October in 2010. In order to make a direct comparison between 2011 and 2010 data, the TACs have provided a snapshot of the preliminary applications submissions as at 12 October 2009. Further details on the data collection and methodologies can be found in the data qualifications section on page 13.

1.1 Overall preliminary applications and trends

TAC applications

As of mid October 2010 there were 220 847 preliminary applications made through TACs for admission to university in 2011. Table 1 shows the number of preliminary applications in each state in comparison with preliminary applications at the same time last year.

Table 1: Preliminary applications by state and territory, as at October 2010 and October 2011

State	2010	2011	% change
NSW and ACT	70 876	72 504	2.3%
Vic.	61 326	62 260	1.5%
Qld	41 168	42 007	2.0%
SA and NT	19 401	20 276	4.5%
WA	17 486	17 178	-1.8%
Tas.	6675	6622	-0.8%
Australia	216 932	220 847	1.8%

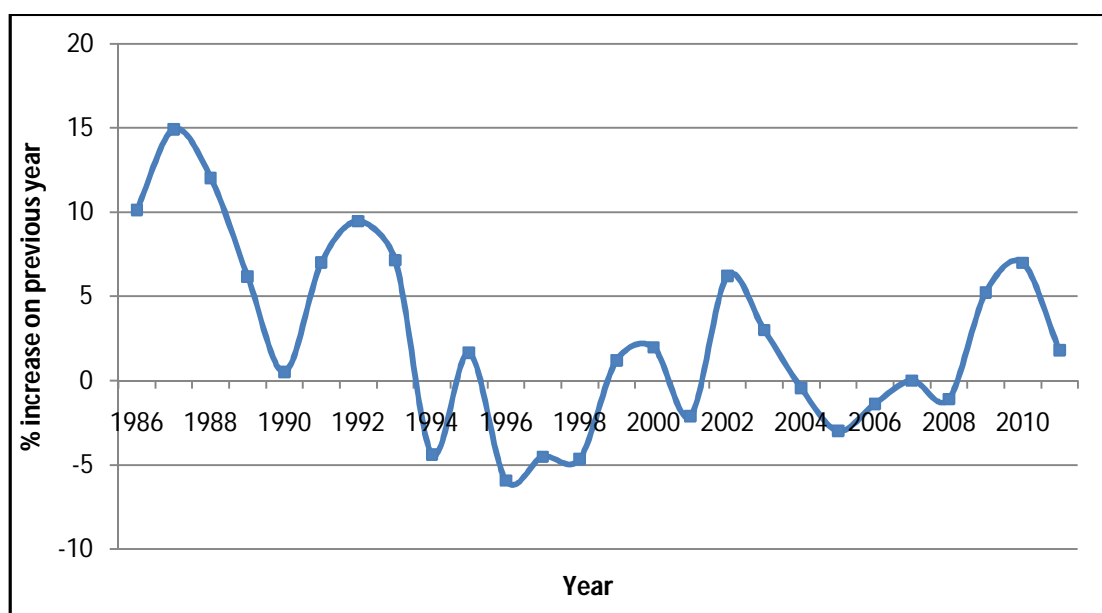
Overall, preliminary applications have risen moderately by 1.8% compared with the same time last year. This is much lower than the 8.1% growth in preliminary applications data between 2008-09 and 2009-10.

Growth in preliminary applications varied among states. South Australia/Northern Territory (4.5%), New South Wales/ACT (2.3%) and Queensland (2.0%) recorded the strongest growth. Preliminary applications increased slightly slower than the national average in Victoria (1.5%) and the number of preliminary applications fell in Tasmania (-0.8%) and Western Australia (-1.8%).

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 a TAC in another state.

Figure 1 shows the year on year percentage change in application numbers for the academic years from 1986 to 2011, where the 2011 change is based on preliminary applications only. The figure shows that the increase in 2011 of 1.1% (the lowest since 2008) has returned to levels that are more moderate. Elevated changes in applications in the mid 1980s reflected the rapid increase in the Year 12 retention rate at that time and the flow on effect to university applications.

Figure 1: Year on year percentage change in applications ^{(a) (b) (c)}



Notes:

(a) Data from 1986 to 2008 are based on percentage change in eligible applicants. Eligible applicants exclude those applicants who apply on the basis of a Year 12 qualification obtained in the current or previous year with an Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER) score/Interstate Transfer Index (ITI) below an agreed benchmark. All applicants applying on a basis other than recent Year 12 qualifications are included as eligible applicants.

(b) Data from 2009 are based on all applicants, including non-eligible applicants.

(c) Percentage change from 1986 to 2010 is based on final application numbers. 2011 data are based on preliminary application data as at October 2010.

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 11 October 2010. 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 2009-10 admissions cycle showed an 8.1% increase in applications. By the end of the applications process in March however, this had decreased to a 6.9% increase in applications between 2008-09 and 2009-10. 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 will withdraw their application 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 will be 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 will 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 2011* report.

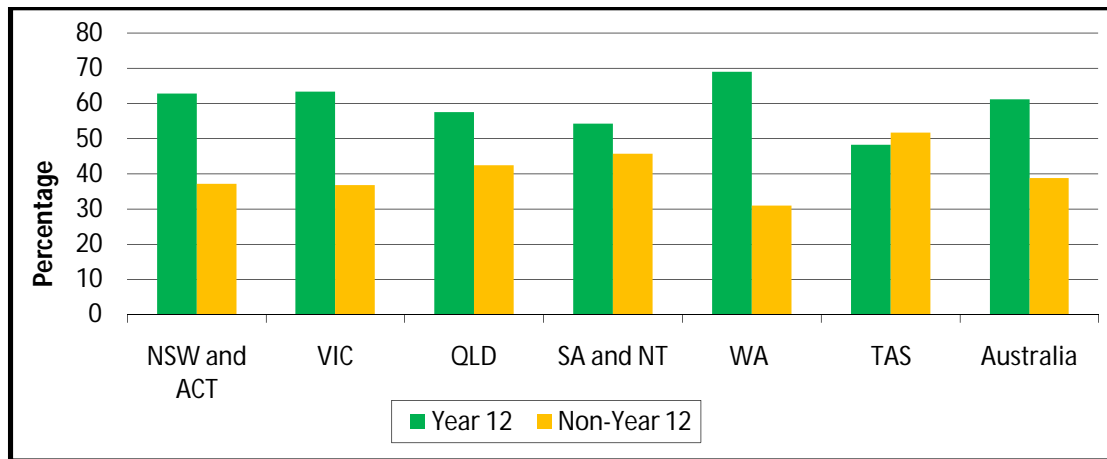
Current Year 12 applicants

The majority of applicants through TACs in all states except Tasmania are current Year 12 students. Nearly 61% of applicants nationwide as at October 2010 were current Year 12 students. The proportion varies somewhat by state (Figure 2). Year 12 applicants in all states and territories increased strongly with national growth of 4.1%. In contrast, non-Year 12 applications fell 1.7% nationally with a wide dispersion of outcomes among the states and territories. In South Australia non-Year 12 applications grew by 5.7% consistent with the labour market in that state (see the later discussion on the impact of changes in the labour market conditions on preliminary applications) whereas non-Year 12 applications fell in Western Australia (-14.0%), Tasmania (-6.6%), Victoria (-2.2%), and New South Wales and ACT (-1.3%).

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

State	Current Year 12			Non-Year 12		
	2010	2011	% Change	2010	2011	% Change
NSW and ACT	43 549	45 536	4.6%	27 327	26 968	-1.3%
Vic.	37 951	39 390	3.8%	23 375	22 870	-2.2%
Qld	23 367	24 182	3.5%	17 801	17 825	0.1%
SA and NT	10 633	11 008	3.5%	8768	9268	5.7%
WA	11 303	11 862	4.9%	6183	5316	-14.0%
Tas.	3005	3196	6.4%	3670	3426	-6.6%
Australia	129 808	135 174	4.1%	87 124	85 673	-1.7%

Figure 2: Proportion of applicants by state and territory, by Year 12 and non-Year 12



Age

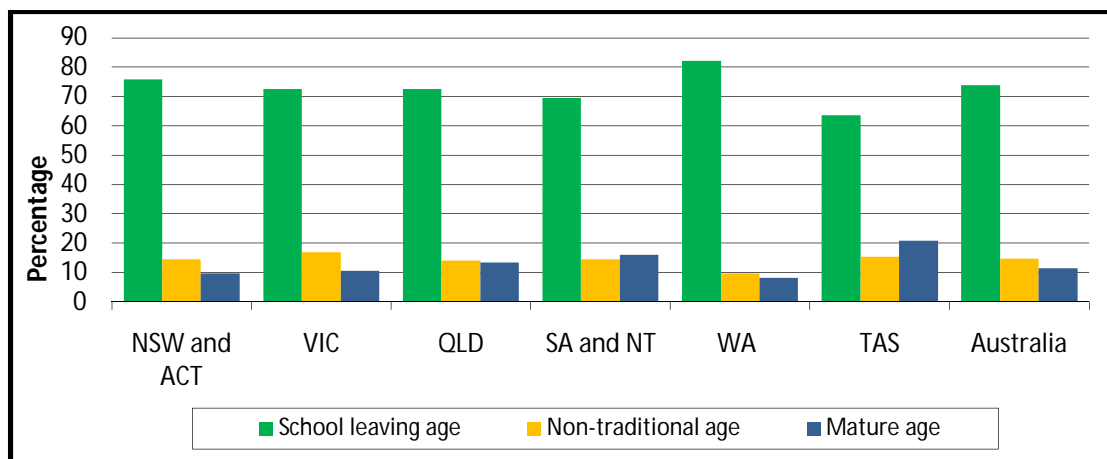
For the purposes of analysis applicants in this report, applicants were divided into the following age categories:

- 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 aged)

Nationally, the majority (74%) of applicants as at October 2010 were aged 19 and under. Those in the non-traditional age group accounted for 15% of applicants and those defined as mature aged accounted for the remaining 11%. There was a small group of applicants aged under 16 (a total of 732 or 0.5% of the school leaver cohort). These proportions are broadly similar to those found for preliminary applications in October 2009 (72% school leaver cohort, 15% non-traditional age, 12% mature aged and 0.5% or 730 early achievers).

The share of applications by age group varies across states and territories (Figure 3). The school leaving age cohort ranges from 82% of the total in Western Australia down to 64% in Tasmania. The proportion of applicants in their early 20s varies less by state, with the lowest proportion in Western Australia (10%). Mature age applicants make up 21% of the total in Tasmania, 16% in South Australia/Northern Territory and 13% in Queensland.

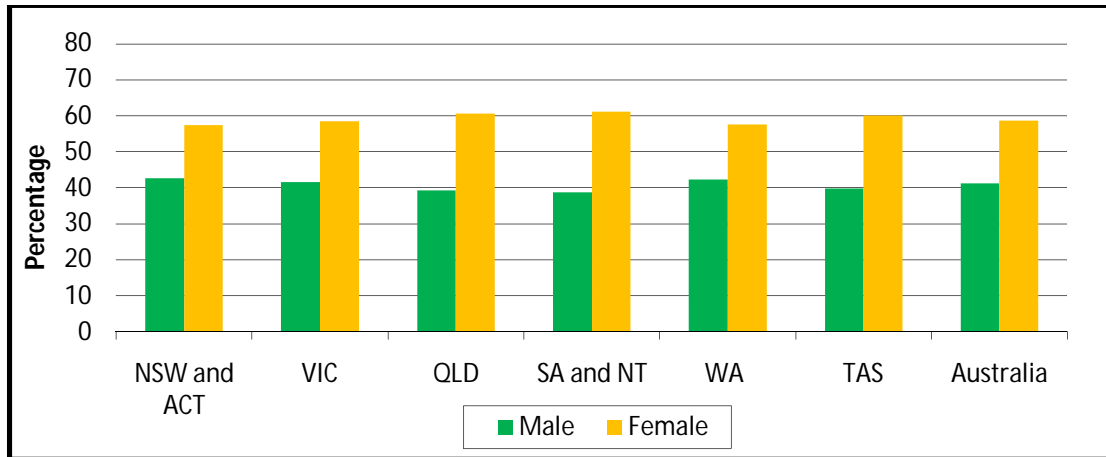
Figure 3: Proportion of applications by state and territory, by age



Gender

As at October 2010, 59 % of applicants to TACs were female and 41% were male, similar to preliminary applications data in October last year. Figure 4 indicates that the gender breakdown for October 2010 was similar across states

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



Indigenous status

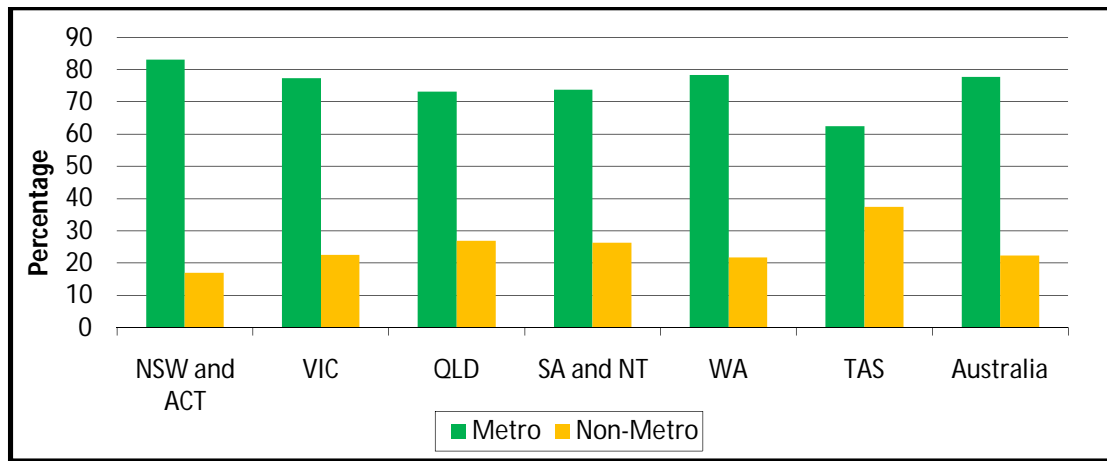
Approximately 1% of 2010-11 preliminary TAC applicants identified themselves as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin. This is similar to the proportion of 2009-10 preliminary TAC applicants. Tasmania (1.6%) and Queensland (1.3%) had a higher than average number of applicants who identify themselves as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin while Victoria (0.6%) and Western Australia (0.7%) have less. It should be noted that Indigenous status is a self-identification item on TAC application forms.

Regional status

Preliminary applications data indicates that applicants from metropolitan areas are overrepresented. 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, 61% of Australia's population lived in metropolitan areas (that is, mainland state capitals or major urban districts).

Findings from the preliminary data show that 78% of applicants were from metropolitan areas when using the MCEETYA remoteness categories, although variation was observed across states (Figure 5). Nationally, the same proportion of metropolitan applicants (78%) was found for the 2009-10 preliminary data.

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

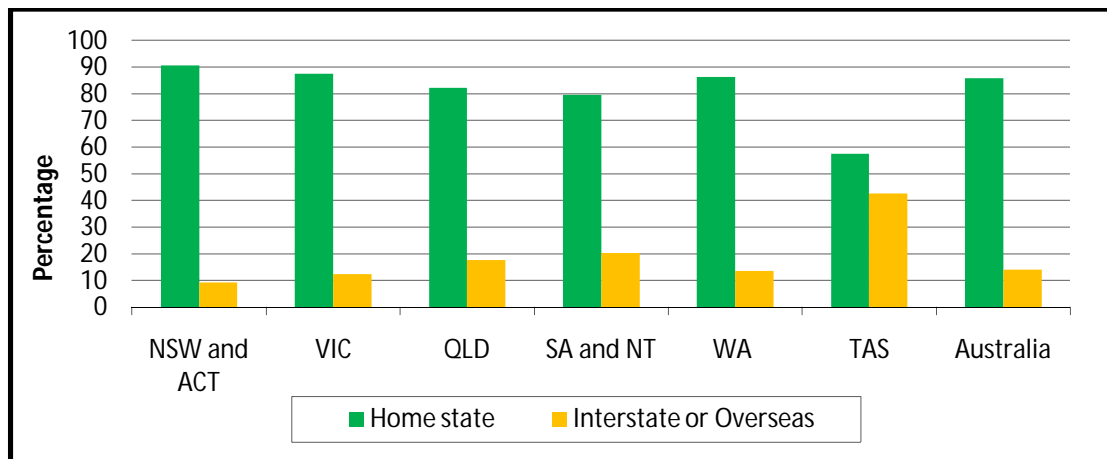


Interstate applicants

Based on the postcodes reported for permanent home residence by applicants, 14% of applications to TACs were from interstate applicants, similar to the 2009-10 preliminary applications data (13%).

Figure 6 shows the divide for 2010 October data by state into home state and interstate applicants. Caution should be applied when interpreting proportions of interstate applicants 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



Note: Those with a missing code are included in the 'Interstate and Overseas' category.

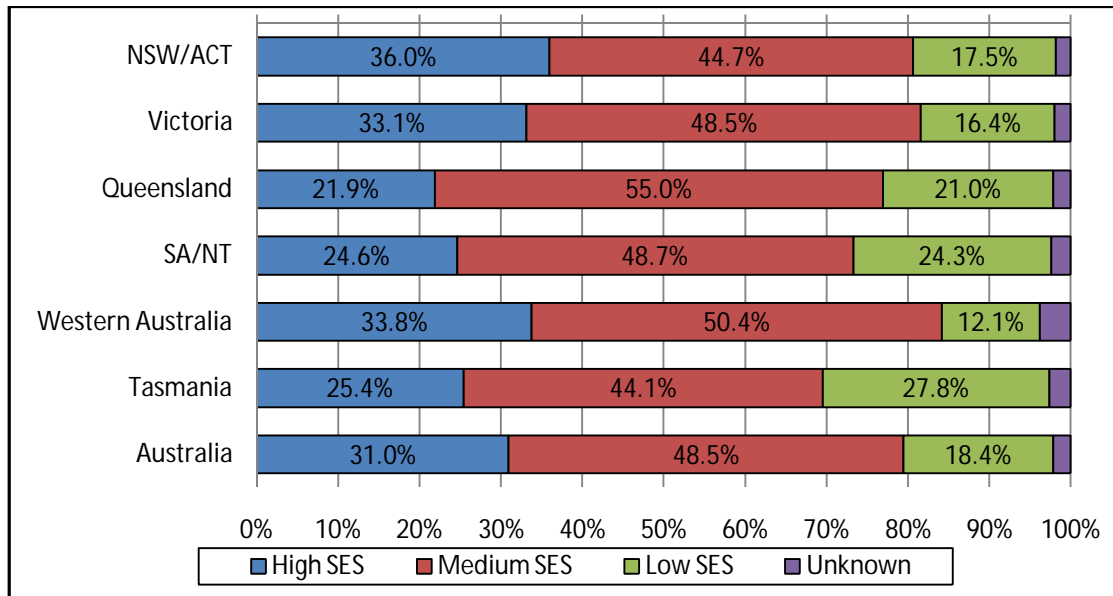
Socioeconomic status

Postcode data allows classification of applicants by SES. Of all applicants, 4797 or 2.2% could not be assigned to an SES classification because they were living outside of Australia, living in postcodes whose SES could not be determined; or because they had not provided data on postcode.

High SES applicants were over-represented among the pool of applicants. Nearly one third (31.0%) of applicants were 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 applicants (defined as the middle two quartiles, that is, half of the population) represented 48.5% of domestic applicants – roughly equivalent to their population share. People from low SES backgrounds were, on the other hand, under-represented. Only 18.4% of domestic applicants were from low SES backgrounds in comparison with their population share of 25%. While low SES applicants remain under-represented, their numbers have increased faster than applicants in other SES categories. Applications from low SES persons increased by 3.0% in 2011, compared to 2.0% for medium SES applicants and 0.6% for high SES applicants.

The pattern of distribution of applicants by SES at the national level was reproduced state by state (Figure 6). High SES applicants were particularly over-represented in New South Wales/Australian Capital Territory (36.0%), Western Australia (33.8%) and Victoria (33.1%). Low SES applicants made up only 12.1% of the total in Western Australia, but 27.8% in Tasmania and 24.3% in South Australia/Northern Territory.

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



2. Discussion

Preliminary applications grew by 1.8% for the 2011 academic year, which represents a slowing in growth in preliminary applications compared with 2010 academic year. Factors that influence the number of applications include:

- trends in the Year 12 feeder population,
- the number of students who complete Year 12, and
- the state of the labour market.

Modest growth was expected for the 17 year-old population in 2010, the main feeder group to universities. Data on Year 12 apparent retention rates for 2010 are not available until early 2011, however the apparent Year 12 retention rate increased by 1.4 percentage points in 2009. The improvement in the labour market over the period October 2009 to October 2010 is also expected to have dampened demand for university places.

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 have increased, only marginally, by 0.3% at the national level in 2010. There is, however, wide variation across states and territories. For example, the feeder group have increased by 1.7% in Northern Territory and decreased by 1.2% in the Australian Capital Territory.

Table 3: Estimated resident population, 17 year-old cohort, by state and territory, 2007-2010

State	2007	2008	2009	2010	% change 2009-10
NSW	94 822	95 966	95 539	95 277	-0.3%
Vic.	71 215	72 078	71 480	71 947	0.7%
Qld	59 116	60 792	62 090	62 572	0.8%
SA	21 426	21 435	21 651	21 452	-0.9%
WA	30 344	30 690	30 801	31 077	0.9%
Tas.	6938	7140	6954	6943	-0.2%
NT	3317	3314	3307	3362	1.7%
ACT	4781	4774	4663	4609	-1.2%
Australia	291 980	296 222	296 518	297 283	0.3%

Source: ABS, Population by Age and Sex, Australian States and Territories, June 2010 (Cat No 3201.0)

2.2 Number completing Year 12

School retention rates will also influence the number of persons of school leaving age who are able to apply to university based on their secondary qualification. In 2010, the Year 12 retention rate for Australia grew by 2.0 percentage points (as shown in Table 4).

Table 4: Apparent retention rates by state and territory, 2006-2010

State	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	% point change 2009-10
NSW	70.5%	69.7%	69.6%	71.3%	72.5%	1.2
Vic.	79.9%	80.1%	79.4%	80.2%	81.1%	0.9
Qld	78.8%	78.5%	78.1%	79.6%	82.5%	2.9
SA	71.5%	72.7%	74.4%	78.5%	81.9%	3.4
WA	71.8%	70.3%	73.8%	75.0%	78.3%	3.3
Tas.	64.8%	65.4%	64.8%	63.8%	71.0%	7.2
NT	58.4%	61.7%	60.1%	54.8%	53.0%	1.8
ACT	88.7%	85.2%	85.2%	86.9%	90.8%	3.9
Australia	74.7%	74.3%	74.6%	76.0%	78.0%	2.0

Source: ABS, Schools Australia 2009 (Cat No 4221.0) - Year 7/8 to Year 12 apparent retention rate.

In 2009, changes to the processing of Northern Territory enrolment data will affect comparisons with previous years of all numbers.

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 the unemployment rate (seasonally adjusted) was unchanged across October 2007 and October 2008. Following on from the global financial crisis, labour market conditions softened noticeably and consequently the unemployment rate rose 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%.

Consistent with the modest improvement in the labour market in 2010, preliminary applications increased only slightly for the 2011 academic year (1.8%). At the state level, the unemployment rate fell slightly in all states except South Australia. In the states where the unemployment rate fell, growth in preliminary applications was less than 2010. Conversely, in South Australia, where the unemployment rate rose, growth in preliminary applications rose faster than the previous year.

Table 5: Unemployment rate by state and territory, October 2007 to October 2010

State	2007	2008	2009	2010	% point change 2009-10
NSW	4.6%	5.2%	6.1%	5.4%	-0.7
Vic.	4.4%	4.4%	5.6%	5.5%	-0.1
Qld	3.7%	3.8%	6.0%	5.6%	-0.4
SA	5.4%	5.3%	5.2%	5.7%	0.5
WA	3.7%	2.4%	5.0%	4.6%	-0.4
Tas.	5.6%	3.6%	5.6%	5.2%	-0.4
NT	4.9%	3.5%	3.6%	2.8%	-0.8
ACT	2.5%	2.7%	3.7%	3.2%	-0.5
Australia	4.4%	4.4%	5.5%	5.1%	-0.4

Source: ABS, Labour Force, Australia, April 2011 (Cat No 6202.0)

Seasonally adjusted figures except for NT and ACT (trend).

3. Data Qualifications

The data referred to in this report are for applications for undergraduate university places received from TACs as at 11 October 2010. It should be noted that:

- The reference date for the data provided was 11 October 2010. For TACs, this included applications made before their agreed on-time closing date (30 September 2009) plus applications made up to 11 October. Applicants that 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 will 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).
- Preliminary applications time series are not possible 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.
- 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.