



**Australian Government**

**Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations**

# Undergraduate Applications, Preliminary Data for 2010



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Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations  
Location Code: 032  
GPO Box 9880  
CANBERRA CITY ACT 2601

For questions regarding preliminary application data or for further information, please email [applicationdata@deewr.gov.au](mailto:applicationdata@deewr.gov.au)

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## Preliminary Applications Data

This report looks at the number of applications made to universities as at November 2 2009 (preliminary applications) as part of the application process for the 2010 academic year. 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.

Data for the 2010 academic year includes applications made through Tertiary Admission Centres (TACs), as in previous years. In addition, data on applications submitted directly to universities will also be available for the first time this year. As 2010 is the first year that direct application data is available, there is no scope for comparison with 2009. Universities had received only a limited number of direct applications by early November 2009. A comprehensive picture of direct admissions activity will not be available until March 2010. For these reasons, the current report does not include detailed analysis of direct applications data.

From the 2009 academic year onwards DEEWR (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) has had access to unit record data on applications which allows for analysis at a fine level of detail. As unit record data was collected for preliminary applications from TACs for both 2009 and 2010, direct comparisons are possible.

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 also offers and acceptances information. After the conclusion of the applications process in mid-2010, this information will be presented in a detailed report entitled *Undergraduate Applications, Offers and Acceptances 2010*. Further details on the data collection and methodologies can be found in the 'Data Qualifications' section below.

### Overall preliminary applications and trends

#### Tertiary Admission Centre applications

There were 237,496 preliminary applications made through TACs for admission to university in 2010 as at the start of November 2009. 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 as at November, 2008-09 and 2009-10**

State	2008-09	2009-10	% change
NSW and ACT	72,607	75,099	+3.4%
VIC	64,447	69,418	+7.7%
QLD	39,784	46,820	+17.7%
WA	16,164	18,321	+13.3%
SA and NT	19,941	20,691	+3.8%
TAS	6,699	7,147	+6.7%
<b>TOTAL AUSTRALIA</b>	<b>219,642</b>	<b>237,496</b>	<b>+8.1%</b>

Overall, preliminary applications have risen strongly by 8.1% compared with the same time last year. Preliminary applications data from the new data collection (2008-09 and 2009-10) are not directly comparable with previous preliminary applications data. An approximate

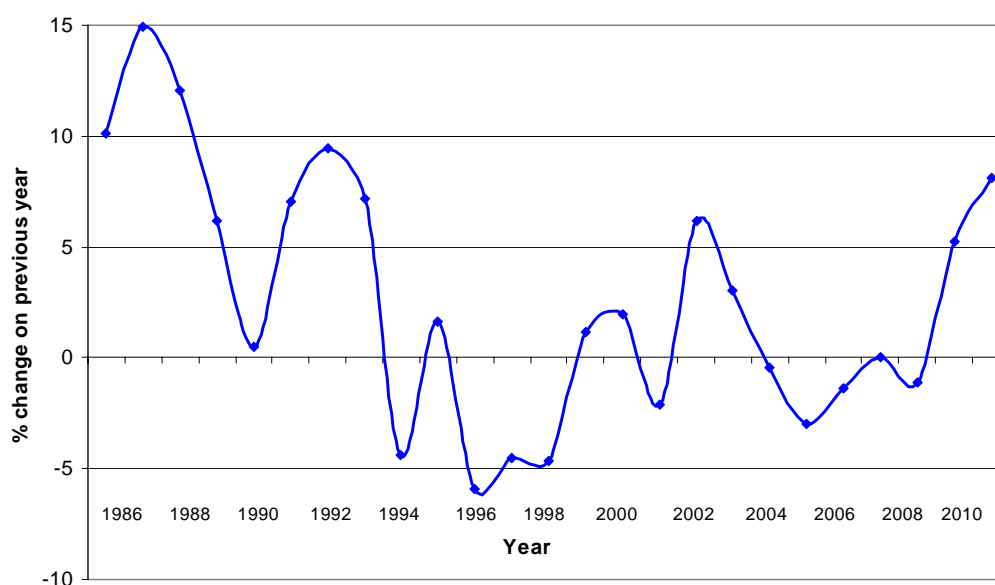
comparison however indicates that growth in preliminary applications between 2007-08 and 2008-09 was 3.5%, notably lower than growth in the current year.

Applications were up in all States, with Queensland (17.7%) and Western Australia (13.3%) recording strongest growth. Application increases in these States in particular contributed to the high national growth figure overall (8.1%). Preliminary applications increased slightly slower than the national average in Victoria (7.7%) and Tasmania (6.7%). In New South Wales/Australian Capital Territory and South Australia/Northern Territory, growth in preliminary applications was more modest in comparison, increasing at 3.4% and 3.8% respectively.

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

Figure 1 shows the year on year percentage change in application numbers for academic years from 1986 to 2010, where 2010 change is based on preliminary applications only. The figure shows that recent increases in application numbers are approaching levels seen in the economic downturn of the early 1990s. Elevated changes in applications in the mid 1980s reflect the rapid increase in Year 12 retention rate at that time and the flow on effect to university applications. The effect of labour market conditions on university applications is discussed later in this report.

**Figure 1: Year on year percentage change in application numbers** (a) (b) (c)



Notes:

(a) Data from 1986 to 2008 is 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 and 2010 is based on all applicants, including 'non-eligible' applicants.

(c) Percentage change from 1986 to 2009 is based on final application numbers. 2010 data is based on preliminary application data at this time.

## **Direct applications**

There were 22,070 preliminary applications made directly to universities for entry in 2010 as at the start of November 2009. Direct applications data refers to preliminary data submitted by only thirty universities. The number of preliminary direct applications varies from very few to several thousand across institutions. It appears that the time profile of direct applications varies across institutions. A clearer picture of direct applications will be evident later in the application process and a comprehensive analysis of this data will be included in the *Undergraduate Applications, Offers and Acceptances 2010* report.

There is no means of identifying applicants who apply directly to multiple Higher Education Providers (HEPs). Therefore the number of direct applications record the number of applications and not the number of applicants. Direct application numbers will therefore include double counting of applicants.

## **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 early November. For TACs the bulk of applications are usually received by the end of September ('on-time' cut off date), though they continue to receive applications thereafter. Although it is still quite early in the application process, preliminary data for November is a reliable lead indicator of movements in demand. Nevertheless, figures do vary over the course of the admissions process, and annual percentage changes can look quite different – especially at the State level. Indeed, in 2008 a negative trend in the number of applications as at September was reversed by the end of the applications process in March. Although not directly comparable due to the new data collection for the 2009 academic year, preliminary data for the 2008-09 admissions cycle showed a 3.5% increase in applications. By the end of the applications process in March however, this had risen to a 5.6% increase in applications between 2007-08 and 2008-09. November 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, 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 preferred 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 and interstate applications. 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 2010* report.

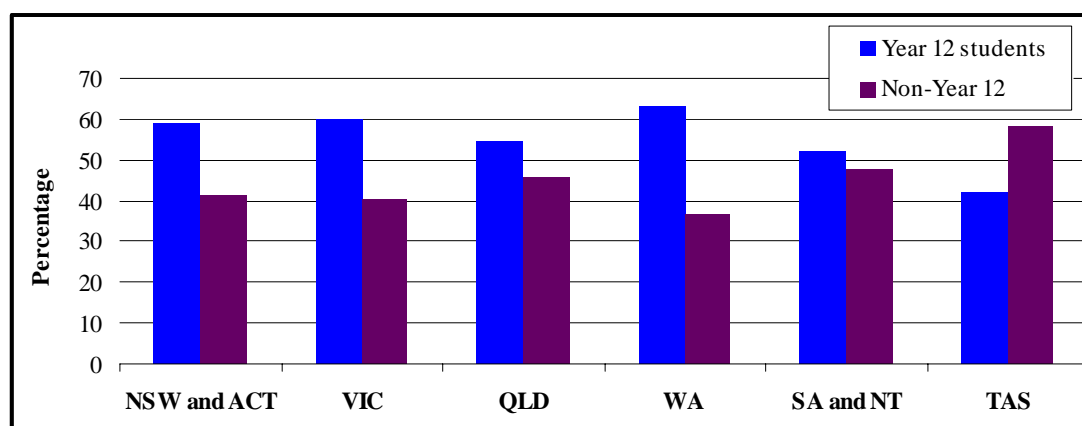
### Current Year 12's

The majority of applicants through TACs in all States except Tasmania are current Year 12 students. Nearly 58% of applicants nationwide as at November 2009 were current Year 12s. The proportion varies somewhat by State (Table 2 and Figure 2). Although the number of Year 12 applicants in all States except Tasmania increased, applications from this group as a proportion of total preliminary applicants decreased in every State. This indicates that much of the growth in applications for the 2010 academic year is from non-Year 12 students. Indeed, applications from current Year 12s grew by 3.9% nationally compared to 14.4% for non-Year 12 applicants.

**Table 2: Applications by current Year 12 students as a proportion of all applications, as at November 2008 and November 2009**

State	2008-09			2009-10			% change Current Year 12s 2008-09/2009-10
	Total	Current Year 12s	% of Year 12s	Total	Current Year 12s	% of Year 12s	
NSW and ACT	72,607	43,294	59.6%	75,099	44,219	58.9%	-0.7%
VIC	64,447	40,659	63.1%	69,418	41,546	59.8%	-3.3%
QLD	39,784	23,072	58.0%	46,820	25,459	54.4%	-3.6%
WA	16,164	10,793	66.8%	18,321	11,574	63.2%	-3.6%
SA and NT	19,941	10,573	53.0%	20,691	10,794	52.2%	-0.8%
TAS	6,699	3,038	45.4%	7,147	2,994	41.9%	-3.5%
<b>TOTAL AUSTRALIA</b>	<b>219,642</b>	<b>131,429</b>	<b>59.8%</b>	<b>237,496</b>	<b>136,586</b>	<b>57.5%</b>	<b>-2.3%</b>

**Figure 2: Proportion of current Year 12 applicants by State**



## Age

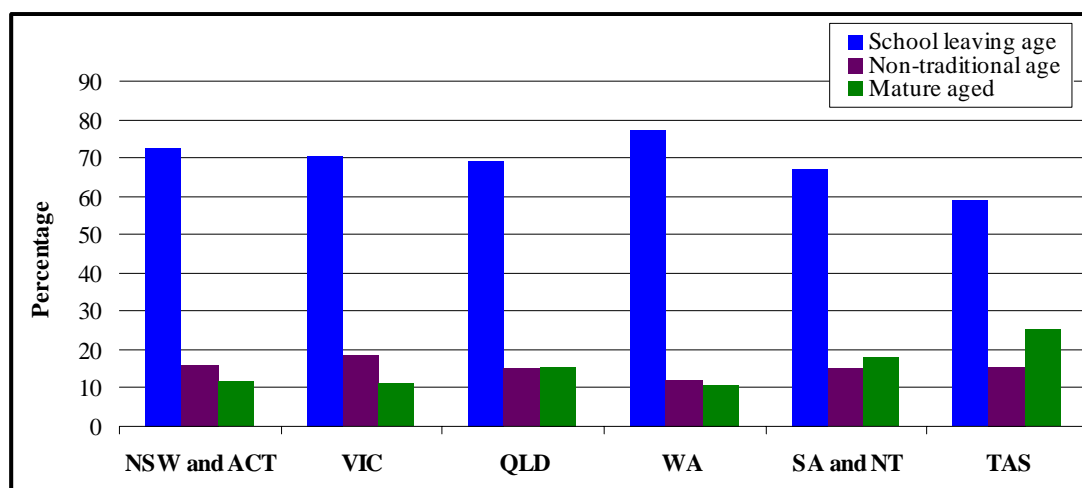
For the purpose of analysis applicants were divided into the following age categories:

- those aged 19 and under ('the school leaver cohort')
  - with a subset of those applicants 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 (71%) of applicants as at November 2009 were aged 19 and under. Those in the non-traditional age group accounted for 16% of applicants and those defined as mature aged accounted for the remaining 13%. There was a small group of applicants aged under 16 (a total of 778 or 0.5% of the school leaver age cohort). These proportions are broadly similar to those found for preliminary applications in November 2008 (73% school leaver cohort, 16% non-traditional age, 12% mature aged and 0.5% or 782 early achievers).

The share of applications by age group varies across States and Territories (Figure 3). The school leaving age cohort ranges from 77% of the total in Western Australia down to 59% in Tasmania. The proportion of applicants in their early 20s varies less by State, with the lowest proportion in Western Australia (11%). Mature age applicants make up more than 25% of the total in Tasmania, but approximately 11% in Western Australia, Victoria and New South Wales/Australian Capital Territory. South Australia/Northern Territory also recorded a high proportion (18%) of mature age applicants.

**Figure 3: Proportion of applicants by State and age**

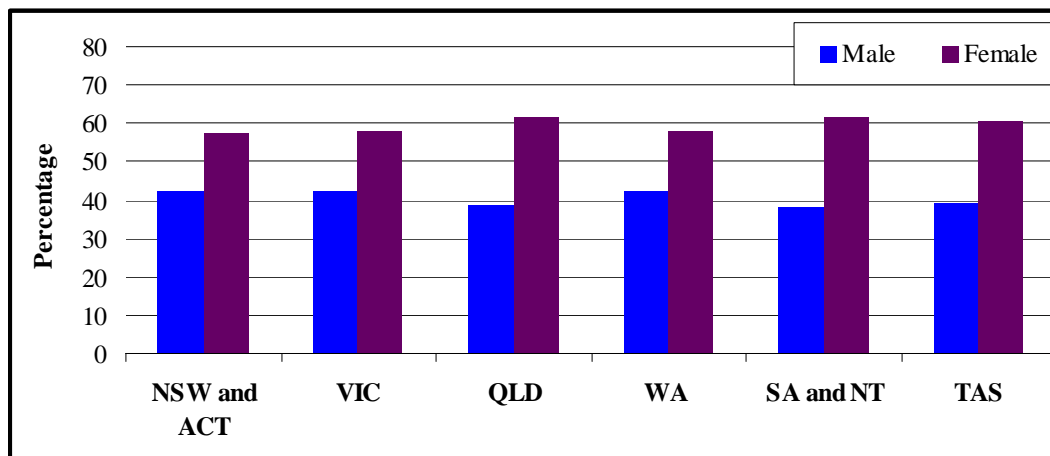




## Gender

As at November 2009, 41% of applicants to TACs were male, similar to preliminary applications data in November last year. Figure 4 indicates that the gender breakdown for November 2009 was similar across States. The mean age of males was slightly lower than that of females (20.1 years and 20.7 years, respectively). This was marginally higher than for 2008 (19.8 years for males and 20.4 years for females).

**Figure 4: Proportion of applicants by State and gender**



## Indigenous status

Approximately 1% of 2009-10 preliminary TAC applicants identified themselves as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin. It should be noted that Indigenous status is a self-identification item on TAC application forms.

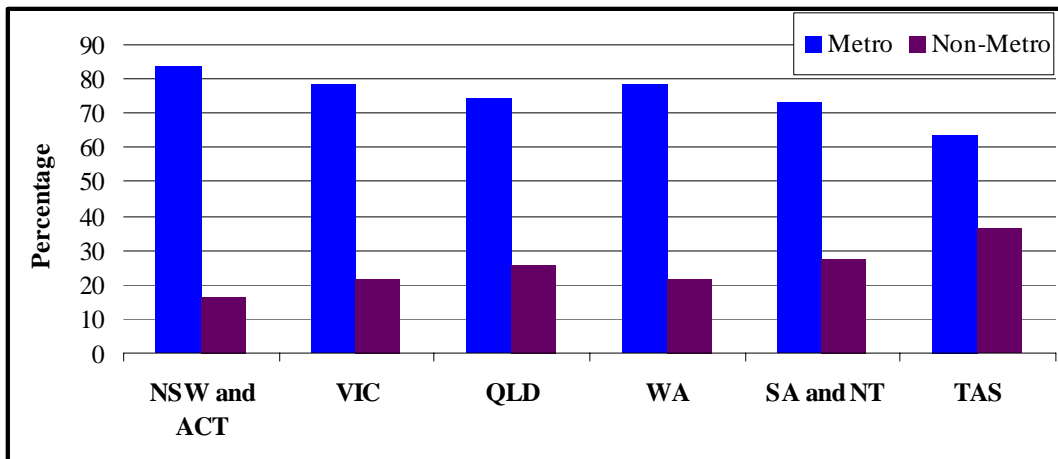
No comparison is available with preliminary application data from last year, but final application data as at 31 March 2009 indicated that Indigenous persons constituted 1% of all applicants to university.

## Regional status

Applying the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) “remoteness” categories to data collected as part of the 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 2008-09 preliminary data.

**Figure 5: Proportion of applicants by State and region**

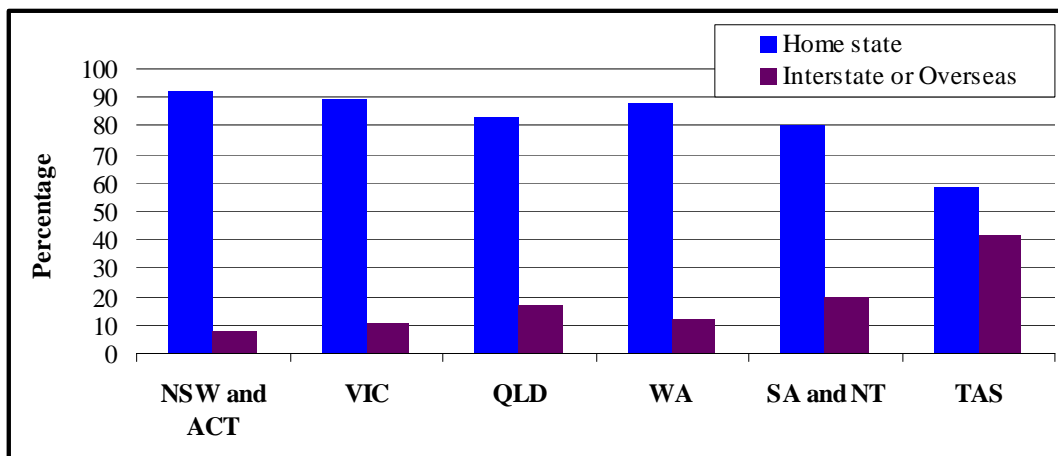


Interstate applicants

Based on the postcodes reported for permanent home residence by applicants, 13% of applications to TACs were from interstate applicants, similar to the 2008-09 preliminary applications data.

Figure 6 shows the divide for 2009 November data by State into home state and interstate applicants. Caution should be applied when interpreting proportions of interstate applicants however, due to double counting resulting from applicants applying to multiple TACs in different States.

**Figure 6: Proportion of home state applicants by State**



## 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 is projected to have increased only marginally by 0.3% at the national level in 2009. However there is wide variation across States and Territories. For example, the feeder group is expected to have increased by 1.9% in Queensland and decreased by 3.5% in Tasmania.

**Table 3: Projected population of 17 year-old cohort, 2007 to 2009**

State	2007	2008	2009	% change 08-09
NSW	94,237	95,106	95,151	0.0%
VIC	70,816	71,482	71,158	-0.5%
QLD	59,122	60,512	61,660	1.9%
SA	21,332	21,373	21,655	1.3%
WA	30,222	30,402	30,465	0.2%
TAS	6,927	7,071	6,824	-3.5%
NT	3,363	3,288	3,280	-0.2%
ACT	4,702	4,735	4,667	-1.4%
<b>TOTAL AUSTRALIA</b>	<b>290,742</b>	<b>294,001</b>	<b>294,892</b>	<b>0.3%</b>

Source: ABS, *Population Projections* (Cat No. 3222.0) - Series 29(B) Projected Persons Age 17

School retention rates will influence the number of persons of school leaving age who are able to apply to university on the basis of their secondary qualification achieved upon completing Year 12. Relative stability, at least at the national level, in the number of 17 year-olds in recent years has been matched by the stability in Year 12 retention rate (as shown in Table 4). Data on retention rates for 2009 are expected to be published by the ABS in early 2010.

**Table 4: Apparent Retention Rates, 2005 to 2007**

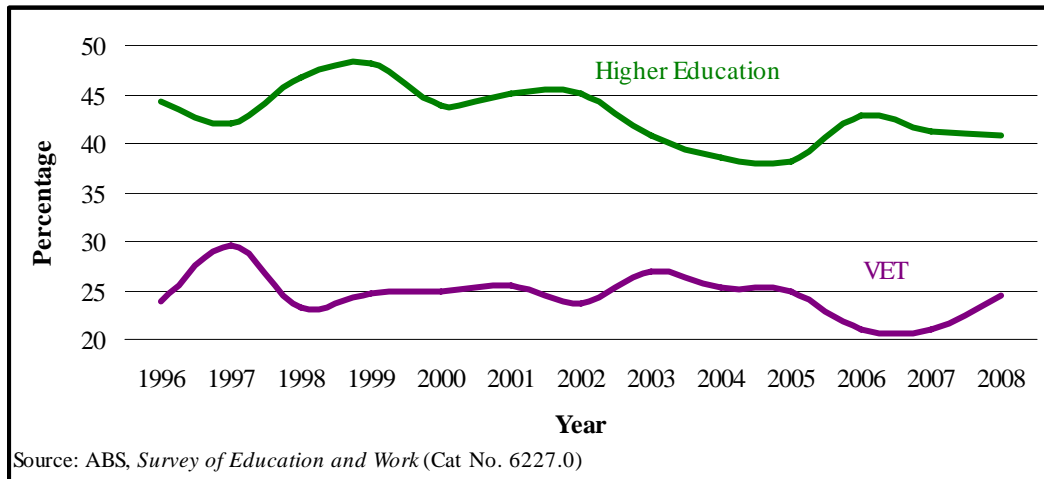
State	2006	2007	2008	% change 07-08
NSW	70.5	69.7	69.6	-0.1
VIC	79.9	80.1	79.4	-0.7
QLD	78.8	78.5	78.0	-0.5
SA	71.5	72.7	74.4	1.7
WA	71.8	70.3	73.6	3.3
TAS	64.8	65.4	64.8	-0.6
NT	58.4	61.7	60.1	-1.6
ACT	88.7	85.2	85.2	0.0
<b>TOTAL AUSTRALIA</b>	<b>74.7</b>	<b>74.3</b>	<b>74.5</b>	<b>0.2</b>

Source: ABS, *Schools* (Cat No. 4221.0) – Year 7/8 to Year 12 Apparent Retention Rate

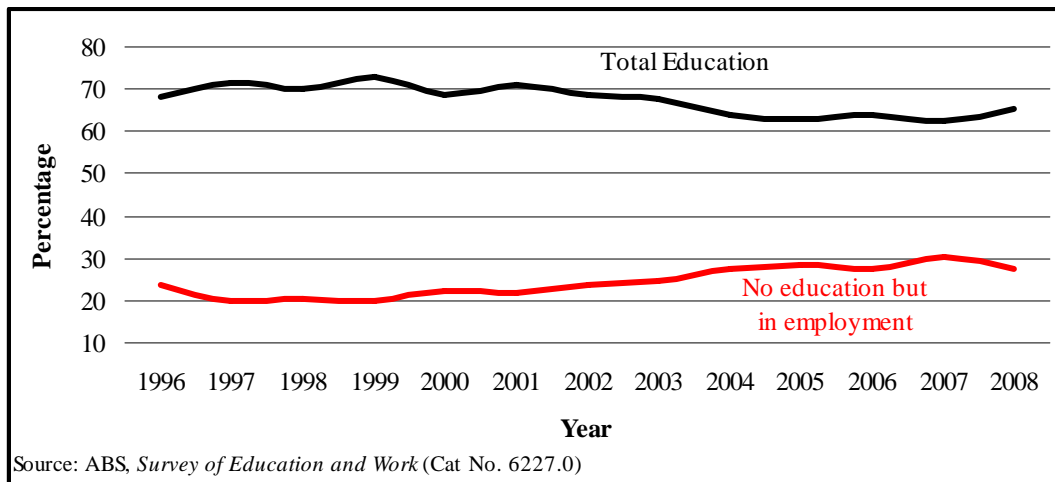
## Trends in Year 12 Completer Pathways

Data from the ABS Survey of Education and Work show that the percentage of Year 12 completers going on to higher education was stable across 2007 and 2008 (41%), but lower than in 2006 (43%) (Figure 7). The proportion going on to VET in 2008 (25%) however increased back to levels seen in 2005, after a drop in participation in 2006 and 2007. Figure 8 shows that following an increase in the proportion of Year 12 completers in employment and not in education in 2007 (30%), the proportion was back to the level seen in 2006 (28%).

**Figure 7: Year 12 completers – participation in higher education and vocation and technical education (VET), 1996 to 2008**



**Figure 8: Year 12 completers – participation in tertiary education and employment, 1996 to 2008**



## Impact of Changes in Labour Market Conditions

Changes in labour market conditions can also influence demand for university places. In a weaker labour market there are fewer job opportunities and wages and salaries tend to increase more slowly so that investment in post secondary education means that there are likely to be lower 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 (GFC), labour market conditions softened noticeably and as a consequence the unemployment rate rose to 5.8% in October 2009. It would therefore be expected that the increase in unemployment would lead to increasing application numbers to university for the 2010 academic year. State patterns in applications are consistent with this proposition. Queensland and Western Australia experienced the largest increase in applications at the same time that unemployment increased more rapidly in those States between October 2008 and 2009. Conversely, the smallest increases in applications were seen in New South Wales/Australian Capital Territory and South Australia/Northern Territory, and these States/Territories experienced smaller increases in unemployment.

According to DEEWR's *Skilled Vacancy Report*, job vacancies fell by 44% across the year October 2008 to October 2009. Since July however job vacancies have shown slight increases, likely to be a result of the positive outlook for the labour market and economy, leading to increased recruitment. Indications of improvements in the labour market may have some impact on university applications over the next few months.

**Table 5: Unemployment rate, October 2007-09**

	2007	2008	2009	% points change 08-09
NSW	4.6	5.2	6.1	+0.9
VIC	4.5	4.5	5.7	+1.2
QLD	3.8	3.9	6.0	+2.1
SA	5.5	5.4	5.3	-0.1
WA	3.7	2.3	5.0	+2.7
TAS	5.5	3.5	5.4	+1.9
NT	4.9	3.5	3.9	+0.4
ACT	2.5	2.7	3.7	+1.0
<b>TOTAL AUSTRALIA</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>+1.4</b>

Source: ABS, *Labour Force* (Cat No. 6202.0)

Seasonally adjusted figures except for Northern Territory and ACT (trend).

Based on the experience of the last major economic downturn in the 1990s, reduced employment opportunities were associated with an estimated 11% increase in the number of school leaver applications over a three year period between 1990 and 1993. A weaker labour market encouraged students to stay on and complete Year 12 thus increasing the size of the Year 12 feeder population. In addition, a weaker labour market encouraged a larger proportion of Year 12 completers to apply for higher education. Over the same period, reduced employment opportunities were associated with an estimated 12% increase in mature age applications.

Though the softening in labour market conditions associated with the GFC is not as marked as that which occurred in the 1990's downturn, there has nevertheless been an appreciable increase in applications of 5.6% in 2009 and an 8.1% increase in preliminary applications for the 2010 academic year. There may be additional factors encouraging growth in applications more recently. Analysis of these factors is beyond the scope of this report on preliminary applications data.

## Data Qualifications

The data referred to in this report are for applications for undergraduate university places received from TACs and HEPs as at 2 November 2009. It should be noted that:

- The reference date for the data provided was 2 November 2009. For TACs, this included applications made before their agreed 'on-time' closing date (30 September 2009) plus applications made during October. Applicants that submit their applications after the 'on-time' date must pay late fees.
- A small proportion of applicants will make applications to more than one TAC resulting in some double counting of applicants.
- There is no means of identifying applicants who apply directly to multiple HEPs. Therefore the number of direct applications records the number of applications not the number of applicants. That is, it includes 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 November data. Where possible, time series will be maintained when using the new Application and Offers Data Collection from the 2009 academic year onwards.
- Data on offers is not yet available as the offer process has not yet begun. The bulk of offers are made in January, with further rounds occurring in February, and even March, in some states/territories.
- Commentators sometimes use early figures on the number of offers made as an indicator of the supply of university places. However, it is important to note 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.