

CHAPTER 6 - NEED FOR A COMPREHENSIVE ALTERNATIVE ADMISSIONS PROVISION?

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

6.1.1 In the previous three Chapters, the Project has reported on its investigative and developmental stages. It has done this through:

- **Core fieldwork information.** It sets out the core information produced during fieldwork. That was derived from consultation and discussion, through reflection by people with substantial practical experience in senior schooling, counselling and admissions, and through observation of “natural” occurrences of admissions provisions that use non-conventional evidence presented by school-leavers.
- **Analysis** of that information, drawing out principles and notions concerning an alternative admissions system for school-leavers with a non-conventional school background.
- **Alternative admissions system model.** Development of a model for an alternative admissions system that could if required be used on a wide scale, eg State-wide, or in more local institutional situations, based on revealed practicable arrangements at present in use.

6.1.2 **Changing Perspective of the Project.** As this work proceeded, the project team’s discussions and observations led it to have changing perspectives of the project itself and its educational and equity settings. Some of the factors that brought this about have been emphasised in the preceding Chapters.

6.1.3 They are collected and added to here. This Chapter deals with what appears to be an increasingly strong, by developing, contemporary question about the core purpose of the project and how to achieve it, and makes recommendations on that. The Chapter is arranged in the following way:

- **Factors affecting the core purpose of the project.** It discusses the standing of the core purpose of the project and issues that have become influential in the project team’s questions about the underlying purpose of the project and its future direction. Changing approaches to public policy providing for “school-leavers” have an important part in this, and are referred to.

- **Emerging questions concerning the purpose of the project.** The Chapter then addresses emerging questions concerning the perceived need for an alternative admissions system – and the most likely way of achieving an appropriate result for school-leavers with non-conventional secondary schooling.
- **Outcomes and recommendations.** Outcome positions lead from the discussion, and recommendations concerning achieving the core social purpose of the project are made.

6.2 CONVENTIONAL AND ALTERNATIVE TERTIARY ADMISSIONS

Changing Thinking about “Normal” Tertiary Transition

- 6.2.1 Some conventional assumptions concerning leaving school and proceeding to tertiary study appear to have had a strong bearing on the policies, structures and processes concerning transition – even in the face of changing demography in tertiary and higher secondary participation in the last two or three decades.
- 6.2.2 These long-standing, conventional assumptions were evident in much of the advice received from people in schools and tertiary institutions consulted by the project, and in public and political discussions about transition and tertiary admissions.
- 6.2.3 However, they are decreasingly being held to, and their contemporary worth is being increasingly questioned. The project discovered this when consulting people in touch with school-leavers making transition decisions, the increasingly varied scope of upper-secondary experience and the widening opportunities for older adolescents to engage in education, training, and work. A new view on how young people should be helped to make their various transitions is also found in emerging public policy reviews.

Two classes of admission?

- 6.2.4 As one example, there has been a pervasive and previously almost unconscious separation of notions about tertiary admissions into two principal classes:
- TER-based admissions direct from school, and
 - the others.
- 6.2.5 TER-based direct admissions have tended to be seen *de facto* as the benchmark method, the “others” frequently being distinguished by use of terms such as “non-OP” or “mature” or “special” admissions. Further, processes for non-TER-based

admissions, and thinking about them, have been heavily coloured by the forms and processes associated with TER-based admissions.

- 6.2.6 Yet the now recognised, relatively high comparative proportion of tertiary admissions not coming directly from secondary school, at least 45%¹, tests conventional ideas that this route is somehow not “normal”.

Many Individual Opportunities and Times for Transition; and Some Limits

- 6.2.7 There is a further reason to question the notion that the normal route from school to tertiary study is by direct transition at the end of Year 12.
- 6.2.8 The project team discussed with school, QTAC and tertiary personnel, their views on post-year-ten educational, vocational, and personal development, and transition and routes to tertiary admission among school-leavers.
- 6.2.9 People concerned with operating alternative admissions schemes, or providing development routes for school-leavers with non-conventional post year-ten backgrounds, raised questions about the apparent one-point-in-time thinking about admitting school-leavers, and domination of thinking by the TER route.
- 6.2.10 They pointed to an expanding multiplicity of opportunities for tertiary admission and routes through levels of tertiary study – eg AQF levels - that can become progressively visible and available to people post-year-ten. This is whether they are in training, education, or work. They wonder why these are seen as “alternative” rather than as a large part of a set of different though normal routes for progression.
- 6.2.11 It also seems to be recognised in some places that the extent to which such access is available varies from time to time, eg as demand for access to particular courses and institutions varies.
- 6.2.12 Consultation also raised the need to recognise the validity, as an outcome of secondary schooling, of personal choice to enter work directly or, indeed, not to participate in training, education, or work. This can reasonably be seen, in our social and political setting, as a stage in a person’s life choices, or be because a person is constitutionally or culturally incapable of effective participation beyond basic levels, or at all – and beyond the procedures quite widely in place for giving admissions consideration to people with disabilities. These people should not be regarded as being denied access to tertiary education for structural reasons.

¹ In the most inclusive interpretation, the 90% of school-leavers entering tertiary courses is between about 50% including interstate movements, and about 56% if very recent TER-qualified applicants are also included.

School Students' Futures – Own Perspective and Timing

- 6.2.13 A perspective informed by such factors takes much greater account of the potential or post school-leaver's own view of individual future vocational, training, and educational possibilities in the light of personal possibilities and practicabilities. It stands in contrast to the view that appears often to be used when pathways are discussed – a general, global, institutional or administrative perspective of cohorts of students, moving in predetermined different.
- 6.2.14 Representing the notion of there being routes to tertiary education, whether to provide general advice to potential tertiary students or to develop policy and procedure, almost necessarily requires taking such a comprehensive and general view. That is, a view taken of routes to particular, completed or partial “qualifications” - seeing each route as if students have trodden it, and thereby producing convenient administratively deployable notions such as pathways.
- 6.2.15 Even the broad and realistic conception of “pathways” presented in the Finn Report¹ is seen to be too orderly to apply to some school-leavers - through its references to interrelated experiences and the need for a sense of continuity across borders. Such factors, it increasingly appeared to the project, might be more important to those administering transfers, transitions, and articulation than likely to be visible to, or able to be conceived of by, some individuals fending their way ahead.
- 6.2.16 However, people working with school students repeatedly stated that young people, from before year ten, are increasingly forming plans for their futures. These are usually as some form of vocational or personal lifestyle or study aspiration. They are not necessarily conceived as pathways, and are often qualified by a quite realistic appreciation of the effect on their potential tertiary access possibilities, for example, of their socio-economic circumstances², or geographical locations.
- 6.2.17 Thus, emerging “next steps” appear sometimes to be seen in immediate prospect through the eyes of different individuals, at different levels of achievement, proceeding at different rates, in changing directions, to face their own peculiar,

¹ Young People's Participation in Post-compulsory Education and Training (Finn Report) (Australian Education Council, AGPS, Canberra – 1991) p.13

² As a typical quoted example: In a small country town, a young woman left school with an idea she might do legal work. She found a clerical job with a local solicitor, learned more about the possibilities for her in legal work, accumulated resources and confidence, and moved to a city-based position in a legal office, as a base for part-time tertiary study in law.

unfolding futures. These can be orderly, smooth, or long-term views - but are not necessarily so.

6.2.18 Among people consulted, the personal perspective of a route or pathway is observed often to be quite individual, developing step-by-step, and affected by progressive stages of achievement, experience, knowledge, personal possibilities and values, and changing aspirations and directions. The routes are not necessarily continuous, or underpinned by a consistent aspiration, nor do they necessarily have a steady direction. They sometimes appear to have notable developmental plateaux.

6.2.19 In forming the project's recommendations, the evidence of peculiarly individual movement towards tertiary study was influential.

Is the Idea of the Project's Target Group Still Valid?

6.2.20 The sense of the comments from field sources about normal and alternative routes for transition to tertiary study taken by school-leavers, referred to above, seems to be:

- Timing for perceiving possibilities and for action is increasingly in the hands of individual school-leavers.
- Vocational plans are being formed at earlier ages.
- Some school-leavers have planned, immediate or long-range routes to tertiary study.
- Others take short steps, often vocationally directed, that progressively lead to new stages of employment, training, education, or no participation.¹
- Both streams include people who change direction as they find out more about education, vocations, and personal interests, or change their personal circumstances.
- The steps are interspersed with development plateaux.
- School-leavers, or students in school, are not likely to look for routes to tertiary access unless they have personal aspirations they think realisable.

6.2.21 Those ideas, and others like them, progressively affected the project team's perspective of the project. The apparent importance of providing a comprehensive

¹ See discussion of participation figures in [section 6.5](#).

alternative admissions process appears much diminished – especially one that is part of, or anything like, the general TER-based admissions machine. More weight has been attached to the notion of potential access by a multiplicity of routes progressively formed, sometimes uniquely, and often timed individually, by school-leavers and former school-leavers themselves and to the availability of such routes over time.

6.3 QUESTIONS ABOUT ASSUMPTIONS

Two Questionable Assumptions about Transition to Tertiary Studies

- 6.3.1 In particular the related views of transition and availability of access, in Queensland at least, directly question two common underlying assumptions about “normal,” and therefore also alternative, transition to tertiary education - among other beliefs and practices.
- 6.3.2 **“Normal” Progression.** The first relates to the inferred fundamental assumption - that the normal procedure and expectation is for school-leavers to progress directly from school to tertiary education, especially higher education. This is despite
- well developed understandings about different developmental rates for young people’s aspirations, competencies and capability;
 - awareness that school-leaver routes to tertiary study are numerous - especially, in Queensland, broadening from within a year or two of completing twelve years of continual schooling or its equivalent;
 - evidence for a decade or more that just under half of new tertiary admissions comes from conventional, immediate school-leavers with TERs.
- 6.3.3 **Alternative and Mature-age Admission.** The impact of the first factor is reinforced by a second – the comprehensive structural arrangements for “mature-age” alternative entry in Queensland, made available to students increasingly from age 19 and substantially from age 21, are still largely denied those in the 16-19 years-of-age bracket.
- 6.3.4 The scope of opportunity for the 19+ and 21+ age groups is indicated by there being, in addition to those QTAC schedules used to assess Year 12 and similar results, approximately 75 other schedules available for use by institutions to assess a range of other formal and non-formal qualifications and attributes that are not widely used to assess 16-19 year old applicants.
- 6.3.5 This arrangement apparently results from an assumption that it is not somehow appropriate to assess that sort of evidence if it is presented by school-leavers –

conventional or otherwise. That view appears in turn to reflect concern in some quarters that permitting presentation of that evidence by school-leavers would “undermine” secondary schools and the TER. This is sometimes characterised as “giving students two bites at the cherry”.

- 6.3.6 The notion itself seems bound up with the one-point-in-time assumption, and with competition for direct entry to the tiny proportion of tertiary courses that can still be considered competitive. The policies of different tertiary institutions incorporate these restrictions to varying extent. But evidence is evidence, and it appears inequitable to deny its use on grounds of age.
- 6.3.7 In this respect, the comparative scope of opportunity for the 19+ or 21+ age group is indicated by there being¹
- over 300 QTAC schedules used to assess previous Year 12, Senior, matriculation results, and their equivalents obtained in Queensland and elsewhere at different periods, and
 - in addition to those, approximately 75 other schedules available for use by institutions to assess a range of other formal and non-formal qualifications and attributes - ones that are not now widely used to assess 16-19 year old applicants, but for which some such applicants appear increasingly able to provide evidence.

Need for a Comprehensive Alternative System?

- 6.3.8 If the weight of the assumptions and structural arrangement underlying the notion of “normal” transition is indeed diminished, questions arise as to the validity of the construct on which this project is founded – the existence of a notable group of Queensland school-leavers that lacks access to tertiary education, including high-demand courses, and requires the provision of a comprehensive special admissions process. For example:
- Which Queensland school-leaver² aspirants to tertiary education seem to be denied reasonable access that caters for their individual aspirations and personal circumstances in a timely way, and at what scale?
 - Is any such denial (as distinct from lack of opportunity in personal circumstances) a direct function of non-conventional schooling background, or of structural or personal circumstances, created by various factors?

¹ From published [QTAC schedules in use 2001](#).

² The term “school-leaver” is used as defined at [para. 1.1.3 as 16 – 19 year olds](#).

6.3.9 The following situational factors seem closely related to this issue:

- School-leavers' apparently normal, developing possession, from about age 16, of evidence for tertiary admission of various sorts based, eg on schooling, vocational training, and employment experience itself. (As set out in Chapters 4 and 5, and later here)
- The provision of progressively wider access to gateways into and within tertiary education – at lower levels from about 16 years of age, and for higher levels from about 19 years of age.
- The increasing provisions being made for 16-19 year olds to undertake recognised, school-based vocational education, formal workplace programs, and other alternative programs, often in conjunction with senior secondary schooling, that can become the threshold to Alternative tertiary study routes.

6.3.10 So, is the target group, at least to some extent, a construct:

- created by an increasingly questionable fundamental assumption about “normal” transition immediately after 12 years of continual schooling; and
- structurally reinforced by applying the view that the markedly greater range of admission provisions made for those aged 19 or 21 and above is not applicable to or suitable for school-leavers?

6.3.11 The emergence of issues of the sort described above triggers a re-examination of the perceived setting from which the assumed needs for a comprehensive alternative admissions provision come.

6.4 THE NOTION OF THE TARGET GROUP

6.4.1 To begin reaching a conclusion about the potential worth of having a comprehensive alternative admissions process in Queensland, it appears necessary to obtain some idea of the extent to which the target group exists as one denied opportunity for tertiary access, and the extent to which any such group might be susceptible to being addressed by a particular admissions system as distinct from other provisions for facilitating tertiary aspiration and access.

6.4.2 This process revealed little evidence pointing directly to an identifying such a group. So the approach taken has been to identify the sub-sets of the relevant youth cohort that do seem to have options of tertiary access, or who are in some way shown to be engaged in reasonable outcomes of school education –

essentially some form of tertiary study or training or work – that could provide tertiary access in due course. Then to arrive at as well informed an opinion as possible on whatever the group that is thought to be unprovided for might be.

- 6.4.3 To do this, the project drew on: statistical examination; opinions arrived at in substantial, comprehensive reviews, eg of youth education, training, and development; consultations with informed professionals in relevant research and policy fields; admissions professionals; and professionals working in schools and related institutions dealing with school-leavers.

Schooling, School-leavers, and Tertiary Transition

- 6.4.4 Recent changes can be seen in the character of the school population completing 12 years of essentially continual schooling.

- 6.4.5 **Completion of Year 12 schooling.** For 30 years, development in Queensland senior secondary schooling syllabuses and assessment has to some extent recognised the desirability of broadening the appeal of the senior schooling experience. It was hoped it might embrace the changing scope of interests and capabilities of the rapidly increasing numbers remaining in school. Year 12 enrolments increased from 32% of the 17-year-old population in 1976, to 71% in 1999¹. (See Chapter 3) The numbers of the cohort not completing 12 years' schooling fell from 24,000 to 15,000.

- 6.4.6 **Movement from school to tertiary study.** Of the students completing 12 years of schooling, the proportion who applied for tertiary admission² fell during the same period from 78% to 65%. Seen another way, this represents an increase in the number of Year 12 completers not applying for tertiary admission from 2,660 to 12,887 – an increase of 485%. As well, applications for tertiary admission rose in absolute terms from 9,543 to 23,302 – an increase of 244%. This was about half the rate of increase of non-applicant completers, and just a slightly larger absolute increase.

- 6.4.7 In our view, this is not to be seen as surprising or undesirable – the school-leavers not proceeding appear to be drawn from that slice of the age cohort that in the past would have been unlikely to complete 12 years of conventional schooling; or whose members have aspirations, or unsatisfactory experiences of schooling, that propel them away from formal study – at least for a while. [See paras 6.5.33-50.](#)

- 6.4.8 Thus, it might be said that the increase in retained school students included a considerable proportion of those less able to reach necessary entry standards, as

¹ Twenty-fourth Annual Report to June 2000.

(Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre Ltd – Brisbane, 2000, table 30 p.129)

² For courses at AQF III and above, ie higher TAFE and university courses.

well as a much increased number of those not aspiring to tertiary admission – or at least not sufficiently to try an application - even though a potential admission route of some sort seems often to have been available – para. 6.3.9.

- 6.4.9 **Tertiary admission demand pressure.** As seen in Chapter 3, the undergraduate “demand pressure” (for available places) as seen generally from within the tertiary sector fluctuated only mildly during the period. Considerably increased numbers of Year 12 completers obviously moved on to immediate destinations other than tertiary study – or were absorbed by increases in tertiary places available.
- 6.4.10 **In reality or in effect, entry score cut-offs declined in many courses.** This was especially evident in the “special-case” status given to applicants by institutions, to secure enrolments in some courses less in demand, making that decline greater in reality than revealed in records of TER cut-off levels for courses.
- 6.4.11 Consensus among admissions, school, and guidance personnel appears to be that there are opportunities for most aspiring students with TERs to be admitted directly into a tertiary place – at least in a tertiary course that presents an opportunity to demonstrate the capability to perform tertiary study, and subsequently possibly to transit into a desired course or vocational stream. For example, 91.6% of school-leaver applicants in 1999-2000 received offers, and 21.2% either did not go on to take up an offer (14.5%) or did not sustain their enrolment (6.7%).¹
- 6.4.12 At the same time, a general idea of the extent of use of partial tertiary qualifications as a basis for tertiary entry can be had from the fact that, for 1999-2000 admissions, 31% of admissions offers were made to people for whom such qualifications were the highest level of admissions evidence presented.²
- 6.4.13 Of course, this leaves aside the **35% of Year 12 school-leavers who did not apply for tertiary places.**³ But as the data quoted in para. 6.5.6 suggests about 90% of the cohort are in full or part-time education, training, or employment.

Another View of School-Leaver Tertiary Admissions

- 6.4.14 In 1999-2000, 48.2%⁴ of new tertiary enrolments comprised 1999 Queensland Year 12 students. so it could be said that at least half of the new applicants are drawn from people not moving to tertiary entry direct from Year 12.

¹ Twenty-fourth Annual Report to June 2000, table 29, p.128.

² Ibid, Table 17, p 111 – 14,918 offers **based on partial tertiary qualifications**.

³ Ibid, Table 30, p 129.

⁴ Ibid, Table 16, p 109.

- 6.4.15 However, if it is assumed that the movement into and away from Queensland of tertiary entrants with 1999 Year 12 or equivalent qualifications is about the same, it might reasonably be said that the proportion of Queenslanders with those qualifications moving direct to tertiary courses somewhere is about 51%, ie 16,861 of 33,222 new tertiary entrants.¹
- 6.4.16 If tertiary entrants showing as highest entry qualification a Year 12 or equivalent completion² gained in any year or place are taken into account, the proportion of “Year 12” entrants rises to about 56%. Recent Year 12s transiting through other tertiary courses **almost invariably** rely on a tertiary result to “raise their TER” – by way of a TER(OE) to enable them to achieve entry into more preferred courses. So it seems reasonable to say that close to the additional 5% of Year 12 entrants gaining tertiary admission are relatively recent Year 12s, most of whom have not previously enrolled effectively in tertiary institutions. **This is supported by the observations of experienced QTAC admissions staff.**
- 6.4.17 Thus, it is taken that about 56% of entrants (18,660 in 1999-2000) are school-leavers entering tertiary study, in the sense that they arrive, mostly sooner, or sometimes later. This number represents about 36% of 17-year olds, 50%³ of Year 12 students, and 69% of those completing Year 12 with a TER.
- 6.4.18 Since 65% of those with TERs⁴ actually apply for tertiary places direct from school, the achievement of some sort of access sooner or later by school-leavers with TERs who aspire to tertiary admission seems highly probable.
- 6.4.19 At the same time, and in the same sense as the earlier consideration of notions of “normal” routes for reaching tertiary studies, is it reasonable to regard a proportion of 44% of people entering tertiary studies on the basis of something other than “Year 12”, recent or ancient, as using anything other than a normal suite of routes to tertiary entry?

6.5 THE “NON-TRANSITIONAL” SEGMENT

- 6.5.1 To obtain an idea of the possible scale of the project target group, a “group” in the sense that it is a numerical set remaining after other sets of the school-leaver population have been identified by salient characteristics, such as having TERs or being in employment – the project team sought some understanding of the nature and size of those other sets. In essence, the project team encircled the possible target set by understandings drawn from such sources as: data on “participants”

¹ Ibid, table 18, p118.

² Ibid, table 18, p118.

³ To give estimates, the base figures for the percentage calculations have been drawn from 1990 populations.

⁴ Twenty-fourth Annual Report to June 2000 (QTAC) op cit, table 30.

(as defined in the “footprints to the future” report¹); other social data; and perceptions gained from fieldwork, consultations, and the experience of the project team – essentially an inferred approach.

- 6.5.2 The group is defined principally as comprising individuals having an unsatisfied desire for tertiary access at the school-leaving moment.
- 6.5.3 Some information is based on populations near but not precisely fitting the age range (16-19) used to define school-leavers. However, at the level of generality of this examination, moderately appropriate fit is thought to have been possible.

Group Size and Opportunity

6.5.4 The “footprints” report defines “participants” as those who are in full-time education or work, or part-time in both. Reporting education and labour force activities of 15-19 year olds² Australia wide, it shows that:

- 69% are in full-time education.
- 6% are in full- or part-time employment, and part-time education.
- 10% are full-time employment, not in education.

Thus, in “footprints” terms, 15% of that 15-19 year old cohort are seen as not being “participants”.

6.5.5 On participation, Queensland fares about on a par with the rest of Australia, although rather less well at the top end³ of the defined school leaver range, as the following comparative figures show:

¹ footprints to the future – Report of the Prime Minister’s Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce 2001 (DETYA, Canberra – 2001) pp 205

² footprints to the future op cit, table 9, p 117
drawing on Transition from Education to Work, Australia
(Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra – May, 1999)

³ Queensland school students have only 12 years of universal schooling, excluding a pre-school or preparatory year. This leads to earlier school completion ages.

Table 6.1: Percentage of People by Age, participating full-time in Education or Employment, or part-time in both.¹

Location	age 15	age 16	age 17	age18	age 19
QLD	96.7	91.8	82.6	79.1	66.8
AUST	96.7	94.5	88.6	79.0	75.5

- 6.5.6 However, Australia-wide, a further 5% who are not in education are part-time employed. Thus, about 10% of school-leavers are unemployed (5%) or not in the labour force (4%), and not engaged in education – or possibly slightly above 10% in Queensland. About 90% of school-leavers – a slightly lower proportion in Queensland - are in full time education, training, or employment, or in both part-time education or employment, or are just part-time employed, the last being a small minority.
- 6.5.7 Relating those figures to the school completion data in paragraph 6.4.5, this might suggest that roughly 5,000 people in the current Queensland 17 year old level of the cohort do not participate in work or education, and that about 2,000 of these are not in the labour force.
- 6.5.8 The notion of a proportion of about 10% being non-participants in the “footprints” sense has been given some implicit weight by previous choice of a higher figure by the Finn² review of a target of 95% participation to end of Year 12.
- 6.5.9 A further factor that has at least a possible bearing on both tertiary transition and participation, in a “footprints” sense, is the proportion of people with severe profound disabilities, and to a lesser extent with moderate levels of disability, and who are engaged in school education of some sort. In terms that here can be seen only as broadly indicative, people with disabilities expected to last for six months or more as a proportion of the population made up about 11% of the 15-24 year old population in Queensland³. About 6% points out of the 11% have a profound-severe level of core activity restriction.
- 6.5.10 The opinion of people working in the field of special education who were consulted is that the considerable majority of profound-severe disabilities are long

¹ Transition from Education to Work, Australia

(Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra – May, 1999) unpublished paper.

² Young People’s Participation in Post-compulsory Education and Training (Finn Report)

(Australian Education Council, AGPS, Canberra – 1991) p 48

³ Disability: A Queensland Profile

(Disability Services Queensland, Queensland Government – 1999) pp 1-6

term, that a substantial proportion involve multiple disabilities, and that these often prevent or seriously inhibit participation in work or in education beyond fundamental levels.

- 6.5.11 However, many people with milder levels of disability leaving education in the later stages of 12 years of schooling are reported now to have success in early TAFE activity, especially TAFE programs designed to create a route for people with disabilities into some form of further education or training. Many at this level participate successfully in various levels of work and education – but might not be expected to travel much further in tertiary education.
- 6.5.12 While it would not be sensible to draw from this brief exploration of incidence of disability among school-leavers a number for those unable to participate, it does give strength to the notion that the size of the group with the potential to participate in tertiary study, training, or work, but without the opportunity to do so, is relatively small and probably smaller than the 10% notion that has emerged from this discussion. The 4%¹ indicated as being not in the labour force appears to some extent to relate here.

Notions of Participation in Work and Education, and Successful Outcomes for School-Leavers

- 6.5.13 In terms of providing opportunity for access to tertiary education for people with non-conventional school backgrounds, the findings reported earlier about evidence, and routes into tertiary study arbitrarily withheld from people aged under 19 or 21, become relevant. They provide grounds for asserting that a good part of those in that 90%², if changes were made to minimum age restrictions in institutional admissions policies, and they are prepared to study or work to assemble appropriate evidence over time, could bring in due course some form of alternative evidence to bear concerning tertiary entry – should they have that aspiration. That is, if they are not already qualified for tertiary entry through OP, articulation, or recognised pathways.
- 6.5.14 However, in terms of this project, it is important to recognise that, while participation in a “footprints” sense might be desirable communally and, for many, individually, achieving it is a matter of election by individuals. Elections of that sort involve not only opportunity, but also such factors as personal aspiration, protection from alienation by formal education, and the exercise of legitimate individual life choices as mentioned in para. 6.2.12.

¹ footprints to the future op cit, Table 9, p 117

² This includes the proportion, about 15%, who are employed but not in education.

- 6.5.15 For example, it is easy to find cases of recent school-leavers who have chosen to move directly and conclusively into work, who are clearly commercially and personally successful, and who if they ever desired it would have no difficulty obtaining tertiary admission.
- 6.5.16 At the same time, it is clear from counsellors' comments, that achieving tertiary admission is for many school-leavers not at all a satisfactory outcome. Although, for increasingly informed school-leavers who chose to take it, it can be a sub-optimal means to a desired admissions or vocational end.
- 6.5.17 For some, exercising those choices provides a satisfactory outcome, for others the outcomes may be less satisfactory. The issue is to form a view on the extent to which providing a comprehensive alternative admissions process under prevailing assumptions – [section 6.2](#) - would itself contribute to a better outcome for those people – and then to consider practicability.
- 6.5.18 To help do that, a number of other factors are now set out. They emerged during consultations as being thought to have substantial effects on individual choices. They and the discussion on size of the target group, led as they progressively became visible to reconsideration of the project's current and future usefulness and functional justification.

School-leavers' Aspirations to Tertiary Access

- 6.5.19 As has been mentioned, consultation revealed the view that school-leavers are tending to begin earlier the formation of choices about post-school life. This can lead to decisions to leave school for work; to move into training, eg through TAFE; to engage in an amalgam of work, school, and training, sometimes by formal arrangement; or to follow more conventional routes to tertiary study.
- 6.5.20 There is a strong belief among observers that the aspirations of some students are set during the last three years of schooling – or earlier - by subject choice influenced by school based personal advice. For example, one influence on aspiration appears as decisions made by school staff about who should not attend presentations by visiting advisers from tertiary institutions.
- 6.5.21 Another factor is rational choice made by individuals considering their own circumstances – but the choices are often confined by limited awareness of post-school possibilities.

- 6.5.22 This is well illustrated in Queensland research conducted by Alloway¹ and others on male and female secondary students' attitudes to university study, but focussing on the issue that 36.5% of James Cook University students are male, compared with 46% nationally.
- 6.5.23 The report² reveals a high preference, especially among rural boys, for paid work or related vocational preparatory studies, sometimes evident from age 15. It expresses concern about the limited extent to which boys (and girls) are assisted to know about vocational opportunities outside their own locations, have notions of wider economic futures, or understand what university study might actually entail. Attitudes to the school experience, and concerns about the cost of university attendance, also seem instrumental to choices.
- 6.5.24 The report does not assume that choices made at school-leaver ages are eternally committing, but does put a strong case for a profile of measures to be taken to provide an informed opportunity to choose to aspire to tertiary study immediately or later in life, including addressing the attitudinal factors discussed in this Chapter.

School-Leavers' Aspirations to Access to "Prestige" Courses

- 6.5.25 School-leavers' aspirations to access "prestige" courses have produced one of the concerns that appear to have driven work supported by Commonwealth agencies for over two decades. The key assumption is that discrimination occurs when school-leavers without a conventional background and associated high TER are prevented from being able to be considered for immediate access. The project developed the following views on this matter in a Queensland setting.
- 6.5.26 "Prestige" courses are taken to be those with relatively limited enrolments, traditionally with high entry-score cut offs, generally believed to lead into professions or occupations with high earning potential and social standing. Classic examples often given are courses in medicine, law, dentistry, veterinary science, para-medical areas such as physiotherapy and optometry, sometimes aspects of engineering, and some of the more recent arrivals such as information technology.
- 6.5.27 Courses that are offered by institutions with a proliferation of highly specialised sub-divisions of more conventional fields were put aside in this consideration. These are characterised by titles such as Bachelor of Applied (Field) (Sub-Field) (Professional Application) – and by their taking very small enrolments – around 5–20.

¹ Alloway, Nola, Gilbert, Pam, and Haupt, Patricia: Research Report: "Factors Associated with Participation of Male Students in Higher Education Studies at James Cook University". monograph (James Cook University of North Queensland, Townsville – 2001) pp 19

² *ibid*, p 19

- 6.5.28 The perceived prestige and potential earnings associated with a few of the listed and similar courses are considered by some to be now rather inflated, and opportunities to practice much more influenced by supply and demand factors than was the case in the past, as well as economic cycles and structural changes – eg in the cases of veterinary science, geology, or laws, and more recently information technology. However, considerable cachet seems still to attach to most of the courses, including these, as reflected by demand for entry – but not always by high entry scores, eg in some law programs.
- 6.5.29 In cases such as medicine and dentistry, access is either exclusively or predominantly other than direct from Year 12. The usual route is by possession of a prior bachelor's degree or tertiary study the results which influence selection. Thus, the various direct and indirect routes for entry to less competitive courses come into consideration as a precursor to seeking admission to “prestige” courses.
- 6.5.30 In the one (moderately sized) medical program in Queensland open to direct school-leavers, 21 of the 58 people¹ enrolled in 1999-2000 were not direct from Year 12, and alternative access routes provided special consideration for those with indigenous standing, or remote/country residency.
- 6.5.31 In some fields, such as laws, information technology, and engineering, courses have proliferated, producing an array of different entry levels so, in law, it is possible to gain a foothold by presenting with a current OP of 14.²
- 6.5.32 Of particular importance for this project is the observation that a substantial minority, sometimes a majority, of entrants to “prestige” courses come other than from the current Year 12 cohort. Some examples of such bachelor courses in Queensland are shown in Table 6.2.

¹ In this section, data are drawn from:

Twenty-fourth Annual Report to June 2000.

(Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre Ltd – Brisbane, 2000) Table 3 pp 26-82

² In a TER range 1(high) to 25(low).

Table 6.2: Entrants to “Prestige” Tertiary Courses – Current Year 12 Students, and Others

	<u>TER</u>	<u>Basis for Entry Year 12 - Other</u>
• Laws (example 1)	14	71– 61
• Laws (example 2)	3	4 – 95
• Commerce-Laws	2	32 – 11
• Arts-Laws	2	45 – 21
• Medicine#	*	37 – 21
• Optometry	2	20 – 12
• Vet Science	1	23 – 62
• Pharmacy	2	46 – 69
• Occupational Therapy	3	30 – 63

* special entry requirements additional to TER or TER(OE)

The one Queensland course when Year 12 entry is possible

Alienation from Schooling

6.5.33 A more negative factor affecting access by some school-leavers is the strong reported incidence of alienation from school occurring particularly from Years 9 and 10 onwards. The upsurge of interest in providing improved middle schooling, eg in structural changes in some private schools and on trial in some Queensland Government schools, reflects among other things educators’ concerns about disengagement from school during the early secondary years.

6.5.34 Consultations suggest that there is a substantial stream of young people who have quite high levels of disaffection with the notion of “school” as a personal and social experience, and with the modes of learning represented by the classroom, and by conventional curriculum.

6.5.35 The factor is widely recognised, eg in these examples of published studies.

6.5.36 In 1999, the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia reported¹ on its qualitatively based studies on children leaving school early, undertaken among those who had recently left school before completing the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE). Of the 42 clusters of reasons given for leaving school early, 11 were each given by over 20% of respondents. The eleven clustered around these notions:

- Subjects not relevant or interesting, limited choice.
- Got or wanted a job; needed money; started TAFE.
- Boredom with school; uninteresting school work.
- Treated unfairly, as a “kid”.

6.5.37 Examination of pairs of student responses with highest correlation – at over 0.40 – reinforces the emphasis given to those reasons by respondents, and added these notions to the list:

- Low self esteem concerning school subject performance: subjects too difficult.
- Didn’t like teachers: teachers didn’t like me.

6.5.38 A comprehensive summary by Rumberger² of literature on student dropout draws attention to five sorts of factors identified as instrumental: personal, family, school, community, and peers. The school factors comprise four groupings: social composition of school students; school resources; school structure; and school policies and practices.

6.5.39 Although the project was conscious of some apparent influence by those factors, issues of school policies and practices were the ones most evoked by statements made during our consultations. Reference has clearly been made to aspects of practices and structure that appear to trigger disengagement. Rumberger says that schools also bring about involuntary discharge of students in various ways – a point relevant to our observation about some school practices that label some students as not being destined for higher tertiary study.

¹ Leaving School Early without Credentials: as many reasons as students

(Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia, Adelaide - Research Report No 1, 1999)

² Rumberger, Russell W. “Why Students Drop Out of School and What Can be Done.”

A paper prepared for the Conference “Dropouts in America: How severe is the Problem? What Do We Know about Intervention and Prevention?” Harvard University, Jan. 2001.

(U California, Santa Barbara – revised May 2001)

6.5.40 When considering how schools might in future support youth, Kennedy¹ touches on a number of the factors drawn out in this Chapter that point to the need for a more comprehensive approach to the issue of tertiary access for young people who are seen, from a traditional perspective, not to have a conventional secondary school background. He makes two points particularly relevant to considering the core purpose of this project:

- Drawing attention to the apparently persistent appearance in OECD countries² from people aged 16-19 of about 20% of early school-leavers, with an “educational underclass” of about 10% not in education or a job, he asks whether this might have become structurally “...a permanent feature of the youth landscape.”
- In direct relation to that point, he takes us to the persistent observation, frequently made during the recent few decades at least, that the “...provision of secondary education has moved from being provision for an elite to provision on a mass scale.” He then asks the inevitable question about the suitability of conventional school experiences to a new and changing clientele, in changing contexts.³

6.5.41 Experience in a number of places in Queensland and elsewhere, as mentioned in [para. 6.5.54](#), appears to be that learning in real situations, such as in work placement, is likely to prove far more engaging and motivating for a moderate proportion of students than experience in formal teaching, including vocational education taught as “subjects”. The school’s role is increasingly as a base and anchor point for individually focussed schooling, external training, and vocational activity.

6.5.42 It is worth taking rueful note that these ideas reflect those asserted and tested by John Dewey⁴ in the late 1800s, when he proposed⁵ that “...industrial activities are the most influential factors in determining the thought (and) ideals ... of a people.” - and this when almost all 16-19-year-olds by that age were in any case doing the real thing at work or in the home.

6.5.43 Although aspiration to access tertiary study may well emerge after a period away from study or in vocational training, one effective method of redressing alienation

¹ Kennedy, Kerry J. “Uneasy Pathways for the Post-Millennial Generation: How Might Schools Support Youth in the Future?” in Curriculum Perspectives 21 (1) (Australian Curriculum Studies Association, Canberra - 2001)

² Ibid, p 3. (1997 figures)

³ Ibid, p 3.

⁴ Dewey, John: The School and Society (University of Chicago Press, Illinois - 1899) pp 131-137

⁵ Cubberley, E.P. The History of Education (Houghton Mifflin, Cambridge Mass. – 1948) pp 781-2

for school-leavers – apart from long-sought changes to the personal, social, and curriculum experiences provided by schools - was seen to be the school-based, vocational experience in work places, which is gradually becoming more practical.

Attitudes to Study and Learning

- 6.5.44 From an attitudinal perspective, work undertaken under commission from ANTA¹ lends support to preceding observations. The work appears to reflect related attitudinal factors likely to affect personal choice to seek tertiary education from school. The survey was applied nation-wide to people aged 16 and over.
- 6.5.45 An immediate indication of the relevance of the work's findings to choice and aspiration is the report's statement: "...we employed a definition of learning that covered informal learning, training and study. The rationale for this was that the qualitative research indicated that the definition of learning to which the community responded most positively was that characterised as informal, unstructured or incidental/experiential learning. Reactions to "study" on the other hand were extremely negative. People viewed informal and incidental learning most favourably and defined it merely as "learning".²
- 6.5.46 The study reports on two segments in which 16-24-year-olds are overly represented. The segments – whose views of study and learning are described by the phrases "might give it away" and "learn to earn" – make up respectively 7% and 17% of the subject population – over a quarter.
- 6.5.47 For the former segment:³ "...learning and study are not part of their self-concept...at this point of time, they recognise that other people value it. This segment is likely to engage in learning not because they value it per se but because they feel it has to be done to get ahead in life. "
- 6.5.48 The latter segment:⁴ "...feel that learning is only valued if it leads to a job or a qualification and that ... really study is not important. This segment engages in learning because they know it is the way to get ahead and feel they have some way to go, ... not because they love learning. They love what learning achieves for them materially not for its own sake. They prefer job-specific learning."

¹ This is drawn from a report of quantitative research undertaken for the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) in 1999 as part of development of its National Marketing Strategy for Skills and Lifelong Learning. The referenced segment of research reported concerned the attitudes, values, and behaviour of the general community towards skills and lifelong learning. It was conducted by four firms: Quay Consulting: The Research Forum (lead consultant); The Albany Consulting Group; and Mc Kinna et al, and accessed through www.anta.gov.au.

² *ibid*, p 3.

³ *ibid*, p 16.

⁴ *ibid*, p 15.

- 6.5.49 When to these segments are added “only if you make it easier” (16%) and “I’m done with it” (14%), the likely importance of aspirations and other factors shaping choice become more clear.
- 6.5.50 Although the age of the general subject population extends well beyond the range of interest to this report, the project considers that there are findings that support the view that the effective shaping of choice and aspiration are core factors in the issue of tertiary transition, and that these are highly likely to have been strongly influenced for many people by experience during school years – and for older people, of course, in later study and learning experiences.

Broader Public Policy Approaches to Promoting Tertiary Study by School-Leavers

- 6.5.51 The examples used in this report, drawn from published research and public policy reviews, reveal a movement away from seeing training, work, and education operating in relatively separate domains, and conforming to conventional expectations, eg movement beyond notions of “one-point-in-time” transition from end of school to tertiary study, of conventional upper-school experiences, and of focus on single pathways.
- 6.5.52 Some ideas from the “footprints”¹ report have been discussed earlier. Most notably for this discussion about the relevance of a focus on alternative tertiary admissions, it emphasises the need for an integrated, systemic approach to the development of people in the school-leaver age range and somewhat beyond. It sees that development being enriched with knowledge and experience that can build realistic life and vocational aspirations. It emphasises the need to accommodate individual flexibility in vocational preparation, in terms of routes and timing. It wants to make the development experience sufficiently engaging and free of alienating situations to bring a very high proportion of young people into post-school vocational study and training – and to continue that engagement in a measured way for a long-term vocational future.
- 6.5.53 The recent review of post-compulsory education and training in Victoria, chaired by Peter Kirby,² emphasised the need, among comprehensive recommendations, for “...a more coherent and less fragmented post-compulsory phase...” changes to encourage more engagement in education and training, and recognition of the need to provide flexibly in routes and timing for individual needs and dispositions.³
- 6.5.54 In Queensland, there has been for some time pressure to bring consideration of vocational education courses taken in upper secondary schooling within the ambit

¹ footprints to the future, op cit

² Final Report of the Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria (Victoria Department of Education, Employment and Training, Melbourne – 2000) pp176

³ ibid, pp7-10

of the now long-standing arrangements for producing a TER at the end of Year 12. In the light of the much broader policy understanding of the development needs of school-leavers and providing for them, that has come about in the last decade or so, this concern seems too conventionally focussed and particular for the future.

- 6.5.55 A much broader and somewhat less conventional approach appears to have been taken in the recent commissioning by the then Queensland Minister for Education of a review¹ of the Queensland senior certification.² Although some way from reporting, the review is tasked to consider the suitability of institutional settings, and certification, apparently with a view to providing people predominantly in the school-leaver group with a form of official recognition of different forms of learning and vocational and other experience that can be seen to equate to 12 years of schooling.
- 6.5.56 The review is interested in catering for people moving at different rates, and in addressing issues such as alienation from study by offering a much more comprehensive notion of success in study. In this sense, it comprehends many of the issues identified in research and review referred to in this Chapter, and found in the associated consultations, that appear to turn some school-leavers away from the many routes into tertiary study and vocations now available.
- 6.5.57 From the perspective of this project, broad based certification of the type being contemplated holds considerable promise as a form of evidence likely to be considered for admission to AQF levels I and II programs, in some of the means for dealing with non-TER-eligible school-leavers developing in QTAC, and though some existing QTAC schedules.

6.6 CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE TARGET GROUP FOR THE PROJECT AND PROVIDING ACCESS TO TERTIARY STUDY

- 6.6.1 Reasons arise from the matters discussed in this Chapter and earlier, to question whether the group that has been assumed to be likely to benefit from the provision of an alternative tertiary admissions process is sufficiently large and clearly discernible to justify the introduction of such a process.
- 6.6.2 It is concluded that when the construct of that group and its originally perceived needs is freed from a number of traditional notions about access, seen in terms of its apparently diffuse size and character, and placed in the strongly emerging

¹ A review being undertaken by the Queensland Government through Education Queensland with the support of the Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (BSSSS), directed by John Pitman, former Executive Officer of BSSSS. It is required to report by June 2002.

² A reference to the Senior Certificate, the long-standing certificate of completion of Year 12 through an essentially conventional schooling route, issued by BSSSS, which is also responsible for annual determination of TERs for **Year 12** completers.

context of public policy for broad engagement of the school-leaver group, the justification for making provision on a limited and focussed admissions front is greatly reduced.

6.6.3 The reasons are these.

6.6.4 **Questionable assumptions.** The notion of the targeted group is dependent to a considerable extent on two assumptions that have become questionable through changing school demography and school-leaver behaviour, and economic and training actualities. They are:

- **“Normal” tertiary transition.** “Normal” tertiary transition by the hoped for body of school-leavers consisting of up to 90% of the cohort can no longer be reasonably assumed to be direct from the end of Year 12, at one point in time. Most people entering higher tertiary study in Queensland do not come direct from Queensland Year 12. Many school-leavers take years to enter tertiary study.
- **“Mature-age” students.** The notion of “mature-age” students as a “different” group is increasingly demonstrably dated. Particularly so is the practice of limiting access by school-leavers with evidence classified as non-conventional because of their age, to the considerable range of routes open to older applicants.

6.6.5 **Access to “prestige” courses.** Access to high-demand courses in Queensland leading to vocations considered prestigious and/or lucrative is now commonly achieved by routes other than those leading direct from Year 12, predominantly but not exclusively through full or partial completion of other tertiary courses.

6.6.6 **Aspiration to tertiary study.** Developing an aspiration to enter tertiary study, and acting to effect it, is timed by many personal considerations that develop at different stages for different individuals, eg knowledge of vocational and study possibilities, circumstantial opportunity, experience, demonstrated ability, attitudes to study, personal and perceived personal need for qualifications, resources, location.

6.6.7 **Substantial existing provisions.** Lower level tertiary-AQF access opportunities, numerous institution-based processes to consider disability and non-conventional evidence, and established and emerging QTAC provisions for school-leavers without TERs, already provide for many school-leavers with non-conventional secondary school backgrounds. Use of some has diminished, while demand for others is small but rising.

6.6.8 **Potential indirect access to tertiary study aspired to.** About 90% of the school leaver group appear to be considered, from investigations undertaken by current, comprehensive public policy reviews, to be in part-time or full-time work or

education and training, or in both. This opens the opportunity for that proportion of the cohort to produce some form of evidence to support a beginning entry to tertiary study, and consequent opportunity to transit to desired courses on the basis of demonstrated tertiary achievement – without necessarily completing conventional secondary schooling.

6.6.9 **The unengaged group.** Although the precise size and character of the group not engaged by the idea of undertaking further study, or alienated from study, is not clear, collateral considerations suggest that it is made up of:

- that part of the approximately 10% of the cohort who are non-participants after setting aside possibly up to half who have disabilities causing a profound to severe level of core activity restriction likely to prohibit or severely inhibit vocational tertiary study; and
- an unknown part of the approximately 15% of the group in full-time or part-time employment that is not undertaking education or training; however from attitudinal data given earlier, the size of that part seems likely to be significant and not necessarily amenable to ideas of study.

6.6.10 **Issues associated with the non-engaged group.** Although the non-engaged group is not essentially congruent in character with the assumed, notional group with which this project is concerned, considering that group does disclose some issues related to producing access to tertiary study for school-leavers:

- **Personal choice.** Recognition of the validity of personal choice of work as the sole immediate valid outcome of school, and to eschew tertiary study - at least for some time.
- **Inability.** Recognition that as ability margins of this large cohort of school-leavers are approached, the residual sub-set is increasingly likely to have characteristics that render unattainable tertiary study leading to vocational outcomes, ie low abilities, or disabilities.
- **Personal factors.** Recognition of the importance of addressing other personal factors such as attitudes to study or alienation from it, personal social and resource contexts, knowledge and experience of vocational possibilities, and vocational and study aspiration.

6.6.11 **Relative importance of factors to be addressed.** In providing tertiary access for school-leavers with non-conventional backgrounds, attending to circumstantial issues affecting opportunity and aspiration, such as those just canvassed, seems to be indicated by research studies mentioned. This is recognised both in emerging public policy and in this project's field consultations, as being of much higher importance to inclusion and access than providing a new access gateway

mechanism for tertiary study. This is particularly so if a number of the residual assumptions about access, as addressed above, are dealt with.

6.7 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Observations and Findings

6.7.1 **Queensland's tertiary admission provisions are much more comprehensive and well established than in other states.** (Chapters 3, 4)

- There are almost 400 ways for applicants to present an extensive range of identified types of admissions evidence, including many forms of qualitative data, evidence of formal achievements in many fields, and structured data drawn from school-based assessment. QTAC and the institutions collaborate in developing schedules to translate this evidence into TERs(OE) and in operating these avenues for presentation.
- The use and codification of that data proceeds in a climate of public acceptance, and without the repetitive public debates about what types of evidence school-leavers should present that even now occur in some other states. Slightly more than half the applicants admitted to tertiary courses are not direct from Queensland Year 12.
- There is an extensive range of tertiary institutional alternative admissions and transitional programs, some providing generally for applicants with disadvantage, others for school-leavers. School results used for tertiary admission can be affected by consideration of disadvantage.
- There are central provisions (through QTAC) for considering alternative evidence, and for providing TERs(OE) or other forms of tertiary access to students completing Year 12 without being eligible to receive TERs.

6.7.2 **There are six sets of conventional and alternative evidence, comprising over 38 types of evidence, shown to be used by Queensland institutions for the tertiary admission or selection, of school-leavers and other applicants.** (Chapters 3, 4)

- School-leavers are shown to be able, to varying extent, to draw on that range of evidence, and marshal and present it.
- Careful and effective schedule-based and qualitative methods are employed in most institutions, and in QTAC, for applying alternative evidence and for making assessment and admissions decisions.

- One institution, Bond University, provides for such evidence to be used for mainstream admissions, while others accept large parts of the range for “mature-age” admissions, and for alternative school-leaver admission routes, sometimes admitting substantial proportions of course populations using it.

6.7.3 A model has been developed for a centrally operated, comprehensive alternative admissions system, compatible with the Queensland education and tertiary admissions context, drawing on existing methods in use in Queensland and on research into achieving consistency in qualitative judgement based on disparate evidence. (Chapters 4, 5)

- The model assumes the use of types of evidence shown to be available to and able to be used by school-leavers, and builds on methods of making admissions judgements employed in the various tertiary institutions.
- It uses structure and procedures to build and maintain lateral and longitudinal consistency and comparability in making admissions judgements based on the disparate evidence seen to be available to schools and considered reasonable in the light of the present diversity in existing admissions schedules.

6.7.4 However, the usefulness and practicability of proceeding with the development and introduction of such a model, focussing on the conventionally assumed point of transition of school-leavers to tertiary education, has been thrown into doubt by:

- questions increasingly raised during the project about the contemporary relevance of conventional assumptions and policies, reflecting motives of proceeding by full-time study to Year 12 and thus to university or higher TAFE levels and
- the emergence of new potentially influential public policy approaches to development and engagement of school-leavers (16-19 year olds). (Chapters 3 and 6)

In particular, factors that have been found relevant here include the following:

- Timing, aspiration, and opportunity for transition seem to be driven by many individual factors – they are no longer seen as a one-point-in-time issue.
- The apparent assumption that the normal route for accessing tertiary education after Year 12 is the TER is decreasingly well founded. Considering the end of Year 12 as the “normal” point for transition appears to have become an obsolescent notion – as is regarding the direct TER route to be the benchmark when considering other methods for admission.

- The conventional notion of “prestige” courses has been eroded, or has changed in new social and economic circumstances. Admission to such courses now essentially follows a primary-degree in another field, or some tertiary study performance, and appears merely through having a TER. Most such courses apply no longer unusually competitive, at TER level and have become more readily accessible by course transfer.
- Thus, people with non-conventional secondary histories can follow many transitional routes into tertiary study, and into so-called “prestige” courses, by demonstrating tertiary study competencies as they proceed, or having the appropriate aspirations.
- Public policy is moving influentially to regard various distinctly individual timings and combinations of work, education, and training as appropriate forms of engagement for about 90% of 16 to 24 year olds, thereby giving increased salience to non-conventional senior secondary school histories.
- The increasing melding of work, training, and education from age 15 or earlier, and factors such as alienation from formal schooling, point to the adoption of a model of continual opportunity for transition - provided effectively by the AQF levels I, II, and III programs, and entry to the more readily accessible higher tertiary courses, as means for those with non-conventional secondary backgrounds to demonstrate qualification to be admitted to competitive courses.

6.7.5 Partially in light of these and other changes, the institutional policy barriers preventing school-leavers from accessing the QTAC “mature-age” schedules before certain threshold ages, usually 19 or 21, appear unsustainable. (Chapters 3, 6)

- School-leavers with unconventional senior secondary histories are increasingly able to present types of evidence, including AQF levels I and II qualifications, employment histories, and individual secondary subject achievements that are treatable through the QTAC schedules.
- Institutions are increasingly willing to admit such people to tertiary courses as they show up in QTAC screening processes.

6.7.6 Emphasis in promoting engagement of older adolescents and young adults appears to be relocating to providing: support to individual people to find the form of educational, training, or work engagement that from time to time fits their aspirations and personal circumstances; and the help required to form aspirations and positive attitudes to education, training and work, and to develop knowledge of possible futures in these and related future personal actions. (Chapter 6)

- This changing emphasis is identified in emerging public policy, in advice from secondary school personnel, and through research among school-leavers as the core targets for funding and informed support action.
 - Evidence includes the emerging cases of local provision of alternative school work experience vocational training groups administratively supported from secondary school bases.
- 6.7.7 **There are extensive provisions for tertiary access in Queensland within a short time of leaving school. Alternative means of engagement for the school leaver group are increasing recognised and used. Recent national policy consideration has accepted that about 10-15% of school-leavers will not be engaged for various reasons. Thus, the extent of the target group of tertiary-able people with non-conventional school backgrounds originally assumed to exist is now considered to be quite small. To the extent the group still exists in terms of denied tertiary access where individual aspiration exists, other approaches canvassed in this report seem the most practicable one to me to address the groups access needs. (Chapter 6)**

Recommendations

- 6.7.8 The recommendations that emerge from this project are essentially to recognise that the ideas on which it was based, some dating from attention given to social equity in the 1970s, have been overtaken. At least in Queensland, a comprehensive Alternative admissions procedure has developed, accessible by the whole population with relevant, broadly scoped evidence to present. Routes to tertiary admission are increasingly accessible, individual, varied, and not time bound.
- 6.7.9 The recommendations, which follow the main finding set out above, are:
- **Recommendation 1: That the focus on admissions considerations be moved from the immediate progression of Year 12 leavers into particular higher education courses. Rather, the admission of applicants from a general population, including those recently from school, using many routes and methods, and at individually appropriate times, should be recognised as the normal pattern for tertiary transition.**
 - **Recommendation 2: That, in order to recognise the increasing range of evidence available for presentation by 16-19 year old people, the present age thresholds for access to the Queensland QTAC-based admissions schedules be relaxed to enable their use by school-leavers able to present appropriate alternative evidence. This access might be either in lieu of or in addition to TERs for most people immediately completing secondary school.**

- **Recommendation 3:** That the development of an alternative admissions process for immediate school-leavers with a non-conventional secondary school background, based on conventional views of transition and school-leaver admission, and concerned with access to “prestige” tertiary programs, not be pursued - since access to tertiary courses, including prestige courses, is decreasingly competitive, and increasingly available through use by a range of sorts of evidence of proficiency.
- **Recommendation 4:** That resource priorities be given instead to assisting people in the process of setting educational and vocational directions, to understand educational or vocational possibilities, and their likely individual means of achieving personal goals - rather than to developing further school-leaver admissions systems.