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Views and Influences

Tertiary education, secondary students and their advisers

00/08

Adrian Harvey-Beavis
Lyn Robinson
Australian Council for Educational Research

Evaluations and Investigations Programme
Higher Education Division
Department of Education,
Training and Youth Affairs

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Preface

The study was commissioned by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs as part of the Evaluations and Investigations Program.

Within the study the authors each had particular areas of responsibility for which they conducted the analyses and reported the findings. Lyn Robinson conducted the research and wrote up the findings for Chapter 2 (the literature review) and Chapter 3 (the *Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth* data). Adrian Harvey-Beavis wrote the rest of the report.

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Many people contributed to this report: the students, the teachers, and the parents who agreed to be interviewed; the principals who agreed to the study in their schools, encouraged teachers to contribute to the study and who supplied facilities to interview the students; the teachers who contacted parents; and the administrators within head offices who granted permission to approach schools.

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We would also like to thank other staff at ACER who assisted us in the production of this report. Fiona McSweeney and Phil McKenzie in particular, made important contributions.

Adrian Harvey-Beavis and Lyn Robinson

Abbreviations and acronyms

ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ANOP	Australian National Opinion Poll Services
CES	Commonwealth Employment Service
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training
DETYA	Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
EIP	Evaluations and Investigations Program
HECS	Higher Education Contribution Scheme
LSAY	Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth
RIASEC	Types of occupations and interests described by John Holland: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional
SES	Socio-economic status
SPSSx	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TER	Tertiary Entrance Rank
VET	Vocational Education and Training

Executive summary

The study explored the range of perceptions, attitudes, images, aspirations, plans, and knowledge of tertiary education held by groups of students in Years 10, 11 and 12, some parents, and some teachers of senior school students. It did this primarily by using a case study methodology.

The main research questions for the study were:

1. What are the perceptions, attitudes, images, aspirations, plans, and knowledge of tertiary education held by Year 10, 11 and 12 students?
2. What are the perceptions, images, plans, and knowledge of tertiary education held by the parents, teachers and careers counsellors—the main advisers to these groups of students?

Theoretical framework

To address these questions, a theoretical framework was proposed. It advanced the view that those processes underlying the development of occupational preferences also underlie the development of educational preferences. This theory suggested that students' views of tertiary education would have four key dimensions—sex type, prestige, field type, and ease or difficulty of access to the institutions or to courses within those institutions. These dimensions and their theoretical context shaped the interpretation of key concepts in the research questions and the content of the questions asked of students, parents and teachers during the interviews.

Literature review

A literature review was conducted for the study. The review showed that the two most important sources of influence on students, as reported by students, were parents and teachers. This provided a rationale for the interview of parents and teachers in the case studies. As well, a number of studies that were reviewed had findings consistent with information collected during the case study interviews. This helped add plausibility to the study.

Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth data

Complementing the information taken from the literature review was the analysis of data from the *Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth* (*LSAY*). This is a data set held at ACER. It contains information on the educational and occupational plans and aspirations of Australian youth across time. It consists of nationally representative samples of a number of different cohorts. These data confirmed many of the findings identified in the literature review as important. The *LSAY* data also contributed some new findings. For example, they suggested that how happy a student feels at school is an important predictor of educational aspirations. (This suggested that this study's focus on school advisers was justified.) Together with the literature review, the *LSAY* data also (1) provided a context for the case studies, (2) helped to identify which types of schools to approach, and (3) helped to weight the amount of time spent on various topics during the interviews. But it was the case studies which provided the data to help answer the main research questions.

Case studies

For the case studies, a total of 87 students, 23 parents and 19 teachers were interviewed. A total of 28 interviews were conducted, 19 of these were with students, five were with parents and four were with teachers.

There were five schools selected for the study. Using the information gleaned from the literature review and the *LSAY* results, a number of factors were used to guide selection of these schools. These factors included: geographic location, sector (Catholic, government, independent) and the likely socio-economic background of students and parents. The final set of five schools involved in the study came from five States. There was a remote government school, a rural government school, a city Catholic school, students and parents from a city government school and a rural independent school.

Findings from the case studies

The case studies were designed to provide in-depth accounts of the range of views held about various aspects of tertiary education. The main findings are now summarised.

- There was little evidence of a systematic variation among the views of these students, parents or teachers across any of the classifications used in the study—school location, sector and, for the students, Year level. This may in part be due to the wide variation seen within the schools. The only

systematic difference seen was that some rural students and parents were concerned about the cost and distance from home of a move to a city campus.

- The perceptions and images that these students and parents have of TAFE institutes and of universities seem to be mainly shaped not by the amenities, courses or locations of the institutions, but by their perceptions and images of the students (and to a lesser extent the teachers) at these different institutions. People not things or processes are the important features of the tertiary education landscape.
- The attitudes towards both TAFE and university held by students, parents and teachers ranged from the positive to the negative. The students less often saw TAFE in a positive way, although some were very positive about its 'hands-on' approach to learning.
- Sex typing and prestige did not seem to be important factors in the images that these students and parents had of universities and TAFEs as institutions. (There were some parents and students who felt that boys would feel more comfortable than girls in TAFE.) Sex type and prestige dimensions seemed more pertinent to these students', parents' and teachers' images of courses within these institutions.
- Ease of access did seem to colour the images that the students had of TAFE. It was seen in a less positive light than universities because of this easier access. In contrast, ease of access did not seem to shape the images that these parents and teachers had of TAFE and universities.
- The parents and students in this study rarely knew about administrative procedures for admission to either TAFE or university. Equally, they were rarely concerned about this, relying on the school to provide the information when needed. There were low levels of understanding, outside of the most general observations, about what was done on a day-to-day basis at either university or TAFE by the students. The parents and teachers did not provide much information on this topic. This suggested that the day-to-day life of a student on campus is not important in shaping attitudes, perceptions and images of tertiary educational institutions.
- For students and parents in this study, the outcomes expected of university and TAFE were often to do with the world of work—qualifications, jobs, knowledge and skills. Some of the parents and teachers who were interviewed also referred to the intellectual and cultural enrichment that students could achieve.

In summary, the perceptions, attitudes, images, aspirations, plans, and knowledge of tertiary education of the students, parents and teachers that participated in this study were often bound up with their images of the people who study or work at universities and TAFE institutes and of their understandings, images and expectations of the demands of the world of work.

1. An overview of the study

This chapter describes:

1. the aims of the study;
2. the broad type of approach used in the conduct of the study;
3. a theoretical framework for understanding the views held by students and their advisers of the world of tertiary education;
4. the main concepts used in the study; and
5. the main research questions addressed by the study.

1.1 Aims of the study

The major aim of the study was to provide insights into the diversity of views of tertiary education held by secondary school students and their advisers.

Specifically, the study aimed to investigate the perceptions, attitudes, images, aspirations, plans, and knowledge of tertiary education held by groups of students in Years 10, 11 and 12, some parents, and some teachers.

Another aim was to examine the extent to which secondary students' perceptions have changed since 1995 (the year when the *Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY)* data were first collected on this issue.)

1.2 Approach

The study was largely an exploration of the range of views of various aspects of tertiary education that might be expected to be found among senior school students in Australia. The study also sought to develop an understanding of the context in which students formed their views. This context was provided by describing a theoretical framework that drew largely on the work of Gottfredson (1981). The context was also understood by drawing upon previous research in the area and by examining selected data from the *LSAY* program.

Information about the current views of students and their advisers was gathered using a case study methodology. Face-to-face interviews with students from Years 10, 11 and 12, parents, and some teachers from selected schools were the principal sources of information.

The interview data did not permit statistically based inferences to be drawn about the population of all students, advisers and teachers in Australia. However, the *LSAY* data did permit some generalisations to be made about secondary students as a whole. Thus, the study used both qualitative and quantitative methods.

1.3 Theoretical framework

Central to the theoretical framework used in the study was Gottfredson's (1981) theory of the development of career aspirations. By adopting the arguments of Naylor (1993), Gottfredson's theory was then applied to the understanding of educational aspirations and by implication, the views that students have of tertiary education.

1.3.1 Gottfredson's Theory

Gottfredson (1981) proposed a theory of the development of occupational aspirations. Central to her theory is the notion of the 'self concept'. The self concept is, as she writes, 'one's view of who one is and who one is not'. Such a view will, she claims, 'more or less consciously', include views about one's abilities, interests, personality and 'place in society' (1981 p. 547). For Gottfredson the importance of the self concept is founded upon her assumption that people 'act on their beliefs about themselves' (1981 p. 547). When individuals nominate an occupational preference, or when they are describing their aspirations, they are doing so, in large part, on the basis of their beliefs about themselves and their location within the social world.

Gottfredson describes how the self concept develops by referring to the theory of cognitive development proposed by Van den Daele (1968). According to this theory, the development of the self concept is driven by the cognitive development of the individual. A more complex self concept only develops as the ability to reason develops. This cognitive development occurs in stages. Associated with each of these stages of cognitive development are new stages in the development of the self concept. Gottfredson argues that with each one of the first four stages in this development, there are four corresponding stages in the development of aspirations.

Table 1 summarises the four stages of children's cognitive development proposed by Van den Daele, and the corresponding stages proposed by Gottfredson. It shows that children first understand that occupations are adult roles. This understanding develops between the ages of 3 and 5 years. In the second stage, children learn to discriminate gender. At this second stage children are able to distinguish between occupational images or stereotypes

based on sex type. This second stage occurs between the ages of 6 and 8 years. In the third stage, children learn to discriminate between 'social class' levels. At this stage they can distinguish between occupational images based on social prestige level. At this third stage children also recognise differences in intelligence. The third stage of cognitive development emerges between the ages of 9 and 13 years. In the fourth stage children learn to distinguish between such psychological characteristics as personality, interests, values and competencies. At this stage they can, for the first time, identify occupational field types. This fourth stage occurs from the age of 14 years onwards. Given that the sample of students for the case studies consisted of those enrolled in Year 10 to Year 12, it was expected that most would have achieved Stage 4 in this schema.

Table 1: Summary of the four stages in the development of the self concept and occupational preferences proposed by Gottfredson

	Stage 1: Orientation to size & power	Stage 2: Orientation to sex roles	Stage 3: Orientation to social valuation	Stage 4: Orientation to internal self
Age	3–5	6–8	9–13	14 and over
New elements in perception of self and others	Little v Big	Gender	Social class and intelligence	Personal values, competencies
New elements in occupational perceptions and preferences	Occupations as adult roles	Sex type	Prestige level	Field of work

Source: Gottfredson (1981)

Gottfredson argues that as each stage of cognitive development is entered, the individual acquires the ability to make more abstract discriminations about his or her self concept. Consequently, at each new stage of cognitive development new aspects of the self concept—and so also, new aspects of occupational images—are perceived for the first time. Once a new aspect is perceived, an individual can make a new judgement about the compatibility of his or her self concept with an occupational image. Once these judgements are made, the individual will perceive some occupations as no longer desirable and so he or she will cease to prefer them.

Thus, at the second stage of cognitive development those occupations perceived to be of the 'inappropriate' sex type will be identified and judged by individuals to be no longer acceptable. At the third stage of cognitive development occupations with an 'inappropriate' social prestige level will be identified and judged to be no longer acceptable. Finally, at the fourth stage of cognitive development, occupations with an 'inappropriate' field type will be identified and judged to be no longer acceptable. With this sequence,

Gottfredson argues, the number of acceptable occupations (that is occupations which are congruent with the individual's self concept) is reduced. This process Gottfredson names 'circumscription'.

Thus, for Gottfredson, the development of career aspirations is a process of developing an increasingly refined understanding both of one's self, and of the world of work. As this understanding becomes more refined, so the number of preferred occupations is reduced until a most preferred occupation, or a small number of occupations, is identified as worthy of aspiration.

The criteria for assessing the match between the self concept and an occupation which emerge developmentally early, are seen by Gottfredson as being more 'foundational'. As such, they are the hardest to compromise when there is a poor match between occupations that are preferred and those that are available. For Gottfredson, interests will be compromised first, then social prestige, then as a last resort, sex type. Gottfredson also cites assessment of the effort required as important. This view has been criticised by, for example, Taylor and Pryor (1985), who argues that it is impossible, in practice, to separate these various dimensions when considering occupational options. However, Gottfredson's theorising does suggest that to investigate views of the world of work, it would be wise to consider how people perceive the sex type of occupations, the social prestige of occupations, and the type of people who would be expected to be found in these occupations. The question now becomes, to what extent does this theorising translate from the world of work, to the world of tertiary education?

1.3.2 Generic interests

Naylor (1993) has shown that occupational interests can be regarded as generic. He argues that the relationship between types of interests and the types of jobs that people prefer can also be found when examining educational preferences. That is, types of interests, the types of occupations preferred and the types of educational courses preferred by individuals tend to be congruent with each other. It was this approach which formed the basis for the report *Individual Demand for Tertiary Education: interests and fields of study* (Harvey-Beavis and Elsworth 1998). That report confirmed Naylor's views that interests, previously seen as related only to occupational preferences, were also implicated in shaping educational preferences and choices. Further, the study showed that the occupational interests of students, measured using the research form of the Australian Interest Measure (Naylor 1997), helped to predict the type of educational course for which they had applied. These interests were conceptualised in terms of John Holland's RIASEC typology (Holland 1973; Holland 1997).

1.3.2.1 Holland's classification of occupations and interests

Holland classifies occupations and occupational interests into six broad types:

1. Realistic: an interest in manual or physical problems and activities;
2. Investigative: an interest in abstract or conceptual problems and activities;
3. Artistic: an interest in literary or artistic problems and activities;
4. Social: an interest in problems and activities to do with caring, particularly for people;
5. Enterprising: an interest in problems and activities to do with money and the exercise of power; and
6. Conventional: an interest in problems and activities associated with running an office and storing or retrieving information.

1.3.2.2 The relationship of interests to fields of study

The Harvey-Beavis and Elsworth study (1998), demonstrated empirically that fields of study can be identified from clusters found in applications to tertiary admissions centres and that these fields can be meaningfully mapped to the Holland typology of interests.

Table 2: The relationship between the RIASEC classification of interests and fields of study

Interest type	Field of study
Realistic	–
Investigative	Building and Design, Engineering and Computing, and Professional and Applied Science (including Medicine and Dentistry)
Artistic	Visual Arts and Music
Social	Applied Social Science, Child Care and Teaching, Health Studies (but not Medicine or Dentistry), Community Service and Sport and Recreation
Enterprising	Humanities, Social Science, and Communications (e.g. Journalism)
Conventional	Business, Commerce, Law, Hospitality, Business Languages, and Library and Information Processing

Source: Harvey-Beavis and Elsworth (1998)

Table 2 shows the relationship between the RIASEC classification of interests and the fields of study identified by Harvey-Beavis and Elsworth (1998). Consider, for example, those Year 12 students who had interests measured as 'Social'. Typically, they preferred a course from the 'Applied Social Science, Child Care and Teaching, Health Studies, Community Service and Sport and Recreation' field. (Note that there were no fields of study which were found to be related to Realistic interests in this study.) Students' occupational and educational aspirations can, thus, be classified using the same typology. For the present study, it was only possible to tentatively explore the implications of this. For example, the relationship between the field of study and the type of job was investigated.

1.3.3 The nexus between views of the world of work and views of tertiary education

This study proceeded on the assumption that the processes described by Gottfredson as underlying the development of occupational aspirations also applied broadly to the development of tertiary educational aspirations. In other words, just as people have cognitive maps of the world of work, they also have cognitive maps of the world of tertiary education. While this view was somewhat speculative, there were grounds for believing that this was a sound basis for the study. First, there was the work of Naylor, and Harvey-Beavis and Elsworth which showed the close relationship between the types of occupations and of the field types of tertiary courses. Secondly, many of the concepts used by Gottfredson can be seen as likely to be related to decisions about whether to enter a university or TAFE institute, or a particular course. These include self perceptions of ability and interests, and the sex composition of the student body. The only dimension where there was no immediately obvious parallel was that of the social status dimension used by Gottfredson. However, if social prestige is construed as providing an index of ease of access to social resources, then it is possible to view access to tertiary education courses, as indexed by entrance scores, as being analogous to social prestige in the world of work. Tertiary education courses with higher entrance scores could be seen as offering more 'prestige'. This approach was adopted for the study.

1.4 Central concepts and their operationalisation

The study involved examining the perceptions, attitudes, images, aspirations, plans, and knowledge of tertiary education of students and their advisers. The interpretation and operationalisation of these key concepts was largely shaped by the theoretical framework outlined above.

1.4.1 Perceptions

Meaning: Dtretske (1995) has argued that perception is about 'either things or facts' (and hence not of 'ideas'). To perceive is to extract information, via the senses, from the world about 'things and facts'. There is here, also, a useful opportunity to distinguish perceptions from attitudes. Perceptions are made of things and facts, while an attitude is a response (of a particular kind) to these things and facts (see below).

Operationalisation: Since the concept of 'perception' includes within its meaning the view that sense data are primary, participants in the study were

asked to think about university, and then to describe what they saw (and not how they evaluated it). Similarly, participants were asked to describe what they saw when they thought of a TAFE institute.

1.4.2 Attitudes

Meaning: There is a vast literature on the meaning and measurement of attitudes (Petty, Wegener et al. 1997). For brevity and clarity's sake, an attitude was defined as an 'evaluative response toward an object' (Tesser and Shaffer 1990). This response can be further distinguished from an affective (felt) response (which may not be evaluative).

Operationalisation: Students and their advisers were asked to evaluate universities and TAFE institutes in general. This was done by asking them to say whether, in general, they thought that a university or a TAFE education was 'a good thing' and something for which students should aim. It was anticipated that in answering this evaluative question, respondents would also indicate how they felt about universities. Interviewers were encouraged to focus discussion on the evaluative dimension of interviewees' responses.

1.4.3 Images

Meaning: An 'occupational image' is, for Gottfredson, a generalisation or a set of generalisations which an individual makes about an occupation. For Gottfredson 'occupational image' is synonymous with 'occupational stereotype' (p. 547). She uses the word 'image' in preference to 'stereotype' to avoid the negative connotations that she feels are associated with the use of the word 'stereotype'.

An image can be distinguished from a perception in that an image is a generalisation, whereas a perception is of a particular phenomenon—that which is presented to the senses.

Operationalisation: Using Gottfredson's theory as a guide, students were asked about: their perceived (1) sex type of institutions, (2) the prestige level of institutions and courses, (3) the types of persons attending TAFE institutes and universities, and (4) the amount of effort that they felt was needed to gain access to university or TAFE.

1.4.4 Aspirations

Meaning: An aspiration was defined as the most preferred educational or occupational preference of a student.

Operationalisation: Following from Gottfredson (1981), an educational aspiration was identified as the single best educational alternative named by a person at any given time. Thus, students were asked to nominate the course or job they most wanted after leaving school. Discussions of student aspirations with the parents and advisers were subsumed within the discussion of student plans.

1.4.5 Plans

Meaning: The 'plans' of students were defined as their educational and occupational intentions. These plans did not have to be formulated in any systematic way, nor did they need necessarily to be coherent.

Operationalisation: Students were asked what they intended to do immediately after they had finished their schooling, and what they would like to do after they had completed their post-school training or education. Where these plans did not relate to education or employment, interviewers directed the students towards their educational and occupational plans. Following from Gottfredson's theorising, the extent to which students had circumscribed and compromised their preferences formed the focus to these questions. This was done by exploring the relationship between the students' aspirations and their plans. Students were asked if they expected to study a course or have a job which they would most like, or did they expect that they would have to accept a less preferred option.

Parents and advisers were asked about how realistic and coherent the student's plans seemed to be. The focus was again upon the extent to which students had circumscribed and compromised their aspirations. Parents were asked if they expected students to study or work at what they most liked.

1.4.6 Knowledge

What can be known about universities or the TAFE sector is extensive. It was decided that the key elements of knowledge, from a student's perspective, had to do with access, process and outcomes. For access, students were asked to describe what they needed to do to gain access to university or TAFE. For 'process', they were asked to describe what they expected to do day-to-day while studying. For outcomes, they were asked to describe what they expected to learn, and what employment opportunities would become available to them upon completion of their course. Students not intending to go to university or TAFE were encouraged to answer these questions. Parents and advisers were also asked similar questions.

1.5 Research questions

The main research questions for the study using the data from the case studies were:

1. What are the perceptions, attitudes, images, aspirations, plans, and knowledge of tertiary education held by Year 10, 11 and 12 students?
2. What are the perceptions, images, plans, and knowledge of tertiary education held by the parents, teachers and careers counsellors—the main advisers to these groups of students?

1.6 The contents of the report

The report consists of five main sections. These are:

1. a literature review;
2. a description of students' educational plans in Australia taken from the *LSAY* data set;
3. a description and discussion of the methodologies used in the study;
4. results of the study using data from interviews with students; and
5. results of the study using data from interviews with parents and teachers.

1.7 Overview of Chapter 1

It is likely that the same processes of development that underlie the formation of occupational aspirations also underlie the formation of aspirations for tertiary education. Using the work of Gottfredson this permitted key concepts to be organised in relation to each other and defined. Accordingly, 'images' were seen as being made up of four dimensions or aspects of importance—sex type, status or prestige, type and perceptions of ease of access. 'Plans' were seen in terms of the extent to which students had compromised their aspirations.

2. Literature review—trends, influences and choices concerning post-compulsory education

This chapter reviews the literature related to:

1. trends in attitudes to school completion and post-school study;
2. influences on students' educational intentions and on their educational participation; and
3. the process of career choice and the transition from secondary to tertiary study.

The material discussed in this chapter shows the range of factors that influence students' decisions about completing school and making the transition to tertiary education. Factors shown to be important by this review were taken into consideration when designing the present study. Additionally, the review locates the present study within a wider research and policy context.

2.1 Trends in attitudes to school completion and post-school study options

Students' perceptions of tertiary study options are bound up with their attitudes and intentions regarding secondary school completion. Perhaps the most far-reaching manifestation of students' attitudes and expectations has been the increase in school retention that has occurred over the last two decades. As one of the studies which investigated that growth in school completion concluded:

> *The very rapid increase in Year 12 retention—particularly during the second half of the 1980s—cannot be explained by any single development; changes in the level of economic activity, structural changes in the youth labour market, changes in government educational programs and income support schemes, changes in curriculum, increased ability to invest in education, or generational effects. These increases in Year 12 completion rates are most likely the result of the compound interaction of all of these influences to produce some critical level of retention such that staying at school to complete*

> *Year 12 became the norm. This may well propel the transformation of Year 12 graduation to being a near-universal qualification in the 1990s. (Williams, Long et al. 1993a page 15)*

While national retention rates during the 1990s have declined somewhat after peaking at 77 per cent in 1992 (Lamb 1996) the general expectation at the end of the decade was that most students would complete secondary school. Almost as a corollary, there is a pervasive view—held by students, and their parents—that university was a preferable post-school study option compared with TAFE.

A combination of factors has produced this focus on higher education as the principal outcome of school completion, and the vocational education and training (VET) option being seen as less desirable—not only within schools but within the community generally. Both accompanying and as a result of the increases in school retention rates, in many States there were structural changes in the secondary curriculum in the final years. These changes were designed to offer a more inclusive, comprehensive curriculum, rather than separate academic and technical streams as had occurred previously, and may have had the effect of reinforcing the expectation that Year 12 completion 'naturally' led to university. Other influences on students' attitudes and expectations included teachers, who modelled their own university backgrounds, and regarded TAFE as a second-best alternative, and a lack of information relating to VET (Chapman and Smallwood 1992, Dwyer, Harwood et al. 1997).

There have been numerous studies that have documented the increasing community acceptance of school completion and, with it, a preference for university over TAFE. Many of these studies have also sought to explain the development of these preferences, expectations and associated attitudes, by investigating the influences that have combined to produce them.

At the national level, a series of studies to investigate both the opinions of young people and community attitudes to youth issues and Federal government youth policies and programs was conducted by Australian National Opinion Poll Services (ANOP) at regular intervals during the 1980s. In 1984, 1986 and 1988, and also in 1990, nationally representative groups of 2000 young people aged 15 to 24 were surveyed. From 1986, an additional sample of adults aged 25 and over (numbering 1000 in 1986 and 1990, and 2000 in 1988) was included in these surveys. Personal interviews were used to obtain people's views on a range of issues relating to education and training. Data from the surveys enabled the monitoring of trends over time; for instance, between 1984 and 1990 the percentage of young people who believed that it was a good idea to encourage students to complete 12 years of education (either in school or in TAFE) rose from 83 per cent to 93 per

cent. In 1990, the four most commonly cited responses to an open-ended question about the main benefit of completing Year 12 among both groups (young people and adults) were that school completion provided improved employment prospects, both generally, and in terms of getting a 'good' (or well-paid) job, as well as a better general education, and help in personal development and maturity. The 1990 study also found widespread support, too, for government policy encouraging increased participation in tertiary education, with improved job prospects as the main perceived advantage. A question about the educational aspirations of those young people who were still high school students was included in the 1990 survey. While 91 per cent wished to complete Year 12, 59 per cent hoped to go to university (61 per cent of females, and 56 per cent of males) compared with a much lower 14 per cent who intended to go to TAFE (16 per cent of males, and 13 per cent of females) (ANOP 1990).

Over the last two decades various other studies conducted in one or more States have shown similar results—that university has consolidated its position as the favoured post-school option. Anderson, Saltet et al. (1980) provided early evidence that university was the preferred destination of students in the Australian Capital Territory, revealing a decline in the proportion of students indicating an intention to go to TAFE between 1972 and 1979. This study also noted the unrealistically high occupational aspirations of students. In 1979 in government schools, 50 per cent of Year 10 students, and 60 per cent of Year 11-12 students had plans for a professional career. These proportions seeking to enter the professions were far higher than the opportunities that existed, with the difference between students' aspirations and attainment being referred to as the 'disappointment gap' (Anderson, Saltet et al. 1980).

Data collected as part of the Victorian SCOPE project, which surveyed all secondary school students in the post compulsory years in that State, revealed that the majority—approximately 65 per cent—of Year 12 students in 1987 intended to go on to higher education, compared with less than 10 per cent intending to go to TAFE. These data also indicated a decline between 1984 and 1987 in the proportion of Year 11 students wanting an apprenticeship (Taylor, Alder et al. 1989).

Perceptions of TAFE held by students and by teachers was the subject of a study conducted in 1992 in two States. The study used both interviews and questionnaires to gather the opinions of several hundred students and 150 teachers from 33 schools in New South Wales and South Australia. It found that most students thought that university was more highly regarded in the community than TAFE. Students saw TAFE as being for 'dropouts', and believed that parents preferred their children to go to university. While students were aware of TAFE, they had little detailed knowledge of TAFE

courses, and the majority did not know that it was possible to transfer to university from TAFE (Chapman and Smallwood 1992). This study also examined the question of how perceptions of TAFE developed. The sources of information that were identified by students included other people who had studied at TAFE, parents and friends. That is, word of mouth was important to them for finding out about TAFE. The report argued, however, that these informal networks may not be well informed, creating the risk that decisions by students may be based on misinformation. Materials such as handbooks were not nominated by students as important information sources. The report noted that the mass media provided university role models, but not TAFE ones. The study also found that teachers tended to regard TAFE as a second-best alternative to university, although this view was less prevalent among careers teachers and principals. Teachers indicated that they had similar gaps in their knowledge about TAFE as did students, pointing to the need to better target information for this group (Chapman and Smallwood 1992).

In the same year, 1992, ANOP Research Services was commissioned by the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) to undertake a study of the attitudes of New South Wales students to post-compulsory education and training options. The main objectives of the research were to obtain a better understanding of how secondary school students' post-secondary education preferences were formed, how firmly they were held, and the extent to which they could be broadened and modified. In addition the study investigated students' awareness and knowledge of current post-secondary education and training options, and the image and standing of those options.

A series of 27 group discussions was held with secondary school students, as well as unemployed young people, teachers and parents, to provide the background for the development of the questionnaire used in a telephone survey of a sample of 1824 students in Years 10–12. The sample was randomly selected and the results were weighted by current year at school, gender and type of school (government or non-government). Topics covered in the telephone survey were:

- post-compulsory education and training aspirations;
- commitment to current plans;
- image of, and attitudes to, university and TAFE; and
- knowledge of post-secondary education and training options, and sources of information.

The ANOP study found widespread acceptance of increased participation in secondary school and in post-secondary education and training. It showed

that completing Year 12 was increasingly seen as the norm. The main reasons students wanted to complete Year 12 were to gain entry to higher education and to improve their job prospects, although a minority (about ten per cent) remained at school as an alternative to unemployment. The study also documented the push to higher education, at the expense of vocational education, with four times as many NSW Year 10–12 students aspiring to university (64 per cent) as TAFE (15 per cent). It was noted that these were unrealistic aspirations, given that a considerably larger percentage of students have higher education plans than the percentage which actually proceeds to university—in 1992, 38 per cent of Year 12 school leavers commenced university in NSW. This emphasis on higher education accompanied a desire for higher socioeconomic status jobs: over half (56 per cent) of the students surveyed aimed at professional occupations. The survey found that university aspirations were more marked among students in Year 12 (compared with Years 10 and 11), female students, students from non-government schools, those with better educated parents, and those with non-Australian born parents. The study concluded that to address the imbalance in post secondary educational and workforce preferences there was a need to improve awareness of, and attitudes towards, TAFE (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1993).

A follow-up to the 1992 NSW study was conducted by ANOP in 1994 to monitor students' attitudes to post-secondary education and training options, to identify any changes since 1992, and to investigate the reasons for such changes. While the same topics were investigated, the geographic coverage of the 1994 study was expanded beyond NSW to take in the other mainland States. A national telephone survey of almost 2000 Years 10–12 students confirmed the previous finding that proceeding to Year 12 was the accepted norm; in 1994 the majority (59 per cent) of students planned to go on to higher education, with the figure for males being 52 per cent, and for females 65 per cent.

2.1.1 Changing perceptions?

While these studies are consistent in revealing a preference among school students, teachers and parents for university as a post-school destination, there has been some indication of a shift in views. The emphasis on higher education was found to be a little less pronounced between the 1992 and 1994 ANOP studies. In NSW in 1992 the proportion of students aspiring to university had been 64 per cent; by 1994 this figure had fallen slightly to 60 per cent, and the percentage of students intending to go to TAFE increased from 15 to 20 per cent. This greater interest in TAFE could be taken to indicate some success in the promotion of TAFE from 1992 onwards.

Nevertheless the 1994 study concluded that university was still considered the better option, and TAFE remained a long way behind in terms of image. Continued effort was therefore needed to ensure that TAFE was perceived as an acceptable alternative to higher education (ANOP 1994).

A 1997 survey of approximately 500 parents of students in Years 10–12 in Tasmania found that opinion about the overall image of TAFE and of university was equally positive. In response to separate questions, the same percentage (70 per cent) of parents believed that TAFE and university had a good image as a further education destination. While substantial proportions (40 per cent in each case) of respondents indicated that they were unaware of any changes in the image of TAFE and of university over the last two years, more than one-third (35 per cent) of parents believed that the image of TAFE had improved, while almost 30 per cent thought the image of university had worsened (Department of Education Community and Cultural Development Office of Youth Affairs and Family, Tasmania 1997).

Another recent Victorian study (Dwyer, Harwood et al. 1997) also indicated that attitudes toward Vocational Education and Training (VET) may be changing. The researchers, using data from both surveys (around 2000) and interviews (80), found that among young people who had experienced VET, there was a shift from mainly negative preconceptions (based on their opinions in 1991, when in their final year at school) to highly positive re-assessments of the value of VET when asked about it in 1996. The study drew attention to a number of factors that are contributing to an increased awareness of VET post-school options. Senior students are now more likely to have direct experience of VET, as a result of VET in schools programs offered in Years 11 and 12, as well as other activities at the school level. These activities include more extensive work experience, and individual school programs developed in conjunction with local TAFE institutes. Furthermore, good quality information about VET is now more readily available to senior school students. TAFE institutes promote themselves directly to schools, often having school liaison officers to provide information to careers and Year 12 teachers, as well as through more general promotion campaigns, such as ‘Open Days’. It seems that there is an improved public perception of TAFE, and that while university remains the favoured post-school option, students and parents are paying more attention to TAFE courses.

2.2 Influences on students' educational intentions and on their educational participation

Students' plans concerning secondary school completion and their perceptions of their tertiary study options can be influenced by a large range of factors. These same factors are, in turn, when combined with intentions, influential in accounting for patterns of participation. A major category of influences are those that relate most directly to the students—both factors that can be ascribed to their personal and family background, and others that are concerned with their educational experience and achievement. Two additional sets of influences can be seen to impact on students' perceptions. These are the external influences of other people, as well as attributes of the educational institutions themselves—either school or post-school. The importance of the two latter groups is that, compared with student background characteristics, they are more amenable to intervention by policy makers (Elsworth, Day et al. 1982). (Further reference to these external influences will be made in the later discussion of the literature on career choice and the transition from secondary to tertiary study.)

2.2.1 Student background factors

The student background variables associated with school and post-school educational participation are well established in the research literature (see, for instance, (Williams 1987; Williams, Long et al. 1993a, Williams, Long et al. 1993b, Long, Carpenter et al. 1999). These variables include gender, ethnic background and family socioeconomic status. There are also strong associations with geographic location, and with type of school attended, although the influence of each of these two variables has also been shown to be linked with socioeconomic factors. Students' performance at school—particularly level of academic achievement, and students' own views of their ability—can also influence their intentions. The impact of such background variables on educational outcomes—that is, on both Year 12 completion, and participation in further or higher education in the post-school years—has been demonstrated in many studies. The following discussion draws on some of this literature, to illustrate the relationships that can be expected when analysing the quantitative data in the present study. As well, the variables mentioned here are those that have been used as the basis for the selection of the case study schools for this study.

2.2.1.1 Location

Rural/urban differences in levels of educational participation have been seen as partly attributable to physical factors—that is, to the disadvantages of distance and isolation—but also to differences in social and family values, and therefore different orientations toward education in urban and rural communities (Williams, Long et al. 1993a Williams, Long et al. 1993b).
A study conducted in 1987 into the attitudes towards education of students and parents in two adjoining rural regions in southern New South Wales and north-western Victoria (Braggett, Hatchard et al. 1988) exemplifies this. The researchers analysed enrolment data from over 30 schools relating to the 1981 Year 7 cohort to show a substantial drop in enrolments in Year 11: they calculated that the Year 7–11 retention rate was approximately 43 per cent, and from Year 7–12 it was 31 per cent, with markedly higher rates for females than males. The factors which caused rural students to leave school were discussed, including the view that only academically able students go on beyond Year 10. Important also were; financial hardship, travel time, accommodation problems, and family disruption. The study also highlighted some of the problems of transition to post-school study for rural students, including the costs of tertiary education when students needed to leave home, the difficulty of finding accommodation in the city, and students' difficulties in coping in the first year of post-school study (Braggett, Hatchard et al. 1988).

A recent Tasmanian report (Department of Education Community and Cultural Development Office of Youth Affairs and Family, Tasmania 1997) based on extensive community consultation with young people and those working with them, canvassed the range of concerns affecting young people living in rural and isolated locations. Among the educational issues for rural youth raised in those discussions were lower educational expectations and low retention rates beyond the compulsory years, more limited access to educational resources and vocational training, a lack of information regarding education and training options, and difficulties related to transport and the need to travel long distances. Such studies suggest that students and the parents of students in rural areas have a distinctive set of perceptions about tertiary education that needed to be canvassed in the qualitative phase of the present study.

2.2.1.2 School type

Differences between the educational expectations of students in government and non-government schools have long been established. For instance, in the ACT in 1979, 90 per cent of non-government school students expected to complete Year 12, compared with 81 per cent of government school students

(Anderson, Saltet et al. 1980). Victorian data for 1987 revealed that a much higher proportion of Year 11 students in non-government schools (around 85 per cent) than in government schools (just over 70 per cent) intended to stay on at school in the following year (Taylor, Alder et al. 1989). It is also well documented that these intentions are translated into outcomes. By the end of the 1980s, rapidly increasing Year 12 completion rates produced a sharp rise in demand for entry to university. Studies conducted in Queensland and Victoria in 1990 to investigate the issue of unmet demand for university places found that non-government school students were over-represented among successful applicants and among applicants generally, while students from less affluent backgrounds were less likely to apply, although no less successful in receiving an offer (Cameron, Pope et al. 1991). Between-system differences in Year 12 completion rates and entry to higher education have been found to persist, even after adjusting for the differing social origins of the student populations (Williams, Long et al. 1993a; Williams, Long et al. 1993b).

2.2.1.3 Family background

In addition to location and school type, other factors that have been shown to be linked with educational expectations and outcomes were considered in the selection of the sample of schools for this study. One of the most significant influences on educational participation is a student's socio-economic background. The positive relationship between family socio-economic status and educational outcomes has been clearly demonstrated. Williams summed up the findings on school completion:

> *The lower the social status of the family, the lower the educational level of the home, and the more limited the economic resources available to support the education of children, the less the likelihood that the student will complete all the years of formal schooling offered. (Williams, Long et al. 1993b)*

The association between socioeconomic status and participation in higher education is similarly strong (Williams, Long et al. 1993a). The term 'socioeconomic status' is variously interpreted in the literature, although parental occupation and education and family wealth are most commonly identified as the three key components (Ainley, Graetz et al. 1995). It has been argued that these components are most reliably measured on the basis of individual student-level data (Ainley, Graetz et al. 1995), and such an approach was possible in the analyses of the quantitative *LSAY* data for the present study. While this approach was not feasible in collecting the qualitative data from students and their advisers in the case study schools, to try to ensure the inclusion of a spread of students from different socio-

economic backgrounds, broader factors related to the socioeconomic status of the area in which the school was located were taken into account.

Another important characteristic of students which has an impact on their educational intentions and participation is their ethnic background. Although there are questions about how ethnicity is defined—for instance, whether parent's country of birth or main language spoken at home should be used—the research evidence indicates that students from non-English speaking family backgrounds generally have higher educational aspirations, and are not disadvantaged in terms of school completion and entry to higher education (Williams, Long et al. 1993a; Williams, Long et al. 1993b). On the other hand, the educational disadvantage suffered by students from Indigenous backgrounds is considerable; retention for this group at secondary school is substantially lower at all age levels, attributed to a range of factors, including a lack of relevant courses, lack of culturally appropriate curriculum and assessment, and low literacy levels (Long, Carpenter et al. 1999).

2.2.2 Social-psychological variables

In the preceding discussion of trends in attitudes to school completion and post-school study options, reference was made to the influence of other people on students' educational intentions and perceptions. 'Significant others' may be family (parents and siblings), friends, other students, teachers, and careers counsellors in schools and in post-school educational institutions, who are sources of both information and of advice for students. In addition to these interpersonal influences, external sources of influence can include the various elements of the media—newspapers, radio, television and so on.

The 1990 ANOP study of attitudes toward education and employment gathered information about the relative importance of such external influences in shaping opinion. As part of that survey young people were asked to nominate, from a list, who or what influenced them when making important decisions regarding employment and careers. Among 15–24 year olds, the major influence was seen to be parents (nominated by 57 per cent of respondents); the second most frequently nominated influence (by 35 per cent of respondents) was careers advisers; a third group of similarly ranked influences (ranging from 24–28 per cent) included subjects studied at school, friends, work experience, and teachers, as well as television. Of lesser importance were newspapers and the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) (12 per cent and 15 per cent respectively), while radio and magazines were seen as having almost no influence on career decisions (3–4 per cent).

The study found some differences between the views of young people and the views of parents as to what influenced young people. Parents placed

more emphasis on the influence of young people's peers, work experience, teachers and television than young people did, and, compared with the perceptions of young people, underestimated the influence of the CES. It was also noted that another ANOP survey conducted in Victoria in 1990 showed that, among people intending to work in the following five years, the most important sources of credible information about jobs were seen to be careers advisers, teachers, the CES and newspapers—from which it could be concluded that the latter two had much greater perceived importance as sources of information than as sources of influence (ANOP 1990).

2.3 Choice of institutions

Research within the area of student institutional choice is often instigated by tertiary institutions themselves, with two broad purposes in mind. Some studies may be used to address equity issues—to identify under-represented groups, with the aim of taking steps to overcome barriers to access and thereby encourage increased participation by such disadvantaged groups. Secondly, research which charts students' intentions can be used by the institutions to market themselves more effectively to prospective students. Frequently, these two purposes overlap (for example, Morgan 1991, Cowan and Jordan 1993, Cummins 1993).

Location, and concerns about accommodation, are major considerations for students in the choice of an institution, particularly for those attending regional universities. A survey in 1991 of over 1200 newly enrolled on-campus students at the Geelong campus of Deakin University found the main factor influencing students' choice of institution to be proximity to home (Morgan 1991). Cowan (1993) confirmed that the majority of students chose to enrol at the University of Newcastle because it was their local university. Students from outside the region had chosen it for two main reasons: either they had missed out on a place at another university because of a low Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) score (a disproportionately high percentage of such lower achieving students were from educated and affluent backgrounds) or because accommodation was cheaper than in Sydney. The study noted that male school leavers were more likely to move away from home to attend university than females.

Evidence as to the relative importance of institutional prestige on student choice of tertiary institution is not consistent. There is evidence that the TER has an effect. Data for students who completed school in 1991 in the Australian Capital Territory and entered tertiary education in 1992 showed that students with higher TERs chose the Australian National University or universities in NSW, those with middle level TERs went to the University of

Canberra, while those with the lowest TERs went to TAFE (Edwards and Haigh 1994). This hierarchical set of preferences for sectors and institutions implies that there is a correlation between students' TER and the standing or prestige of the institution. Brennan and Marriott's (1996) investigation of the influences on students' institutional choice also confirmed the importance of an institution's academic reputation in the selection process—especially for males. However, other studies (Harvey-Beavis and Elsworth 1998) concluded that there was no evidence that the primary factor in choice of an institution was its prestige.

Various studies of student institutional choice refer to the importance of advice and influence of significant others, and generally agree that interpersonal influence plays a part in forming students' institutional preference. While the role of family, friends and school personnel—both careers counsellors and teachers—is acknowledged, their relative influence may vary considerably. For instance, among newly enrolled students at Deakin, while careers teachers were cited as the major source of information about courses they were not seen as the major influence on course selection—the most influential other persons in course selection were reported as parents (20 per cent) and people who were experienced in their intended career area (17 per cent)—these were of more importance than careers teacher (12 per cent) and friends (11 per cent) (Morgan 1991).

Brennan and Marriott (1996) investigated the importance of interpersonal sources on the development of institutional preferences. A generic model of the decision making process was presented, in which the search for information was viewed as a strategy to reduce the level of risk or uncertainty in that process. Information about their choice of university was collected from first-year students enrolled in either a business degree or studying business subjects at a number of metropolitan universities; the results (based on over 500 responses) suggested that the careers counsellor was an important influence on choice of institution, second only to family members. Furthermore, the opinion of careers counsellor and teachers was more important for students whose parents had not been to university than for those who had.

An account (Cummins 1993) of attempts by Monash University to market its regional campus more effectively in rural areas illustrates the complex community attitudes that may be encountered, and the importance of 'word of mouth' as a means of influencing students' decisions. Issues included elements of parochialism in some parts of the student 'catchment area'; the need to promote the benefits of secondary and tertiary education, yet at the same time avoid the implication that the community was disadvantaged; a need to convince school teachers that the institute was a worthy higher

education destination for their students; and the value of the 'grapevine' in overcoming local prejudice—to this end, friends and family networks were more important than, for instance, newspapers (Cummins 1993).

While much of the evidence concerning selection of institution relates to the entry to university, increasing attention is being given to alternative educational pathways. For instance a survey of parents of students in Years 10-12 in Tasmania was commissioned by the Tasmanian TAFE Marketing Group, to determine parents' perceptions and awareness of further education options, with the aim of promoting the TAFE option more effectively. This strategy was adopted after a 1995 survey of students had established parents as an important source of information regarding further education. Nearly half of the parents surveyed in 1997 indicated that they knew a moderate amount or a lot about TAFE—this proportion was the same for university—although there were lower levels of knowledge (33-40 per cent) about traineeships and apprenticeships, and much less was known about private providers. The most common sources of information about further education were given as friends and relatives (57 per cent of respondents indicated these as a source), brochures and handbooks (56 per cent), newspaper features (47 per cent), and teachers (40 per cent). These results revealed that the printed media played an important role in communicating information to parents—newspapers raised awareness, while brochures and handbooks provided more detailed information. One of the recommendations of the study was that marketing strategies should highlight the perceived strengths of TAFE—for instance, compared with university, TAFE was seen by parents as providing greater opportunities for hands-on experience and lower study costs (Department of Education Community and Cultural Development Office of Youth Affairs and Family—Tasmania 1997).

2.4 Concluding note

Finally, it should be noted that while the studies cited in this chapter touch on issues and themes pursued in this report, none have as their primary focus the issue of students and advisers' perceptions of tertiary education. These other studies do, however, provide reference points to help establish the plausibility of findings from the case studies.

2.5 Overview of Chapter 2

The range of factors that the research literature has shown to influence students' decisions about completing secondary school and making the transition to tertiary study have been canvassed. Three broad categories of influence were noted:

- characteristics of students (social background and personality);
- the influences of significant others; and
- institutional attributes.

No study was found which approached the understandings of student and their advisers' perceptions in the way the current study seeks to do.

3. Information from the students' educational plans

This chapter presents some results from the *Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth* (*LSAY*) study. It discusses:

1. school completion; and
2. post-school study intentions.

The results from *LSAY* are being presented to provide evidence supporting the decision to select a range of schools in different geographical locations, situated in different social contexts and part of different educational systems (Catholic, government and independent). The results also suggest that the focus upon schools as well as parents is important if students' tertiary education and occupational aspirations are to be understood.

The results from *LSAY* also evidence changes that seem to have occurred over time in students' aspirations including their decision to complete Year 12 and continue with tertiary education. This helps establish an understanding of the macro social context in which to locate the findings from the case studies. The *LSAY* results also point to aspirations as relatively stable both over time and between cohorts (although there was some evidence that intentions to study can be volatile among individuals over time). Generally, the *LSAY* results suggest that the range of views identified in the case studies are likely to remain fairly stable over the next few years.

The data for this chapter come from the cohort of students which was in Year 9 in 1995. In that year, a nationally representative sample of 13 613 students was surveyed. Students completed reading and mathematics tests, as well as a questionnaire that collected information about their personal background, their attitudes to school and their educational plans. This sample has been contacted in each subsequent year—in 1996, via a questionnaire mailed to the students' home address, and from 1997 by means of a telephone interview. Data are therefore available concerning when students intended to leave school, and their post-school plans, in successive years over the period 1995 to 1998. To provide another indication of trends between 1995 and 1998, reference can be made to parallel data from a similar sized cohort of Year 9 students who were surveyed in 1998.

3.1 School completion

The *LSAY* data can be used to develop an overview of the proportions of students intending to stay on at school and those intending to leave before completing Year 12.

3.1.1 Trends in students' school completion intentions within the 1995 cohort

Table 3 shows that in 1995, of the 13 316 Year 9 students who provided a response to the question of when they planned to leave school, just under 72 per cent intended to stay on to complete secondary school, while about 10 per cent planned to leave before Year 12. Almost 20 per cent were undecided about when they would leave school. More females (77 per cent) than males (66 per cent) indicated that they would complete Year 12.

In the following two years, as the cohort progressed through secondary school, the percentage planning to complete Year 12 increased—to 78 per cent in 1996, and to 94 per cent of those who were at school, in Year 11, in 1997. Females were consistently more likely than males to say they intended to complete school, although this gap decreased from 11 to 5 percentage points between Years 9 and 11.

Table 3 School completion intentions of Year 9 students in 1995, Year 10 students in 1996, and Year 11 students in 1997, by gender

School intentions	Year 9 in 1995			Year 10 in 1996			Year 11 in 1997		
	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
Complete Year 12	66.2	77.2	71.9	72.6	83.3	78.1	91.2	96.0	93.8
Undecided	20.5	16.1	18.3	11.9	7.6	9.7	3.8	1.9	2.8
Leave before Yr 12	13.3	6.7	9.9	15.5	9.1	12.2	5.0	2.1	3.5
Total per cent	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
n	6554	6762	13316	4322	5244	9566	4058	4616	8674

Source: *LSAY* data, ACER. There are some minor rounding errors in the percentages.

3.1.2 Trends in student intentions between cohorts

While the 1995 Year 9 cohort is the focus of the data analyses presented in this chapter, it is of interest to note that the expectation of secondary school completion has consolidated even further since 1995.

A comparison of Table 3 and Table 4 reveals that between 1995 and 1998 the percentage of Year 9 students who planned to stay on to do Year 12 rose from 72 per cent to 77 per cent, with a much larger increase among males (by 6 percentage points) than females (3 percentage points). There was an

almost equal diminution in the percentages of males who intended to leave school before Year 12 and those who were undecided about when they would leave, whereas among females the larger change was a reduction in the percentage of intending early school leavers.

Table 4 School completion intentions of Year 9 students in 1998

School intentions	Year 9 students in 1998		
	Males	Females	Persons
Complete Year 12	72.8	80.4	76.6
Undecided	17.4	15.6	16.5
Leave before Year 12	9.9	4.1	6.9
Total per cent	100	100	100
n	6885	6582	13467

Source: LSAY data, ACER. There are some minor rounding errors in the percentages.

3.1.3 Influence of student background factors

The *LSAY* data permit an analysis of how school plans measured in 1995 varied according to a number of student background factors, and these results are displayed in Table 5. (Further details of students' intentions to complete school, disaggregated by these characteristics and by gender, are presented in Appendix B, Table 16.)

As Table 5 shows, students' educational intentions are linked in part to personal and family background factors such as ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Intended school completion was considerably higher among students from non-English speaking backgrounds (78 per cent) than English speaking backgrounds (71 per cent), and much higher among non-Indigenous students (73 per cent) than Indigenous students (55 per cent). While over 87 per cent of students whose fathers were in the highest occupational status category intended to complete Year 12, the comparable percentage for students in the lowest category was 67 per cent.

The contrast between students categorised by the level of their parents' education was similar—85 per cent of students with a parent who had been in higher education intended to complete school, compared with 69 per cent of students whose parents had not themselves completed secondary school.

There was a strong association between intention to complete school and type of school attended. A lower percentage (67 per cent) of students at government schools planned to complete Year 12 than in non-government schools—among students at Catholic and independent schools the figures were 79 per cent and 84 per cent respectively.

It could be expected that a student's experience of school would be a powerful influence on their decision about how long they would remain there. This is illustrated by the data in Table 5 in which students' level of achievement and perceptions of their ability are seen to be related to intentions to complete Year 12.

Table 5 School completion intentions of Year 9 students in 1995 by student background characteristics

	Per cent of students			
	Complete Year 12	Undecided	Leave before Year 12	n
Gender				
Males	66.2	20.5	13.3	6554
Females	77.2	16.1	6.7	6762
Ethnic background				
English speaking	70.8	18.6	10.6	10268
Non-English speaking	78.4	16.0	5.6	2571
Indigenous background				
Non-indigenous	72.8	17.8	9.5	12292
Indigenous	55.2	28.4	16.4	379
Fathers' occupational status				
Upper	87.5	9.6	2.9	1522
Upper middle	79.9	14.5	5.7	2434
Lower middle	69.9	19.2	10.9	4789
Lower	66.9	20.6	12.5	2406
Parent's education				
Higher education	85.1	10.8	4.1	2533
Completed sec school	74.9	15.3	9.7	2711
Trade / technical qualification	74.5	16.0	9.6	931
Didn't complete sec school	69.4	19.1	115	3853
School type				
Government	67.3	20.7	12.1	8871
Catholic	79.4	14.8	5.8	2477
Independent	84.1	11.1	4.9	1968
School achievement				
Highest quartile	87.0	10.2	2.8	3492
Third quartile	78.7	15.4	6.0	3282
Second quartile	67.0	21.9	11.1	3338
Lowest quartile	54.7	25.6	19.7	3170
Perception of ability				
Above average	83.0	11.8	5.1	6503
About average	62.8	23.6	13.6	6073
Below average	39.9	34.8	25.3	542
Location				
Metropolitan	76.6	16.1	7.4	7394
Regional	69.0	19.0	12.0	3305
Rural and remote	62.9	23.0	14.1	2583
State				
Australian Capital Territory	74.9	21.6	3.5	588
New South Wales	69.2	18.8	12.0	3043
Victoria	75.3	17.0	7.7	2807
Queensland	73.9	17.0	9.1	2463
South Australia	77.5	16.8	5.7	1664
Western Australia	70.0	19.4	10.6	1806
Tasmania	54.0	26.4	19.7	571
Northern Territory	62.4	24.1	13.5	374

Source: *LSAY* data, ACER. Note: See Appendix A for definition of student background variables

Those who were 'higher achievers', and those who regarded themselves as doing well in their school work, were much more likely to indicate an intention to complete Year 12 than 'lower achievers', or those who saw themselves as performing less well than others. For instance, 87 per cent of students in the highest achievement quartile intended to complete school, compared with 55 per cent of the lowest quartile. While noting the highly skewed distribution of students between the categories of perceived ability, there is nevertheless a marked contrast in their school intentions; 83 per cent of those who considered themselves to be above average planned to do Year 12, compared with 40 per cent of those who saw themselves as below average. (Further data about the relationship between students' attitudes to various aspects of school life and their school intentions is discussed in the following section.)

Factors of location also effect the likelihood of students' planning to complete secondary school. A higher percentage of students from metropolitan locations (77 per cent) intended to do Year 12, compared with students from rural and remote areas (63 per cent). There was wide variation between the States, with the highest percentages intending to complete school in South Australia (over 77 per cent), Victoria and the ACT (each 75 per cent), and the lowest percentages in the Northern Territory (62 per cent) and Tasmania (54 per cent).

3.1.4 Influence of quality of school life

Year 9 students in 1995 were asked to respond to a set of 30 statements about their life at school. Table 6 records the percentage of students who agreed with each statement (that is, answered either *Strongly agree or Agree*) disaggregated according to their school intentions. The 30 items were assigned to four groups, based on (but not identical with) earlier factor analytic studies of a slightly larger number of items that measured students' quality of school life (Williams and Batten 1981; Ainley, Reed et al. 1986; Batten 1989).

The four groups of items, representing different aspects of school life, are:

- general satisfaction with school and school work;
- relationships with teachers;
- the relevance of school work; and
- a sense of achievement, or feeling successful.

There is a clear and repeated pattern of responses throughout these data, which can be illustrated by reference to the first item in Table 6. While 68 per cent of students who intended to complete school agreed with the statement *The work we do is interesting*, the comparable figure among those who

planned to leave before Year 12 was much lower—46 per cent, a difference of 22 percentage points, with the percentage for the undecided category of students falling between these two extremes. When the average percentage agreement for the items which dealt with general satisfaction with school is compared, there is a similar difference of 21 percentage points in the level of agreement with the statements by intended school completers and non-completers. Among these general satisfaction items, the largest contrast, of 29 percentage points, was for responses to the item *My school is a place where I feel happy*.

Differences between the two groups of students for the three other quality of school life scales were a little less than for general satisfaction, but still in the order of 16–17 percentage points. The greatest difference within the relevance scale (of 23 percentage points) was for the item The things I am taught are worthwhile, while for the achievement scale it was the item I am a success as a student (a difference of 25 percentage points).

Table 6 Percentages of Year 9 students who agreed with Quality of School Life items, by intention to complete school, 1995

Quality of School Life item	School intentions		
	Complete Year 12	Undecided	Leave before Year 12
General satisfaction items			
The work we do is interesting	67.9	51.0	45.9
I feel happy	77.9	61.5	49.0
I like learning	78.8	60.9	54.2
I enjoy being there	59.8	41.4	32.3
I like to ask questions in class	63.6	50.8	46.2
I like to do extra work	31.8	17.1	14.2
I really like to go each day	39.8	26.2	19.8
I enjoy what I do in class	65.4	47.6	40.4
I get excited about the work that we do	25.2	17.6	15.7
I find that learning is a lot of fun	47.4	32.1	30.0
I am given the chance to do work that really interests me	64.3	52.0	49.3
Average percentage agreement with general satisfaction items	56.7	41.3	35.2
Relations with teacher items			
Teachers are fair and just	68.1	54.2	47.9
Teachers listen to what I say	69.3	55.3	46.5
Teachers give me the marks I deserve	81.0	74.4	70.3
Teachers take a personal interest in helping me with my work	47.3	38.2	39.5
Teachers help me to do my best	74.4	63.5	58.5
I feel safe and secure	80.2	71.2	62.4
Teachers treat me fairly in class	76.6	63.9	56.4
Average percentage agreement with teacher items	71.3	60.2	53.9
Relevance of schooling items			
The things I learn are important to me	91.1	80.0	72.0
The work I do is good preparation for my future	87.7	74.7	67.7
I have acquired skills that will be useful when I leave school	87.9	76.2	70.4
The things I learn will help me in my adult life	88.9	80.0	74.8
The things I am taught are worthwhile learning	82.5	68.2	59.7
Average percentage agreement with relevance item	87.9	76.1	69.3
Sense of achievement items			
I have learnt to work hard	82.5	68.9	63.2
I achieve a standard in my work which I consider satisfactory	86.0	76.6	73.5
I always achieve a satisfactory standard in my work	79.0	66.6	62.0
I always try to do my best	84.9	77.0	73.9
I know how to cope with the work	87.7	77.2	75.6
I can do well enough to be successful	93.8	83.7	76.5
I am a success as a student	84.8	66.6	59.6
Average percentage agreement with achievement items	85.8	74.1	69.8

Source: *LSAY* data, ACER

Table 7 presents these data on students' attitudes to school in summary form. It shows, for the three categories of students, their mean scores for each quality of school life scale, with a higher mean score indicating a greater level of satisfaction with that particular aspect of schooling. As the previous discussion has already highlighted, students who intended to finish Year 12 were consistently happier with their school life than were students who planned to leave earlier, with students who were undecided occupying an intermediate position on each of the satisfaction scales.

Table 7 Mean scores on Quality of School Life scales by intention to complete school, Year 9 students in 1995

	School intentions		
Quality of School Life scales	Complete Year 12	Undecided	Leave before Year 12
General satisfaction	2.57	2.30	2.16
Relations with teachers	2.77	2.58	2.46
Relevance of schooling	3.17	2.89	2.77
Sense of achievement	3.08	2.83	2.75
Sample sizes	*8461*	*2097*	*1074*
	8664	*2134*	*1080*
	8986	*2197*	*1127*
	8849	*2176*	*1086*

Source: *LSAY* data, ACER

Note: Sample sizes for each scale vary due to the differing incidence of missing data for items within scales.

3.1.5 School intentions and outcomes

Longitudinal data permit the investigation of longer-term outcomes, and enable these to be related to factors which may have influenced those outcomes. In this instance, information about which students were attending school some years after their intentions had been measured can be examined, to provide an indication of how reliable a predictor such intentions might be. Table 8 displays these data for students who were at school in 1998, and whose intentions had been measured when they had been in Year 9 in 1995; the overwhelming majority of students in 1998 were in Year 12, although there were very small numbers in Years 11 and 13.

Overall, 78 per cent of students whose plans were known when in Year 9 in 1995 were still attending school in 1998. As expected, among those who had earlier indicated an intention to complete school, the proportion was higher—87 per cent. Yet the more interesting figure may be for those who in 1995 had said that they would leave school before doing Year 12, almost one-third (29 per cent) of whom were still at school in 1998. And a substantial

proportion—nearly two-thirds—of those who in 1995 had been undecided about when to leave were also still at school in 1998.

The importance of background factors in influencing the likelihood of students' intending to complete school were shown in Table 5; the significance of one such factor, gender, is reinforced by the data presented in Table 8. Table 5 showed that in 1995 a higher percentage of females (77 per cent) than males (66 per cent) intended to complete Year 12. Table 8 reveals that in 1998, 90 per cent of females who had previously said they would do so were still at school, compared with 84 per cent of males. This gender difference was also true for other categories of students—for example, among females who in 1995 had said that they would leave before Year 12, 35 per cent were still at school in 1998, whereas the comparable figure for males was lower at 26 per cent.

Table 8 Percentages of students who were attending school in 1998 according to their school intentions measured in 1995

	School intentions in 1995			
Attending school in 1998	Intended to complete Year 12	Undecided	Intended to leave before Year 12	All students in 1995*
Males	84.2	61.7	26.0	73.0
Females	89.8	66.8	35.2	83.3
Persons	87.3	64.0	29.1	78.3
Sample sizes				
Males	*3230*	*902*	*461*	*4593*
Females	*3996*	*759*	*233*	*4988*
Persons	*7226*	*1661*	*694*	*9581*

Source: *LSAY* data, ACER

Note: *Students who, in 1995, responded to the question about when they planned to leave school, and who were still at school in 1998

Students' intentions in 1995, compared with outcomes—that is, whether they were still at school in 1998—can be disaggregated according to other personal and family background characteristics (see Appendix B, Table 17). In all instances, the categories of students indicating a higher preference for school completion in 1995 are over-represented among those who were at school in 1998 compared with the categories among whom school completion was less favoured. This is the case not only for students who intended to complete school, but also among students who were undecided about when they would leave, or who had planned to leave before completing school. Hence, while students' intentions are useful indicators of the likelihood of school completion, background factors can also be seen to play a significant role.

3.2 Post-school study intentions

3.2.1 Trends in student post-school study intentions within the 1995 cohort

The data presented in Table 9 provide a picture of students' post-school study intentions across the years 1995 to 1997, from when students were in Year 9 to when they were in Year 11. Year 9 students in 1995 were asked whether or not they intended to study at any time after leaving school, and if so, the type of course they planned to do; *undecided* was not offered as a response option, but students who indicated more than one type of study were allocated to this category. In 1996, sample members were asked to indicate, from a list of activities that included various kinds of study and the options of *no study* and *don't know*, what they planned to do in the year after leaving school. Among the non-study options that were included when this same question was asked of students in 1997 were look for work/get a job, other and don't know. This variation in the form and the wording of the questions about post-school intentions therefore must be considered when comparing responses between years. The response categories that are most effected by this variation are the *undecided/don't know*, and the *no study* categories. Hence, the large decline between 1995 and 1996 in the percentage of students who indicated that they would do no further study after leaving school—from 16 per cent to 2 per cent—may be attributed not merely to a sudden increase in study aspirations as students moved from Year 9 to Year 10, but may also be an artefact of the changed structure of the question about intended post-school study.

Table 9 Post-school study intentions of Year 9 students in 1995, Year 10 students in 1996, and Year 11 students in 1997, by gender

	Year 9 in 1995			Year 10 in 1996			Year 11 in 1997		
Post-school intentions	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
University	40.9	55.8	48.5	38.7	51.0	45.0	49.3	60.2	55.2
TAFE	29.8	24.2	26.9	32.6	20.2	26.2	26.0	20.2	22.9
Apprentice / Traineeship	16.9	4.8	10.7	22.9	5.6	14.0	11.9	2.2	6.7
Other TAFE course	12.8	19.4	16.2	9.7	14.6	12.2	14.1	18.0	16.2
Other study	6.3	6.3	6.3	4.1	4.9	4.5	0.3	0.8	0.5
Undecided / Don't know	1.9	1.7	1.8	22.2	21.8	22.0	7.5	7.5	7.5
No study	21.2	12.1	16.5	2.3	2.2	2.2	–	–	–
Work	–	–	–	–	–	–	11.1	7.8	9.3
Other	–	–	–	–	–	–	5.9	3.6	4.7
Total per cent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n	6386	6576	12962	4224	5121	9345	4006	4620	8626

Source: *LSAY* data, ACER

The figures concerning the particular type of post-school study that students intended to pursue, either at university or in TAFE, can be viewed with less equivocation, as these response options were constant across the years. In 1995, over 48 per cent of Year 9 students planned to go to university; this figure dipped slightly to 45 per cent in 1996, but had increased by 1997, when 55 per cent of students who were then at school in Year 11 gave university as their intended post-school destination. Females were consistently more likely to do so than males, although this gap decreased from 15 percentage points to 10 between Years 9 and 11.

While plans for further study in TAFE also differ by gender, there are also differences between the types of TAFE study. For this reason, the two categories—apprenticeships/traineeships, and other non-apprenticeship TAFE courses—are reported separately in Table 9. Among males in Year 9, 17 per cent planned to do an apprenticeship, compared with only 5 per cent of females. This situation was reversed for students intending to study other TAFE courses, although the contrast was not as marked—13 per cent of males wanted to do such a course, compared with 19 per cent of females.

TAFE was a less likely post-school option for older students—a slightly lower percentage (23 per cent) of students who were in Year 11 in 1997 indicated they intended to go on to TAFE, compared with the cohort when in Year 9 (27 per cent). This decline was attributable to a fall between those Year levels in the proportion of males planning to do apprenticeships, a number of these having presumably left school prior to Year 11.

3.2.2 Trends in post-school study intentions between cohorts

Table 10 provides evidence of a continuing tendency for university to be favoured above all other post-school study options. Between 1995 and 1998 an increasing proportion of Year 9 students indicated that they planned to go to university, the percentage growing from almost 49 per cent in 1995 to 56 per cent by 1998. This increase was mainly at the expense of study in TAFE, which declined by more than four percentage points between 1995 and 1998—there were falls of this magnitude among males intending to do apprenticeships and females intending to do other TAFE courses.

Smaller decreases were also recorded between the Year 9 cohorts of 1995 and 1998 in the percentages which intended to do no study and other kinds of study after leaving school—falls of two and one percentage points respectively.

Table 10 Post-school study intentions, Year 9 students in 1998

	Year 9 students in 1998		
Post-school intentions	Males	Females	Persons
University	51.6	61.6	56.8
TAFE	23.0	20.6	22.2
Apprenticeship / Traineeship	12.8	4.8	8.7
Other TAFE course	11.0	15.8	13.4
Other study	5.5	4.9	5.2
Undecided	1.9	1.2	1.5
No study	17.2	11.7	14.3
Total per cent	100.0	100.0	100.0
n	6687	6380	13067

Source: *LSAY* data, ACER. There are some rounding errors in the percentage figures.

3.2.3 Influence of student background factors

Strong associations between students' personal and family circumstances and their stated intention to pursue various kinds of study after leaving school can be seen in Table 11, which presents data for the 1995 Year 9 cohort. (Table 18, in Appendix B presents these data disaggregated by gender.)

The relationships between an intention to study at university and various student background characteristics mirror those discussed in Table 5 concerning school completion. For instance, the figure for students from non-English speaking backgrounds who indicated they wanted to go to university was 18 percentage points higher than that for students from English-speaking backgrounds. The difference between non-Indigenous and Indigenous students was of the same magnitude. Measures of family socioeconomic status—both father's occupation and parents' education—showed a strong and positive association with university attendance; the contrast between the upper and lower groups of students on each of these measures was more than 30 percentage points. School type can also be regarded as an indicator of socioeconomic status; 27 per cent more students from independent schools than from government schools were planning to go to university.

School achievement was an even more powerful influence on students' post-school study intentions. Among students in the highest achievement quartile, over 70 per cent intended studying at university, whereas the figure for the lowest quartile was 26 per cent. Based on students' own perceptions of their ability, three times as many students who saw themselves as above average planned to go to university compared with those who saw themselves as below average. Students in metropolitan areas were more likely than those in rural and remote areas to indicate that they intended university study, the figures being 56 and 39 per cent respectively. Large interstate differences were also evident, ranging from a maximum of 63 per cent in the ACT, through approximately 55 per cent in Victoria and 52 per cent in South Australia, to a low of 30 per cent in Tasmania.

Table 11 Post-school study intentions of Year 9 students in 1995 by student back-ground characteristics

	Per cent of students					
	Uni	TAFE	Other	Undec'd	No study	n
All students	48.52	6.9	6.3	1.8	16.5	12962
Gender						
Males	40.9	29.8	6.3	1.9	21.2	6386
Females	55.8	24.2	6.3	1.7	12.1	6576
Ethnic background						
English speaking	45.4	28.4	6.9	1.7	17.6	10000
Non-English speaking	63.5	20.0	3.9	1.9	10.8	2511
Indigenous background						
Non Indigenous	49.6	26.6	6.3	1.8	15.7	11983
Indigenous	30.4	29.8	6.2	0.8	32.8	373
Father's occupational status						
Upper	74.2	14.0	4.5	1.7	5.7	1502
Upper middle	60.3	20.8	6.7	1.6	10.6	2372
Lower middle	43.7	30.1	6.3	2.0	17.9	4676
Lower	39.8	31.9	6.8	1.9	19.7	2342
Parent's education						
Higher education	72.4	14.8	5.3	1.9	5.6	2495
Completed sec school	47.5	27.3	6.7	1.4	16.9	2639
Trade / technical qual	50.4	29.0	8.2	2.1	10.4	920
Didn't complete sec school	44.3	30.7	5.8	1.8	17.3	3766
School type						
Government	41.3	30.8	6.6	1.9	19.4	8619
Catholic	59.6	21.5	5.5	1.5	12.0	2417
Independent	68.7	14.9	6.1	1.8	8.5	1926
School achievement						
Highest quartile	71.2	15.2	6.3	1.4	5.9	3423
Third quartile	56.5	23.9	6.4	1.6	11.7	3205
Second quartile	39.8	32.5	6.1	2.1	19.5	3244
Lowest quartile	25.8	36.5	6.3	2.1	29.3	3056
Perception of ability						
Above average	62.1	20.0	6.3	1.5	10.2	6383
About average	36.3	33.8	6.3	2.0	21.7	5874
Below average	21.0	34.4	7.2	1.9	35.6	522
Location						
Metropolitan	55.9	23.5	5.9	1.8	13.3	7194
Regional	42.8	29.0	7.0	2.1	19.5	3220
Rural and remote	38.7	33.5	6.6	1.5	21.5	2515
State						
ACT	62.7	19.0	7.9	0.7	9.7	569
New South Wales	47.0	30.2	5.6	3.1	14.1	2975
Victoria	54.6	22.4	5.5	1.7	15.9	2741
Queensland	44.1	26.7	7.9	0.3	21.0	2390
South Australia	51.5	25.0	6.4	2.0	15.2	1599
Western Australia	47.9	28.9	5.4	1.1	16.8	1772
Tasmania	29.5	31.7	12.0	0.4	26.3	549
Northern Territory	43.8	21.1	10.9	0.0	24.3	367

Source: *LSAY* data, ACER

3.2.4 Shifts in post-school intentions between Year 9 and Year 11

The nature of these longitudinal data make it possible to compare students' intentions about post-school study at different points in time, particularly to investigate how these might change as students move through their schooling. Table 12 presents data for that group of students who provided information about their post-school plans both in 1995 and in 1997.

Table 12 Post-school study plans of students in 1997, according to their intentions in 1995

		Post-school intentions in 1995					
Post-school plans	In 1997	University	TAFE	Other study	Undecided	No study	All 1997 students in 1995
University	55.5	75.9	27.9	41.3	48.9	20.0	57.1
TAFE	22.8	10.9	43.1	23.9	30.4	39.5	22.4
Other study	0.5	0.3	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.5	6.2
Undecided	7.2	5.5	8.7	7.7	7.9	11.9	1.8
No study	13.9	7.5	19.3	26.1	11.9	28.1	12.6
Total per cent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
n	8277	4866	1762	526	130	993	8277

Source: *LSAY* data, ACER

As the first column in Table 12 shows, in 1997, over 55 per cent of these students intended to go to university; the final column of the Table shows that two years earlier, in 1995, 57 per cent of the group had indicated that they intended to go to university. The central columns of the Table disaggregate students' post-school intentions measured in 1997 by what they had planned to do in 1995. Among the students who had intended to go to university in 1995, 76 per cent were still planning to do so in 1997, while 11 per cent indicated they planned to go to TAFE. Of those students intending to go to TAFE in 1995, 43 per cent maintained that plan in 1997, but 28 per cent were now planning to go to university, and 19 per cent were not intending any further study. The next largest group, numerically, was that which, in 1995, had indicated no post-school study—while 28 per cent were still intending no post-school study by 1997, 40 per cent were intending to go to TAFE and 20 per cent to university. Hence, although the overall level of interest in university study expressed by the cohort in 1997 (55 per cent) was not all that much different to that measured in 1995 (57 per cent), these figures reveal a considerable degree of volatility over time in the intentions of individual students.

3.3 Overview of Chapter 3

Three main messages emerge from the *LSAY* data. The first is that an increasing proportion of students intends to stay on beyond the compulsory phase of schooling to complete Year 12. However the percentage planning to complete school varies considerably according to both personal background characteristics and to students' school experience. There are two indicators found in these data of the strength of this continuing trend toward higher school retention rates. One is the proportion of students who, despite having stated previously that they intended to leave school early, actually remained at school in the post-compulsory years, and the other is the increase between 1995 and 1998 in the percentage of Year 9 students who planned to complete school.

The second conclusion that can be drawn from these data is that the status of university as the preferred post-school pathway has not diminished. The number of Year 9 students who indicated university as their intended destination after leaving school increased by several percentage points between 1995 and 1998; there was a small decline in the proportion planning to do no study, but the largest fall was in the percentage which planned to go on to further study in TAFE.

The third main conclusion is that students' schooling experience influences their intentions about completing year 12 and entering post-school study. Students who feel happy at school, and who are performing well, are more likely to have high educational aspirations. This suggests that the school environment plays a role in shaping aspirations and intentions.

4. Case study methodology

This chapter describes:

1. the planned and achieved sample of schools for the study;
2. the organisation of the interviews that were conducted with students, teachers and parents; and
3. how the data were collected and analysed.

The main concern of the study was to identify the range of views, perceptions, images and so on that students, parents and teachers have of tertiary education. Consequently, an in-depth case study approach was used. This approach provides the opportunity for talking in-depth to participants in the study, of questioning them, and of following up any unexpected or unusual statements they might make. What this approach does not permit is statistically based inferences to be drawn to a larger population of students, parents or teachers. In other words, it is not possible to say how representative the views expressed by the participants in this study are of other students, parents and teachers. Thus, while the study was not intended to be representative, it did seek a wide as range of contexts as possible.

4.1 Planned and achieved school sample

The case study schools were selected from a wide range of social and geographical locations to try and capture as wide a range of views as possible. These locations were identified as important in the literature review and by the *LSAY* data. Accordingly, the following mix of social and geographical locations was used to select schools:

- Remote location, in part to include Aboriginal students in the sample;
- Rural;
- Regional centre;
- Lower socio-economic city area; and
- Upper socio-economic city area.

This selection also ensured that as many States as possible were represented in the study. The achieved sample of schools—grouped by location and sector—that participated in the study were:

- Country town—an independent school which takes residential boarders with a predominantly high SES catchment;
- Country town—a government school with mixed SES catchment;

- Remote—a government school in a mining town with mixed SES catchment;
- Capital city—Catholic school with a mixed SES catchment; and
- Capital city—students and parents from a government school with a high SES catchment, and students from a government school with a mixed SES catchment.

These schools came from five different States. The States are not disclosed because to do so could identify some of the schools. (Anonymity was guaranteed to them in reporting the findings.)

4.2 Organisation and conduct of the group interviews

4.2.1 Selection of students, parents and teachers for the interviews

Schools were asked to select around six students who were intending tertiary education and six students who were not intending tertiary education. They were asked to select across a range of abilities and to include males and females. In practice it was difficult to identify any students who were not intending any form of tertiary education. Often those selected as not intending any, were in fact intending to travel or work for a couple of years and then return to education. (The implications of this are discussed below.) The researchers had no input into the final selection of students by schools.

The selection of parents was also made by the schools. Originally it had been planned to interview the parents of the students interviewed. This proved to be too difficult to organise for all but one group (the city government school parents). Often the parents who participated in the study were those active in the school on committees, or who in other ways contributed to the life of the school. In this, they may not be typical of all parents. All but one of the parents interviewed expected their children to continue to tertiary education.

The teachers who participated in the study were volunteers. Some had a formal role in giving careers advice to the students. They were not necessarily the teachers of any of the students who were interviewed.

4.2.2 Student interviews

It was intended to interview groups of up to six students, of mixed ability and with both sexes present. There were separate interviews held for

Years 10, 11 and 12 students. This was to ensure that the younger students felt able to speak more freely. Separate interviews were planned for students who did and who did not intend to proceed to tertiary education. Thus, it was planned to conduct up to six student interviews per school. In practice, it proved difficult to find more than one or two students in any school who intended no post-school training. This had an immediate impact on the design of the study. Originally, six student interviews were planned for each school—one for each of students in Years 10, 11 and 12 who were intending going on to tertiary education, and one for each Year level not intending tertiary education. At the second school where interviews were conducted, it became apparent that the 'non-tertiary education' group was mostly made up of students who were in fact intending tertiary education. Compounding this difficulty was the forthrightness of those students' intending tertiary education when they were discussing students who were not intending tertiary education. They variously described them as 'losers', 'not so smart' and so on. The students who were not intending tertiary education exhibited signs of unease during these comments. An ethically unacceptable process of stigmatisation was thus occurring. This was confirmed later by one of the teachers who had talked with the students after the interview. As a result, at all subsequent interviews where there was a mix of students intending and not intending tertiary education, the interview was conducted in ways to minimise the risk of stigmatising the 'non-tertiary' education students. All subsequent interviews with the formally 'non-tertiary 'student groups had a majority of students who said that they intended some form of tertiary education. As a consequence, too few data were collected from the study to sustain a discussion which contrasted the views of tertiary and non-tertiary education bound students.

All interviews were audio-taped. All interviews had a typical length of around 30 minutes. This meant that manageable amounts of data were collected. See Table 14 for the details of the number of interviews conducted.

Student interviews were conducted at the school, during school hours. At the interviews, students were each asked to complete a short questionnaire. (See Appendix C for a copy of the questionnaire.) The interview proper was then commenced. An open or non-fixed format interview schedule was used with broad topic areas structuring the discussions. The topics covered during the interviews with the students were:

- perceptions of tertiary education;
- images of tertiary education;
- educational and occupational aspirations;
- educational and occupational plans; and

- knowledge of tertiary education.

In practice, there was much overlap in the discussion of topics. See Appendix C for a copy of the interview schedule used.

A total of 87 Year 10, 11 and 12 students were interviewed. Of these, 40 were females and 47 were males. The distribution of the student interviewees across States can be seen in Table 13.

Table 13 Distribution of student interviewees by State (percentages rounded to nearest 5%)

State	Number	%
New South Wales	34	40
Queensland	16	20
Tasmania	9	10
Victoria	9	10
Western Australia	19	20
Total	87	100

There were 26 Year 10 students, 32 Year 11 students and 29 Year 12 students interviewed. At each Year level, about half were female.

4.2.3 Teacher and parent interviews

The interviews with the teachers and parents were held after-hours and were held in a restaurant to encourage participation. There were five sets of parent interviews and four sets of teacher interviews conducted. There were four or five parents at each interview. Separate interviews were conducted with teachers. There were four to six teachers at each of the interviews. Parent and teacher interviews typically lasted from 40 to 60 minutes depending upon the numbers present. See Appendix C for a copy of the interview schedules used. A total of 23 parents and 19 teachers were interviewed. Table 14 shows the location and how many interviews were conducted for the study. A total of 19 interviews were conducted with students, five were conducted with parents and four interviews were conducted with teachers.

The city Catholic school had finished the school year at the time of the interviews, and only those students who were informally on campus were able to participate. A group of ten Year 11 and 12 students were combined for one interview session. All of them were planning to go to university or TAFE.

For the city government school, a snowball sampling technique was used to generate two groups of students—one each from Year 10 and Year 11. A group of parents was also generated in this way. The originally sampled

school and its replacement refused to participate, and by the time this was known, it was too late to begin approval procedures with the relevant government department. It was, therefore, not possible to obtain a sample of city government school teachers. The Year 10 students attended a school in a high SES, inner urban area, and the Year 11 students attended a school in a medium-range SES, outer urban area.

Table 14 Location, sector and number of interviews conducted with students, parents and teachers

	Year 10		Year 11		Year 12			
	Uni or TAFE	No Uni or TAFE	Uni or TAFE	No Uni or TAFE	Uni or TAFE	No Uni or TAFE	Parents	Teachers
Remote govt.	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Rural govt.	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
City Catholic			✔		✔		✔	✔
City govt.	✔		✔				✔	
Rural Indep.	✔		✔		✔		✔	✔
Total	4	2	5	2	4	2	5	4

All students in Years 10, 11 and 12 at the rural independent school were intending post-school education and training, hence only three student interview sessions were required at this school.

4.3 Presentation of analysis and findings

The data from the interviews were audio-taped. The data were captured from these by listening to the tapes and taking notes. The data from the questionnaires were coded and stored electronically. Analysis of these data was undertaken using the computer package SPSSx.

The interview data taken from the students, teachers and parents who participated in this study show the range of perceptions, attitudes, images, aspirations, plans and knowledge they have of tertiary education. The sites that participated in the study were not randomly selected, and the number of cases is small. Given these conditions, statistical inference is not justifiable. Despite this, during the analysis of the data it was hard not to be struck by a number of common themes that were encountered across the schools. For example, many students in all the schools, regardless of their Year level, said that they preferred university to TAFE as a post-school destination. At most, these types of findings may be pointing towards questions that could be explored in more detail using a randomly drawn sample of many more students.

4.4 Overview of Chapter 4

Interviews were conducted with students, teachers and parents. Students also completed a brief questionnaire. A total of four teacher, five parent and 31 student interviews were conducted, involving 19 teachers, 23 parents and 87 students.

Interview data were taken directly from the audio-tapes and transferred into text based data, and the questionnaire data were stored and analysed electronically.

5. Case studies—the students' views

This chapter describes findings taken from interviews with, and questionnaires completed by Year 10, 11 and 12 students. In particular it describes the students':

1. perceptions of tertiary education;
2. attitudes towards tertiary education;
3. images of tertiary education;
4. occupational and educational aspirations;
5. occupational and educational plans; and
6. knowledge of tertiary education.

This chapter presents the range of views reported by students. It does so by grouping the students' responses by Year level, and within Year level, by the school at which they were studying. Implicit in this organisation is the view that these groups may share some common features. What are these features? It is expected that the range of responses to questions about tertiary education will be widest among Year 10 students, less wide among Year 11 students and narrowest among Year 12 students. This is expected because, consistent with Gottfredson's theory of circumscription, the older students should have a more focused set of aspirations. It is also expected that there will be differences between the schools which may be related to their type and location. Such differences were identified as important during the review of the research literature. (The review showed that geographic location and the social background of students may be implicated in views and responses to tertiary education.) It is important to stress again, that while the data are grouped in this way, they cannot support generalisable claims about students in general, nor about the categories into which they have been grouped.

The students' responses are reported almost word-for-word. Minor repetitions and phatic sounds—er, um and so on—have been removed. Names of persons, schools and locations have been removed (and sometimes replaced by a generic description). Responses made by the same student appear together. Comments made by different students appear on separate lines. Not all responses made by students are included. For example, within a school, where the same response was reported by more than one student, only one instance is reported here. This was done as the main intent of this material is to describe the range of views, not the frequency of their occurrence.

5.1 Perceptions

Since the concept of 'perception' includes within its meaning the view that sense data are primary, students were asked to think about university and TAFE and then to describe what they saw (and not how they evaluated it). In practice it was hard for the students not to evaluate what they were seeing.

5.1.1 TAFE

The perceptions that students had of TAFE sometimes seemed to be shaped by their perceptions of their local TAFE institute. (It was the country students who referred to the 'local TAFE'.) It was sometimes difficult to separate students' perceptions of TAFE from their perceptions of the types of people who attend TAFE institutes—a topic considered in more detail below.

The response of these students was wide ranging, along many different dimensions and sometimes contradictory. TAFE was variously seen to attract older students (but sometimes both young and old), and to be for the less academic or more hands-on type of person. TAFE students were seen to be learning in a 'big school environment' but at other times TAFE was said to be not like school, and at other times as like a small university. TAFE was seen to have small classes. There was little evidence of a narrowing of the range of responses across the Year levels, nor were there large differences between the students from the different types of schools. The only group who saw TAFE students as hard-working were those students from the remote government school who were intending to study at a TAFE institute.

Year 10 students

- City government school students said when describing their perceptions of TAFE:
  - a wide range of people, older people, in their 30s
  - mechanics, builders
  - not so much to do with the written side of learning
  - hands-on
- A rural independent school student said:
  - I just think of country people doing ag[riculture]... courses but at a lower standard ... not to be mean or anything, but slightly less intelligent people or older
- Remote government school students (not intending university, but intending a job, apprenticeship or a TAFE course after leaving school) said:
  - hard work

  - different from school—people want to be there
  - lots of rooms
- A remote government school student (intending university) said:
  - [TAFE is for] old people but it has new buildings

Year 11 students

- City government school students said:
  - more people, rooms are bigger, bigger area around, bigger than this school
  - a place similar to school but more hands-on
- A rural independent school student said:
  - easy going, relaxed
- Remote government school students (not intending university) said:
  - welding
  - older and young people mixed
  - it has workshops
- Remote government school students (intending university) said:
  - not as hard as uni
  - very 'cruisy' [easy]
  - like a small uni
  - relaxed
  - spread out
  - just doesn't seem stressful

Year 12 students

- Rural government school students said:
  - big buildings, books
  - at uni they have 200 to 300 people in a lecture. At TAFE they have minimal class[es]
- A remote government school student (not intending university) said:
  - school ... for old people
- A remote government school student (intending university):
  - a place where no-one is pressing the students to do anything ... it's up to you

5.1.2 University

Perceptions of universities were wide ranging. A common perception across all Year levels was that universities were old and big. Some perceptions were erroneous, for example that 'two-thirds' of university students are 'Asians'. The positive aspects of universities were perceived to include their gardens, cafes and the opportunity to socialise. There was, however, a sense that universities were socially remote (also geographically, for this was important for the rural and remote students). Some students perceived university as a little frightening. This can be inferred from a number of comments—from references to bars on windows, to an observation that it was a place where a person could easily get lost. There were no discernible patterns in their perceptions of university that were related to either Year level of the students or the type of school that they attended.

Year 10 students

- A rural government school student said of their perceptions of universities:
  - hundreds of people crammed into the auditorium
- City government school students said:
  - like the movies from the US. They make it seem all fun ... you don't do any work. Huge parties. But you know it's not like that
  - clean classrooms with a white board. With a professor or doctor writing all this stuff on the board and every one is taking down notes and they have big final exams
  - big room with steep seats
- Remote government school students (not intending university, but intending a job, apprenticeship or a TAFE course after leaving school)
  - big classrooms
  - lots more chairs and desks
- Remote government school students (intending university):
  - old buildings
  - heaps of people
  - rooms full of books
  - gardens are done up and it's all posh
  - a place you can get lost in

Year 11

- Remote government school students (intending university):
  - you get treated like an adult

  - big buildings, street signs everywhere
  - proper gardens—perfect, cafes
  - huge library

Year 11 and 12

- A city Catholic school student said:
  - two out of three are Asians

Year 12 students

- Remote government school students (not intending university) said:
  - a big castle
  - people running around
  - big labs
- Remote government school students (intending university)
  - big old grey building
  - bars on windows (said jokingly)
  - little grey men with glasses
  - old historic buildings

5.2 Attitudes

Students were asked to evaluate TAFE institutes and universities. This was done by asking them to say whether, in general, they thought that a university or a TAFE education was 'a good thing'. It was anticipated that in answering this evaluative question, respondents would also indicate how they felt about universities and TAFE institutes.

5.2.1 TAFE

Most students were reluctant to view TAFE as not a 'good thing', seeing it as having some role. Most responded, however, to the question about how good TAFE was by contrasting it with university and seeing university as the preferred option. Some students were quite negative about TAFE. Others were very positive, particularly when TAFE was seen to provide better job opportunities than universities. Thus the range of responses to TAFE was wide among these students. Attitudes did not appear to vary by the students' Year level, geographic location or by the school type in which they were enrolled.

Year 10 students

- A city government school student when describing his attitude to TAFE said:
  - a lot of employers these days look at TAFE [graduates] and put them straight at the top of the pile with the skills that they've got

Year 11 students

- A government city school student said:
  - [TAFE] has different courses from uni ... a better option if you don't need to go to uni ... [for example, courses in] fashion
- A rural independent school student said:
  - There's situations for every person, like not everyone might be able to go to a university and so TAFE is the next best thing for them, so it just depends on the situation.

Year 12 students

- Rural independent school students said:
  - no [not a 'good thing']
  - personally, 'no', and also my parents, I've always been brought up to always head to uni. TAFE never entered [into consideration]

5.2.2 University

As a first response to the question about whether university was a good place to go, nearly all students agreed that it was. However, this view was often then qualified and sometimes contradicted in subsequent discussions.

The positive aspects of university were reported to be how it improved employment opportunities giving better and higher paid jobs; and also how it provided more knowledge and broadened the mind. In contrast, university was seen by some students as in fact not leading to improved job outcomes, it was also seen as expensive, too hard, pointless and a waste of time if it did not lead to a job that was of interest. So, while the initial responses of students towards universities suggested a positive attitude, there were many who saw it in a decidedly negative light. There was some evidence that the Year 12 students who were interviewed had a more critical view of university, and were readier, therefore to hold negative attitudes towards it. There was no evidence that geographic location or school type was associated with varying attitudes towards universities among the students who were interviewed.

Year 10 students

- A city government school student, describing her attitude to university said:
  - helps to get a job
- Remote government school students (not intending university, but intending a job, apprenticeship or a TAFE course after leaving school) said:
  - more knowledge, more money, better jobs
  - it costs a lot
  - no! Not for me! Too hard
- A rural independent school student said:
  - no, not really. I'm not looking forward to it but it's a thing you have to do now. You're not going to get a good job [otherwise]
- A rural government school student said:
  - [it] depends on the person. If you are good with your hands, it is not [an]advantage to go to uni

Year 11 students

- A government city school student said:
  - looks better on your resume ... if you've been to a uni ... better than a TAFE
- Remote government school students (not intending university, but intending a job, apprenticeship or a TAFE course after leaving school) all said that university was good but one student then noted that:
  - it depends what you want to do ... if you need it for the job you want ... if you don't, then there is no point, really
- Remote government school students intending university, when asked if university was, in general a good place to go, gave a loud and quick affirmative response. But there was one student who then qualified this view:
  - in some ways it seems good, but in other ways it seems pointless ... with the job outcomes afterwards, ... [it could be] a waste of money

Year 11 and 12 students

- City Catholic school students said:
  - [university] broadens the mind
  - [it is] a big melting pot [of] various cultures
  - you gain knowledge by going there. Not just in lectures but talking to people who are going there. You can learn just so much

Year 12 students

- Remote government school students not intending university (but intending a job, apprenticeship or a TAFE course after leaving school) had quite a pragmatic view of university. They argued that it was only required if their objectives in the world of work required it. For these students, TAFE and universities were neither seen as better nor worse than each other although university was seen as having 'higher standards'. Neither institution was preferred over the other, nor were they seen as intrinsically good or useful places. As some of these students noted:
  - yes [it is a good thing] but there are lots of people doing university that could get jobs anyway ... like, it's just a waste of time
  - my cousin went to uni and she decided she wanted to be something. [Now] she's working at Coles as a check out
- Remote government school students intending university agreed that university was a good place to go, but some also felt that if it was not going to lead to a job, then 'it's a waste of time'.

5.3 Images

Following from Gottfredson's theory, sex type, prestige level and the type of people at TAFE and universities (or in different courses at TAFE and universities of interest to students) were the key dimensions to the image of tertiary education that were investigated. Additionally, Gottfredson's account of a 'tolerable effort boundary'—the level at which a career option is seen to be too difficult to pursue—led to the investigation of the perceived difficulty of access to TAFE and university courses for students.

5.3.1 Sex type

Sex type was investigated by asking students how comfortable females and males would feel at a university or a TAFE institute.

TAFE colleges were often seen as being somewhat male in orientation, while universities were seen by nearly all the students as places where males and females would, generally, be comfortable. Some students felt that both sexes would feel comfortable at TAFE institutes and others said that this would vary between courses both within TAFE institutes and universities. There was some evidence that there were sex types attached to some courses—males and engineering, females and childcare, fashion and hairdressing were the most commonly cited by the students. There was little evidence that sex type images varied by Year level, geographic location or school type. The evidence from these interviews suggests that there is little range in the

response of students to the sex typing of universities—females and males are expected to feel comfortable—while there is a wider range of views concerning TAFE institutes. Sex typing was most forcefully identified with courses within institutions.

Year 10 students

- A rural government school student, when discussing sex typing said:
  - uni is generally equal [but] engineering is male dominated
- A city government school student said:
  - [TAFE] sounds more like a male place ... you don't see too many females dropping out of school at 16
- All the Year 10 remote government school students not intending university, but intending a job, apprenticeship or a TAFE course after leaving school, felt that both males and females would feel comfortable at both a university and a TAFE college.
- Year 10 remote government school students intending university said that males and females would be comfortable at university. There was however quite an extensive discussion about TAFE colleges by these students. One male student argued that in male-dominated courses females would feel uncomfortable, and in female-dominated courses (hairdressing and childcare were the examples he cited), males would feel uncomfortable. These students expected to find informal 'males areas' and 'female areas' at the local TAFE institute.

Year 11 students

- Rural independent school students said:
  - you would get females there [at a TAFE] but it's more a males place
  - it's equal [be]cause there are a lot of things there that girls can do as well (said by a female considering TAFE as an option)
- Government city school students said:
  - more males
  - all mechanical
  - there would be few females—there are girls in fashion though
- At the remote government school, one female student not intending university said that she would feel 'really bad' doing a university engineering course.
- All the students who were interviewed at the remote government school and intending university felt males and females would feel comfortable at both a university and a TAFE institute.

Year 11 and 12 students

- A city Catholic school student said:
  - TAFE is a bit different [from university]. Not many girls are enrolled. [There] is not such a high interest [from them]

Year 12

- A rural independent school student said:
  - I have a feeling that males are a bit more dominant at the TAFE college
- Students interviewed at the remote government school who were not intending university argued that how comfortable males and females felt at TAFE and university would 'depend on the course', but generally, they expected it would be 'OK'.
- Students interviewed at the remote government school who were intending university felt that there would be few problems for females at university although a few did not know. For TAFE, the views were less certain. One student referred to the likely difficulties for a girl doing an Engineering course at TAFE. Others noted the complexities of making these judgements:
  - it depends, there are so many. It's not like universities. You don't know. I don't think you can make a judgement
  - country TAFEs are different from metropolitan

5.3.2 Prestige level

It proved difficult during the interviews to hold students to a discussion of entrance scores for admission to universities. Most knew that courses for law and medicine were hard to access because of high entrance scores, but beyond this most Year 10 and 11 students seemed to have little knowledge of entrance scores. Year 12 students intending university had more knowledge, if only because the entrance scores needed for the course they were intending to apply for were now more often known.

So, if the entrance score is taken as a measure of the perceived status of a course, then these students commonly did not have a sense of the status of courses. It seems not to have been an important dimension to their images of university or TAFE courses. Some further evidence of this can be found in the data taken from the questionnaire that they completed. Students were asked in the questionnaire to nominate the 'score' that they needed for entry into their most preferred course. Of the 78 who said that they planned to go on with a course, 39 (50 per cent) did not know the required score for admission. Examining the data by Year level showed that Year 10 students were least likely to know—16 of the 22 (or about 70 per cent) not knowing

the needed score—compared with Year 12 with 12 of 26 (about 40 per cent) not knowing.

However, it became clear when students were asked to describe the types of people at TAFE institutes and universities, that one of the important or recurring dimensions used by students to distinguish TAFE from university students was their social background (as attributed by the interviewees).

5.3.3 Types of students at TAFE institutes and universities

Asking about the type of students who attended universities and TAFE institutes provided the clearest view of students' images. In sharp contrast to the truncated discussions about entrance scores, there were long, detailed and animated discussions about the types of people at TAFE and universities.

Images of the types of people studying at TAFE ranged widely from the disparaging to the praiseworthy. There were numerous dimensions underlying these responses including the personal (or imputed) characteristics of the people, their motives, their appearance and their social standing. TAFE students were variously seen as under-educated, as trying to improve their lot, as lazy and troublesome, as people who do not like to study, and as coming from a lower social status background. The students who had more positive images of TAFE students were from the remote rural government school (but not all the students who were interviewed from this school agreed with this view). The 'hands-on' perception of TAFE seems to have shaped many views of the types of students at a TAFE institute.

There was little variation in the range of the images of TAFE students between the Year levels.

5.3.3.1 TAFE

Year 10 students

- A rural independent school student, discussing the type of person who studies at a TAFE institute said:
  - people that miss out on an education ... my dad teaches there and he says lots of them can't read and all that
- A city government school student, half jokingly commented:
  - they wear blue overalls, footy shorts and say 'yea but' ... 'but' what?
- Remote government school students (not intending university, but intending a job, apprenticeship or a TAFE course after leaving school) said:
  - someone just trying to get better at their job
  - more practical

- Remote government school students intending university said:
  - having a go at something
  - looking for an apprenticeship

Year 11 students

- A rural independent school student said:
  - at a TAFE college you would expect someone who hadn't done well at school, just bludged it ... and at uni you would expect the people who have done the hard work
- City government school students said:
  - people who cannot get into uni
  - they're always pushing TAFE at the school. They want to get rid of the trouble makers
  - bums ... smokers
- Remote government school students (not intending university, but intending a job, apprenticeship or a TAFE course after leaving school) said:
  - average, even older
  - ferals!
  - people who don't like studying and stuff
  - more into hands-on stuff
- Remote government school students (intending university) said:
  - trades
  - not as intelligent, but they're skilled
  - they have parties and don't talk about the news

Year 11 and 12 students

- City Catholic school students said:
  - blue uniforms
  - multi coloured hair ... pierced ears

Year 12 students

- Rural government school students said:
  - I think of people who haven't finished school ... I wouldn't like to think of TAFE as an option for next year if I didn't get into uni. I wouldn't go to TAFE
  - you get the lower end of the scale, like people who are too lazy, don't want to finish school

- Remote government school students (not intending university, but intending a job, apprenticeship or a TAFE course after leaving school) said:
  - more like common people ... people who go to university are doctors, lawyers, scientists ... people who go to TAFE are mechanics, managers, shop assistants ... people like that
  - people who can give back more services [to the community]
- A remote government school student intending university said:
  - TAFE students are 'more in the world' ... older and more mature

5.3.3.2 University

While the range of views of the type of people who study at university was wide, and many were positive, there was a sense in many of the students' responses that the people at universities were remote and strange. They were also seen as privileged—either intellectually ('smart') or socially ('snobs'). University students were also seen as liking to socialise, while others saw them as ambitious, hard working and disciplined. The bohemian student fringe seen on campuses coloured some of these students' images. Again, there seemed to be no clustering of views by Year level, school type or location evident with these interview data.

Year 10 students

- Rural government school students, discussing images of university students said:
  - party animals and nerds
  - different for different courses ... medicine—intelligent, dedicated
  - high class people ... have the money to pay for it
- A rural independent school student said:
  - ones that have more money
- City government school students said:
  - weird dressers
  - interested people [that is, interested in their studies
  - older people
- Year 10 remote government school students (not intending university, but intending a job, apprenticeship or a TAFE course after leaving school) described university students as 'motivated' and 'smart'.

- Year 10 remote government school students (intending university) described university students as:
  - smart
  - people who are academic ... but 'C' students could get in!
  - normal people like us, but with bigger brains ... friends of ours are like normal people, but really smart

Year 11 students

- A student at the rural independent school described university students as 'more ambitious people'
- City government school students said:
  - brainy
  - arty people, hippies ... depends what university ... at [new 'red brick' university], but at [old 'sandstone' university] all snobs
- Remote government school students not intending university said:
  - adults
  - posh
  - academic
  - Asians
- Remote government school students (intending university) said that university students were:
  - smart people
  - hard working people
  - snobs
  - the elite
  - they all go out and have coffee and they just sit there drinking coffee having really weird conversations about everything—the whole world, the news

Year 11 and 12 students

- A city Catholic school student said:
  - smart and disciplined ... [but] there's a difference between medicine and arts students

Year 12 students

- A rural independent school student noted:
  - [They are] different people in the city than the country. Not as friendly

- Remote government school students not intending university, described university students as ‘smart’ and as ‘dedicated to do what they want’.
- A remote government school student (intending university) saw university students as ‘very smart’. Another said that there were ‘many Asians’ which was amended to ‘highly multi-cultural’ by another student. Another of these students described university students as ‘rebels’.

5.3.4 Amount of effort

University was viewed as generally hard to gain entry to, although some courses were seen as easy to get into; and TAFE was seen as easy to gain entry to, but with some courses—apprenticeships in particular—being perceived to be hard to enter. Some students also commented upon how hard it was once university or TAFE had been entered. It is interesting to note how a student living in a rural area also commented on the difficulties of living away from home and studying.

Year 10 students

- An independent rural school student said of the difficulty of entry to university:
  - [it] depends on the course you take [but for a TAFE] as long as you’ve got the money ... and you just have Year 10 to get in. You can’t get into uni with that
- Government city school students said:
  - Uni seems like a private school and TAFE seems like the public schools... public schools have to accept you. Private schools can just say ‘No—Go away!’
  - if you couldn’t get into a uni, TAFE would be your second choice... except that they would not have as good teachers
- Remote government school students (intending university) said of the difficulty of accessing university:
  - it’s not that hard if you’re mature aged
  - not that hard if you’re a straight ‘A’ student
  - extremely hard to go to university. You’ve got the whole State competing
  - [for TAFE all that had to be done was] enrol, and you’re there ... It’s laid back. Make a coffee table

Year 11 students

- A rural government school student said that it is 'much more work to get into uni'.
- Remote government school students not intending university said:
  - you can do TAFE and then go to uni ... a friend of mine got into university really easily, but she's finding it really hard to keep up ... and it doesn't help being up there and away from your family
- The remote government school students felt it was hard to get into university but easy to access TAFE. Of university, they said:
  - really hard, depending on what course you want to do …
  - if it's a hard course ... something like maths or science, its a lot harder to get in

Year 11 and 12 students

- A city Catholic school student said that it 'depends on what you want to do. Medicine is hard but other course entrance scores—like Arts and Science are about 50—Medicine is [high 90s] … To gain entry to TAFE, just ring up'.

Year 12 students

- A remote government school student not intending university, felt that entry into TAFE was not very hard requiring 'average grades', noting however that 'some courses are hard', and 'it's hard to get an apprenticeship and traineeship.'
- A remote government school student intending university said:
  - Not that hard ... I suppose it is hard, but there are lots of other avenues you can go these days ... like TAFE course, college classes ... but medicine, if you've decided to do that you're pretty smart anyway ... but I think it's pretty easy

In contrast TAFE was seen as harder to gain entry for those students who had selected an academic stream of study. As students from the remote government school said:

- it's harder if you haven't done what they [the TAFE] requires of you, because of the selection criteria, you're not going to meet it
- there's a lot of competition to get into TAFE
- [Another reported, as an explanation for this demand, that] TAFE graduates are preferred to uni students

5.4 Aspirations

An aspiration was defined as the most preferred educational or occupational outcome of a student.

Students' aspirations ranged widely in content and in clarity. They ranged from a vaguely defined interest in a broad industry (for example, 'the media'), through to a clearly specified occupation with the training and education route to that occupation known (for example, university training to become a veterinarian working with horses). Most occupations that were of interest were trades, para-professional or professional. Consequently, nearly all aspirations were associated with an aspiration to attend a TAFE or university. No students specified attendance at a university or a TAFE as an end in itself. Some students did not know what they aspired to, and a few said they had no work or educationally related aspirations. While Year 12 students might have been expected to have more clearly defined post-school aspirations than younger students, this was not true of the students interviewed for this study. Similarly, there was no evidence of school type or geographic location being associated with varying ranges or types of aspirations.

An examination of student aspirations was undertaken using data collected from the questionnaires that they completed. Students were asked to nominate both the job they imagined that they might do in the future and their most preferred tertiary course of study. After removal of missing cases and the records of those students not intending post-school studies, there were 58 observations available. Holland (1997) was used to classify occupations into Holland's RIASEC types, and Harvey-Beavis and Elsworth (1998) was used to classify all but four Realistic courses into RIASEC types. The Harvey-Beavis and Elsworth study did not identify any Realistic courses as it only investigated courses for which application was made through a tertiary admissions centre. In the questionnaire data there were four courses—all in TAFE—that were classified as Realistic. The courses were Electrical, Plumbing, Auto Electrical, and Mechanics. Based on the expert advice, these were classified as Realistic types of courses.

Table 15 Field of most preferred course by type of future occupation each classified using Holland's RIASEC typology

	Most preferred course type						
Job type	R	I	A	S	E	C	Total
R	3					1	4
I		20					20
A			5				5
S	1	2	1	6			10
E		1		1	8		10
C		1				8	9
Total	4	24	6	7	8	9	58

This classification into types permitted an investigation into the congruence of students' educational and occupational aspirations. A high level of congruence was found. An examination of Table 15 shows that 50 of 58 (85 per cent) of the observations made appear on the diagonal (shown as shaded). In other words, most students preferred tertiary courses of a field type the same as the type of occupation they imagine that they will be doing in the future. For example, if a student's most preferred course of study involved an Investigative type course, this student was also likely to imagine an Investigative type of occupation for the future. These data point to a strong relationship between the world of education and the world of work among these 58 students and are consistent with the findings of Harvey-Beavis and Elsworth (1998). They also suggest that the aspirations of these students are coherent. (Note, however, these data are illustrative only, and should not be used to infer that the relationship seen here will be found in the populations of Australian senior school students. The non-random within-school sampling procedures used preclude making such an inference.)

5.5 Plans

Following from Gottfredson's ideas described in Chapter 1, the extent to which students had circumscribed and compromised their preferences formed the focus to the questions about student plans. This was done by asking them if they *expected* to achieve the occupations that they would like to do in the future. The range of response to this issue was narrow—all students expected to do what they would like to do both educationally and in the world of work. One Year 12 student from the remote government school expected to achieve this only if he 'worked hard'.

Some students had also worked out compromise strategies. One Year 12 student from the rural government school planned to do a TAFE course if he did not get into his preferred university courses. Others were not clear about what they wanted do in the short or long term. As one student from the city Catholic school said: 'Kids just go to uni because they don't know where to go after school'.

5.6 Knowledge

The key elements of the knowledge that students have of universities and TAFE that were examined in the interviews with the students were (1) access (how to gain entry), (2) process (what is done while studying) and (3) outcomes (what the student expects to achieve by studying).

5.6.1 Access

Most students in Years 10 and 11 did not know about the administrative procedures needed to access TAFE or university. However, they were confident that they would know them when needed, especially for university admission. Reference to the careers adviser as the source of the necessary information was common. One student was concerned about the role of auditions and folios in selection procedures. Year 12 students, interviewed late in the year and who had applied for university knew about the process, but some of these students stated that they were unclear about access procedures for TAFE.

Comments included:

- A Year 11, rural independent school student said of universities, 'we'll get a package [of information] and you just send away and ask to be accepted'. Of TAFE he said ' ... just rock up'.
- A Year 11 or 12, city Catholic school student said that all that was required to gain access to TAFE was to 'just ring up', while acknowledging that for some TAFE courses, prerequisites were required.

5.6.2 Process

Students were asked to describe what they expected to be doing at university or TAFE (whichever was their preferred destination) on a day-to-day basis. Many students in response sat silent and much encouragement was required to elicit answers. Often students had to be asked to imagine that they had been at university or TAFE that day, and to then describe what they had imagined. There was little evidence from these students that they knew in detail what was done on a day-to-day basis at a university or a TAFE institute.

When students did answer, it was at a high level of generality and with very similar content—attend lectures, prepare for examinations and socialise. Students focused upon university life and did not include TAFE within their notion of 'studying' when answering this question.

Comments included:

- A Year 10 rural independent school student observed:
  - all you see is people going to lecture after lecture, do assignments, that's it
- A Year 10 city government school student fancifully observed:
  - Wake up at 10. Go to a lecture. Come home. Drink. Lots of free days ... you can leave whenever you want. It's more your responsibility

- A Year 11 rural government school student had a somewhat different view:
  - hear what you've got to know, you write it down, then you get to go to bed and work it all out

5.6.3 Outcomes

Students were asked to describe what they expected would be the main outcomes for them of going to a university or TAFE institute. The main outcomes expected were qualifications and a job.

Year 10 students

- City government school students said:
  - jobs
  - help you to have different views of things' [this coincided with the view expressed by this boy's mother during the interview with the parents]
- A remote government school student intending university expected to get a job, or a better job than he would get by not going on to tertiary education. TAFE was seen as giving him 'skills', while in contrast universities had outcomes that were more nebulous. Indeed, when this topic was opened up for general discussion, it became clear that many students did not seem to know what they would be learning.

Year 11 students

- A rural independent school student said that a university would:
  - help you get a job but also you [could] prove to yourself you can do it
- Government city school students expected the outcomes of tertiary education to involve:
  - getting a job
  - meeting people
  - more learning
  - better skills
  - a hole in my wallet
- Remote government school students intending university said that they expected to achieve:
  - a good job
  - a job in the town [with the mining company]
  - a qualification

However, there were concerns expressed by this group of students. As they said:

- I heard that they're really low [job prospects] ... you're not even guaranteed a job once you leave uni
- you have to get a top score to get a job [even with a qualification]

Year 12 students

- Remote government school students intending university showed similar concerns as their fellow students from the same school not intending university—on the one hand they expected as an outcome to have additional skills, but on the other, there was uncertainty about their prospects in the labour market.
  - come out with ... I don't know ... you always hear, like, all the time, about how [people who go to university] don't end up doing what they thought they were going to come out with ... and that scares me a bit. I don't want to work [at university] for four years, to come out and do something I didn't want to do. I want to be sure I am choosing something that I like ... my goal is to come out and hopefully go into a job and keep my directions the whole way through
  - Another student, who was planning to run his own business, said that he expected 'to achieve knowledge, but not skills'

5.7 Other views

One student described why he did not consider continuing his education into TAFE:

- For us at Year 10 we had to decide to do [the academic course]—I never considered anything but [the academic course] ... I just wanted always to do it. Never thought about doing anything else. I don't know why. So it was easy for me because I knew I wanted to go to uni ... only just now I've got a big direction. My dad took me down [to a university] to decide what I wanted to do. Now I've got real direction ... before I knew I wanted to go to uni ... I didn't know what to do [study] ... that gave me the direction ... [Year 12 student]

The cost of education was a worry to some students:

- when I think about it [university] I always think about the money I have to repay [be]cause then I think 'What if I don't get a job after doing all this?' I'll have to pay them back anyway [Year 12 student]
- I could have to pay $100,000 to go to uni ... [Year 11 student]

Related to this concern about cost, was one about how useful university education is:

– I reckon uni doesn't teach you about the job you're going to do. I reckon it's just, you go there, you learn stuff. You don't learn about what you're going to do [Year 11 student]

The prospect of travel from a rural area to a city was a concern for some of the students, not just because of the costs but also because of the isolation from family and friends.

5.8 Overview of Chapter 5

This chapter described the range of perceptions, attitudes, images, aspirations, plans and knowledge of Year 10, 11 and 12 students from five different States around Australia attending Catholic, Government and Independent schools.

There was little evidence of a systematic variation in students' views across Year level or between school types. This may in part be due to the wide variation seen within schools. The only systematic difference seen was that some rural students were concerned about the move to a city campus but there were no city students who reported a concern about moving to a rural campus to study.

The **perceptions** students had of TAFE and university were wide ranging, and sometimes contradictory. Universities were sometimes reported to be frightening places, but TAFE institutes were never so described. The **attitudes** they held were mixed. Many had a positive attitude to university, but qualified it by describing concerns about likely outcomes. TAFE was less often seen in a positive way by the students, although some were very positive about its 'hands-on' approach to learning.

The **images** of universities and TAFE institutes were examined along four dimensions:

- Sex type: TAFE institutes were sometimes seen as places where males would feel more comfortable than females. In contrast, universities were seen as places where both sexes would feel comfortable. However, students did comment that there would be some courses at both TAFE and university that would be dominated by one sex or the other—engineering by males, fashion, child care and hairdressing by females. On the evidence from this study, sex typing of the institutions does not seem to have formed an important part of the images of the institutions. There was some evidence, however, that images of courses may be shaped by sex types.

- Prestige: there was little evidence that prestige, as indexed by entrance scores for courses, shaped the images of TAFE and universities. Investigation into the types of persons attending these institutions suggested that the social background of students attending TAFE and university are an important dimension to the images that these students have of these institutions.
- Type: There was often wide ranging and animated discussion of the types of persons who attend TAFE and university. These ranged from the positive to the derogatory—for both institutional types. On the positive side, TAFE students were seen as dedicated to increasing their skills, and being focused upon hands-on learning [seen implicitly by some students as a good way to learn]. University students were variously seen as dedicated, ambitious, clever and hard working. On the negative side, TAFE students were seen as lazy, low in social status, unkempt and of dubious character. University students were seen as rebels, socially privileged, wealthy, and bohemian (in ways which were not intelligible to the students). Perceived student types seem to be an important element in the images that these students held of TAFE and universities.
- Effort: TAFE was seen as easy to access, with some courses hard to access (apprenticeships and traineeships being cited), while universities were often seen by these students as hard to access, although with some easy to access courses. Ease of access did seem to colour the images that students had of TAFE and universities, with the easier-to-access TAFE being seen in a less positive light as a consequence of this easier access. TAFE is a place, according to some of the students, where the 'drop-outs' go.

The **aspirations** of students were varied both in content and in clarity. Some students did not know what they wanted to do, and others had a highly focused aspiration with a pathway to achieving it mapped out. The questionnaires provided information which suggested that for those students who intend to go on to tertiary study, there is a high level of congruence between the field of study they aspire to, and the type of work they seek. (This finding was constrained by being limited to the 58 students for whom there were data.)

The **plans** of students were examined by considering the extent to which there was evidence that they had or were prepared to compromise their aspirations. This was done by asking if the job they most liked was also the job they expected to have in the future. All students who could nominate a future occupation, expected to have the job they most liked. There were some students who did not know what job the might have in the future.

The **knowledge** that students had of tertiary education was considered by examining three key dimensions:

- Access: all of the Year 10 and Year 11 students who were interviewed admitted to not knowing how to access universities, but they were very confident that they would be told by the school at the time when they needed to know. TAFE access procedures were also not well known, but were often seen by these students to be less formal. Two characteristic responses made by students were—'just ring up' and 'just rock up'.
- Process: There were low levels of understanding outside of the most general observations, about what was done on a day-to-day basis at either a university or a TAFE. Views proffered ranged from socialising in a cafe to a grim preoccupation with lore and knowledge.
- Outcomes: The outcomes expected of university and TAFE were qualifications, jobs, knowledge and skills. However there were expressions of concerns about the likely job outcomes, particularly for university graduates, and particularly in the light of the cost of studying at a university. Would university be a waste of time and money? Some students were concerned that it would be so.

Other aspects of tertiary education mentioned by students were the high cost to them both in the short term (accommodation) and the long term (HECS), and the difficulty of accessing city campuses for rural students. This was a theme that was to be repeated by many parents and teachers during the interviews that were conducted with them.

6. School case studies—parents' and teachers' views

This chapter describes findings taken from interviews with teachers and parents—the main advisers to students in Years 10, 11 and 12. (Some of the teachers were formally involved in career advice at the schools, and others seemed to offer advice only when approached by individual students on an informal basis.) A total of 23 parents and 19 teachers were interviewed.

This chapter describes the parents' and teachers':

1. perceptions of tertiary education;
2. attitudes towards tertiary education;
3. images of tertiary education;
4. reflections on the occupational and educational plans of students; and
5. knowledge of aspects of tertiary education.

This chapter focuses on the range of views reported by parents and teachers. It presents this range of views by grouping their responses by the type of adviser (parent or teacher), and the school with which they were associated. Implicit in this organisation is the view that within these groups there may be some common features. It also suggests that there will be differences between the groups. In fact, with the data collected from these interviews, it was not possible to detect any noteworthy differences between parents and teachers, or between the different schools. (There were, however, some concerns unique to parents from rural areas.) So while these categories did not serve an analytic function, they have been preserved. This was done for stylistic reasons. The categories provide some consistency with the previous chapter and they may help the reader negotiate the text.

The parents' and teachers' responses are reported almost word-for-word. Minor repetitions and phatic sounds have been removed. Names of persons, schools and locations have been removed. Quoted responses made by the same person appear together in the same paragraph. Comments made by different persons appear on separate lines. Not all responses made by parents or teachers are included. Only those which provide a sense of the range of responses are included.

6.1 Perceptions

As with the students, parents and teachers were asked to describe a visual image that they had of a university and of a TAFE. Rarely did they describe one. Instead they tended to put their views on universities and TAFE colleges—which usually involved describing problems with the institutions and what the solutions to these problems might be.

6.1.1 Parents

The parents' views of TAFE ranged widely from seeing them as not achieving their potential, to useful places of learning for those not able or interested in a university education.

There were similarly wide-ranging views of universities. Some parents saw universities as centres of thought and debate existing to promote intellectual growth, and others (most of the parents) saw them as providing students with opportunities to obtain an entree into the professions. Some parents, however, were very critical of the state of universities and their supposed focus on employment outcomes. Parents tended to say more, be more descriptive and less prescriptive, and be able to give a picture of a university during the interviews compared with their discussions of TAFE. There was little evidence that parents' perceptions varied by their geographic location or by the type of school that their children were attending. However, parents from the remote school did focus on the political activities of university students more, and the city parents had a wider range of views of universities during these interviews.

6.1.1.1 TAFE

- Parents with children enrolled at the city government school said of TAFE:
  - a watered down technical institute compared with what it used to be
  - TAFE students can do things
  - sort of second grade ... second best
- Parents with children enrolled at the remote government school said of TAFE:
  - it's lost its original focus on trades and is now trying to duplicate things done at universities
  - courses for people who didn't make it into uni
  - a mini high school
  - less intimidating [than a university], more accessible for Aboriginal people
  - more user-friendly [than a university]

6.1.1.2 University

- Parents with children enrolled at the remote government school said of university:
  - lots of people
  - demonstrations
  - hotbed of young idealistic politics
  - steeped in mystery and mystique, tradition
- Parents with children enrolled at the city government school said:
  - knowledge and learning—that's an old fashion[ed] idea now. They go to university to get a job now
  - very little hours and a lot of free time
  - kids see university as a fun place ... that's not a bad thing, but ...
  - a privileged lot of people who will probably get a job

An exchange during an interview between two of the parents from this school was interesting. One argued that: 'Universities should offer knowledge for knowledge sake ... universities are becoming a job factory ... that's a tragedy'. Another parent replied: 'I think you've got a romantic idea of universities. [There are] lectures of 180 to 200 people with people sitting in corridors, with a lecture that is read out by a lecturer who has done it a thousand times before; no such things as a tutorial or if there is a tutorial, it's held by a third-year student for the first years'. Two very negative views of universities are being expressed here.

6.1.2 Teachers

It was difficult to obtain information about perceptions of university from the teachers. There was a sense during all of the teacher interviews that since all present were university graduates—some teachers being recent graduates—that to describe perceptions was unnecessary. Every one at the interview 'knew' what a university was like and to require a discussion seemed a waste of time. As a consequence there was very little information available from the interviews about teachers' perceptions of universities. The few comments made are not recorded here. (Typically the comments were reminiscences about student life.) Teachers spoke a little more freely about TAFE, but it was still unusual for them to describe a picture that was connoted by thinking of a TAFE institute.

- A teacher at the rural government school said:
  - it [TAFE] doesn't have a big profile within the town, up there, out of the way at the end of town. Nobody ever sees it. You have to drive out of your way even to see the TAFE college

- Teachers at the rural independent school said:
  - TAFE offers a variety of subjects and areas that people can study that are not necessarily offered in school ... a non-academic option for the kids that wouldn't normally go to university
  - a lot of people who go to TAFE will be outdoors and will be quite happy

6.2 Attitudes

It also proved difficult to elicit information about attitudes from the parents as there was a tendency among them to theorise explanations for the problems which they identified as existing in universities and TAFE institutes, rather than stating their attitudes towards them. For this reason, the range of attitudes often had to be inferred from statements that were not always directly related to the issues at hand. Using this approach it could be inferred parents' and teachers' attitudes ranged widely from negative to positive for both universities and TAFE institutes. Some of the interviewees held positive attitudes towards some aspects of universities or TAFE, and negative attitudes towards other aspects. Some did not know about TAFE and so had no attitudes towards it. All commented upon universities.

6.2.1 Parents

6.2.1.1 TAFE

- A parent with children enrolled at the city government school said of TAFE:
  - I would prefer them [his children] to go to uni ... I have no problem with TAFE, but I don't see it as higher education
- A parent with children enrolled at the remote government school said:
  - [my son] would never think of going to TAFE. He thinks TAFE is where the guys go to do their apprenticeship training ... he would never ever think of it straight out of school
- A parent with a child enrolled at the city Catholic school said:
  - OK, if they're there for the right reasons [a career path]
- Parents with children enrolled at the rural government school said:
  - a TAFE crosses all boundaries from a child minding centre to a place for drop-outs ... and there are very good colleges and the students get a lot out if it ... I don't think a lot of the [TAFE] teachers have been taught how to teach

  - TAFE is more locally centred and more vocationally oriented. A place you go to get [an] apprenticeship, skills
- Parents with children enrolled at the rural independent school said of TAFE:
  - a fall-back position for uni
  - an image is hard to give ... there are a whole lot of different areas in TAFE that are not publicised

6.2.1.2 University

- Parents with children enrolled at the city government school all assented to the view that university was good for children to attend. As one said:
  - any degree is better than none in the market
- Parents with children enrolled at a remote government school were less positive about universities, saying:
  - I don't think it is a necessity for [all] the kids because you've got to have some with lower expectations ... it doesn't suit every child
  - you can have so many philosophers sitting around contemplating their navels and answers to the universe, but you've got to have some people doing the work
  - I admire academics but really ... a lot of academics don't know how to design a bolt hole for the door! Really clever, but they've got no common sense. Someone stole their personality ... left their brain behind and took everything else
- A parent with a child enrolled at the city Catholic school said:
  - it depends on their motivation—not if they're going to uni because all their friends are going or because their parents want them to follow a particular career
- Parents with children enrolled at the rural government school observed of universities:
  - the standards have dropped considerably and now it's become more of a financial institution ... the main concern is dollars and not so much what is taught and ensuring that students who graduate are worthy of graduating
  - university opened up the world for me
- Parents with children enrolled at the rural independent school said:
  - an elitist institution
  - money [to be paid by the parents] and hard work for students

6.2.2 Teachers

6.2.2.1 TAFE

- Teachers at the remote government school saw TAFE as more important to students than university because in a mining town it was both more practical and relevant to the needs of the students.
- Teachers at the city Catholic school said:
  - no spoon-feeding—students learn autonomy, researching, meeting deadlines independently
  - they gain more skills for the work force
  - they learn responsibility for others in class with group work, working in a team. This is less likely to happen at uni—only in some courses like social work or nursing
- Teachers from the rural independent school said:
  - there is still a stigma and it's probably from 20 or 15 years ago, when it was blue collar
  - if he comes out through a TAFE course ... as a builder, he can go and make a good business for himself as a builder. He'll make more money than I ever will
  - they will be able to study without struggling

6.2.2.2 University

- Teachers at the remote government school said of universities:
  - a way out of the town and a ticket to freedom for some students
  - it allows students to develop and expand social connections and does not require them to have adult responsibilities too early
- Teachers at the city Catholic school said:
  - [university is good] as a means to an end if students have a goal in mind, [but it is not good] in teaching skills
  - [university] should be about broadening oneself, education for the sake of education, but now with HECS fees, job-specific training is needed not education. More people have got more jobs from TAFE than [from] getting a degree

A teacher from the rural independent school said universities open up 'a professional career path'.

6.3 Images

It will be recalled that sex type, prestige level and the type of people at TAFE and universities (or in different courses at TAFE and universities) were the key dimensions to the image of tertiary education that were investigated. Gottfredson's account of a 'tolerable effort boundary' also led to the investigation of the perceived difficulty of TAFE and university courses for students. For the parents and teachers, there were no data gathered on the prestige dimension using entrance scores to courses as an index. Instead, information about prestige was gathered during the discussion of the 'types' of students at TAFE and universities.

6.3.1 Sex type

There were wide-ranging views about how comfortable male and female students would feel at TAFE institutes and universities. The type of course students were studying was seen to be important in assessing how comfortable they would feel. Courses seem to be perceived in terms of sex type by only some of the parents.

6.3.1.1 Parents

- Parents with children at a remote government school said:
  - [at university] the old bastions are just about down
  - depends on the course
  - [of TAFE] I still tend to think the majority of the males would be doing a trade and technical type courses and the females would generally be doing office and clerical courses ... not many in non-traditional courses.
- From the city Catholic school, one parent had not thought about the issue. Another noted:
  - Society is dominated by men, so I expect uni is also
- One parent with a child at the rural government school said:
  - TAFE is not now male dominated ... women are getting into all areas
- Parents with children at the rural independent school said:
  - both sexes are comfortable at uni
  - TAFE is male dominated
  - no problems in TAFE [for the female students]

6.3.1.2 Teachers

- A teacher at the remote government school said:
  - Some of the more timid girls will be uncomfortable at a university ... even though females in some universities are the majority, they may perceive themselves as a minority because males are more vocal
- A teacher at the rural government school said:
  - possibly gender based, according to the courses students take, but not overall
- A teacher from the rural independent school expected to find 'no bias' at either universities or TAFE institutes.

6.3.2 Type of students at TAFE institutes and universities

As with the students, asking about the type of people who attended universities and TAFE institutes provided a clear view of parents' and teachers' images. And again, as with the students, images of the types of people studying at TAFE ranged from the somewhat disparaging to the praiseworthy. (The parents and teachers were less inclined than the students, however, to be disparaging.) University students were commonly seen in a positive light, while there was a wider range of views concerning TAFE students, particularly among the teachers. There was little evidence from either the teachers or the parents that social background or prestige contributed to their images of TAFE institutes or universities.

6.3.2.1 Parents

- Parents from the city Catholic school said:
  - [of university students] some are there filling in time. Others [are there] for a future career
  - [of TAFE students] apprentices, tradespeople, people who haven't got what it takes to go to uni
- Parents from the remote government school saw university students variously as 'intelligent', 'disciplined', 'focused', and 'motivated'. Of TAFE students, one parent was 'not sure', and another noted that TAFE is for 'mature aged students—it's for everyone'.

6.3.2.2 Teachers

- Teachers at the remote government school said:
  - [TAFE is for] students who can't or won't work hard ... [who] take the easy option

- University students, in contrast were seen as:
  - well controlled
  - polite
  - organised
  - academic, but not necessarily more mature or street-wise
- A teacher from the rural government school argued:
  - [TAFE students] as a general rule come from the middle to bottom end of the range of academic ability, but come from the top range of ability for practical skills. At university, the kids that are academic are those than can reason, analyse and synthesise
- A teacher at the rural independent school said:
  - TAFEs cater for a broader range of people than uni so [are] very practical, artistic but certainly not academic

6.3.3 Amount of effort

There was a wide range of views on how easy it is to access University and TAFE. Both teachers and parents were quick to point out that ease of access was related to the course for which students were applying. Typically, both TAFE and universities were seen as relatively easy to access by parents and teachers. There was far less sense, as a consequence, of these institutions being felt as remote and privileged among the parents who were interviewed for this study, compared with the students.

6.3.3.1 Parents

- Parents with children at the city government school said:
  - [university access was] fairly difficult
  - [TAFE was] easier [than university] but I'm not sure
  - depends on what course

One parent noted that it was possible to 'work your way up' through TAFE for admission to university. Another parent said that they did not know how easy it was to access TAFE or university.

- One parent with a child at the city Catholic school said for both TAFE and university that it depended on the type of course.
- A parent with a child at the rural independent school said of university:
  - fairly difficult ... They don't always get into their first choice so they have to spend 12 months trying to upgrade their scores

6.3.3.2 Teachers

- A teacher from a remote government school said:
  - TAFE is fairly easy, but some courses are not, for example, vet[erinary] nursing.
- A teacher from the city Catholic school said that access to university and TAFE was 'fairly easy'.
- A teacher from the rural government school observed:
  - [for some students it is difficult because] some parents put a lot of pressure on their kids that don't have the ability but who see it as a rise in the social class of their child, or as a way out of [the town], or a better job than they had themselves
- A teacher from the rural independent school said:
  - I think it is getting easier to get into university at the moment.

6.4 Students' plans

Parents and teachers did not offer a wide range of responses to this issue. Most commented upon the difficulties that young people have in planning for an unpredictable future. Parents and teachers both tended to describe theories of career development or to present scenarios about the world of work, relating their own experiences. Where comment was made, it tended to focus upon the vagueness of many students' plans.

6.4.1 Parents

- For the group of parents from the city Catholic school, students were expected to study and work at what they liked best. This had as an unintended outcome, from the parents' perspective, of many changes of plan being made by the students. One of these parents said that while some students' plans could not be expected to be realised, tertiary study could help. She said:
  - [study] exposes them to people, influences and disciplines enabling them to find a more realistic career or a greater range of options

6.4.2 Teachers

- Teachers from the city Catholic school said:
  - students don't tend to have plans—only [of] going to uni or TAFE—but [they] think no further than this

  - TAFE is not seen as an option unless other plans fall through. Students are not course-specific enough to think about doing a TAFE course
- Teachers from the rural independent school said:
  - kids with a background in something ... where there is a 'family theme'—they seem to have a good sense of what they want to do ... they want to stay in that sort of field
  - the Year 12s pretty well all know what they want to do, but the Year 11s don't know as much
  - I always find it is the academic kids who have a clearer idea of where they want to go

6.5 Knowledge

As with the students, discussion of knowledge about tertiary education focused on (1) how to gain access to universities and TAFE institutes, (2) what the students actually did when enrolled in their courses, and (3) the kinds of outcomes that the parents and teachers were expecting for the students.

6.5.1 Access

Schools were seen as the locus for information about gaining access to university and, less commonly, TAFE. Parents did not know about enrolment procedures but they were confident that schools had this information. Indeed, the parents seemed content to let the schools handle the detail of these administrative procedures.

6.5.1.1 Parents

- Parents with children at the remote government school, when discussing how well they understand the procedures for enrolment, said:
  - wouldn't have a clue but I'm hoping my daughter will tell me
  - I'm sure the teachers will organise me
  - by the time I familiarise myself with the TER score it will all get thrown out
  - you know people who have had kids go to uni, so you just go and see them
- On how well their children know the procedures the parents said:
  - I know they know about the scoring and things like that
  - the teachers are pretty good at guiding them along

- The parents from the rural government school who were interviewed did not know what administrative procedures were to be followed for admission to either TAFE or university. They said, however, that they were confident that the school and the students did know this information.
- At the rural independent school, the parents were confident that the school would provide the information for access to university. For TAFE one of these parents said:
  - rock up there when they say the courses are starting and pay and you get in—lots of TAFEs have rolling entry and exit

6.5.1.2 Teachers

- A teacher from the remote government school said:
  - students have no idea of procedures. They are spoon-fed

These teachers argued that the need to spoon-feed students should be seen as a failure of the school. The school was seen not to have an adequate careers education program in place. Additionally, teachers thought that the parents tended to be apathetic. Less than a quarter of invited parents, for example, attended a careers night held in 1999.

- A teacher at the rural government school said:
  - students are spoon-fed for uni applications but [they] need to ask about TAFE
- A teacher at the rural independent school was more confident saying:
  - the school has careers advisers to describe their options

6.5.2 Process

There was little discussion of the process that parents and teachers thought students go through in the day-to-day business of studying either at TAFE or university. Nor was there much discussion of what they perceived students as thinking they would be doing each day at a tertiary education institution. One of the difficulties that the interviewers faced in dealing with this topic was that the answers that could be given seemed to be so obvious—so taken for granted—that to give them was demeaning for the interviewees.

One teacher expressed concern that the students would find it hard to take responsibility for their own work out of the school environment. Another said:

- I think it has changed since we went to uni ... it was more a social thing as well as learning. Now, I don't see it as much fun at all and the kids they come back and tell you they are very concentrated on their academic studies

6.5.3 Outcomes

The expected outcomes ranged widely. Some parents and teachers saw the main outcomes of tertiary education in terms of the labour market. Others referred to more humanistic outcomes such as, enrichment by knowledge or experience. Upward social mobility was also noted as a possible outcome by one parent.

6.5.3.1 Parents

- Parents with children at a remote government school said that they expected the outcomes of tertiary education to be:
  - qualifications
  - a happy well adjusted person would be a bonus, [laughter] but a qualification ...
- Parents with children at the city government school said:
  - learn what he needs to know so he can move on into a career, his life activity
  - he would get a notion of thinking in a logical way and [of] the world being a helluva lot bigger than the world he lives in. So, nothing to do with his job, or his future, just the notion that he is part of something that is far more interesting than he's ever going to be, and far more interesting than the limited world he has grown up in
  - a passport into the middle class
  - a time to develop their thoughts. To kick up their heels. To be ridiculous. Life does get boring and mundane. A time of pure enjoyment
- A parent with a child at the rural government school said:
  - a better position in the labour market
- Parents with children at the rural independent school said:
  - end up in a better job than we are in
  - she will have her own career. She must have something she can fall back on

6.5.3.2 Teachers

- Teachers from the remote government school said:
  - [the students] will get a well-needed opportunity to think, experiment, develop ideas
  - have space to think openly
  - the piece of paper is not important. Instead, opening their eyes to the world is critical

  - just leaving the town will broaden their minds
  - hope it sets them up for whatever field they choose
- A teacher from the rural independent school, when discussing likely university outcomes, said:
  - you can always end up getting a job, but you can't have too much confidence in the job you end up with

6.6 Other views

One of the issues that arose in the rural and remote locations was the additional burden that was placed on families whose children went to the city to study. As one rural parent noted, when their child chooses a course of study that leads to a qualification for which there is no work in the town, they are in fact declaring they are moving out of the district and away from their family and friends. Many of the students also expressed concern about moving away from home into the city. One parent from a country town, however, said:

- one of the reasons we chose to live in a country town was that it was safe. It was a better place to bring up children. The education system here is good. There are plenty of opportunities for kids ... [but] we've always accepted that our children couldn't settle here

6.7 Overview of Chapter 6

This chapter described the range of perceptions, attitudes, images, plans and, knowledge of tertiary education held by the main advisers of students—their parents and teachers.

The **perceptions** parents and teachers had of TAFE and university were hard to identify during the interviews. Consequently, their perceptions had to be inferred from statements which did not always relate directly to this issue. What was said, suggested that their perceptions of TAFE and universities were wide ranging. Parents seemed to find it easier to talk about universities than TAFE. The **attitudes** towards TAFE and university held by parents and teachers ranged from the positive to the negative.

The **images** of universities and TAFE institutes were examined along four dimensions:

- Sex type: TAFE institutes and universities were sometimes seen as places where males would feel more comfortable than females. Most parents and teachers focused their discussion upon courses rather than the institutions.

Consequently, on the evidence gained from the interviews for this study, sex typing of the institutions does not seem to have been an important part of the parents' or teachers' images of TAFE and universities. Images of courses may be shaped more strongly by sex types.

- Type: There was often wide-ranging and animated discussion of the types of persons who attend TAFE and university. These ranged from the positive to the derogatory—for both institutional types. Perceived student types appeared to be for both parents and teachers in this study, an important element in their images of TAFE and universities.
- Effort: TAFE and universities were generally seen as easy to access, with a minority of courses hard to access. Ease of access did not seem to shape the images that these parents and teachers had of TAFE and universities. Some parents did not know about access to either type of tertiary education institution, and others felt access to university was hard to achieve.

The **plans** of students were seen as ill formed, or vague and subject to change by some of the parents and teachers.

The **knowledge** that parents and teachers had of tertiary education was considered by examining three key dimensions:

- Access: all of the parents who were interviewed acknowledged not knowing how to access universities or TAFE, but were confident that the school had the necessary information. Teachers were familiar with university procedures, but a few were not familiar with the TAFE procedures.
- Process: Short of there being a concern with how well students would cope with the independence available to them on tertiary campuses, there was little information gathered about the day-to-day process of getting a tertiary education from either parents or teachers.
- Outcomes: The outcome expected of university and TAFE were often related to the job market, but some of the parents or teachers who were interviewed stressed intellectual and cultural enrichment as important outcomes.

There were few **other** aspects of tertiary education mentioned by parents and teachers. There was some discussion of the particular problems of rural students in accessing tertiary education.

7. Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the range of perceptions, attitudes, images, aspirations, plans, and knowledge of tertiary education held by groups of students in Years 10, 11 and 12, some parents, and teachers. It did this primarily by using a case study methodology. The main research questions for the study were:

1. What are the perceptions, attitudes, images, aspirations, plans, and knowledge of tertiary education held by Year 10, 11 and 12 students?
2. What are the perceptions, images, plans, and knowledge of tertiary education held by the parents, teachers and careers counsellors of these groups of students?

To address these questions, a theoretical framework was proposed for understanding the development of students' views of tertiary education. This theory not only provided an orientation to the research questions, but also helped define a set of key concepts needed to explore these research questions.

The theoretical framework was based upon Gottfredson's (1981) theory of the development of occupational aspirations and extended by using Naylor's (1993) work on generic interests. He proposed that those processes underlying the development of occupational preferences (and by inference occupational aspirations), also underlie the development of educational preferences and aspirations. Thus it was proposed that students' educational aspirations and preferences would be shaped by four key dimensions—sex type, prestige, field type, and ease or difficulty of access to the institutions or to courses within those institutions. The theory helped to give meaning to the concepts of 'aspirations', 'images' and 'plans'. The use of Gottfredson's theory—employing as it does John Holland's typology of interests and occupations—also permitted some tentative investigation of the relationship between the type of courses the students most preferred and the type of occupations they envisaged that they may do in the future.

A literature review was conducted for the study. Its purpose was to show what factors are implicated in attitudes to school completion, and post-school study plans, and the transition from school to work. The review showed that the two most important sources of influence on students, as reported by students, were parents and teachers. This helped to provide a rationale for the interview of parents and teachers in the case studies. As well, a number of studies that were reviewed had findings consistent with information collected during the case study interviews. This helped add plausibility to the study.

Some of the important results found in the literature and also evidenced during the interviews included the following:

- *University is the preferred destination of students in Australia compared with TAFE.* This was reported by many students during the interviews. It was also said by a number of the parents.
- *The media seems to provide some role models of university life but it does not provide any for TAFE* . When the media was mentioned by students during the interview, it concerned life on university campuses (as depicted in movies from the USA). Students did not discuss TAFE and its representation in the media.
- *Tertiary education is primarily perceived by students to be about getting jobs or an entree into the world of work.* Many students who were interviewed also saw university and TAFE mainly in terms of the access to the world of work that these institutions offered.
- *Many students intending tertiary education are seeking a professional job.* While this is not discussed in detail in this report, many of the students who were interviewed were seeking professional or para-professional jobs.
- *Rural and remote communities have particular problems accessing tertiary education.* Distance from home and the cost of accommodation were major concerns of some of the rural-based students who were interviewed. These issues were not raised by city-based parents or students.
- *Informal grapevines—especially family and friends—are important in finding out about tertiary education.* Both parents and students during the interviews referred to these informal grapevines as sources of information about tertiary education.

Complementing the information taken from the literature review was the analysis of the *LSAY* data. This helped to show that the influences identified in the literature review are, indeed, important. (For example, it showed that university remains the preferred tertiary education option for school students.) The *LSAY* data also suggested that how happy a student feels at school is an important predictor of educational aspirations. This in turn suggested that this study's focus on school advisers was justified. Together with the literature review, the *LSAY* data also (1) provided a context for the case studies, (2) helped to identify which types of schools to approach, and (3) helped to weight the amount of time spent on various topics during the interviews.

The case studies were expected to provide the data to help answer the research questions. They were designed to provide in-depth accounts of the range of views held about various aspects of tertiary education. Year 10, 11 and 12 students, parents with children at the case study schools and teachers at these schools were interviewed. The strength of the case study approach is that it provides the researchers with an opportunity to seek clarification of

issues, pursue them in depth and follow up on unexpected responses from the participants. A weakness of a case study approach is that it does not admit of statistical inference to a broader population. Recognising this limitation, the case studies aimed to illustrate the range of views that were described by the interviewees. There was little focus on the frequency of responses.

So, what are the answers to the main research questions that the case study data provided?

First, there was very little evidence of a systematic variation between the students, parents and teachers according to geographic location or school type, or, for the students, Year level. This may in part be due to the wide variation seen within the schools. It should be noted that some rural students and parents were concerned about the cost and distance from home of a move to a city campus.

Secondly the perceptions and images that students and parents have of TAFE institutes and of universities seem be mainly shaped not by the amenities, courses or locations of the institutions, but by their perceptions and images of the students (and to a lesser extent the teachers) at these different institutions. People not things or processes are the important features in the tertiary education landscape. More specifically, the research found the following:

- The **perceptions** students, parents and teachers had of TAFE and university were wide ranging, and sometimes contradictory. So wide ranging were these perceptions, it is not easy to summarise them. A sample of perceptions gives a flavour: universities were variously seen as old, somewhat remote, a little frightening (full of sign posts), steeped in tradition; and TAFE was seen variously as like a small university, a big school, for older people, and easy going.
- The **attitudes** towards both TAFE and university held by students, parents and teachers ranged from the positive to the negative. Many students had a positive attitude to university, but they then expressed concerns about likely cost and poor employment prospects even with a university qualification. TAFE was less often seen in a positive way by the students, although some were very positive about its 'hands-on' approach to learning.
- The **images** of universities and TAFE institutes were examined along four dimensions:

On the evidence from this study, **sex typing** of the institutions does not seem to have formed an important part of the images of the institutions. There was some evidence that suggested the images of courses may be shaped by sex typing. TAFE institutes and universities were sometimes seen

as places where males would feel more comfortable than females. There was some evidence that sex typing of courses was stronger in TAFE institutes than in universities.

There was little evidence that **prestige,** as indexed by entrance scores for courses, shaped the images of TAFE and universities.

There was often wide-ranging and animated discussion of the **types of persons** who attended TAFE and university by all participants in the study. The animation evidenced by these discussions suggested that this dimension was something people knew enough of to comment on at length, and to argue about. This in turn suggests that images of the type of people who study (and teach) at tertiary educational institutions are important. The types of persons identified by students, parents and teachers ranged from the positive to the derogatory—for both institutional types. On the positive side, TAFE students were seen as dedicated to increasing their skills, and university students were variously seen as dedicated, ambitious, clever and hard working. On the negative side, TAFE students were seen as lazy, low in social status, unkempt and of dubious character. University students were seen as rebels, socially privileged, wealthy, and bohemian.

Ease of access did seem to colour the images that students had of TAFE. It was seen in a less positive light than universities because of this easier access. In contrast, ease of access did not seem to shape the images that the parents and teachers had of TAFE and universities.

- The **aspirations** of students were varied both in content and in clarity. Some students did not know what they wanted to do, and others had a highly focused aspiration with a pathway to achieving it mapped out. Closely related to these aspirations were the **plans** of students. These were examined by asking if the job that the students most liked was also the job they expected to have in the future. All students, who could nominate a future occupation, expected to have the job they most liked. Plans did not seem to include, at this stage, strategies for a compromise. For parents and teachers, the plans of students were seen as ill formed, or vague and subject to change.
- The **knowledge** that students had of tertiary education was considered by examining access procedures, the day-to-day life of a student on campus, and the outcomes of completing a course. Parents and students rarely knew about entrance procedures to either TAFE or university. Equally, they were rarely concerned about this, relying on the school to provide the information when needed. There were low levels of understanding, outside of the most general observations, about what was done on a day-to-day basis at either a university or a TAFE by the students. Parents and teachers did not provide much information on this topic. This suggests that the day-

to-day life of a student on campus is not important in shaping attitudes, perceptions and images of tertiary educational institutions. For students and parents, the outcomes expected of university and TAFE were qualifications, jobs, knowledge and skills. Some of the parents who were interviewed also referred to the intellectual and cultural enrichment that students should experience as contributing to important outcomes.

- **Other** aspects of tertiary education mentioned by students and parents were the costs to them of university. There was also concern, related to the question of costs, about the problems of rural students in accessing tertiary education. Partly related to these concerns cost, were concerns about moving away from family, friends and the district.

In summary, the perceptions, attitudes, images, aspirations, plans, and knowledge of tertiary education of the students, parents and teachers that participated in this study were often bound up with their images of the people who study or work at universities and TAFE institutes, and their understandings, images and expectations of the demands of the world of work.

Appendix A: Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth data and variables

Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (*LSAY*) is a program of research that has been conducted by ACER over more than two decades. The program is financially supported by DETYA and is based on access to schools provided by government and non-government authorities throughout Australia.

Data have been collected from several national samples of young people—from four groups born in 1961, 1965, 1970 and 1975 (referred to as the Youth in Transition project), and more recently two groups of students who were in Year 9 in 1995 and in 1998. The 1995 Year 9 cohort was first contacted at secondary school, when students completed a questionnaire, and achievement tests in mathematics and reading; annual data collections from this cohort, in 1996 by means of a mail survey, and subsequently by telephone, span the period 1995 to 1998. Below is a description of the student background variables used for this report.

Ethnic background	Refers to father's country of birth, reported here in two categories—born either in Australia or overseas in an English speaking country compared with born overseas in a non-English speaking country.
Indigenous	This is based on student's self reporting.
Father's occupation	This was coded using the 2-digit minor groups of the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations and condensed to four categories following a schema suggested by Najman and Bampton (1991). These categories have been labelled: upper, consisting of upper ranking professional and managerial occupations; upper middle, consisting of lower professional, para-professional and technicians; lower middle including tradespersons, clerks and sales workers; and lower, consisting of plant operators and labourers.
Parent's education	Based on respondents' report of mother's highest level of education attained; for respondents for whom information about mother's education was missing, father's educational attainment was used.

School achievement	Achievement quartiles derived from students' combined scores on standardised multiple choice tests in reading and mathematics.
Perception of ability	Students were asked to indicate how well they were doing in their school subjects overall, compared with others in their year level; five response categories (very well, better than average, about average, not very well, and very poorly) have been condensed to three.
Location	Based on postcode of student's home address.

Appendix B: Detailed results from the *LSAY* data

Table 16 Percentages of Year 9 students intending to complete Year 12, by student background characteristics and by gender, 1995

	Per cent			Sample size		
	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
Ethnic background						
English speaking	65.1	76.2	70.8	5013	5255	10268
Non-English speaking	73.4	82.8	78.4	1238	1333	2571
Indigenous background						
Non-Indigenous	67.0	78.1	72.8	5967	6325	12292
Indigenous	48.9	60.3	55.2	172	207	379
Fathers' occupational status						
Upper	85.2	89.8	87.5	759	763	1522
Upper middle	75.8	83.5	79.8	1194	1240	2434
Lower middle	63.2	76.2	69.9	2298	2491	4789
Lower	59.9	73.2	66.9	1152	1254	2406
Parent's education						
Higher education	80.2	89.5	85.1	1198	1335	2533
Completed sec school	69.8	80.6	74.9	1442	1269	2711
Trade / technical qual	68.6	81.1	74.5	498	433	931
Didn't complete sec school	63.9	73.5	69.4	1651	2202	3853
School type						
Government	61.1	73.4	67.3	4400	4471	8871
Catholic	74.0	83.9	79.4	1159	1318	2477
Independent	82.0	86.1	84.0	995	973	1968
School achievement						
Highest quartile	84.5	89.7	87.0	1837	1655	3492
Third quartile	73.9	82.5	78.7	1467	1815	3282
Second quartile	59.5	73.5	67.0	1568	1770	3338
Lowest quartile	47.2	62.8	54.7	1664	1506	3170
Perception of ability						
Above average	78.0	88.1	82.9	3318	3185	6503
About average	55.8	68.8	63.5	2803	3270	6073
Below average	36.8	44.8	39.1	338	204	542
Location						
Metropolitan	72.7	80.4	76.6	3658	3736	7394
Regional	61.3	76.1	69.0	1628	1677	3305
Rural and remote	55.0	70.4	62.9	1252	1331	2583
State						
Australian Capital Territory	69.0	79.5	74.9	264	324	588
New South Wales	62.8	75.6	69.2	1552	1491	3043
Victoria	70.3	79.9	75.3	1376	1431	2807
Queensland	68.8	79.0	73.9	1271	1192	2463
South Australia	73.3	81.0	77.5	792	872	1664
Western Australia	65.2	74.6	70.0	841	965	1806
Tasmania	43.9	63.2	54.0	275	296	571
Northern Territory	55.6	69.2	62.4	183	191	374

Table 17 Percentages of students in school in 1998, by educational expectations when in Year 9 in 1995, and by student background characteristics

	Intention in 1995			
	Complete Year 12	Undecided	Leave before Year 12	Total n in 1998
Gender				
Males	84.2	61.7	26.0	4593
Females	89.8	66.8	35.2	4988
Ethnic background				
English speaking	86.2	62.9	28.3	7499
Non-English speaking	92.3	72.7	41.0	1780
Indigenous background				
Non-Indigenous	87.8	65.0	30.2	8930
Indigenous	67.3	35.7	11.3	203
Fathers' occupational status				
Upper	95.1	79.4	39.2	1192
Upper middle	90.8	75.6	33.1	1874
Lower middle	86.8	63.0	26.5	3489
Lower	83.8	56.4	26.7	1705
Parent's education				
Higher education	93.3	77.5	35.8	1924
Completed sec school	86.9	64.3	27.2	2027
Trade / technical qual	87.6	70.0	29.2	711
Didn't complete sec school	87.1	60.5	31.7	2703
School type				
Government	83.9	60.8	27.0	6189
Catholic	92.5	75.6	35.1	1862
Independent	93.4	67.9	41.7	1530
School achievement				
Highest quartile	94.1	76.5	41.8	2827
Third quartile	90.6	77.2	34.3	2507
Second quartile	84.3	64.1	33.3	2324
Lowest quartile	75.8	51.5	23.8	1901
Perception of ability				
Above average	92.0	70.8	36.8	4984
About average	81.3	63.0	26.9	4127
Below average	69.6	44.0	22.5	326
Location				
Metropolitan	90.4	70.6	38.8	5246
Regional	83.7	59.2	24.2	2417
Rural	82.5	56.9	21.3	1917
State				
Australian Capital Territory	86.2	84.4	44.3	407
New South Wales	89.8	65.2	28.4	2082
Victoria	88.2	69.7	35.0	2068
Queensland	87.0	64.4	33.4	1726
South Australia	86.0	62.0	27.8	1314
Western Australia	84.3	51.9	22.6	1341
Tasmania	70.5	52.5	15.0	403
Northern Territory	72.7	49.1	44.7	240

Table 18 Percentages of Year 9 students in 1995 intending to study at university or TAFE, by background characteristics and by gender

	Post-school study intentions								
	University			TAFE			Total sample size		
	M	F	P	M	F	P	Males	Females	Persons
All students	40.9	55.8	48.5	29.8	24.2	26.9	6386	6576	12962
Ethnic background									
English speaking	32.3	53.1	40.9	31.3	25.6	28.4	4894	5106	1000
Non-English speaking	58.9	67.5	55.8	22.6	17.7	20.0	1206	1305	2511
Indigenous background									
Non-Indigenous	42.0	56.6	45.4	29.3	24.0	26.6	5822	6161	11983
Indigenous	22.5	36.8	63.5	36.3	24.5	29.8	170	203	373
Fathers' occupational status									
Upper	72.6	75.7	74.2	14.9	13.1	14.0	751	751	1502
Upper middle	54.0	66.2	60.3	23.5	18.3	20.8	1167	1205	2372
Lower middle	33.4	53.3	43.7	35.2	25.4	30.1	2239	2437	4676
Lower	31.5	47.3	39.8	33.4	30.5	31.9	1128	1214	2342
Parent's education									
Higher education	65.2	78.9	72.4	19.1	10.9	14.8	1185	1310	2495
Completed sec school	40.4	55.4	47.5	30.0	24.4	27.3	1403	1236	2639
Trade / technical qual	41.9	60.1	50.4	32.9	24.5	29.0	491	429	920
Didn't complete sec schl	35.6	50.1	44.3	34.1	28.2	30.7	1613	2153	3766
School type									
Government	33.0	49.5	41.3	33.6	28.1	30.8	4273	4346	8619
Catholic	54.0	64.3	59.6	24.6	18.9	21.5	1135	1282	2417
Independent	63.0	74.5	68.7	17.5	12.3	14.9	978	948	1926
School achievement									
Highest quartile	66.6	76.2	71.2	18.9	11.2	15.2	1798	1625	3423
Third quartile	47.8	63.5	56.5	27.1	21.3	23.9	1432	1773	3205
Second quartile	27.8	50.1	39.8	36.3	29.3	32.5	1533	1711	3244
Lowest quartile	20.3	31.8	25.8	37.7	35.2	36.5	1604	1452	3056
Perception of ability									
Above average	54.8	69.5	62.1	23.7	16.2	20.0	3252	3131	6383
About average	27.0	44.1	36.3	36.5	31.5	33.8	2720	3154	5874
Below average	18.9	24.1	21.0	35.6	32.5	34.4	324	198	522
Location									
Metropolitan	51.4	59.5	55.9	25.1	21.9	23.5	3567	3627	7194
Regional	29.5	54.7	42.8	33.6	24.7	29.0	1584	1636	3220
Rural and remote	26.2	47.0	38.7	37.4	29.9	33.5	1220	1295	2515
State									
ACT	55.2	68.7	62.7	23.1	15.8	19.0	258	311	569
New South Wales	40.2	53.8	47.0	33.7	26.8	30.2	1519	1456	2975
Victoria	46.2	62.3	54.6	26.1	18.9	22.4	1357	1384	2741
Queensland	36.5	51.9	44.1	29.7	23.6	26.7	1236	1154	2390
South Australia	43.4	58.0	51.5	25.4	24.6	25.0	756	843	1599
Western Australia	41.0	54.4	47.9	28.9	29.0	28.9	822	950	1772
Tasmania	20.8	37.2	29.5	31.8	31.6	31.7	261	288	549
Northern Territory	35.6	51.8	43.8	26.3	15.9	21.1	177	190	367

Appendix C: Data collection instruments

This appendix contains each of the instruments that were used to gather the data. They include:

- Parent interview schedule;
- Teacher interview schedule;
- Student interview schedule; and
- Student questionnaire.

Parent interview schedule

Plans

Q 1 When does your child plan to leave school?

Q 2 What does your child intend to do immediately after leaving school?

Q 3 What job does your child intend to do after completing their education or training?

Q 4 Is this what your child would really like to do?

Perceptions

Q 5 Think about TAFE in general? What do you see when you think of a 'TAFE' institute or college? Do you think this is what your child also sees when they think about TAFE in general?

Q 6 Think about university in general? What do you see when you think of 'university'? Do you think this is what your child also sees when they think about university in general?

Knowledge

Q 7 Do you know about the administrative procedures that need to be followed in order to get into university/TAFE?

Q 8 Do you think that your child knows about the administrative procedures that need to be followed in order to get into university/TAFE?

Q 9 What do you expect your child to do and achieve at university/TAFE?

Q 10 What do you expect will be employment outcomes for your child of attending a university or TAFE?

Attitudes to university and TAFE

Q 11 Do you think going to a university is, in general, a good thing to do? Why?

General images of university and TAFE

Q 12 In general, do you think that a university is a place where both males and females feel comfortable? If no, explain.

Q 13 In general, do you think that a TAFE college is a place where both males and females feel comfortable? If no, explain.

Q 14 Generally, how hard is it to gain entry to university/TAFE?

Q 15 Describe the type of people that you think go to university? If you think that there are different types, talk about them.

Q 16 Describe the type of people that you think go to a TAFE institute or college? If you think that there are different types, talk about them.

Teacher and Careers Teachers interview schedule

Plans

Q 1 About what proportion of your students have concrete post-school plans?

Perceptions

Q 2 Think about TAFE in general? What do you see when you think of a 'TAFE' institute or college? Do you think this is what your students also see when they think about TAFE in general?

Q 3 Think about university in general? What do you see when you think of 'university'? Do you think this is what your students also see when they think about university in general?

Knowledge

Q 4 Do you think that your students know about the administrative procedures that need to be followed in order to get into university/TAFE?

Q 5 What do you expect your students to do and achieve at university/TAFE?

Q 6 What do you expect will be employment outcomes for your students of attending a university or TAFE?

Attitudes to university and TAFE

Q 7 Do you think going to a university is, in general, a good thing to do? Why?

Q 8 Do you think going to a TAFE is, in general, a good thing to do? Why?

General images of university and TAFE

Q 9 In general, do you think that a university is a place where both males and females feel comfortable? If no, explain.

Q 10 In general, do you think that a TAFE college is a place where both males and females feel comfortable? If no, explain.

Q 11 Generally, how hard is it going to be for your students to gain entry to TAFE/university?

Q 12 Describe the type of people that you think go to university? If you think that there are different types, talk about them.

Q 13 Describe the type of people that you think go to a TAFE institute or college? If you think that there are different types, talk about them.

Student interview schedule

Plans

Q 1 When do you plan to leave school?

Q 2 What do you intend to do immediately after leaving school?

Q 3 What job do you intend to do after completing your education or training?

Q 4 Is this what you would really like to do or what you expect to do?

Perceptions

Q 5 Think about TAFE in general? What do you see when you think of a 'TAFE' institute or college?

Q 6 Think about university in general? What do you see when you think of 'university'?

Knowledge

Q 7 What do you need to do in order to get into university/TAFE?

Q 8 What do you expect to do and achieve at university/TAFE?

Q 9 What do you expect will be employment outcomes for you?

Attitudes to university and TAFE

Q 10 Do you think going to a university is, in general, a good thing to do? Why?

General images of university and TAFE

Q 11 In general, do you think that a university is a place where both males and females feel comfortable? If no, explain.

Q 12 In general, do you think that a TAFE college is a place where both males and females feel comfortable? If no, explain.

Q 13 Generally, how hard is it to gain entry to university/TAFE?

Q 14 Describe the type of people that you think go to university? If you think that there are different types, talk about them.

Q 15 Describe the type of people that you think go to a TAFE institute or college? If you think that there are different types, talk about them.

Student Questionnaire: Perceptions of TAFE and University

This questionnaire asks you about you and some of your plans for the future. It also asks about what job your parents have. This questionnaire is part of a study of students' plans regarding tertiary education which the Commonwealth Government has contracted the Australian Council for Educational Research to do. The information you give us will be used to help us understand young people's views of their educational and career options after leaving school.

- Do not put your name on this questionnaire.
- It is not a test, so there are no right or wrong answers.
- If you do not want to answer a question just leave it blank. If you have any questions about the questionnaire, please ask me.

About you

Q 1 Are you male ☐ or female ☐ ?

Q 2 Are you in Year 10 ☐ Year 11 ☐ or Year 12 ☐ ?

Q 3 How much ability do you think you have in each of these areas?

Circle a number where you best fit.

	Little ability			Much ability
Working with your hands	1	2	3	4
Doing mathematics	1	2	3	4
Doing artistic things	1	2	3	4
Helping others	1	2	3	4
Doing clerical work	1	2	3	4
Managing and influencing people	1	2	3	4

Q 4 How much do you like to do the following activities?

You might do these things at home, school, work, or in the community.
Circle a number where you best fit.

	Not like			Like very much
Working with your hands	1	2	3	4
Doing mathematics	1	2	3	4
Doing artistic things	1	2	3	4
Helping others	1	2	3	4
Doing clerical work	1	2	3	4
Managing and influencing people	1	2	3	4

About your family

Q 5 What is the main or most recent job of your father (or male guardian)?

_____

Q 6 What is the main or most recent job of your mother (or female guardian)?

_____

About your future

Q 7 When you think about your future, what jobs do you imagine you might do?

Write the name of the job (e.g. primary school teacher, truck driver, dance instructor, accountant). If you are planning to join one of the armed forces, write down the job you would like to do when you join up.

_____

Q 8 When you think about TAFE, university or other studies after you leave school, what courses do you imagine you might do?

If you do not know, just say so. List up to three.

I. _____

II. _____

III. _____

Q 9 Name the institution where you would most like to study these courses.

If you do not know, just say so.

Course name _____

Institution _____

About your most preferred course

Q 10 What is your one *most* preferred course?

Name the institution too.

_____

If you do not have a preferred course or do not know, just say so and go to Q15

_____

Q 11 Thinking about your most preferred course, what is the proportion of males and females enrolled in it? Circle one number.

Nearly all males	Mostly males	About half males & half female	Mostly female	Nearly all females	Don't know
1	2	3	4	5	0

Q 12 What is the 'cut-off' (TER) score for the course you would most like to enter?

If you do not know exactly, have a guess, or if you do not have any idea, just say you do not know. If there is no cut-off score for the course, just say so.

_____

Q 13 Describe briefly, the type of people that you think are enrolled in this course.

_____

_____

Q 14 How much effort will <u>you</u> need to make in order to get into this course? Circle one number.

Not much	Some	Quite a lot	A lot	Don't know
1	2	3	4	0

About your least preferred course

Q 15 Think of a course in which you would least like to enrol. What is this course? (Name the institution too, if you know it.)

_____

Q 16 Thinking about this course, what is the proportion of males and females enrolled? Circle one number.

Nearly all males	Mostly males	About half males & half female	Mostly female	Nearly all females	Don't know
1	2	3	4	5	0

Q 17 What is the 'cut-off' (TER) score for the course you would least like to enter?

If you do not know exactly have a guess, or if you do not have any idea, just say you do not know. If there is no cut-off score for the course, just say so.

_____

Q 18 Describe briefly, the type of people that you think are enrolled in this course.

_____

_____

Q19 How much effort would <u>you</u> need to make in order to get into this course? Circle one number.

Not much	Some	Quite a lot	A lot	Don't know
1	2	3	4	0

Finished! Thank you!

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