

Chapter 7

Retrospect and Prospect

This chapter of the report attempts to identify some of the trends and developments that were apparent in the 1999 school year. Many of the trends have already been identified in previous reports and, in these cases, it is only necessary to examine whether 1999 followed the expected pattern.

Enrolments

In general terms, the enrolment patterns discerned in the 1998 report were again evident in 1999. There were 3.227 million students enrolled in Australia's schools in 1999 and this represented an increase of 0.87 per cent on the number enrolled in 1998. It is anticipated that total enrolments will continue to increase in the immediate future, although the rate of increase is expected to gradually decline.

One of the factors determining the total enrolments in schools is the extent to which students are retained in post-compulsory education. Some evidence on this issue is provided by apparent retention rates, which rose sharply in the early years of the decade (from 64.0 per cent in 1990 to 77.1 per cent in 1992). The apparent retention rate to year 12 then fell to a low of 71.3 per cent in 1996 and was 72.3 per cent in 1999. The 1999 figure exceeded the 71.6 per cent recorded in 1998 and confirmed the trend of a slowly increasing apparent retention rate.

A similar trend is evident from an examination of age participation rates. For the 15–19-year-old age group, participation rates in schooling have risen steadily from 44.2 per cent in 1990 to 50.0 per cent in 1999. Again, the 1999 figure was an increase on the 49.7 per cent achieved in 1998 and is further evidence of an overall increase in the proportion of students staying on at school.

The trend towards increased enrolments in non-government schools, which was discussed in the 1998 report, continued in 1999. In 1990, 72.1 per cent of all students were enrolled in government schools. However, the government sector's share of enrolments has fallen steadily and, in 1999, was 69.7 per cent. During the same period the Catholic sector

maintained a relatively constant share of enrolments (19.7 per cent in 1999), while the proportion enrolled in the independent sector increased sharply from 8.0 per cent in 1990, to 10.6 per cent, in 1999.

A further manifestation of this trend is apparent in the data relating to the numbers of schools. Since 1990, the number of government schools has fallen by 520, while the number of non-government schools has risen by 103. As a result, 27.3 per cent of all schools in 1999 were non-government, compared to 25.2 per cent in 1990.

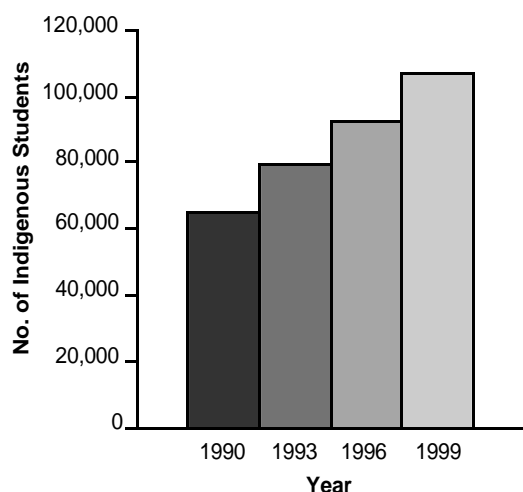
A further significant trend in the enrolment patterns of Australian schools is the increase in the number of Indigenous students. Table 7.1 shows that, between 1990 and 1999, there has been an increase of 64.7 per cent in the total number of Indigenous students at school. During the same period, the increase in school enrolments for all students was 6.1 per cent. As a result, the proportion of Indigenous students in our schools has risen from 2.1 per cent in 1990 to 3.3 per cent in 1999. Among the reasons for this increase has been a steady growth in the levels of access and participation and retention rates for Indigenous students.

Table 7.1 Enrolment increases, Indigenous students and all students, Australia, all schools, 1990–99

	<i>Enrolments</i>			
	<i>Indigenous primary</i>	<i>Indigenous secondary</i>	<i>Indigenous total</i>	<i>All students total</i>
1990	43,528	21,207	64,735	3,041,657
1993	55,155	24,307	79,462	3,098,375
1996	64,857	27,810	92,667	3,143,015
1999	73,208	33,240	106,628	3,226,650
% Increase 1990–99	68.2	56.7	64.7	6.1

Source: ABS Cat No. 4221.0, *Schools Australia*, 1999 and earlier related publications

Figure 7.1 Increased enrolments of Indigenous students, all Australian schools, 1990–99



Source: ABS Cat No. 4221.0, *Schools Australia*, 1999 and earlier related publications

Teacher staffing

During 1999, there was considerable concern expressed in a number of quarters regarding the supply of trained teachers for Australian schools. However, a taskforce set up to monitor this issue found that there was no significant problem concerning the overall number of teachers likely to be available in the next few years. The taskforce identified a teacher supply problem in some particular subject areas, as well as noting a continuing difficulty in finding adequate staffing for schools in some isolated areas. Most jurisdictions have developed strategies to address

these problems and some are outlined in the relevant chapter of this report.

In 1999, the number of students enrolled in initial teacher education courses increased to 45,586. This represents an increase of 1,533 (or 3.5 per cent) on the previous year. However, the number of students graduating from initial teacher education programs rose only marginally by 1.5 per cent.

Overall student–teacher ratios fell in every State between 1998 and 1999. The largest change was in Queensland, where the ratio for all schools fell from 15.5 in 1998 to 14.8 in 1999. For Australia as a whole, the fall was from 15.3 in 1998 to 15.0 in 1999. The trend, identified last year, towards improved staffing levels in primary classes was confirmed in 1999. The primary ratio between 1998 and 1999 fell from 17.9 to 17.3, compared to 12.7 to 12.6 in the secondary ratio.

The student–teacher ratio differences between the sectors that were described in the 1998 report were again evident in 1999. However, the gap between the independent schools on the one hand, and government and Catholic schools on the other, closed slightly. While the overall ratio for independent schools remained at 13.1, the ratio in Catholic schools fell from 16.6 to 16.3 and in government schools from 15.3 to 14.9.

The gender composition of the Australian teaching service continued to show an increase in the proportion of female teachers. In 1999, 78.0 per cent of primary and 54.1 per cent of secondary teachers were female. This compares with 77.5 per cent and 53.5 per cent respectively for 1998.

Destinations of school leavers

Throughout the 1990s there were some significant changes to the destinations of students leaving year 12 in Australian schools. While the number entering employment in the year following completion of year 12 remained relatively stable, the number remaining unemployed fell from 11 per cent in 1992 to 5 per cent in 1999, as shown in Figure 7.2.

During the same period there was an overall increase in the proportion of year 12 leavers entering higher education, from a low of 34 per cent in 1993, to the current high of 47 per cent in 1999. The most popular bachelor level courses for 1999 year 12 leavers were Arts (27.8 per cent), Business (23.3 per cent) and Science (21.4 per cent).

Figure 7.2 School leavers unemployed in year following year 12, Australia, 1992–99

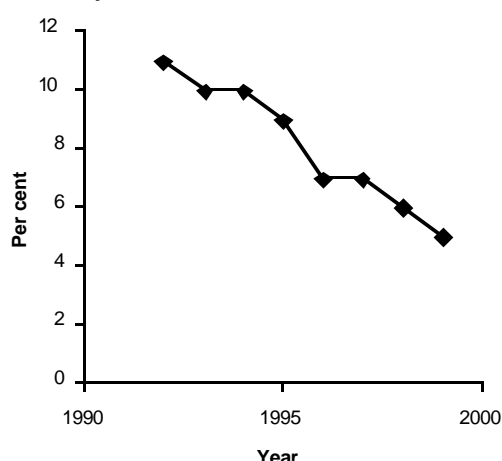
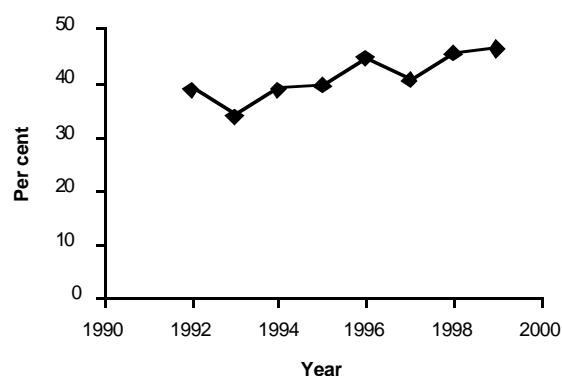


Figure 7.3 School leavers entering higher education in year following year 12, Australia, 1992–99



Curriculum development

A new trend towards major curriculum development appeared to be emerging in 1999. During the early and mid-1990s, national collaboration in curriculum resulted in the publication of a curriculum statement and profile of learning outcomes in each of the eight key learning areas. In 1993, MCEETYA decided that the extent of uptake of these curriculum initiatives should be decided by each State. Although they were not nationally adopted, the statements have, since that time, been the major guide to curriculum development in most jurisdictions.

In 1999, however, a number of authorities began reviewing, or signalled their intention to review, the school curriculum. In some cases the review built directly on the nationally prepared statements, but in others there appeared to be a completely fresh approach. However, within the various separate processes that were underway, there seemed

to be a common theme of seeking to identify a set of 'essential elements'. For example, development began on the South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework that will encompass curriculum provision for all learners from birth to year 12 for the first time in that State.

The SACSA Framework looks towards the future needs of learners by introducing the Essential Learnings as fundamental determinants of the curriculum. The Essential Learnings are cross-curriculum values, dispositions, skills and understandings that will interact with the Learning Areas in the structure and detail of both the Curriculum Scope and the Curriculum Standards components of the Framework.

In Queensland, work began on The New Basics Project, which is an attempt to get back to the basics of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, with a clear focus on improving student outcomes through increasing the intellectual rigour of student work. The New Basics are clusters, families or groups of practices that are essential for survival in the worlds that students have to deal with.

Significant curriculum development was also in progress in Western Australia, with the progressive introduction of the Curriculum Framework for all schools, and Tasmania began preparations for a major period of curriculum consultation and review scheduled to begin in 2000.

Schooling for students with disabilities

Over the last several years there has been a significant change in the approach to the education of students with disabilities. The most tangible manifestation of this change has been the increasing prevalence of the practice of including students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms. As a result, the number of special schools in Australia fell from 444 in 1990 to 312 in 1999.

The increase in the number of students with disabilities seeking enrolment in mainstream schools was accompanied by an overall increase in the total number of students identified as having a disability. This twofold increase has seen a significant growth in the provision of special education. For example, the number of students with disabilities in the Victorian Catholic school system has increased by 166 per cent, from 1,087 in 1990 to 2,889 in 1999.

The expansion of provision for students with disabilities and the growth in inclusion of these students in mainstream classes has resulted in:

- considerable growth in the number of early special education programs for students at preschool level
- the increasing use of adaptive technology
- the establishment of local support services providing assistance to classroom teachers
- the provision of professional development programs for classroom teachers
- extensive expenditure on modification to sites so they are accessible to students with physical disabilities
- increasing awareness in schools regarding the special needs of students with disabilities and of the provisions of disability discrimination legislation
- accreditation of special courses for students with disabilities, including some in the area of vocational education
- the increasing use of individual education plans
- an increasing incidence of integration of therapy and other services provided by education and other agencies
- increases in the number of staff employed in the provision of teaching and support services
- a number of jurisdictions reviewing the funding models being used to provide for students with disabilities.

Education of boys

Gender equity programs in schools have increasingly addressed a number of issues related to the education of boys. This has been the result of an increasing number of research papers drawing attention to a perceived imbalance between the outcomes being achieved by boys

and girls. Recent attention to literacy learning in the early years of schooling has revealed that many more boys are in the 'at risk' category and in need of intervention and support. At the same time, results at senior secondary level indicate that girls are outperforming boys in the majority of areas.

These observations have given rise to initiatives such as Education Queensland's Boys, Gender and Schooling Project and to the presentation to Conference of Education Systems Chief Executive Officers (CESCEO) of the paper *Issues in the Education of Boys*, which was prepared by the CESCEO Committee on Gender Equity. Many jurisdictions reported that they had given special attention to the education of boys during 1999.

Vocational education and training in Schools

The trend towards increased participation in VET that was identified in last year's report was evident again in 1999. Total enrolments in VET in Schools programs rose by more than 16 per cent, from 117,406 in 1998, to 136,710 in 1999. The rise was consistent across all States and Territories and across nearly all systems. The number of participating students has more than doubled since 1996 and now covers virtually all areas of industry and includes programs from AQF Level I, to AQF Level III.

The number of commencements in part-time New Apprenticeships for school students more than doubled, from 1,591 in 1998 to 3,994 in 1999. In addition, the depth to which students participated increased, with the number of annual contact hours per student increasing by more than 30 per cent, to 145 hours per year. Over 40 per cent of all students undertaking VET in Schools programs in 1999 were involved in workplace learning as part of their program. This represents a doubling of the number of students involved in workplace learning since 1997.