Higher Education
Access and Equity for
Low SES School Leavers

A case study

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Executive summary

Summary

Since its establishment, the University of South Australia has implemented a range of strategies aimed at increasing access and participation of people in the six targeted equity groups identified by the Commonwealth. Despite this, there has been little increase in the participation rates of Low SES people. The University's Special Access Scheme, or USANET, was thus developed. The scheme was designed to address the particular needs of students whose individual educational disadvantage, arising from their Low SES status, is compounded by attendance at schools with significant numbers of students from similar backgrounds. In 1998, the University expanded the scheme to widen the opportunities for students from isolated country schools. The scheme incorporates three components: outreach, access and support.

The need to investigate trends in Australian higher education institutional access and equity policies in the context of a mass higher education system, including trends in criteria for entry to higher education and the implications of these on institutional structures, as well as teaching approaches and standards, has been identified. The research project was designed to investigate the features of the USANET special access scheme and those of similar schemes in other Australian universities in order to identify the factors and structural changes that will result in maximising the access, participation, success and retention of Low SES students.

The research team undertook an analysis of available data on USANET scheme students, i.e. both the group whose entrance score had been adjusted, the USANET bonus group, and those USANET applicants who gained entry to their preferred course without the addition of bonus points, the USANET non-bonus group. In addition, a survey of all USANET students, students from USANET schools but who had not applied through USANET, and a control sample of other school leaver entrants to the University was conducted to collect more detailed information about the experiences of these students. Further qualitative information was obtained from University and secondary school staff by interview. A comparative analysis of similar programs at other universities was also undertaken.

With the targeting of schools under the USANET scheme, it appears that an increasing proportion of applicants from these schools are enrolling at the University of South Australia. In 1996 and 1998, females were more highly represented in both the USANET bonus and non-bonus groups than in the other school leaver group of students, while the reverse was true in 1997. Compared with other school leavers, the two USANET groups tend to be older, more likely to be studying full time and much more likely to be from Low SES and non-English speaking backgrounds. No USANET students to date have been Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, a reflection of the very low number of indigenous students...
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The expansion of the scheme in 1998 has seen a substantial increase in the proportion of rural and isolated USANET students.

It appears that the impact of the changes to HECS may have been greater than early findings have so far revealed. Both bonus and non-bonus USANET students were found to be more likely to be dependent on AUSTUDY, living alone or in rental accommodation and speak a language other than English at home (usually Vietnamese), indicating a greater degree of social and economic disadvantage than the control group.

Future employment prospects, immediate family members and the location of university campuses are important factors influencing decisions to enrol at university. Concerns regarding the adequacy of preparation for university, accessing computer facilities, financial difficulties encountered in studying full time and difficulties combining work and study have been expressed. Staff are approachable and university is enjoyable. The USANET groups indicate generally low levels of family support, difficulties in making friends and difficulties with family and work commitments.

Experiences of the University's student support systems are largely positive, with high levels of awareness, usage and satisfaction with the library, computer facilities and cafeteria, particularly. Low levels of awareness of and satisfaction with specialist USANET support programs are a concern, together with reported poor access to the University's student loans scheme and computer services, and concerns regarding the quality of the student loans and student employment services.

USANET students tend to be less successful but nevertheless persist in their studies at a comparatively higher rate than other groups of commencing students. This result suggests a high level of motivation amongst the USANET students. Clearly, the USANET scheme is having a positive impact and has been successful in terms of its objectives.

All three components of the USANET scheme are perceived as important and that it is, in fact, the combination of outreach, access and support which makes the scheme effective. However, there is still work to be done to improve the scheme and to improve its effectiveness as a means to enhance access to and success at university by students from Low SES backgrounds. While the addition of all isolated schools to the list of targeted schools will improve the scheme's effectiveness for isolated students, a group that overlaps substantially with Low SES students, a further expansion of the program to other urban disadvantaged schools may be warranted. The expansion of isolated schools will also exacerbate the need to address better the particular needs of rural and isolated students within the program, including special consideration of those students who study distance education subjects in Year 12.

Indicators of good practice in outreach identified in similar schemes to USANET are that, for outreach to be successful, a long term relationship between the university and schools needs to be developed. This cannot be achieved during the second half of Year 12 alone. Cultural barriers exist in some disadvantaged schools that prevent students from having equitable access to university entrance. Secondary school staff interviewed were very positive about the USANET scheme.
and indicated that it had already been successful in fostering longer term cultural change within schools and in motivating students to consider and apply for university entrance.

In order to further reduce the impact of cultural barriers, longer term contact is essential, through a series of outreach actions over the course of a secondary student's career, commencing in Year 8 and continuing to Year 12. School-based advice is critical to creating a continuity of outreach within a familiar environment. School staff should be able to provide a first port of call for information with easy referral to the program's coordinator if the need arises. School staff should also be able to provide assistance to students applying to the program, again with easy access to the program's coordinator as necessary.

Support components exist in two key areas; transition to university and ongoing support. It would appear that transition is a critical phase of concentrated risk and student support must focus on this. Ongoing support is also important for Low SES and isolated students, for whom external support mechanisms (networks, family and financial) may not exist, placing these students in a more vulnerable position in relation to both internal (university) and external pressures. Such support services need to be available and promoted to the targeted groups.

**Recommendations**

This study has identified a range of issues which require attention if the University and the sector more generally are to further enhance access, participation and success rates of students from Low SES and rural and isolated backgrounds.

**Recommendation 1**
- Outreach programs targeting Low SES school students should extend from junior secondary school levels to Year 12.

**Recommendation 2**
- Given the considerable overlap between the indicators of disadvantage for Low SES students, and for isolated students, both groups should be specifically targeted during their secondary school years to increase the access to higher education of school leavers in these two equity groups.

**Recommendation 3**
- Support for Low SES and isolated students to improve their retention and success at university needs to be designed to address the specific and different issues faced by these two groups.

**Recommendation 4**
- Distance education and open access studies undertaken by rural and isolated students, particularly those in Year 12, should be supported in a way which acknowledges the additional educational difficulties these students experience.
Recommendation 5
- Programs targeting increased access, participation and success for specified groups of students need to be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis with respect to their effectiveness in making both short term improvements and longer term changes to the equity performance indicators for these groups.

Recommendation 6
- Further research should be undertaken to assess the longer term impact of such programs on student attitudes towards higher education within the targeted schools, including application rates and course preferences.

Recommendation 7
- Given the range of programs specifically targeting Low SES school leavers, collaborative arrangements between these should be considered as a means of enhancing their overall effectiveness and impact, with DEETYA facilitating an initial meeting between relevant institutions.
1. Introduction

In 1987, the then Federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training, John Dawkins, released the Green Paper, *Higher Education: A Policy Discussion Paper*. This Paper, along with the later White Paper, *Higher Education: A Policy Statement* (1988), had a profound impact on the Australian higher education system, effectively abolishing the previous binary system of universities and colleges of advanced education (CAEs), encouraging the merger of many smaller institutions and eventually creating a system of around 37 mostly large and highly diverse universities: the Unified National System.

One of the key principles behind these major reforms to the higher education system was that universities should not be the preserve of an elite but should be accessible to all. This concept was not new to the system: the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) had established its Higher Education Equity Program and Aboriginal Participation Initiative in 1985. However, the Green and White Papers consolidated this principle into policy.

> …in the past, the benefits of higher education have been enjoyed disproportionately by the more privileged members of our community. Those benefits need to be shared more widely and more equitably in the future (Dawkins 1988, p. 6).

The Government is committed to improving access to and success in the higher education system. This goal is critical to our ability to realise the potential of all Australians and to produce the highest quality graduates (Dawkins 1988, p. 20).

The White Paper also recommended the development of 'a statement of national equity objectives [to] form the basis for further negotiations between the Commonwealth and institutions on the development and funding of their equity proposals' (Dawkins 1988, p. 55). This statement, *A Fair Chance for All*, published in February 1990, emphasised that 'higher education institutions... have a clear responsibility to provide opportunities for all sections of the Australian community' and to '[change] the balance of the student population to reflect more closely the composition of society as a whole' (DEET 1990, p. 2). In particular, *A Fair Chance for All* identified six groups of students as disadvantaged in their access to higher education, as follows:

- People from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- People from non-English speaking backgrounds;
- People with disabilities;
- People from rural and isolated areas; and
- Women in non-traditional studies.
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One of the more complex of the targeted equity groups is people from low socio-economic backgrounds (Low SES). This group overlaps significantly with the other designated equity groups. Research has shown that people from Low SES backgrounds are far less likely to complete secondary school (O'Shea 1986; Abbott-Chapman et al. 1991; NBEET 1994). They also tend to attend secondary schools with high concentrations of students from Low SES backgrounds and which have relatively low levels of progression to university.

The University of South Australia was established on the first of January 1991, as part of the Dawkins restructure of higher education and the establishment of the Unified National System. It was formed from the merger of two former colleges of advanced education (CAEs), the South Australian Institute of Technology and three campuses of the South Australian College of Advanced Education. Both these antecedent institutions had developed a strong commitment to providing high quality education for students from a wide range of backgrounds.

The University is the largest in South Australia, with an enrolment of around 24,000 full time and part time students. A wide range of professional and general higher education courses are offered by nine faculties across six campuses, five in metropolitan Adelaide and one in the provincial city of Whyalla, 460 kilometres north west of Adelaide.

In its Act of Establishment, the University is specifically charged with the responsibility for providing educational opportunities

as the University thinks appropriate to meet the needs of groups within the community that the University considers have suffered disadvantage in education,

and also

to meet the needs of Aboriginal people.

In addition, the University’s Mission, Goals and Objectives (Appendix A) consolidate this responsibility within the University’s Strategic and Corporate Plans with two of the University’s eight goals reading:

- to promote access and equity of educational participation and outcomes for groups for whom higher education opportunities have been limited and ensure that teaching and research programs identify, respond to and reflect a diverse student population

and

- to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by providing culturally appropriate education, employment and research programs.

(University of South Australia, 1996, Mission and Goals Statement, Goals 5 and 6)

One result of this commitment to the issues of equity and access has been an active engagement by the University and its staff in research, development and implementation of equity policy and planning, in order to improve both the educational opportunities and outcomes for specific equity groups within the University. A range of strategies, outlined in successive equity plans since 1991, have been implemented in order to improve access, participation and outcomes for the equity groups targeted in A Fair Chance for All.
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The University of South Australia has consistently enrolled a relatively high proportion of students from Low SES backgrounds (between 20 percent and 24 percent). The geographic spread of its campuses, (including one in the comparatively Low SES northern suburbs of Adelaide and one in the provincial industrial city of Whyalla), the range of flexible admission policies (Ramsay et al. 1996), and its focus on vocationally oriented courses have all contributed to its attractiveness to students who may not traditionally have entered higher education. Despite this, however, and a range of strategies adopted in the University’s various equity plans, there has been little increase in the participation rates of Low SES students at the University. As part of its 1995 Equity Plan therefore, and following discussions with the secondary education sector, the University developed a program called USANET specifically to enhance the higher educational opportunities for secondary students from Low SES backgrounds.

1.1 USANET scheme

It was clear to the University that the barriers to Low SES access and success at university were complex and interrelated, with many long term and cultural components. Any attempts by the University to improve outcomes for people from Low SES backgrounds had to integrate outreach, access and support programs and extend beyond simple special entry schemes which had, to date, demonstrated little effect in improving national rates of access (NBEET/HEC 1996).

The University’s Special Access Scheme, or USANET, aims to address the particular needs of students whose individual economic and educational disadvantage, arising from their Low SES status, is compounded by attendance at schools with significant numbers of students from similar backgrounds. The scheme aims to target some of the underlying causes of low university participation by these students through increasing the level of familiarity with higher education options within a number of designated ‘disadvantaged’ secondary schools. In addition, USANET can assist access to university through the addition of ‘bonus points’ to tertiary entrance scores, if required, and provides a program of support for those students who enter the University through the scheme.

The USANET scheme incorporates the elements of outreach, access and support. It was also developed with a deliberate emphasis on achieving long term systemic change rather than reliance on a short term redress of symptoms. It is coordinated by a Project Officer (funded by Higher Education Equity Plan (HEEP) funds) in consultation with an Implementation Committee, and has been integrated with general support and student services at the University. The Implementation Committee includes key staff from the Registry, faculties, the Planning Unit and Student Support Services, and is chaired by the Pro Vice Chancellor (Equity and Academic Support).

USANET focuses on a number of targeted schools across the state and is available to financially disadvantaged Year 12 students enrolled at these schools. The targeted schools were identified on the basis of the State Government’s Disadvantaged Schools Program. Students are identified as eligible for the scheme on the basis of demonstrated individual need, as endorsed by the appropriate school principal. A Health Care Card, School Card or the receipt of AUSTUDY/ABSTUDY benefits are the usual means of substantiation.
1.2 Outreach

In establishing USANET, it was felt that the Outreach aspect was critical for the University to reach its Low SES target population. Access programs alone can contribute little when eligible students are unaware of the program's existence and have no familiarity with universities.

The Outreach component of the USANET scheme consists of several elements: visits to schools, a series of 'Taste of Uni' visits to the University, and close coordination and information exchange with targeted schools. While focusing to date on Year 12, and sometimes Year 11 students, the program plans to increasingly target the lower years of secondary school, aiming to see a gradual improvement in Year 12 retention rates in these schools by increasing students' academic aspirations and motivation.

The wider University community has targeted USANET schools, many of which are in close proximity to its northern Levels campus or its regional Whyalla campus, for much of its general community service and marketing focus. The intention is to build a special and multifaceted relationship with these schools to further increase familiarity and both formal and informal links.

1.3 Access

A key principle behind the USANET Scheme is that the tertiary entrance score is in part an artefact of student circumstances, reflecting a range of social and economic factors which have little relationship to true ability or potential. The University intends that its student population include all students of ability, not simply those whose circumstances have advantaged them socially, economically and educationally.

The Access component of USANET allows for the adjustment of the tertiary entrance score of eligible students from the designated target schools by the addition of a number of 'bonus points'.

1.4 Support

Once students are admitted to the University, an extensive range of support provisions is available. While all students can access the general student support services, a number of programs have been particularly developed to meet the needs of students from the targeted USANET schools. These USANET-specific programs are available to all students from the designated USANET schools. USANET-specific programs include the following:

- Mentor Support links new students with students from a similar course, now in their second year, to provide academic and personal support. Where possible, students from the same secondary school are linked.
- The Specialised USANET Orientation Program includes introduction to other USANET students, introduction to Mentor Support, introduction to key staff (USANET, academic and support services), library orientation, a University
Skills program, Computer Skills program, Tertiary Literacy program and Information Literacy program.

- Face to Face Support is aimed at personalising students' introduction to university. USANET students are provided with the names of specific people to contact for support and other services, including key academic staff, Library staff, USANET staff, Mentors, Support Services Staff (both counselling and academic) and Computing Services Staff.

- The USANET Social Network provides an initial social support network for students from USANET targeted schools. These schools have traditionally had very small numbers of students progressing to university and many of them are also geographically distanced from the University's campuses, including a high proportion of rural schools. The Social Network therefore has an important role in encouraging students to meet and identify with other students and to discuss new experiences with students from similar backgrounds. It is hoped this network will be able to provide ongoing friendship, social activities and support beyond the scope of any university-provided program.

In the long term, it is expected that the USANET Scheme's support program will be embedded within the University's mainstream support programs. The first step in this process will be the integration of USANET student support into mainstream programs where appropriate, e.g. in some academic and counselling support services. In such cases, the USANET administration is responsible for ensuring that all USANET school students are made aware of these services, are familiar with what each service offers, and are given individual (face to face) names to contact. The position of the USANET Project Officer has also been moved from a single office reporting directly to the Pro Vice Chancellor (Equity and Academic Support) to full integration into the University's Student Support Services structure.

1.5 Aims and objectives

In June 1996, the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) provided the University with a grant to undertake a study as part of its Evaluations and Investigations Program. The priority identified by DEETYA was to investigate Low SES access and equity policy and maximisation of support for Low SES students. The University's proposed research project was to focus on evaluating the access and support provided to Low SES students through the USANET scheme since its commencement in 1996. It was also to include a comparison of the USANET scheme with special access schemes at other universities in order to identify the factors and structural changes which can result in maximising the access, participation, success and retention of Low SES students in Australian universities.

The following aims were refined from the original project proposal by the Advisory Committee.
**Aim 1**
To develop detailed profiles of all USANET students admitted to the University via the USANET Special Access Scheme, 1996 and 1997, taking into account factors such as gender, aboriginality, language spoken at home, disability, geographic location, socio-economic status and factors associated with the decision to apply and accept offers.

**Aim 2**
To compare the USANET students to other school leaver entrants at the University and to the undergraduate student cohort as a whole (e.g. assessment standards for entry to the University, Progress/Success):

A: How many students applied through the USANET scheme and how many students were admitted.

B: How these compare with applications and commencing student numbers from the target schools for the three previous years.

C: How many Low SES students were assisted by bonus points to obtain a course of higher preference than they would have otherwise achieved and how many students would not have gained entry to the University of South Australia without bonus points.

D: Success rates at the end of the first year at University of South Australia for USANET students, compared with other Low SES (excluding USANET) and compared with student intake as a whole (excluding all Low SES).

**Aim 3**
To identify the elements of the students’ backgrounds and use of university outreach and support services that contribute to their application, enrolment and success.

**Aim 4**
To identify the elements of the University’s intervention and support programs that are most effective in contributing to the success of students from Low SES backgrounds.

**Aim 5**
To investigate the components of admissions and support programs for Low SES students which are available in other Australian universities.

**Aim 6**
To make recommendations on the implications of the findings for teaching approaches and standards.
Aim 7
To assist in publicising the findings and national recommendations so that they are incorporated into mainstream activities throughout the Australian university community.

1.6 Report outline
The research team has used a review of the national context and combined original research, in the form of a quantitative analysis of student records data and a qualitative survey of selected students and staff, in this study. The information gathered has been put into context through reference to other similar special entry programs at universities across Australia.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the national context and the more recent literature in this area, commencing with the Dawkins Green and White Papers from 1987 and 1988. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of this project in detail.

Chapter 4 provides a statistical analysis of the two cohorts of USANET students: those who commenced in 1996 and those who commenced in 1997, and a review of student performance to date. An extension of this project, granted by DEETYA, has enabled us to incorporate some preliminary 1998 data to allow analysis of a further year's admissions, retention and success data. This chapter includes a detailed analysis of the equity group profiles of the USANET cohorts, with reference to comparable cohorts of other undergraduate students enrolled at the University.

Chapter 5 directs the focus of examination outward and reviews Low SES programs at other selected Australian universities. Chapter 6 discusses the results of the survey of USANET students, together with a few interviews of staff and students, and analyses these in the context of both the University of South Australia and the sector as a whole. A short sub-section focusing on the impact of the recent changes to HECS has been included.

Chapter 7 concludes the report with a summary of findings and a number of recommendations.
2. Review of national context

2.1 Introduction

The pattern of higher education participation in Australia has changed substantially over the latter half of the twentieth century, moving from an elite status in the fifties, with less than four percent of the 17 to 22 year age group participating, to a mass system with 30 percent of that age group participating by 1995 (NBEET/HEC 1996). University study was once the almost exclusive domain of men, particularly from the social and economic elite of society. Access to university in Australia was not a possibility for most women, people from non-English speaking backgrounds or those from lower socio-economic sections of society until the middle of this century. Indigenous Australians were denied citizenship until 1967.

In 1964, the Martin Committee (Commonwealth of Australia 1964, p. 8) commented on the relatively low participation rates of women and recommended that schools better prepare girls for the range of courses available at university, particularly for the science-based courses in which they were severely under-represented. Martin also noted that:

> In Australia it is widely accepted that higher education should be available to all citizens according to their inclination and capacity (1964, p. I).

The Martin Report paved the way for the creation of the binary system of higher education in Australia, comprising universities and colleges of advanced education, channelling much of the expansion of higher education in the seventies into the college sector.

The short-lived Whitlam Labor Government of the early seventies abolished university tuition fees and introduced a means-tested universal tertiary student allowance scheme (TEAS), with the aim of equalising access to higher education for students from all socio-economic backgrounds.

In 1976, the Williams Committee of Inquiry into Education and Training was asked to advise on:

> the accessibility of the provisions including re-entry and transferability and the problems of special groups (for example, the handicapped, ethnic groups, Aborigines and women).

This committee discussed the structural causes of under-representation of these groups in higher education but considered that they were more appropriately dealt with outside the sector, before students were admitted.

The Australian Labor Party was returned to government in 1983 with a commitment to enhancing participation in higher education in general, and in particular for the disadvantaged. The mid-eighties saw the introduction of a
submission-based equity projects scheme (the Higher Education Equity Program: HEEP) and the Aboriginal Participation Initiative (API).

In 1987 the Green Paper, *Higher Education: A Policy Discussion Paper*, had as a major focus, greater participation in higher education, and this was not only as an equity issue, but also as an avenue of maintaining international economic competitiveness and social cohesion. This is further emphasised in the subsequent White Paper, *Higher Education: A Policy Statement* (1988).

> The larger and more diverse is the pool from which we draw our skilled workforce, the greater is our capacity to take advantage of opportunities as they emerge. The current barriers to the participation of financially and other disadvantaged groups limit our capacity to develop the highest skilled workforce possible and are a source of economic inefficiency...

> [Higher education] promotes greater understanding of culture, often at odds with majority attitudes and, in doing so, supports the development of a more just and tolerant society (p. 7).

This conceptualisation of the inclusive imperative implies that people must not be excluded from university study on the basis of their economic situation, ethnicity, gender or physical disability, not only as a matter of social justice but also in pursuit of the optimal intellectual development of the population as a whole (i.e. the concept of ‘the clever country’).

It is in this philosophical, political and economic climate that equity in higher education became an area of concentrated inquiry and moved further forward in the higher education debate to become a significant factor in policy development.

### 2.2 Development of low SES equity policy

The White Paper established the Government’s intention to:

- develop a coordinated national approach to achieving equity objectives in higher education;
- promote equity objectives as an integral part of institutional planning, monitoring and review; and
- encourage a climate of innovation and experimentation, and the application of proven approaches towards achieving equity goals.

In order to achieve the above a statement of national equity objectives published in 1988, *A Fair Chance for All* established the Government’s framework for equity in higher education for the following five years. It shifted the focus of equity policy from submission-based, exploratory investigations to a systematic and monitored component of the planning and reporting processes of all higher education institutions within the Unified National System.

It is important to note here the beginnings of a changing approach to the issue of disadvantage in relation to higher education with a shift from a deficit model, where the student is seen to be missing the requirements for entry and success at university, towards a more institutional model, where institutions are expected to cater more effectively for a diverse community. This shift represents a key turning
point in the equity debate, moving the focus from 'correcting' deficient students through bridging courses and so forth, to recognising the diversity of students' experiences and modifying the institution to respond to their educational implications. This perspective was developed to a much greater degree more recently in the Higher Education Council policy paper, *Equality, Diversity and Excellence: Advancing the National Equity Framework* (NBEET/HEC 1996).

Since 1990, all universities in the Unified National System have been required to plan and report on equity strategies aimed at improving the participation and success of these groups as part of their annual educational profile submissions to the federal Government, based on the framework established by *A Fair Chance for All*. These annual Equity Plans incorporate targets for the five non-Indigenous equity groups, establish priorities and develop strategies for implementation. Funding in the form of the Higher Education Equity Program funds has been allocated to universities on the basis of these plans and their outcomes. From the outset, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have been addressed separately in annual Aboriginal Education Strategies, also incorporated in the annual educational profiles, and have been supported by the Aboriginal Support Funds.

*A Fair Chance for All* highlighted the importance of monitoring progress towards equity objectives and targets at both the national and institutional level and the need for system-wide performance measures to do so. It was not until the publication in 1994 of Lin Martin's report, *Equity and General Performance Indicators in Higher Education*, that this became possible on a national level. As part of the Government's Evaluations and Investigations Program, Martin developed a set of indicators to measure institutions' performance against their own and national targets. In order to allow comparisons across the system Martin also developed, for the first time, a set of system-wide definitions of the targeted equity groups. (Refer to Appendix B.)

Of particular relevance to this study is the definition of Low SES. This target group has been difficult to define within the constraints of the information on individual students available to the sector, that is, the statistical information provided by students at enrolment. Martin concluded that:

> In order to gain a precise measure of socio-economic status of higher education students, information about each student's personal and parental occupation status, income and educational background is required. However, this would necessitate the collection of a large amount of new data from students which would be intrusive and would be of doubtful reliability given the lack of detailed knowledge students often have about their family's financial situation. It would also be complicated by the age and domestic status of students - for example, mature age students living independently of their families may have quite different SES than younger students living at home with parents (1994, p. 129).

After a detailed analysis of the options available, Martin determined that without adding a number of intrusive questions on family circumstances to enrolment forms, the postcode of home address was the principal indicator available to measure socio-economic status. Modifying the previous work of Linke et al. (1988) and Jones (1993), she recommended the following definition:
Students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are defined as those whose postcodes of home location (DEET ELEMENT 320) fall within the lowest quartile of the population of a given catchment region determined by the value of the ABS Index of Education and Occupation (Martin 1994, p. 135). Martin noted, however, that the validity of this definition is reduced by the variations in socio-economic status within often relatively heterogeneous and geographically spread postcode districts. She recommended that sample sizes be restricted to no less than 200 to be statistically meaningful (Martin 1994, p. 132) since statistical validity is increasingly reduced below this level and cannot be applied reliably to smaller groups. As a result, it can be difficult to undertake statistically valid analyses of Low SES student participation or success broken down by variants such as course, other equity groups, or even by school or faculty.

Martin also noted that the definition by postcode is further complicated in rural areas where postcodes can represent very large and highly diverse areas. This diversity also confounds the definitions adopted for rural and isolated areas where a rural postcode may include a major centre such as Newcastle or Ballarat, complete with its own university. Additional care must therefore be taken when using the Low SES definition in rural or isolated areas. As a means of compensating for these difficulties, Martin has developed SES ranking by postcode using national, state and urban populations, with the appropriate ranking being chosen on the basis of the catchment area of each university. The University of South Australia, for example, has chosen to use the national ranking, on the basis of its significant role as a distance education provider.

Martin and DEET were aware of the limitations to the recommended postcode definitions, adopting them on a trial basis only. In the meantime, research has been commissioned, under the auspices of the EIP program, to devise a more reliable definition of Low SES and rural and isolated.

The four performance indicators developed by Martin to measure the progress of each equity group were critical to the translation of the strategies and targets of A Fair Chance for All into institutional policy and planning. These quantitative indicators, adopted by DEET for use by the universities in their equity planning, allow internal and external monitoring and evaluation of progress and have assisted in embedding equity into university policy and planning in general. The equity performance indicators adopted are:

- Access
- Participation
- Success
- Apparent Retention

Appendix C provides details of these performance indicators.

Martin’s definitions and performance indicators have introduced a degree of accountability to all universities, allowing easy measurement of relative progress within and across the system. The linking of HEEP funding (Higher Education Equity Program) to the equity performance of institutions has also encouraged universities to engage more seriously with their equity plans. As a result, equity has
began to advance from good intentions to clearly directed, goal orientated and performance monitored university management policy.

### 2.3 Future directions for low SES students: equity, diversity and excellence

In May 1995, the Minister for Employment, Education and Training asked the Higher Education Council (HEC) of NBEET to:

- assess the progress of the higher education system towards meeting the original equity objectives set in the White Paper of 1988 and further enunciated in *A Fair Chance for All*, and provide advice on the appropriate foundation principles, broad national policy objectives and means of monitoring achievements of the system in meeting these equity objectives over the next five years (NBEET/HEC 1996, p. iii).

This review closely examined the progress made across the system towards the objectives outlined in *A Fair Chance for All* and noted the improvements made in many areas in the report, *Equality, Diversity and Excellence: Advancing the National Equity Framework*. The review highlighted, however, the very poor progress of both the Low SES and isolated target groups, particularly in relation to access and participation rates. These groups, with considerable cross-membership, are now the most under-represented groups in the higher education system.

*Equality, Diversity and Excellence* was finalised after the 1995 Federal Election saw a change of government in Australia. While the review was tabled in parliament by the new minister, there has been no further indication of its policy status. Its findings and recommendations, however, have begun to influence recent directions in equity policy and planning at a national level.

The review highlighted several areas of potential improvement within the higher education system, with particular emphasis on institutional policy and management, which, if implemented, would minimise barriers to access and increase the effectiveness of access, outreach and support programs for all equity groups (including and specifically Low SES).

The review recommended the adoption of the following fundamental tenets and principles on which to base the further development of the Higher Education Equity Program. They emphasise the link between equity and quality, and the need for the higher education system to systematically respond to the diversity of the Australian population.

**Recommendation 2**

That the Higher Education Equity Program be based on the following four fundamental tenets:

1. The extent to which the system responds effectively to the full diversity of the Australian community, at both the institutional and national levels, is one indicator of its quality.
2. The current inequalities of representation and outcomes in higher education are the result of multiple social, educational and economic factors and are not due to different overall levels of ability or potential.

3. The educational disadvantage experienced by some sections of the community in part arises from inadequacies and limitations of the educational system and the system has an obligation to redress this impact.

4. The achievement of greater parity of representation and outcomes in higher education for the range of groups in the community is a matter of fundamental social justice and national vitality.

**Recommendation 3**

That action in the pursuit of this system objective by the Government, and by higher education institutions, be informed by the following five principles:

1. acceptance of the need to remedy and redress the symptoms and outcomes of educational inequalities and to eliminate the ongoing and more fundamental causes of educational inequalities;

2. recognition that the academic and administrative culture of the sector contributes to the patterns of access and success of different groups in society;

3. achievement of an equitable higher education system, demonstrated by equality of access and outcomes for all groups in the community;

4. responsibility for equity lies both with the governing bodies of the institution and with all staff, and accountability will be reflected through core functions and integrated with quality improvement systems in the institutions; and

5. parity of choice for designated groups across various types of institutions while recognising the diversity of the system in relation to catchment of individual universities.


The emphasis on government and institutional responsibility in Recommendation 3 reveals a further shift in equity policy from the student deficit model discussed earlier and continues the emphasis on institutional responsibility introduced by the White Paper and A Fair Chance for All.

The review provides a comprehensive national approach and clear principles which offer institutions a framework and emphases for achieving institutional and national equity targets. It recommends that institutions continue to prepare rolling triennium equity plans and that equity funding to institutions be increasingly linked to equity performance. The position of equity in higher education is thus further reinforced as a policy requirement, to be embedded in institutional management at many levels, reflecting the principal objective for equity across the system recommended by the review:

> To enhance the capacity of the higher education system to contribute to Australia's social, cultural, political and economic vitality and strength through system and institutional action, which embraces the full diversity of the community and results in a student profile that fairly reflects that diversity (1996, p. 73).
Among its many recommendations, one of particular importance to this study addresses the slow progress of the Low SES, rural and isolated groups of students, as outlined below:

Recommendation 13
That specific priority should now be given to low socio-economic status students and rural and isolated students, with action and funding focused on the following areas:

Low socio-economic status students
- awareness programs, particularly those developed in partnership with other levels and sectors of education;
- target access programs;
- programs offering financial and social support;
- programs designed to address ways in which the culture of higher education works to discourage or exclude such students; and
- programs which encourage such students to consider higher level courses.

Rural and isolated students
- awareness and access programs, including diverse entry modes and cooperative ventures with other organisations and sectors of education;
- encouragement to participate in bachelor degree and higher level programs;
- diversification of participation by field of study;
- the improvement of retention and success of students studying by external mode;
- social and financial support; and
- programs designed to address ways in which the culture of higher education works to discourage or exclude such students (pp. 80-81).

While low socio-economic status is the focus of this study, there is a strong correlation between the Low SES and rural and isolated groups of students, and many USANET targeted schools are located in rural or isolated areas. These three groups have increasingly become the equity priorities for the University of South Australia.

In the 10 years since the White Paper, equity policy in higher education has advanced from broad ideals and general strategies to a unified national approach by which universities and, to a lesser extent, the higher education system itself have been made clearly and publicly responsible for equalising access to, and participation in, higher education. The leadership and direction at government level and the requirement for universities to be accountable in this area has seen ‘a remarkable level of compliance and a significant level of equity-directed activity across the sector’ (Ramsay 1995, pp. 1-2).
The recommendations of *Equality, Diversity and Excellence* are continuing to influence equity policy and planning at the institutional level. At the national level, too, despite its ambiguous policy status, it is setting the equity agenda for continued progress with further emphasis on embedding equity in mainstream planning, policy and management, and on investigating and addressing the causes of inequity in higher education.

### 2.4 Issues and trends in outreach, access and support for low SES students

#### National trends

*Equality, Diversity and Excellence* (1996) concluded that progress in access and participation rates for students from Low SES backgrounds has been particularly slow. NBEET figures reveal a decrease in access between 1991 and 1993, and a slight increase between 1993 and 1995, resulting in a 0.1 percent increase in access for Low SES for the period, 1991 to 1995, to 15.6 percent (against a proportional representation target of 25 percent). *Equality, Diversity and Excellence* identified several other points of interest to the focus of this study:

- The 25 years and above age group of students from Low SES backgrounds experienced significantly lower access rates than those under 25. This may indicate that 'second chance' mature age programs such as the STAT, or Special Tertiary Admissions Test, for people over 21 years who do not otherwise qualify for entry, are not providing an effective entry mode for older students from Low SES backgrounds. Recent research at this University indicated that students admitted via this mode of entry were less likely than other entrants to be from Low SES backgrounds (18.3 percent of STAT entrants were Low SES compared to 26.1 percent of all commencing undergraduates in 1995) (Ramsay et al. 1996, p. 29). Statistics also reveal an even stronger bias towards higher SES students at postgraduate level, possibly reflecting both lower rates of progression to postgraduate study by Low SES students and an increase in socio-economic status following graduation, employment and residential moves.

- While the range of special access programs currently operating across Australia for Low SES students was acknowledged, the report recommended careful examination of these to improve their effectiveness and to ensure that they were catering for the maximum number of potential Low SES students.

- The complexity of Low SES issues was highlighted, particularly the compounding impact of multiple disadvantage and the ambivalent attitudes to educational success which pervade the culture of Low SES schools. The report noted that the range of subjects available and/or chosen at senior secondary school can also restrict access to university for many Low SES students, with inadequate counselling and inappropriate subject choices often limiting their ability to meet university entry requirements.

- Success rates for Low SES students are close to, but slightly below average, both nationally and at the University of South Australia. The national success
indicator for 1994 was 0.98 (NBEET/HEC 1996, p. 45). The success rate for 1994 was 0.81 at the University of South Australia, compared to the university average of 0.82, a ratio of nearly 0.99 (Ramsay et al. 1996, p. 39.).

An earlier NBEET report, *Resource Implications of the Introduction of Good Strategies in Higher Education for Disadvantaged Students* (NBEET 1994), highlighted the need for better monitoring of Low SES students and sharing of information and strategies to improve the performance of new and existing access, outreach and support programs. This project attempts to directly address these issues.

**South Australian trends**

In order to place the USANET program in context, trends in Low SES access in South Australia are of particular interest. A recent study conducted by Moodie and Swift (1996) indicates that there is a significant bias towards high SES postcode students in the South Australian higher education sector.

The following table is constructed from data reported by Moodie and Swift and obtained from South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre (SATAC) records:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High SES (25% of population)</th>
<th>Medium SES (50% of population)</th>
<th>Low SES (25% of population)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>47.7%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear that there is a disproportionately high distribution of university enrolments to the high SES quartile of the population. The 10 year comparison suggests that there may be a polarisation of places away from the medium SES group rather than a redistribution from high SES towards Low SES students. A small positive trend in the proportion of Low SES students over the last 10 years may be attributable to the development of access programs by all three South Australian universities during this period.

**2.5 The importance of cultural and structural issues for low SES access**

**Structural barriers**

The NBEET publication, *Resource Implications of the Introduction of Good Strategies in Higher Education for Disadvantaged Students* (1994), highlights the potential for structural barriers to prevent entry of Low SES students, despite the proliferation of special entry programs. Most programs for Low SES entry (including USANET) focus on the Year 12 intake. This assumes that students have reached the level of
Year 12, have enrolled in subjects required for entry into university, and complete Year 12. This is not necessarily the case. O’Shea (1986) reported that students of high SES background are almost twice as likely to reach Year 12 as their Low SES counterparts (60.6 percent of high SES compared with 33.6 percent of Low SES). While these figures are dated and Year 12 retention rates have increased significantly across the board since 1986, there would appear to be little to suggest that the differential has decreased.

An important strategy to help address these structural barriers is the extension of university outreach programs to the junior years at secondary schools, especially in those schools with low levels of progression to Year 12 and higher education. This targeted outreach should focus on providing information and motivating students to investigate higher education possibilities. To influence the aspirations of students who are unlikely to complete or even commence Year 12, outreach programs must address the whole school culture and work with students at Year 10 level or earlier.

Geographic barriers

Moodie and Swift (1996) found that geographic location appeared to have a significant impact on Low SES access to university. Table 2.2 shows the SES profile for the two University of South Australia campuses situated in the relatively Low SES northern suburbs, in comparison with all University of South Australia campuses and all South Australian universities. (The Salisbury campus of the University was closed at the end of 1996 when many of its programs were moved to the nearby Levels campus or to the City.)

Table 2.2 Undergraduate course enrolments, SES profile by locality, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Area</th>
<th>% High SES</th>
<th>% Medium SES</th>
<th>% Low SES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Levels Campus (USA)</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salisbury Campus (USA)</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total USA (All Campuses)</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Universities (SA)</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table illustrates that the campuses located in or near areas with high concentrations of people from Low SES backgrounds attracted a higher proportion of Low SES students. This suggests that geographic proximity to a university campus may encourage students from Low SES backgrounds to be more likely to consider enrolment at university. It is important to note, too, that these campuses had developed programs over time which catered to the needs of the potential students in the areas and which were less attractive to students from other geographic locations.
Cultural and social barriers
Many students from Low SES backgrounds face cultural and social barriers in their aspirations, pursuit and achievement of university study. The literature suggests that lack of awareness, peer or family disapproval, low self confidence and inadequate information about university options may prevent students even aspiring to enter university (Williams et al. 1993; Clarke, Zimmer & Main 1997). Poor study environments and resources, the perceived complexity of application and enrolment procedures and the absence of role models may discourage the Low SES student from attempting to gain entry to university. Lastly, it has been suggested that achieving entry into university may result in isolation, loss of confidence (at times the result of inadequate educational preparation) and withdrawal of emotional support from family and peer group (NBET 1994; Clarke et al. 1997). All of these factors increase the disadvantage of Low SES students.

Of particular significance to Low SES students is the impact of the combination of family, work and travel commitments on the amount of time available for study (Ramsay et al. 1996; NBET 1994). This is especially so for older students and those no longer dependent on their parents. This project will attempt to clarify these issues in order to lay the foundation for effective strategies to achieve long term improvements in the participation and success of people from Low SES backgrounds at the University of South Australia, and in the higher education sector in general.

2.6 Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS)
An important study undertaken by NBET in 1994 (Resource Implications of the Introduction of Good Strategies in Higher Education for Disadvantaged Students) confirmed that financial constraints have a major impact on limiting higher education opportunities for the socio-economically disadvantaged, particularly in the increasingly 'user pays' environment into which the system is moving. While the introduction of HECS in 1989 does not appear to have had a negative influence on the participation of Low SES students, neither has there been any major improvement in participation levels since its introduction. A study undertaken by the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and the Higher Education Council in 1992 reported that HECS did not appear to rate as a major concern in general but that it was perceived by certain groups as a potentially negative influence on their intention to undertake higher education study. In particular, Low SES Year 12 students from rural areas and from single parent families, and single parents or adults from families with dependents, indicated that HECS was likely to discourage their enrolment in higher education.

The highest percentage of any group indicating that HECS would be likely to frustrate their intention to participate was 20.8 percent (for the Low SES Year 12 students from rural schools) (NBET/ HEC 1992).

Modifications were made to HECS as part of the 1996 Federal Budget strategy and eligibility for AUSTUDY has since been tightened. Increases in HECS charges range from 37 percent to 130 percent, depending on the discipline area of the course chosen. The income repayment threshold has been lowered by over $8 000. While it is too early to have a clear picture of the effect of these changes, it appears
that there may have been some negative outcomes, especially for non-school leaver, rural and isolated students (Ramsay 1997). A brief analysis of the impact of HECS on the subjects of this study is discussed later in Chapter 6.

A recent report released from Deakin University, The Swindler’s List (GAS Inc 1997), contends that the scheme can act as a regressive taxation system with a bias against the less well off. The report analyses potential scenarios indicating that students who pay upfront HECS receive significant financial advantage. HECS therefore represents a proportionally higher financial burden on those students who are unable to pay in advance and hence obtain the 25 percent discount. Students from high SES backgrounds are more likely to be able to pay upfront than are Low SES students. They are also more likely to have support, financially and emotionally, in relation to the demands of university life from their families than Low SES students (Williams et al. 1993; Ramsay et al. 1996).

The Swindler’s List also highlights the long term impact on graduates (or discontinuing students) with lower end wages or salaries. As a result of the longer period required to repay the debt and the continual compounding of this debt, a greater total cost is accumulated. There is some anecdotal evidence that Low SES students are more hesitant to assume the debt involved with HECS than higher SES students. While the research team has not been able to find any research supporting this view, it would appear to be at least plausible and worth consideration. Low SES students may then be deterred by both the short term and the long term financial burdens they face, in addition to a possible reluctance to encounter debt in general.

2.7 Developments

A further barrier to higher education access emerging for equity students in general, and in particular for Low SES students, is the expansion of fee-paying courses. This is discussed by Margaret Heagney in her paper, Equity and fee courses: choosing between a rock and a hard place (1995). Until recently, fee-paying courses for local students have been restricted to postgraduate coursework programs with institutions attracting a relatively small proportion of their postgraduate load into fee-paying courses. The 1996 Federal Budget and subsequent legislative changes, however, allowed fees to be charged for undergraduate places from 1998 in certain circumstances, and greatly reduced its funding for postgraduate coursework places. This cut in funded postgraduate load has intensified the rapid expansion of fee-paying postgraduate coursework programs, with a dramatic reduction in HECS-liable places available for postgraduate students. It would appear that Low SES students could be placed at an increasing disadvantage as fee-paying courses continue to increase. This matter was pursued by the Committee to Review Fee-paying Arrangements for Postgraduate Courses, chaired by Gordon Stanley, the then Chair of the Higher Education Council. The Committee found no evidence of significant disadvantage in the statistical data provided, but acknowledged that there was a possible problem with the participation of women in fee-paying business courses (Commonwealth of Australia 1995). The report of the review recommended that institutions include data on the participation of equity groups in the full range of their postgraduate courses as part of their equity plans and that performance be monitored as part of the annual profiles process. The report also suggested that institutions offer a
number of HECS-liable places in fee-paying courses, a strategy which has been adopted by this University.

A detailed analysis prepared for the Higher Education Council by Anderson, Johnson and Milligan on *The Effects of the Introduction of Fee-paying Postgraduate Courses on Access for Designated Groups* (1997) found that people from Low SES backgrounds, women and Indigenous Australians 'tend to enrol in courses where fees are low or where Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) arrangements are available... suggesting that they are deterrents' (p. xv). While the current study is largely concerned with the access of Low SES people to undergraduate study, and further development of a user pays system would be a matter of concern.

### 2.8 Summary

Trends in Low SES access to higher education indicate that students in this group are significantly under-represented at all levels of university education, with increasing disparity at higher degree levels. Success and retention rates, while slightly lower than average over recent years, are very close to the performance targets suggested by Martin (Martin 1994). A range of special access programs for Low SES operate across Australian universities but it appears that careful review and more extensive measures may be required to combat multiple disadvantage, cultural expectations of university and many other compounding social and cultural factors. In addition, recent changes to the funding of higher education and the general policy directions of the current federal government are counteracting any impact these programs may have.

While the revised national framework for equity planning has no official status, *Equality, Diversity and Excellence* has set clear directions for progress, directions which have been taken up, at least to a degree, by DEETYA in its requirements for annual equity plans. These include a greater degree of analysis of student equity data, increased emphasis on the outcomes of strategies, and evidence of embeddedness of equity planning in universities' mainstream activities.
3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This study has been conducted in several stages. Initially, a review of recent literature and policy documents placed the USANET scheme within the broader national equity policy context in Australian higher education (Chapter 2). The research team then undertook a detailed analysis of available data from both the University of South Australia’s Student Records Information System (SRIS) and the South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre (SATAC). This analysis focused on admission, enrolment and progress patterns of the USANET cohort since the first admissions in 1995/96. The results are outlined in Chapter 4. In addition in 1997, a survey was conducted of all USANET students who commenced in either 1996 or 1997 and a control sample of other school leaver entrants to the University from both these years in order to collect more detailed information about the experiences of these students (Chapter 6). Chapter 6 also includes additional qualitative information collected by interview from students, staff and school personnel. The research team undertook a comparative analysis of a number of programs similar to USANET offered by other Australian universities, in order to determine any national trends in the study’s findings and to help formulate recommendations with implications for the access of socio-economically disadvantaged school leaver students across the sector. The outcomes of this analysis are presented in Chapter 5.

3.2 Definitions

For the purpose of this study, it is necessary to clearly define the terms used in this report to refer to several student groupings. In each case, the term refers to the 1996-1998 cohorts.

Bonus students refers to those students who entered the University through the USANET scheme and gained admission to their course with the help of the bonus points available to USANET students.

Non-bonus students refers to those students who applied to the University through the USANET program but who were admitted to their first course preference without the help of the available bonus points (i.e. students who attained the required entrance score unassisted).

USANET entrants refers to all students who applied to the University under the USANET scheme and were admitted, whether with the help of bonus points or not. Essentially, this group is the summation of Bonus and Non-Bonus students.

Other USANET school students refers to those students who attended a USANET targeted school but were not USANET entrants (i.e. they did not apply through the USANET scheme). While they entered the University outside the
Higher Education Access and Equity for Low SES School Leavers

USANET program, they are still eligible to receive the support services provided to USANET students.

Control students refers to a sample of students who were randomly selected from among the University’s commencing undergraduate students who had completed Year 12 within the two years previous to commencing university study and had been admitted on the basis of that study. This subset excluded both USANET School and USANET Entrant students. Approximately 10 percent of the identified population was included as the control sample.

Commencing undergraduate students refers to all commencing undergraduate students, excluding USANET entrant or USANET school students.

All undergraduate students refers to all undergraduate commencing and continuing students, including USANET entrant and USANET school students.

3.3 Analysis of student data from university and admissions centre systems

A statistical analysis was undertaken of the University’s student enrolment data for the first two years during which the USANET program operated viz. 1996 and 1997, including some data from the South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre (SATAC). In addition, preliminary admissions and enrolment data for the 1998 cohort and the most recent retention and success rate data for the 1996 and 1997 cohorts were analysed. The base data were extracted from the University of South Australia’s Student Records Information System (SRIS), comparing USANET cohorts with comparative groups of school leaver entrants to the University (with the USANET student cohorts removed) and the total undergraduate population. The USANET cohorts have been flagged on the SRIS to allow the monitoring and review of USANET enrolments and their performance. Performance has been monitored using Martin’s performance indicators (1994) as these national indicators permit easy comparison with other institutions.

3.4 Survey

The survey population for this study was based on the USANET school groups for 1996 and 1997 with a control sample of approximately 10 percent of all school leaver entrants to the University in both 1996 and 1997. The survey was conducted by mail, with respondents completing and returning the survey instrument attached as Appendix D. The questionnaires were coded in broad categories allowing responses to be grouped into the survey populations outlined above.

The questions incorporated in the survey were based on those included in similar studies in the field, with the research team modifying and developing further questions as appropriate. A five point Likert type scale was used for a number of questions. The responses were averaged, analysed and are discussed in Chapter 6. The analyses of the survey results give an indication of the differences between the groups of students surveyed as well as any particular issues which need to be
addressed. Possible interventions on the part of the University can then be proposed.

Unidimensional Likert type scales can be particularly useful in this type of study, allowing responses to questions to be readily coded as a numerical value and enabling computer analysis. They are designed to produce a quantitative measurement from analysis of a set of qualitative responses. The research team is aware, however, of the limitations of such scales and has taken steps to minimise them. In particular, distributions have been run to ensure that bimodal results are not overlooked when using simple averages.

The survey was distributed at the end of first semester 1997 when the 1997 cohort had completed one full semester of university. The project team felt that this was the minimum practical time for students to attain sufficient experience of university life, having experienced one complete assessment cycle.

The survey was distributed in two mailouts. The first occurred in the second week of July 1997 to coincide with the break between semesters. This mailout was forwarded to the student's home (permanent) address. The second mailout occurred four weeks later, and only to students who did not respond to the first mailout. This second mailout was delivered to the student's term address at the commencement of Semester 2. It was envisaged that by making use of both addresses, a greater proportion of students would receive at least one of the surveys. The following table illustrates the sample sizes and response rates for the student survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sample Size</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Reply</td>
<td>Rate%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonus</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>41*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Bonus</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>71*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USANET Entrant</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>112*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USANET School</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>102*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Due to errors in the student records system, some USANET students had not been correctly identified at the time the survey was conducted, resulting in slightly reduced sample sizes. These errors were corrected for the student data analysis in Chapter 4, hence the difference in sample size between the two analyses. (Two bonus and 28 non-bonus students were not included in the survey.)

Due to the limited size of the USANET Entrant group, the Advisory Committee advised the research team to combine 1996 and 1997 data for detailed analyses in order to increase the sample size and maintain the validity of Martin's definition of Low SES as outlined in Chapter 2.
The research team is aware that surveys such as this one are subject to bias, irrespective of the sophistication of the survey design and analysis. Efforts have been made to eliminate bias, but it is acknowledged that some will still exist and could affect the interpretation of the results.

There are two possible sources of bias in this survey. One is the survey instrument itself and the wording of the questions. While the questions were designed to reflect the aims and intentions of the research, they inevitably reflect the authors’ own assumptions about the nature and relevance of various factors in relation to student experiences.

The other source of bias relates to the characteristics of those students who responded to the survey and the possibility that a disproportionate percentage of respondents with particular views or characteristics may either dominate the responses or be under-represented. Table 3.2 illustrates the equity profile of both the respondents and the USANET Entrant cohort as a whole.

Table 3.2  Equity profile of survey respondents and USANET entrants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>USANET Entrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>21.4 years</td>
<td>19-24 age group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATSI</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOTE</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low SES</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolated</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey respondents who are female, NESB (non-English speaking background) and LOTE (Language other than English spoken at home but not covered by the DEETYA definition of NESB) are under-represented, while other groups are reasonably represented. Other important characteristics may also be under or over-represented, which will create a certain degree of bias in the results. It should be noted that no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were enrolled within the USANET Program in 1996 or 1997, reflecting the very low number of Indigenous students completing Year 12 studies in South Australia.

3.5  Interviews with key university staff

Staff were selected for interview on the basis of their direct involvement with the program. The interview instrument is attached as Appendix E. The objective of these interviews was to add qualitative depth to the study, incorporate staff
perspectives into the report and clarify issues raised by the student survey responses.

The staff selected are identified by their role below:

- The Project Officer 1996-1997
- The Assistant to the Project Officer and Interim Project Officer
- A Student Support Services Student Counsellor
- A Schools Outreach Officer
- A Study Skills Support Officer

As the roles of these staff members are very different, the interview instrument was designed to be as open as possible in order to allow the participants to focus on the aspects that were relevant to their experience. The outcomes of these staff interviews are incorporated into Chapter 6.

3.6 Interviews with school staff

The principals, or other designated staff, from five USANET targeted schools were interviewed by telephone in order to incorporate further qualitative information about the impact of USANET on the targeted schools, their staff and students. As it was not possible to tape record the interviews, key points were noted by the project officer during the interview and reported opinions are incorporated into Chapter 6 in the form of paraphrase rather than direct quotation.

The instrument used during school staff interviews is attached as Appendix F.

3.7 Discussions with USANET mentors

In order to follow up some of the survey data and incorporate a more qualitative aspect to the USANET student perspective, the research team attempted to organise a series of interviews with students who had been both USANET entrants and Mentors for new USANET students in their second year. The interviews were not particularly successful because of the difficulty in contacting the relatively small number of eligible students. Some general information was obtained but little specific data. These general perspectives have been noted in Chapter 6.

3.8 Comparative analysis

In order to provide a comparative analysis of the USANET scheme and to gauge the impact of such schemes on the participation of people from Low SES backgrounds in higher education across Australia, the project team surveyed a number of programs from other universities. In selecting programs, the team focused on those which were reasonably similar to USANET, targeting school leavers and sharing at least two of the three components of outreach, access and support. The team also attempted to select from a range of states and types of
universities, particularly those with an established record in promoting access for people from Low SES backgrounds. The basis of selection is as follows:

1. Demonstrated effectiveness in Outreach, Access and Support; and
2. Programs that target Low SES school leavers specifically.

The Good Universities Guide to Access and Equity Programs (Ashenden, Milligan & Clarke 1997) was used as an initial source to identify suitable programs. The selected programs were then reviewed by the Advisory Committee with the final selection influenced by an examination of more detailed information from the program coordinators.

The selected programs were:

- The Special Access Scheme at Monash University
- UQ-Link at the University of Queensland/ Q-Step at the Queensland University of Technology - combined due to similarity
- ACCESS at the University of New South Wales (ACCESS)
- InpUTS at the University of Technology, Sydney

While not all of the selected institutions met the selection criteria exactly - some targeted groups broader than Low SES (but including Low SES) or similar groups defined differently (e.g. by income) - all the selected programs operate to increase access for Low SES students and appeared to be the most appropriate available as a basis for comparison.

Unfortunately, there appears to have been a paucity of evaluative studies of most of these programs which has limited the analysis. The results of this analysis have been outlined in Chapter 5.
4. USANET students

4.1 Introduction

The USANET scheme was first introduced for the 1996 admissions period following a concentrated period of planning, consultation and development during much of 1995. Publicity was sent to all designated schools during 1995 but there had been insufficient time for USANET project staff to visit the targeted schools or for implementation of the range of outreach activities that had been designed as part of the scheme. Despite this, the University was pleased to receive 299 applications. Of these, 226, or 76 percent, received an offer to one of the South Australian tertiary education institutions in the first round of admissions offers, 149 to the University of South Australia. Forty nine students received offers with the assistance of USANET bonus points and the rest received an offer to their first preference course without the assistance of bonus points. Final enrolment numbers at the University's census date of 31 March are provided in Table 4.1. Of those who enrolled, bonus points were required by only 43 applicants in order to secure entry to their preferred courses.

In 1997, applications through the USANET scheme increased to 325, a pleasing outcome, particularly considering the 1996 federal budget changes to the Higher Education Contribution Scheme, an overall decline in school leaver applications to the University and a considerable reduction in the number of Low SES students who commenced at the University in that year. One hundred and seventy students were offered a place at the University of South Australia, 51 with the assistance of bonus points. Final enrolment numbers are again shown in Table 4.1.

In 1998, the University introduced a second stream to the USANET program specifically to widen the opportunities for students from isolated country schools, a group which was increasingly under-represented at the University. This stream included a number of isolated schools that had already been included in the original list of USANET targeted schools as well as a significant number of new schools. In order to allow more valid comparisons over the three years, for the purposes of this project the research team has included as 'Stream One' schools, those 1998 'Stream Two' schools which were already included in the original group of targeted schools. Taking this into account, 1998 has seen a 12 percent decline in the number of applications from the original group of schools to 286, even though the USANET applications have increased overall to 396. This decline reflects a continuing trend in falling application numbers to higher education in South Australia, and indeed, Australia-wide. At the time of writing, 1998 enrolments had not been finalised but interim figures show that, despite the decline in applications, the number of students who enrolled with the aid of bonus points increased marginally.
Table 4.1 illustrates the pattern of applications and enrolments in the scheme since 1996.

Table 4.1 USANET enrolments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Applications (1)</th>
<th>Enrolments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stream One Stream Two Total</td>
<td>Stream One Stream Two Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USANET Bonus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USANET Non-Bonus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
(1) Application data cannot be separated into bonus and non-bonus groups.
(2) 1998 data is preliminary only.

4.2 Applications to courses

The addition of USANET bonus points to the applicant's tertiary entrance score not only enables an applicant to qualify for entry to university where they may not have otherwise, but also to compete successfully for entry to a higher preference choice of course. An investigation of USANET enrolments revealed that the majority of USANET applicants who enrolled over the first three years were able to do so without the assistance of the bonus points (see Table 4.1). For the students who entered with the assistance of bonus points, in most cases the bonus points have been used to gain admission to a higher preference course, in some cases, a highly competitive course. In each year, over 80 percent of the bonus point students were accepted into either their first or second preference course (see Table 4.2).
Table 4.2  Bonus point students admitted to the University of South Australia, by preference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Preference</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Preference</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Preference</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Preference</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrolled</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity (1)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
(1) Opportunity—those students who would not have gained access to a course preference without the bonus points.

In 1996, only ten of the students admitted to the University of South Australia through USANET would not have received an offer to at least one of their application preferences without the help of the bonus points (refer to Table 4.2 above). This might have been expected in the first year of the program, before the outreach component of the scheme had had the opportunity to influence the aspirations of students who may not have considered university study without the help of the USANET bonus points. However, to date this seems to be a continuing trend, with between two-thirds and three-quarters of USANET bonus point students using the points to obtain a higher preference course rather than to gain access to university. Thus, it could be that the scheme has been more successful at increasing the options for a group of students who are already the high achievers in their school, or that the scheme's outreach component is successfully motivating students at the targeted schools to achieve reasonable university entrance scores or, probably more likely, that the outreach component will take some time to be successful in encouraging the less motivated or confident students to aspire to and apply for a university place. In addition, it is important to note that for students at many of the targeted schools, simply reaching Year 12 can be a major achievement. It is expected that the University's move to extend the scheme's outreach component to the lower years at the targeted schools will help to address this issue, encouraging students in Years 10 and 11 to consider university as an option.

The project team investigated the impact of the introduction of the USANET scheme on student applications and enrolments from the designated target schools. While applications from these schools have declined since 1993, along with applications from all schools in South Australia in general, it appears that the University of South Australia is gaining an increasing share of the enrolments from these applications (refer to Table 4.3 and Figure 4.1). It would thus appear that the USANET scheme has helped increase the proportion of students from these schools who enrol at the University of South Australia.
Table 4.3 Number and proportion of all higher education applicants from USANET targeted schools who enrol at the University of South Australia, 1993-1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Applications</td>
<td>2562</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1861</td>
<td>1475</td>
<td>1339</td>
<td>1034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number enrolled at USA</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage enrolled at USA</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.1 Proportion of all higher education applicants from USANET targeted schools who enrol at the University of South Australia, 1993-1998

4.3 USANET enrolments by faculty

USANET students are enrolled in all of the University's faculties, with particularly high numbers in the Faculties of Business and Management, Health and Biomedical Sciences and Information Technology, as illustrated in Table 4.4. The concentration of students in the quantitatively oriented disciplines was an unexpected outcome of the scheme but may well be explained by the high proportion of USANET students who are from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB), students who tend to be
focused in the quantitative rather than language-based disciplines (refer to Table 4.5.) In comparison with the other school leavers, USANET students are more likely to be enrolled in the Faculties of Aboriginal and Islander Studies, Information Technology, Nursing and particularly, Health and Biomedical Sciences, but less likely to be enrolled in Art, Architecture and Design, Education, Engineering and The Environment and, surprisingly considering the relative concentration of USANET students in this faculty, in Business and Management. USANET enrolments have increased in the Faculties of Business and Management and Health and Biomedical Sciences while in other faculties numbers have either declined or remained reasonably stable over the three years.
### Table 4.4 Faculty USANET enrolments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Bonus</th>
<th>Non-Bonus</th>
<th>Other School Leaver</th>
<th>Bonus</th>
<th>Non-Bonus</th>
<th>Other School Leaver</th>
<th>Bonus</th>
<th>Non-Bonus</th>
<th>Other School Leaver</th>
<th>1998 Stream One</th>
<th>Bonus</th>
<th>Non-Bonus</th>
<th>Other School Leaver</th>
<th>1998 Stream Two</th>
<th>Bonus</th>
<th>Non-Bonus</th>
<th>Other School Leaver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and Islander Studies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art, Architecture and Design</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Management</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>1367</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>677</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering and the Environment</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Biomedical Sciences</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities and Social Sciences</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>755</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whyalla</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>5159</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>2995</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.4 Equity statistics

Table 4.5 provides a profile of all commencing undergraduate students at the University, subsets of this group, namely the two USANET groups, and all other school leaver entrants in 1996, 1997 and (preliminary data only) 1998. This table reveals that USANET bonus students (those admitted with bonus points) tend to be younger than the USANET non-bonus students and than the all other undergraduates group, but around the same age as the other school leaver group. This suggests that the older USANET applicants do not require the addition of bonus points, either because they are achieving higher tertiary entry scores or because they are choosing courses with lower cut-off scores. While all USANET students are, by definition, school leavers, they may be adult re-entry students who have returned to school as mature age students to undertake their Year 12 studies. In 1996 and 1997, two of the USANET targeted schools were specialist adult re-entry schools and a further specialist adult re-entry school was added in 1998.

In 1996, both groups of USANET students were more likely to be female than were the school leaver group in general or all other undergraduates. They were almost twice as likely to be women as men, a situation that changed significantly in 1997 when they were less likely than the school leaver or total undergraduate groups to be female, particularly the USANET bonus point students. Indeed, the difference between the scheme's gender composition over the two years is striking, especially as the proportion of females in the 'other undergraduates' commencing group increased slightly in 1997, while the proportion of females in both USANET groups declined sharply. In 1998 again, USANET students were much more likely to be female than male. This extended to the new Stream Two program for isolated students.

In general, the non-bonus group of women students was the most likely group to be enrolled in non-traditional fields of study (WINS). However, in 1998 the proportion of both the bonus group and the other school leaver group in WINS courses increased substantially, over that of the non-bonus group. It appears that the students from the new isolated stream (Stream Two) were much less likely than any other group to be enrolled in WINS courses.

USANET students tended to study full time and internally, like most school leaver entrants. The non-bonus group were, however, more likely to be studying part time and externally, particularly in 1997, than the bonus group, again possibly reflecting the older age profile of this group.
### Table 4.5 Profile of commencing students at the University of South Australia, 1996-1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Average Age (years)</th>
<th>Female %</th>
<th>Part Time %</th>
<th>External %</th>
<th>ATSI (%)</th>
<th>NSES (%)</th>
<th>LOTE (%)</th>
<th>WINS (%)</th>
<th>Low SES %</th>
<th>Rural %</th>
<th>Isolated %</th>
<th>Disability %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USANET Bonus (1)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USANET Non-Bonus</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other School Leavers (2)</td>
<td>3,148</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Other Undergraduates (3)</td>
<td>16,382</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>56.8</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USANET Bonus (1)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USANET Non-Bonus</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other School Leavers (2)</td>
<td>2,995</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Other Undergraduates (3)</td>
<td>19,171</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Average Age (years)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>ATSI (4)</td>
<td>NESB (5)</td>
<td>LOTE (6)</td>
<td>WINS (7)</td>
<td>Low SES</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Isolated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
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<td>----------</td>
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<td>-------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>USANET Bonus (1)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stream Two Bonus</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>USANET Non-Bonus</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>59.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stream Two Non-Bonus</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other School Leavers (2)</td>
<td>3,569</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Other Undergraduates (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
1. USANET Bonus: USANET students who gained access to course due to bonus points. USANET Non-Bonus: USANET students who gained access to course without the aid of bonus points.
2. Other School Leavers: All commencing undergraduates who are classified for basis of admission as school leavers, excluding USANET students (Bonus and Non-Bonus).
3. All Other Undergraduates: All undergraduate students excluding USANET students (Bonus and Non-Bonus).
4. ATSI: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
5. NESB: Non-English Speaking Background students defined using DEETYA definition.
6. LOTE: Non-English Speaking Background students defined as speaking a language other than English at home.
7. WINS: Women in non-traditional areas of study.
Higher Education Access and Equity for Low SES School Leavers

Not surprisingly, considering the focus of the USANET scheme, there was a very high proportion of students from Low SES backgrounds (defined by postcode) amongst all USANET cohorts (refer to Figure 4.2).

**Figure 4.2** Percentage of groups identified as low socio-economic status

![Bar chart showing percentages of groups identified as low socio-economic status from 1996 to 1998.](chart)

The aim of the USANET program is to increase access for Low SES students to the University of South Australia. Using the broad definition of Low SES developed by Martin (1994), based on postcode of home address, and noting that all USANET applicants must be verified as Low SES by their individual circumstances and that, in some cases, students attending a USANET targeted school will live in postcode areas which are not classified as Low SES by this methodology, it is clear that the program has been particularly successful in attracting students from such backgrounds. This is at a rate of more than three times that of other school leaver entrants to the University.

In 1997, the proportion of USANET non-bonus students of Low SES background dropped markedly relative to 1996, but increased again in 1998. The proportion of bonus group students who were Low SES declined slightly in 1998. The Stream Two, isolated schools group of students were less likely to be Low SES than Stream One students but were still significantly more likely to be Low SES than were the other school leaver entrants. This was particularly so for those admitted without bonus points.

Students from non-English speaking backgrounds were also represented in significantly higher proportions among USANET cohorts than either the other school leaver or the all other undergraduate groups. This is an unexpected outcome of the scheme which may well correspond to the geographic location of a number
of the schools and their proximity to migrant hostels. It also suggests a high level of motivation amongst many of the recently arrived migrant and refugee students enrolled at these schools to progress to university.

Figure 4.3 illustrates the proportions of each group of students who come from non-English speaking backgrounds, as defined by DEETYA, or who indicated at enrolment that they speak a language other than English at home (LOTE). The USANET program has attracted NESB students at a much higher rate than among the other school leaver or all other undergraduates groups, and an even greater number of the more broadly defined LOTE students. (DEETYA defines NESB as people who have been born overseas, have lived in Australia for less than 10 years and who speak a language other than English (refer to Appendix B).) Of those students who had indicated that they spoke a language other than English at home, around one-third indicated that they spoke Vietnamese. Thus, a very high proportion of Vietnamese students have enrolled in the USANET program, in fact, 15 times the proportion of Vietnamese speakers in the general commencing undergraduate cohort in 1997.

Figure 4.3 Percentage of groups identified as of non-English speaking background

Notes:
(1) NESB: Non-English Speaking Background students defined using DEETYA definition.
(2) LOTE: Non-English Speaking Background students defined as speaking a language other than English at home.
(3) S1: The USANET students who attended the original Stream One list of targeted schools (i.e. does not include students from the new isolated stream).
There were no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students amongst the USANET groups in 1996 or 1997, probably reflecting the very low number of ATSI Year 12 enrolments, and even lower number of completions, in South Australia. In 1998, one Indigenous student was admitted, without bonus points, through Stream Two. It should be noted that the University’s admissions policies provide a range of effective entry mechanisms for Indigenous applicants into all of the University’s faculties, including Indigenous subquotas and an Indigenous special entry test for non-school leavers.

Prior to 1998, the USANET scheme had not been particularly successful in attracting rural and isolated student groups. It appears, however, that the expansion of the program for the 1998 admissions, to include all South Australian secondary schools defined by the state government as isolated, will enhance its success in increasing the access of these students to the University. In 1996, there were no bonus point students from rural or isolated backgrounds but this situation improved in 1997, with almost 20 percent of USANET bonus students coming from rural or isolated backgrounds. For non-bonus students, however, the percentage from rural or isolated backgrounds decreased between 1996 and 1997. In 1998, the proportion of rural and isolated students in Stream One dropped slightly for bonus students but remained steady for non-bonus students. For the new Stream Two, however, the vast majority of students were from rural or isolated backgrounds. In fact, all these students completed Year 12 at a designated isolated school and the research team presumes that those students who are not identified as rural or isolated in Table 4.5 were able to provide an urban home address postcode at enrolment (the definition of rural and isolated students is based on the postcode of home, rather than term, address - see Appendix B).
Further analysis of the USANET groups by faculty and equity group provides some additional interesting insights into the USANET student profile, particularly the very high proportion of NESB and LOTE students amongst these groups of students.
In the Faculty of Health and Biomedical Sciences, in which 37 percent of USANET bonus students were enrolled each year, between 40 and 50 percent of the bonus students were NESB and even more spoke a language other than English at home (up to 88 percent of bonus point students in this faculty in 1997). This faculty incorporates some of the University's most high demand courses, including the Bachelor of Pharmacy, in which eight of the bonus point students were enrolled in 1996, and six in 1997. This outcome emphasises the success of USANET in increasing the educational opportunities for a group of highly able students whose personal circumstances may have prevented them from achieving their true potential.

In each of 1996, 1997 and 1998, the largest number of USANET non-bonus students was enrolled in courses in the Faculties of Business and Management (20 percent in 1996, 25 percent in 1997 and 23 percent in 1998) and Information Technology (19 percent in 1996 and 1998, and 18 percent in 1997). Humanities and Social Sciences enrolled 14 percent in all three years, while Aboriginal and Islander Studies increased its share of enrolments from one percent in 1996 to 12 percent in 1997 and then to none in 1998. In contrast to the pattern for USANET bonus students, the Faculty of Health and Biomedical Sciences enrolled only 12 percent of the USANET non-bonus group cohort in 1996, seven percent in 1997 and 11 percent in 1998. This probably indicates that most USANET students who applied for courses in this faculty required the bonus points to achieve the high cut-off scores for courses in this faculty.

4.5 Equity-based HECS exemption scholarships

In 1997, the federal government allocated a number of HECS exemption scholarships to all universities under its Merit-Based Equity Scholarship Scheme with the aim of encouraging the participation of members of disadvantaged groups in higher education undergraduate programs.

The University of South Australia has developed an allocation model that targets those most in need of financial assistance, with applicants ranked according to a set of weighted financial need and equity indicators. For both 1997 and 1998, the University's priorities for allocation of these scholarships have been to students from low socio-economic and isolated backgrounds. All scholarship recipients must hold a Department of Social Security Health Care Card. In 1997, 24 of 49 scholarships (49 percent) were allocated to students from USANET schools and in 1998, this increased to 27 of 45 scholarships (60 percent). The high proportion of scholarship recipients from USANET schools is a further indicator that the students from these schools are amongst the most financially disadvantaged of the students at this University and that USANET is successfully targeting economic hardship.

4.6 Retention and success

An analysis of the change of enrolled study load between 1996 and 1997 for each of the two USANET groups indicates that over a quarter of both groups of students reduced their study load during the course of the year, as shown in Table
4.6. This may be the result of financial pressures and the related pressures of paid work and other responsibilities.

Table 4.6  The 1996 USANET Cohort—Changes to load in the 1997 academic year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>USANET</th>
<th>Did Not Change Load</th>
<th>Reduced Load</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bonus</td>
<td>No. 31</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 72.1</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Bonus</td>
<td>No. 57</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 73.1</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Tables 4.7 and 4.8, and Figures 4.5 and 4.6, both groups of USANET students had lower rates of withdrawal than the total group of school leavers, particularly for the first year of the program. While the re-enrolment rate for bonus point students was lower in 1998 than in 1997, and the program is still in its early stages, these results are encouraging and suggest that the program is effectively serving its target students.

Table 4.7  Progress of the 1996 USANET—Cohort into the 1997 academic year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>USANET</th>
<th>Re-enrolled</th>
<th>Unknown On Leave</th>
<th>Withdraw during 1996</th>
<th>Changed University</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bonus</td>
<td>No. 41</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 95.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Bonus</td>
<td>No. 64</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 82.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All School</td>
<td>No. 2225</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leavers (1)</td>
<td>% 65.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
(1) The breakdown of school leaver students who had not re-enrolled was not available at time of publication.
Figure 4.5  Progress of the 1996 USANET—Cohort into the 1997 academic year

Table 4.8  Progress of the 1997 USANET—Cohort into the 1998 academic year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>USANET</th>
<th>Re-enrolled</th>
<th>On Leave</th>
<th>Withdraw during 1996</th>
<th>Changed University</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bonus</td>
<td>No. 33</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 76.7</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Bonus</td>
<td>No. 81</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 81.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All School</td>
<td>No. 2,286</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>3243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leavers</td>
<td>% 70.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of those who did not re-enrol, the most frequently cited reason given in records was to change universities. It would seem, however, that the USANET students are keen to persevere with their studies, even if over one-quarter of them felt the need to reduce their study load.

Table 4.9  
Student Success, 1996 and 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pass Rate (%)</th>
<th>Weighted Average Mark (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1997 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonus</td>
<td>67.21</td>
<td>63.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Bonus</td>
<td>65.40</td>
<td>72.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other School Leavers</td>
<td>68.92</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Other Undergraduates</td>
<td>62.70</td>
<td>58.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

Pass Rate: Sum of Passed Student Load/Sum of Certified Student Load. Weighted Average Mark (WAM): Average of Marks for each subject x Load Weight of each subject.

(1) Preliminary 1997 data.
The subject pass rate (success rate) of both groups of USANET students, while not as high as that for the other school leavers group, is nevertheless better than the all other commencing undergraduates group (see Table 4.9). Analysis of weighted average marks, however, indicates that both the USANET groups, particularly the bonus group, perform less well than either the other school leavers or the all other commencing undergraduates group.

4.7 Summary

Over the three years, there has been a growth in USANET enrolments at the University and it appears that an increasing proportion of university applicants from the USANET targeted schools is enrolling at the University of South Australia. Compared with the 'all other undergraduates' group, these students tend to be younger, studying on a full time basis, not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, but of non-English speaking background and of Low SES background. In relation to the group of other school leaver entrants, the USANET students tend to be marginally older, more likely to be studying full time, less likely to be of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background, but much more likely to be from Low SES and non-English speaking backgrounds.

Prior to 1998 the proportion of USANET students from rural and isolated backgrounds was relatively low, though higher in 1997 than 1996. The commencement of the new stream for students from isolated schools has seen a considerable increase in rural and isolated USANET students. In 1996 and 1998, females were more highly represented in each USANET group than the other groups, while the reverse was true in 1997.

USANET bonus students are concentrated in the high demand and quantitatively-based faculties of Health and Biomedical Sciences, Business and Management and Information Technology. USANET non-bonus students are well represented in these faculties and also in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Over one-quarter of each of the USANET groups reduced load from 1996 to 1997, but an overwhelming majority of students re-enrolled in both 1997 and 1998. In 1997 bonus students were more likely than non-bonus students to re-enrol but this was reversed in 1998. In both years the USANET students were more likely to re-enrol than the group of other school leaver entrants.

In terms of pass rates, 1996 USANET bonus and non-bonus students were more successful than the group of all other undergraduates but less successful than the other school leavers. When weighting for average marks, both USANET groups were less successful than the other two groups. Thus, they appear to be less successful but nevertheless continue at a very high rate. This suggests that high levels of motivation, possibly strengthened by the effectiveness of USANET support mechanisms, underpin these students' perseverance and success.
5. A comparative analysis of selected low SES access programs in Australian universities

In order to determine good practice in the provision of outreach, access and support for Low SES students and potential students, a sample of special access programs from a range of Australian universities has been reviewed. In order to select the programs for review, the research team used Ashenden, Milligan and Clarke's The Australian Good Universities Guide to Access and Equity Programs (1997) to identify a list of comparable programs which focused on assisting the access of people from Low SES backgrounds, preferably school leavers. This list was finetuned with help from the Quality and Equity Office at DEETYA and on the basis of more detailed information collected from the institutions themselves. The final list of programs studied was approved by the project's Advisory Committee and are:

- Monash University's Special Access Scheme
- The University of Queensland's UQ-Link/ Queensland University of Technology's Q-Step - combined due to their similarity
- The University of New South Wales' ACCESS
- University of Technology, Sydney's InpUTS

The research team investigated all three of the core components of the USANET program: outreach, access and support. An outline of the reviewed programs is provided below, including some comparative analysis, a discussion of their strengths and weaknesses, and some relevant performance indicator data.

5.1 Monash University's Special Access Scheme (SAS) (and School Links Program)

Commenced: 1986—reviewed 1995
Target Group: Low SES and rural/isolated
Type: Outreach, Access, Support—target school-based

The School Links Program commenced as a pilot program in 1986 and operated as an outreach and access program for students attending designated target schools. In 1992 the program was expanded to incorporate schools from the federal government's Disadvantaged Schools Program and the Country Education Project.
In addition, special links exist with Monash University’s regional campuses and with some of their local schools. This program targets Low SES and rural/isolated students, groups which have a considerable degree of overlap between them.

**Components**

**Outreach:** The Junior University Program welcomes senior school students on campus for a day visit and a sample of university life. School visits by SAS program staff and other university staff increase awareness of the program and of university in general. Application information is distributed to targeted schools.

**Access:** SAS operates on the basis of a five percent quota entry system for each course. Students become eligible for this quota by demonstrating academic potential and educational disadvantage (e.g. Low SES status, rural or isolated address). From this sub-group, applicants are evaluated on the basis of disadvantage and entry below the usual TER requirements is made possible. A minimum TER score below which students cannot be admitted is set. In addition, some applications from disadvantaged students from non-target schools are considered on the basis of nomination by school principals and are evaluated on an individual basis.

**Support:** A separate orientation program is organised to welcome SAS students. This includes an individual meeting with the SAS coordinator to establish personal links within the institution. During the academic year, student progress is tracked and reported annually to faculties, and referrals to specific support services are made when necessary. All mainstream support services are also available to SAS students.

**Academic evaluation**

The last major review of the program was undertaken in 1995. It was concluded that the academic performance of students has been well monitored since 1993, with some preliminary data gathered since 1990. From the 1993 and 1994 data, it would appear that SAS students performed similarly to all commencing undergraduates as determined by their Student Progression Ratio (SPR - the ratio of load passed to load undertaken). While for the SAS students, the SPR was slightly below that of the total group of commencing undergraduates, the difference was not considered significant. For example, in 1994, the SPR for the SAS group was 0.82 compared with 0.87 for all undergraduates.

A faculty analysis of SAS students in each of the seven faculties was undertaken but no control sample of commencing undergraduates was included. As a result, no conclusions can be drawn except that SAS students in the courses with higher entry requirements (Law and Medicine) performed better than those in courses with lower entry requirements.
Implications for USANET

- The SAS program incorporates a number of aspects. Feedback from students and school counsellors indicated that the special access entry component was most valued, followed by the junior university outreach program and visits.

- The use of a quota system ensures that all students within a given range below the TER cut-off score are eligible for consideration on the basis of educational disadvantage. This may avoid an undesirable degree of competition between ‘disadvantaged students’ associated with selecting on the basis of TER within a sub-group of eligible students (i.e. the most disadvantaged are likely to have the lowest TER within the eligible group and are therefore the least likely to gain admission).

- The use of a Nomination Net to allow principals from non-target schools to nominate individual students as special cases widens the scope of the program and enables some access to the University by disadvantaged students outside the target schools.

5.2 The University of Queensland—UQ-Link

Commenced: 1989 trial project; 1991 main program; 1994 progress report
Target Group: Low SES
Type: Outreach, Access, Support—target school orientated

This program is very similar in nature to the Q-Step program at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and the two were developed with a considerable amount of cooperation. Because of this, and the limited amount of information on UQ-Link available to the research team, only aspects that differ from Q-Step are included here.

Components

Outreach: 50 target schools are included in the UQ-Link program.
Support: A separate live-in orientation program is available to UQ-Link students prior to the commencement of the academic year. In 1994 the Residential Support Scheme offered 17 scholarships to help UQ-Link non-metropolitan students to attend university by assisting with accommodation needs. $55 500, along with additional assistance from residential colleges associated with the University of Queensland was made available. This has since been expanded to include a large rental share household to provide an alternative to college accommodation. An Emergency Assistance Grant scheme (total value of $6 000) assists students who are in severe financial need to cover emergencies. This has been seen as an important component of support for Low SES students who tend to be more economically vulnerable to emergencies.
5.3 Queensland University of Technology—Q-Step

Commenced: 1992—reviewed 1996
Target Group: Low SES (including sole parents)
Type: Outreach, Access, Support—target school orientated

Q-Step commenced with its first intake in 1992, and was designed on the basis of the UQ-Link program at the University of Queensland. The program is open to all Low SES students but promotion is focused on a group of target schools. Mature age entrants and social security recipients are also eligible to enter via the program if they meet the relevant criteria.

Components

Outreach: A school visits program targeting Year 12 students is undertaken by the program coordinator and operates as a joint program with UQ-Link. The NEXUS program targets Year 8 and 9 students at seven selected Low SES schools. It highlights pathways to university and emphasises that entry into university can be a realistic goal. A three day winter school offers concentrated on-campus experience of QUT for Year 10 students (approximately 100 students in 1997). Information sheets about the program and application forms are distributed to all secondary schools in Queensland and some in northern NSW.

Access: Q-Step enables access for school-based entrants below the usual TER cut-off score, as assessed on an individual basis. Assessment of eligibility and academic potential is carried out both by the Q-Step officer and the staff of the faculty to which the person has applied. Students are drawn from 26 target schools. There are no specific bonus point levels, nor are there quotas, rather, the program runs on a negotiated basis between the Q-Step officer and the faculties involved. Access is also provided for mature age entrants through the Department of Social Security's JET Scheme (targeting long term unemployed, sole parents and people in custodial situations).

Support: A three day Q-Step Orientation program welcomes new students and assists the development of their new role as students. The Q-Step Students' Association provides a forum for students to enter the social and academic life of the University with peer support. Peer mentoring allows senior Q-step students to offer academic and general support for new students and the seniors in turn receive a bursary for their efforts. Casual employment services are made available to assist students to find employment. A computer loan scheme is also in operation, allowing students access to computers at home. A Book Bursaries scheme and the provision of study guides to Q-Step students without the usual charge assist them in meeting study costs. Financial assistance, in the form of travel...
support for these students, has been donated by the City of Brisbane.

**Academic evaluation**
The limited evidence available to the research team indicates that success rates for Q-Step students are not significantly different from those of the total group of all commencing undergraduate students, while attrition rates appear to be slightly lower. The 1996 review recommended that more comprehensive monitoring of these students should be undertaken in order to ascertain long term trends in their performance over time.

It should be noted that, while the introduction of Q-Step has seen an increase in the number of Low SES students enrolled at the University, this growth has only kept pace with overall growth in enrolments and has had little impact on Low SES participation rates which have remained steady at between 11.3 percent and 11.6 percent. Q-Step appears to have increased its effectiveness as a mode of entry for Low SES students (1994: 3.6 percent of all Low SES, 1995: 4.3 percent), but it is clear that the current scale of Q-Step (like most of these programs) is insufficient to make a significant difference to the proportion of Low SES students participating at the University. Q-Step is implementing the recommendations from an external review to increase its outreach activities to address this difficulty. However, the current environment and increasing competition from other Low SES access schemes in the area (e.g. University of Queensland and Griffith) have made it more difficult to maintain Q-Step's numbers.

**Implications for USANET**
- The Q-Step Scheme targets both non-school leavers, the latter through the Department of Social Security (JET) and mature age entrants.
- Joint promotions are organised in collaboration with UQ-Link, including the use of common application forms, resulting in a cost saving, increased profile and less administrative burden on applicants.
- Financial support (even minor, such as public transport tickets or free study guides) has been cited as crucial by many students in the scheme. The need for improved access to on-campus computers was also emphasised.
- Sole parents are an additional target group for Q-Step, with a target of 25 percent of enrolments for 1996. Long term unemployed were incorporated as a target group in 1995 and people in custodial situations joined the target group in 1996.
- The NEXUS program, focusing on Year 8 and 9 students at seven schools with particularly low rates of progression to university, lays the foundation for Q-Step which targets senior secondary students.
5.4 University of New South Wales—ACCESS

Commenced: 1987 (first intake)—reviewed 1990

Target Group: Applicants with financial difficulties, language difficulties—by social security benefit (not Low SES Postcode)

Type: Access and Support


The ACCESS program commenced in 1987. It targets students who have experienced at least two years of language and/or financial difficulties (based on social security benefits).

Components

Outreach: The scheme has no targeted outreach as it is well established and well known. Information is sent to school careers advisers who inform students of the program. Information about the scheme is available to all students at the University’s Courses and Careers Day and other general promotions. An information session is held by the ACCESS scheme coordinator as part of these general University promotions.

Access: Students may receive approval to enter a course if their Higher School Certificate (HSC) aggregate is up to 15 ranks below the required HSC score for that course, subject to a quota of five percent ACCESS eligible students in each faculty. Places are filled competitively by eligible students until either the quota is reached or 15 ranks below entry cut-off is reached. This may result in all students admitted under the scheme meeting or exceeding the HSC entry requirement, i.e. the quota can be met without admitting any students below the usual HSC cut-off score. In 1997 this did occurred in a course with a relatively low cut-off score and with some high cut-off courses which offered a less than 0.5 rank reduction for ACCESS entrants. Eligibility for the scheme is assessed individually by documentation provided by the students and the school principal and is approved by a selection board.

Support: A targeted support program is offered to ACCESS entrants who also have access to all mainstream support programs. An ACCESS Orientation Program is provided prior to the commencement of the academic year and introduces students to university life, facilitating social connections with other ACCESS students, including continuing students who are familiar with the University. Students are organised into sub-groups of ACCESS students on a faculty basis. From 1993, the Learning Centre assumed responsibility for the study skills support role for the ACCESS scheme as the program’s support aspects had been mainstreamed. Additionally, some faculties offer specialist tutoring support in relevant areas (e.g. mathematics).
Low SES students can also enter the University of New South Wales by two other modes of special entry. Firstly, the Financial Need Scholarships offer limited places to those with appropriate entry scores and who can demonstrate financial difficulties. Secondly, students of Low SES backgrounds may enter via the University Preparation Program. These students are admitted with scores below the usual entry requirements and, in the case of Low SES students, at a reduced fee. These access modes primarily attract mature age entrants.

**Academic evaluation**

A major review of ACCESS was undertaken in 1990. It revealed an average subject load pass rate of 80 percent. Students who entered under concessional entry (bonus) averaged a lower pass rate than those who entered without an adjustment to their entry score (non-bonus). The ACCESS students with lower HSC scores tended to have better pass rates than the non-ACCESS commencing students with similar HSC scores.

The 1990 review also revealed a 98 percent retention rate for commencing ACCESS students into their second year, compared with a retention rate for other commencing students of 90 percent.

**Implications for USANET**

- The competitive filling of quotas by TER means that the least disadvantaged within the eligible group of students may select out the more disadvantaged students, who are more likely to require an adjustment to their TER in order to gain entry. It is possible for quotas to be filled without any adjustment to TER being made - i.e. all students would be equivalent to USANET’s non-bonus students.

- Support for ACCESS students has been mainstreamed.

- The 1990 review reported that almost half the students experienced financial difficulties during their first year.

- The 1990 review recommended more data recording and analysis to monitor the impact and effectiveness of the program.

### 5.5 University of Technology, Sydney—InpUTS

**Commenced:** 1989 - reviewed 1995

**Target Group:** Educational disadvantage (including Low SES school leavers and mature age)

**Type:** Outreach, Access, Support

**Numbers:** 700+ enrolled (1989-1996) - 152 in 1996 with 1,853 applying

InpUTS is a broad access program which assists entry for people who have experienced various forms of educational disadvantage during schooling. It assists
students who can show that one or other of the following criteria have contributed to educational disadvantage:

- disabilities
- serious personal illness
- disrupted education
- low income
- language difficulties
- cultural difficulties
- serious family illness
- family relationship problems
- excessive family responsibilities
- lack of support/ time/ facilities for study at home or school
- geographical isolation of home/ school.

Approximately 50 percent of entrants cited low income as a factor in their applications (the third most common criterion), hence the scheme is having some success in assisting entry for Low SES students, assuming the low income definition is a reasonable proxy for Low SES. The first and second most common criteria cited are language difficulties (UTS has 12 percent of its students from non-English speaking backgrounds according to the DEETYA definition) and lack of support/ time/ facilities for study.

**Components**

**Outreach:** Wide distribution of information sheets and application forms (approximately 20,000 per year) via schools and government agencies. Seventy-two percent of applicants receive information through school staff. The 'Shadowing' program allows Year 11 students to accompany current university students through a four-day sample of university life in their chosen field of study.

**Access:** The program operates on a five percent quota system for each course (some faculties exceed this quota). The quota allows eligible students (established educational disadvantage and evidence of high academic potential) access to places below normal TER cut-off (up to ten points) if necessary on a competitive basis (i.e. closest to cut-off scores gain entry first). The scheme also allows access for some mature age entrants.

In 1996, there were 1,853 applications for places under the scheme. Approximately 70 percent were considered eligible and 152 eventually enrolled through the scheme.

**Support:** Mainstream support services are provided to InpUTS students with some additional services available. These include on-campus accommodation available for rural and isolated students (a group
which has substantial overlap with Low SES students), scholarships or grants (up to $500 to assist with study materials), a full time staff member to assist students (students with disabilities and InpUTS students) and identification of contact people in each school (within faculty) to assist students locating appropriate support services.

**Academic evaluation**

The academic performance of InpUTS students has been monitored on a limited basis since 1990. No information on weighted average mark or Grade Point Average is available, however subject load pass rate (SLPR) information is available and indicates that the SLPR of InpUTS commencing students is approximately 0.76-0.79. A snapshot of SLPR for 1992 offers some comparison.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Load Pass Rate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>InpUTS (Assisted entry)</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>InpUTS (Standard entry)</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-InpUTS</td>
<td>0.89</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Although the subject load pass rates for InpUTS students appear to be lower than for other students, most InpUTS students are passing and continue on to complete their degrees.

**Implications for USANET**

- The broad outreach program operating within this scheme is impressive with wide coverage (20,000 information sheets distributed) and focus. The Shadowing program offers potential students good opportunities to demystify university and may help motivate them in their school studies.

- The numbers in the program are significant with a bonus intake of 152 in 1996. The level of applications, 1,853 in 1996, with a 70 percent eligibility rate, reflects the success of the outreach program.

- The use of school contact points (within faculty) for the provision of support services appears to have been a strength of the program and warrants a more detailed evaluation.

- The TER-based competitive selection creates a micro-competitive environment within which the most educationally disadvantaged are less likely to gain access to the program due to their generally lower TER scores.
5.6 University of South Australia—USANET

Commenced: 1996
Target Group: Low SES and rural/isolated (new stream for isolated schools introduced for 1998)
Type: Outreach, Access, Support - target school-based
Numbers: 43 students with assisted entry in each of 1996 and 1997
325 applications in 1997 and 99 admitted without assisted entry
With the addition of a new stream of isolated schools in 1998, applications increased to 396.

USANET outreach commenced in 1995 for its first intake in 1996. Forty three students received an assisted TER to enter courses at the University of South Australia. An additional 78 students who applied for entry through USANET were successful in accessing their course of choice without assistance. All students from the USANET targeted schools, whether they applied through USANET or not, were invited to participate in a specialised orientation and ongoing support program.

Components

Outreach: Twenty four target schools were included in the original year of the program. In the 1997/98 admissions period, this increased to 31 Stream One (Low SES) schools and an additional 36 Stream Two (isolated) schools. The target schools will again be adjusted in 1998 for the next three year period. It is expected that this final set of target schools will remain relatively steady for the foreseeable future.

The USANET Project Officer and assisting staff visit targeted schools throughout the year to give presentations to careers staff and students. A focus on USANET is incorporated into the University’s general information material for target schools. Detailed information is provided to all students at target schools and at the end of the year application forms are distributed to target school students. ‘Taste of Uni’ visits to campuses have been organised for students from targeted schools to experience first hand a day in the life of a university.

Access: USANET assists eligible students by adjusting their tertiary entrance score, in recognition of the educational disadvantage they have incurred. Up to five bonus points, out of a possible score of 90, are added for both Stream One students (Low SES) and Stream Two students (rural and isolated). This not only increases the number of students eligible to gain entry to the University, but also enables more students to enter a higher preference course, with many students thus becoming eligible for high demand courses with
relatively high cut-off scores. To date, student numbers have been relatively small, with 43 students admitted on the basis of adjusted scores in 1996, 43 again in 1997 and 45 Stream One students and 8 Stream Two students (53 in total) in 1998. It should be noted that in each year the program has received a much larger number of applications but that most students gained entry to their course of choice without the assistance of bonus points. (The bonus points are only added to students' scores if required, and for selection purposes only, but do apply for all course preferences at the University until a student is offered a place. Students are not informed of any adjustment to their score.)

The selection and approval process operates slightly differently for the two streams. Stream One (Low SES) students from targeted schools must make a special application to the University and must individually demonstrate Low SES, usually, but not always, by dependence on healthcare/school cards. These students then receive the bonus points (if needed) when being considered for offers at the University of South Australia. Stream Two encompasses all Year 12 students at the designated isolated schools. No special application is required and the bonus points are automatically added, if required, when students are being considered for selection.

Support: USANET support programs are offered to all commencing students from USANET's designated target schools. It is hoped that this will help avoid the possible stigma attached to 'special entry' students. In fact, it is expected that most students will not know whether they were admitted with the help of bonus points or not.

USANET provides a specialised orientation program to welcome students to university and to introduce them to personal contact points within the University's student services. A Mentor Program matches new students with later year students from the same faculty, and preferably from the same course. These mentors provide individual support to help ease the transition to university life, and are trained to refer students to appropriate specialist support when required. A USANET social network is also provided, offering social events to help USANET students meet others, especially in the first weeks of the year.

**Academic evaluation**

As the program has only been in operation for slightly over two years, this report is the first major evaluation that has been undertaken. Please refer to the body of the report for details of the students' academic performance.
5.7 Comparative analysis

The effectiveness of any access program is greatly influenced by the application, selection and admission processes used to govern entry of potential students. Three broad models appear to exist, with a number of variations within each. Firstly there is the quota approach, by which each course or faculty sets aside a specified percentage of places (typically five percent) for access program students. Secondly there is the assisted TER, or bonus point system, by which students have their tertiary entrance score, or ranking, adjusted to assist entry into the university's courses. Lastly there is the individual assessment of students' academic potential and educational disadvantage.

Quota systems

The quota system has been widely accepted and tends to be the system used by the more established programs, InpUTS at the University of Technology, Sydney, ACCESS at the University of New South Wales and the Special Access Scheme at Monash University. Although all of these schemes use quota-based systems, they differ significantly in practice.

At one end of the spectrum is ACCESS at the University of New South Wales. The ACCESS model operates by determining that students are eligible for the quota by measuring a number of indicators of disadvantage. These students then openly compete for merit selection with the quota on the basis of their TER until the quota is filled. The key difficulty here is that students who would have achieved entry without assistance from the program are included in the quota. Students at the greatest educational disadvantage may therefore be competing against those who just meet the criteria. This system creates a micro-competitive environment amongst those considered disadvantaged and is biased towards the least disadvantaged. For example, given two students of similar ability but with one more disadvantaged educationally than the other, resulting in a small TER difference, the system would select the higher scoring and less disadvantaged student in preference to the equally capable but more disadvantaged student. This is surely the reverse of the desired outcome of an access scheme for disadvantaged students. Hence, as was found in 1997, the TER entry cut-off score may not be reduced at all, or may only be reduced by a fraction for some high demand courses. The outcome is that the quota is filled by students who meet the criteria for 'disadvantage' but who don't actually require assistance to gain entry on the basis of TER score or who are very close to the usual TER cut-off score.

InpUTS addressed this difficulty in its 1995 review with a recommendation to modify the selection process by incorporating the degree of educational disadvantage. One option considered by the review is to create several categories of disadvantage and fill the quota from the most disadvantaged first, still on a merit basis and within the overall minimum TER cut-off within that category of disadvantage. Alternatively, a more controversial method canvassed is to rank students solely on the basis of disadvantage and select on that ranking. The review authors noted, however, that this then placed excessive pressure on the evaluation of disadvantage and including the difficulties associated with validating disadvantage as it became central to selection.
**Individual assessment**

The closely related UQ-Link and Q-Step programs operate on a method of individual assessment for selection of students. The project officer negotiates each entry with the faculties involved, with evidence of disadvantage considered for each student. This is an effective system that removes any arbitrary classifications for quantifying relative disadvantage. The key concerns here are the heavy reliance on the project officer's judgment, the potential for individual bias to distort the selection outcomes and the heavy dependence on staff resources process. The potential for personal bias distorting the selection is moderated by the consultation process with the panel of faculty and other staff involved. The resource-dependent nature of this approach is of more concern in the current financial climate facing universities and the pressures this places on staff in terms of their workload during the already pressured admissions process.

In the context of USANET, the additional time required for individual assessment would detract from the outreach and support roles of the project officer. On balance, while individual assessment may be the most comprehensive method of selection, in the current environment the limited resources available to USANET would be better spent in outreach in order to increase the scale of the program at this stage.

**Assisted TER**

The Bonus Point method of entry applied by USANET increases the effective TER of eligible students. In this manner it is similar to a quota system in that students with lower than usual TER cut-off are admitted. However, a critical difference exists between the assisted TER and the quota methods; the assisted TER method does not place restrictions on the number of entrants admitted into particular faculties or courses. As long as the adjusted TER qualifies students for entry, they can be admitted to their choice of course.

This method does not guarantee a spread of USANET students across the University's faculties, but the minimum TER requirement of the quota systems also means that special access students may not be evenly spread across all faculties. As the assisted TER method does not restrict the number of entrants to particular courses, it is hoped that the motivational advantage of students gaining access to high preference courses will assist students to succeed. (88 percent of 1997 USANET students entered their first (67 percent) or second (21 percent) preference courses). Competitive quota systems restrict the number of program students admitted to particular courses, schools or faculties (whatever the level at which the quota is applied) rather than increasing their likelihood of enrolling in their preferred course.

**Targeted school versus non-targeted entry**

Another aspect of the entry systems that can be evaluated is the targeted schools as opposed to the non-targeted approach to student selection. Programs such as UQ-Link, Q-Step and USANET target particular designated disadvantaged schools and restrict access to the program to applicants from those schools. This has the advantage of ensuring that students from schools which are designated as
disadvantaged receive support, creates an ongoing collaborative relationship between particular schools and the university, and directs resources to the areas of most concentrated need.

There are also difficulties with this approach. There will always be marginal schools that just miss out regardless of the criteria used to target schools and the students from these schools miss out, no matter how individually disadvantaged they may be.

Non-targeted programs offer entry to all, based on individual need, regardless of the school attended. This overcomes the difficulties of marginal schools but raises other difficulties. Outcomes can become inequitable if students from highly resourced, perhaps selective or private schools with high matriculation rates (but who suffer personal disadvantage) receive similar levels of support as students who attend highly disadvantaged schools with little or no history of students progressing to university. Additionally, the allocation of outreach resources needs to be spread further, with less resources able to be allocated where they are most needed; i.e. to schools where progression to university study is not part of the school’s culture.

Monash University offers a compromise model with a selection of target schools and a mechanism to allow students outside this target to apply (including mature age, single parents and persons in custodial situations). A recommendation from the school principal (or delegate) is required, along with suitable supporting information about the student’s disadvantage. This model allows resources to be focused in areas of concentrated disadvantage, while not excluding individual cases outside this focus.

In all the cases outlined above, the mode of selection is crucial as the outcomes for students can vary significantly, combined with either targeted or non-targeted programs. A careful integration of the two aspects can ensure that access is more widely available while restricting access assistance in access to those in the greatest need.

USANET has been designed not only to assist a range of individually disadvantaged students but to counteract some of the longer term causes of educational disadvantage which impact on the whole school population in those schools with a high proportion of Low SES students. Students at such schools are statistically less likely to complete secondary education or to aspire to higher education entry or to achieve the TER required to gain entry, regardless of their individual abilities and circumstances. Schemes which target individuals alone ignore the systemic and cultural factors which impact on the student population as a whole in such schools.

5.8 Data

The research team has had difficulties collecting comparative data from the Low SES access programs discussed above. Either little recent data on student participation and success appeared to be available or the data provided was not easily compared across the different schemes. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 have been collated from equity performance indicator data recently released by DEETYA. They provide a picture of the overall Low SES population at each of the selected
institutions but do not differentiate between the students enrolled through the schemes under discussion and other Low SES students at these institutions.

Table 5.1 Low SES performance indicators: Access (1)

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<td>11.3</td>
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<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Proportion of higher education students whose postcode of home address falls in the lowest quartile of the population on the ABS Ed:Occ index.


Table 5.1 reveals that at a national level (dividing the Australian population into SES quartiles based on postcode), the Queensland and South Australia access rates reflect the relatively high levels of Low SES people in the state populations discussed by Martin in Equity and General Performance Indicators in Higher Education (1994). The access indicators for Low SES at the universities of South Australia, Queensland and the Queensland University of Technology reflect these higher Low SES populations, with access rates over 20 percent for all three universities. There is a sharp contrast between the access rates of these institutions and comparable institutions in New South Wales and Victoria. When the access rates are adjusted for the relevant state populations (the state column, in which the individual state populations have been divided into SES quartiles based on postcode), the two NSW institutions still have relatively low access rates, with the University of New South Wales below 10 percent.

In all cases, including at the state and national levels, the older (over 25 years) age group have lower access rates than those under 25 years. The University of South Australia is the only one of the institutions considered in this study with access rates above 20 percent for those over 25 years (in 1996 only).
QUT and Monash University are the only institutions discussed which had an increase in access rates for Low SES students between 1996 and 1997, with falls in access rates recorded nationally and in all states except Queensland between these years. It would be interesting to examine more data on national and comparative access rates for Low SES to investigate whether this general drop in the access rates of Low SES students in 1997 could be attributed to the changes to HECS and AUSTUDY announced in the 1996 Federal Budget.

Table 5.2  Low SES performance indicators: Success (1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1996</th>
<th></th>
<th>1997</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of South Australia</td>
<td>0.98 0.95 0.99 0.96</td>
<td>0.98 0.95 0.97 0.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UTS</td>
<td>0.97 0.98 0.97 0.98</td>
<td>0.98 0.98 0.97 0.98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNSW</td>
<td>0.97 0.93 0.97 0.93</td>
<td>0.99 0.93 0.98 0.94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUT</td>
<td>1.00 1.00 0.99 0.99</td>
<td>1.00 0.98 0.99 0.97</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Queensland</td>
<td>0.99 0.98 0.99 0.98</td>
<td>0.98 0.97 0.99 0.95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monash</td>
<td>0.97 0.98 0.96 0.95</td>
<td>0.96 0.95 0.97 0.94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>0.97 0.97 0.97 0.97</td>
<td>0.97 0.96 0.97 0.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>0.98 0.95 0.98 0.95</td>
<td>0.97 0.95 0.97 0.95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>0.97 0.96 0.97 0.96</td>
<td>0.98 0.96 0.98 0.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>0.98 0.98 0.98 0.98</td>
<td>0.98 0.96 0.98 0.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>0.96 0.97 0.96 0.97</td>
<td>0.95 0.96 0.95 0.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The ratio of Low SES student progress rate to the student progress rate for other students.


Table 5.2 provides success rate data for Low SES students at the five institutions discussed and at state and national levels for 1995 and 1996. These data indicate that in general the Low SES students have slightly lower success rates than other students, with generally lower success rates for the over 25 age group than the under 25 age group. Of the programs discussed, all have success rates at or above the national average for the younger age group except Monash in 1996. Monash, together with the Universities of New South Wales and South Australia, also has lower than average success rates for the older age group. Queensland University of Technology appears to have had the highest success rates for Low SES students in both years.
5.9 Good practice

A caveat must be placed on this section. Due to their diversity and in the absence of thorough, consistent and comparable evaluation of the various access programs discussed in this study, it has been difficult for the research team to make meaningful quantitative comparisons between the programs. As a result, the discussion of good practice which follows is qualitative and deductive. In most cases qualitative or anecdotal evidence has been collated from staff, students or other interested parties gathered throughout the normal operation of the program or during any reviews which have been conducted.

Outreach

From the information gathered as part of this study into USANET, some indicators of good practice in outreach were identified. Principals from target schools indicated that students need to be informed and motivated well before the final year of study. Students make choices that can preclude university as early as Year 10 and in South Australia students can leave school at the age of 15. Therefore, outreach activities need to target students before they make precluding subject choices or decide to discontinue their studies altogether. Earlier outreach activities will reach a much larger pool of potential students than those focused on Year 12 only. Such activities would have the potential to inform and possibly change the aspirations of students who may never have thought about the opportunities available by means of a university education, let alone considered applying to enter one. Students' perceptions of higher education can be positively influenced by earlier contact, especially for students who may be the first in their family to attend university or who attend schools with traditionally low levels of progression to higher education (such as Low SES schools and those in rural or isolated areas).

Potential students require accurate and accessible information about the options available to them, about the nature of university life, and about the opportunities available to graduates. Anecdotal evidence from the USANET interviews suggests that some students have very little exposure to universities and university students/graduates. Information that demystifies university and the type of people who study at university can counteract negative impressions, enhance students’ aspirations and motivate/focus students' study efforts to gain entry. Providing concrete examples of outcomes for graduates can add meaning to what may otherwise seem a vague and abstract goal.

Two aspects are significant in terms of the effectiveness of the outreach component; one is to introduce the concept of university as a realistic option for a wider range of students and at a stage in their secondary education before they have made decisions to preclude it. The second is to encourage and motivate students by providing the necessary information to assist students to select and progress towards their preferred area of study. A third aspect which can be considered ‘outreach’ is the transition from school to university. This is discussed in the Support section.

Many of the programs reviewed acknowledged these factors. The InpUTS Shadowing program is a good example of outreach to senior students. Year 11 students are invited on campus and linked with a volunteer first year student in their preferred area of study. The secondary students then shadow these university
students for four days, attending lectures, tutorials and special information sessions (secondary students only). This level of personal contact and hands-on experience offers students a concrete motivational experience and first hand information on 'what uni is like'. The four day program offers a depth of experience and personal contact with university students, along with a real taste of university life, a far richer and more realistic experience than 'sample' lectures or tutorials. The quality of this experience is enhanced by the fact that the majority of contact is with volunteer students. This increases the credibility of the information given to secondary students, coming as it does directly from university students themselves.

QUT runs a similar Winter School Program for Year 10 students as well as the NEXUS scheme which targets Year 8 and 9 students in particularly disadvantaged schools. This program is a good example of the first component of good practice in outreach discussed above (i.e. introducing the concept and illuminating pathways to university at an early age). The program focuses on a small group of Low SES target schools and provides the groundwork for the subsequent winter school (Year 10) and application information sessions (Year 12). The objectives of the NEXUS Program are to introduce and demystify the culture of university as an option for disadvantaged secondary students. Limited evaluation by the NEXUS team indicates positive outcomes similar to those indicated in the 1996 Q-Step Evaluation.

**Conclusion**

For outreach to be successful, a long term relationship between the university and schools needs to be developed. This cannot be achieved during the second half of Year 12. A range of barriers appear to operate in disadvantaged schools that result in their students being considerably less likely to progress to university study. Longer term contact is essential in order to counteract some of these barriers. A series of outreach actions over the course of a secondary student’s career might include a Year 8 introduction to university and its students via school visits, a Year 10 information and motivation program to ensure that students know they have the option of university study and that they can make choices to take advantage of this option, and a Year 11 or early Year 12 program to provide key information on pathways, assist in study area selection and commence the transition to university culture. Lastly, information and support during the application process needs to be readily accessible by students.

School-based advice is critical to creating a continuity of outreach between the periods of targeted contact. School staff should be able to provide accurate information with easy referral to the project officer if the need arises. School staff should also be able to provide assistance to students applying to the program. Access to the program’s project officer is necessary for both the school staff and students during the application process.

**Support**

Support components exist in two key areas. Transition to university (the first month or two) and ongoing support. It would appear from discussions with USA-NET staff and mentors as well as evidence collected by other programs and highlighted in the literature, that transition is a critical phase of concentrated risk
during a short and defined period of time. Ongoing support is also critical for Low SES and rural students, for whom external support mechanisms (networks, family and financial) may not exist, placing these students in a more vulnerable position in relation to both internal (university) and external pressures.

**Transition support**

All reviewed programs included a targeted orientation program of some form as part of the transition support program. Specialised orientation is valuable for Low SES, rural and isolated students particularly, as they tend to have had limited contact with people who have experienced university and are not usually accompanied by a peer group from their school. These students thus benefit from the opportunity to forge social connections as well as to familiarise themselves with an unfamiliar environment.

One aspect of the orientation programs of a number of the special entry programs appears to have been particularly valuable. This is the nomination of specified contact people from whom students can seek assistance, thereby personalising the institution so students who need help can contact a specified person rather than simply approach an office or counter. Some comments gathered from the student and staff interviews collected as part of this project indicate that it may be useful to hold a small specialist orientation program prior to the commencement of the mainstream orientation. This would remove any possibility of timing conflicts with other orientation sessions and allow students more time to familiarise themselves with the university campus and to make initial social connections with people from similar backgrounds to themselves.

McInnes, James and McNaught in *First Year on Campus* (1995) emphasise that the first few weeks on campus can be very lonely and isolating for students, particularly for rural and isolated students. These students have left their support and social networks behind and should not be abandoned to a large unfamiliar campus. McInnes, James and McNaught reviewed the literature on student accommodation and found that there was significant evidence that campus-based halls of residence enhance students’ social and academic experience of their first year at university and can reduce the likelihood of students either deferring, or possibly abandoning, their enrolment, or withdrawing from their studies. The provision of accommodation for rural and isolated students is therefore an important support at this transition stage to university.

The traditional colleges or halls of residence, however, are expensive and could be daunting experiences for students who have had to move from small and isolated communities. The University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) operates a rental share house as transition housing for new rural and isolated students. This provides a number of benefits for students who know they have secure and affordable accommodation close to campus and will be living in a shared community with other students from similar backgrounds. While their specific needs may vary in other ways, the provision of a range of accommodation options for students from rural and isolated backgrounds would appear to be as vital a part of the transition support as it is for overseas students.

For students from both rural and isolated and low socio-economic backgrounds, the availability of part time employment opportunities is also an important aspect
of support, both at the transition stage and longer term. Living expenses, including rent or board, travel, expensive texts and the other incidental expenses of study are difficult to cover with the limited resources of AUSTUDY alone, presuming that most of the students in question qualify for AUSTUDY. For these students, most of whom have limited family resources, the availability of part time employment opportunities to supplement this income is crucial. Universities can support students by operating effective employment services and by creating on-campus opportunities with the many casual jobs available in campus cafes, bars and other services. The availability of employment support prior to the commencement of the academic year will help students feel more secure about their financial circumstances. Ramsay et al. (1996) found that financial pressures, along with work pressures, were the issues that had most adversely affected commencing undergraduate students' study experience and influenced their decision to withdraw.

Bridging and preparatory support programs may also be of assistance to those students whose subject choices were restricted at Year 12 or who feel that they missed some areas of required or assumed knowledge for a range of other reasons. The opportunity to strengthen weaker areas of knowledge or to cover assumed knowledge requirements that were not undertaken at Year 12 would give these students an opportunity to get a head start in their university studies. This is particularly important for students from schools with small Year 12 numbers where subject choice may have been limited, or even restricted to the distance mode. Preparatory programs may also be of assistance for the students from non-English speaking backgrounds of whom, at least in USANET, there are significant numbers.

Ongoing support
The use of mentors is an extremely useful avenue of support for Low SES, and for rural and isolated students, both at the transition stage and ongoing. As discussed above, these students have particular difficulties settling into an unfamiliar environment, often geographically distant from their home and usually without the support of their peers. Ramsay et al., in Outcomes of a University's Flexible Admissions Policies (1996), found that induction and transition issues were of particular concern for Low SES and, less so, for rural and isolated students.

Mentoring involves the matching of a second year (or higher) student with a new first year student, to share the insights gained from the more senior student's own first year experiences. This personal guide, preferably from a similar background and in the same academic area, can contribute essential 'inside-knowledge' about the workings of day to day student life. The USANET mentor program attempts to match students from the same school (at which Year 12 was completed) as well as to match new students with second year students who have completed the first year course in which the new student is enrolled. Obviously such matches are not always possible but the extra effort is worthwhile, with mentors able to assist students academically as well as understanding and sharing the transition issues of the new students. In the first year of the mentor program at the University of South Australia (1997), some students were matched with mentors from different secondary schools and from different courses, although in the same faculty. These students still responded positively to the support their mentor provided. In a review of the first year of the mentor program, a number of mentors indicated that their
mentees did not seem to require much contact. This was confirmed by the mentees who reported that they did not need much help but that knowing that a person was available to help gave them confidence to try to tackle problems on their own before seeking assistance.

Reducing the financial burden on Low SES students is a further important means of support. The Book Bursaries program run by Queensland University of Technology’s Q-Step provides Low SES students with the opportunity to access the set texts without incurring the significant financial burden this can place on students early in the semester. An extension of this is Q-Step’s Free Study Guide program. The guides are provided to students by faculties without the normal printing charge applied to other students. A computer loan pool is also available to Q-Step students, enabling access to machines without the cost of purchasing them. The University of Technology, Sydney, takes a different approach, offering scholarships to the value of $500 to assist students to buy their study materials.

An additional initiative of Q-Step is the provision of free public transport (donated by Brisbane City Council) to assist students with the cost of travelling to and from university and elsewhere. This is an important contribution as Low SES students tend to live in outer suburbs, adding additional travel time and cost to further disadvantage an already disadvantaged group.

Emergency financial assistance, in the form of student loan or grant schemes, is also an important source of student support to help Low SES, and other students, to overcome short term financial difficulties. These services should be able to respond promptly to requests for assistance, as timing is often critical in these cases. The criteria for loan/grant approval should acknowledge that the most needy students may be the least likely to be able to repay the loan quickly. UQ-Link recognises this and allocates $6,000 per annum to assist students through non-repayable grants. An alternative approach is to be flexible with repayment amounts and to allow longer repayment periods. The addition of budgeting advice for students and a printed guide on how to survive on AUSTUDY, available from a number of student unions, may also help reduce financial difficulties to some extent if made available from early in the year.

Finally, the administration of a comprehensive system of monitoring special entry students is an important element of the support component of these programs. Monitoring students’ performance assists the early detection of study difficulties and timely referral to the support services available to help students succeed in their studies, be they personal/financial or study skills supports. Monash University administers a special student information system that tracks Special Admissions Scheme students throughout the year. Such a system, and the data derived from the system, would enable program managers to analyse aspects of the program and measure its performance. A general deficiency in all the special entry programs examined for this project is the inadequacy of monitoring and evaluation processes. It would appear to be crucial that universities which allocate scarce university equity funds to special entry programs are able to measure the performance of these programs against their stated aims, and in meeting the needs of their target students.

The review of USANET incorporated in this project has occurred early in the program’s life and has required the development of a student monitoring system that will be used by the project officer and faculty student review committees in the
future. The review has also confirmed many of the views and judgements of the USANET project officer and other key staff, and provides detailed information to assist the further development and refinement of the program. While a review of this scale is not possible every year, accurate and consistent monitoring will provide constant data for comparison, including trends over time, and allow issues to be identified and addressed as they arise. In addition, the success of strategies developed to address identified issues can be evaluated at the time they are implemented.

**Conclusion**

Support programs for Low SES, rural and isolated students need to be tailored to the specific requirements of these students. The development of comprehensive monitoring systems is a step towards better understanding the characteristics of these student cohorts, their performance and their requirements. The information collected by these monitoring systems can then be used to finetune programs, identify both strengths and weaknesses, and to initiate early support for students experiencing trouble.

While Low SES, rural and isolated students share many of the same characteristics and have many needs in common, support services must be able to recognise and respond to the particular requirements of each group and, of course, of the individuals within each group. For example, Low SES students are more likely to encounter difficulties with conflict between study and pressure from family and friends or part time work commitments, whereas rural and isolated students are more likely to experience social isolation and loneliness being distant from support networks.

The use of student volunteers and various contributions from the student associations can provide some of the most effective means of support, being personalised, credible and accessible. Additionally, the cost effectiveness of this approach allows resources to be freed up for other areas of support.

Student support, both specialist and mainstream, is a vital component of targeted access programs for students from Low SES, and from rural and isolated backgrounds. Good support programs well help produce successful and satisfied students and graduates, some of whom will return to their home communities and provide the best possible outreach for new school leavers from these communities. This, in turn, will help to build a longer term shift in perceptions of higher education within these communities and a broadening representation of the Australian population enrolled at and graduating from universities.

Examples of good practice have been highlighted throughout this chapter. These examples provide opportunities for programs to further improve the service they offer to their targeted students. Better monitoring of programs, input from students themselves, cross-institutional information exchange and further research are all required in order to further develop successful programs. All programs need to attempt to increase their intakes if the participation rates of Low SES people in higher education are to increase and begin to match the proportion in the general population. In order to do so, it appears that a combination of a strong outreach component, including initiatives targeting junior secondary students, some form of access assistance and an appropriate system of support services, both specialist and
mainstream, is important. In addition, it is essential that universities themselves interrogate their admissions policies and procedures, their teaching and learning systems and their student support services to ensure that these structures meet the needs of all students, and in particular those from Low SES and from rural and isolated backgrounds. These groups of students have historically been, and continue to be, under-represented in and under-serviced by Australian higher educational institutions.
6. Survey of students

6.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 3, a survey was undertaken of all 1996 and 1997 commencing students who had applied through the USANET scheme, those not in the scheme but from USANET targeted schools and two control group samples of commencing students who had been admitted on the basis of Year 12 performance in each of 1996 and 1997, excluding those from USANET schools. A copy of the survey instrument is included as Appendix D.

Table 6.1 gives details of the number of students surveyed and the response rates for each category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>1996 No.</th>
<th>Reply Rate</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>1997 No.</th>
<th>Reply Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bonus</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>41*</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Bonus</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>71*</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USANET Entrant</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>112*</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USANET School</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>102*</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Due to errors in the student records system, some USANET students had not been correctly identified at the time the survey was conducted, resulting in slightly reduced sample sizes. These errors were corrected for the student data analysis in Chapter 4, hence the difference in sample size between the two analyses. (Two bonus and 28 non-bonus students were not included in the survey.)

Response rates were not as high as the research team had hoped, but were regarded as adequate for the study.

In order to increase the validity of the results, the Advisory Committee recommended that the 1996 and 1997 groups be combined into four sub-groups; a control group, a group for each of the USANET bonus and non-bonus students, and one for the other USANET school group. In part, this recommendation was to avoid invalid cell sizes when sub-groups were analysed within each year.
### 6.2 Faculty and campus distribution

Table 6.2 illustrates the distribution of all responses by faculty, while Figure 6.1 shows the distribution by University campus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>USANET</th>
<th>Other USANET</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Bonus</td>
<td>Non-Bonus</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and Islander Studies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art, Architecture and Design</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Management</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering and The Environment</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Biomedical Sciences</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities and Social Sciences</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whyalla</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Not all respondents identified the faculty in which they were studying.
USANET bonus students are concentrated on the campuses in the City, where the Faculties of Business and Management and Health and Biomedical Sciences are located. Almost half of these students were enrolled in the latter faculty. No bonus group students were enrolled in the Faculty of Engineering and The Environment. USANET non-bonus students are also highly represented on the City campuses, particularly in the Faculty of Business and Management, but also on The Levels campus, particularly in the Faculty of Information Technology. The Magill campus houses the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Education, both with low numbers of bonus group respondents, although the former faculty had the second highest number of non-bonus group respondents enrolled. There were relatively low numbers of USANET respondents enrolled in the Faculties of Art, Architecture and Design, Aboriginal and Islander Studies and Nursing. These patterns reflect the enrolment patterns outlined in Chapter 4 and indicate a strong preference for the more quantitatively-based disciplines amongst USANET students, particularly the bonus point students.

6.3 Demographics of respondents

The survey respondents, as school leavers, tended to be concentrated in the younger age groups as would be expected. However, the USANET students, and those not in the scheme but who attended USANET targeted schools, were
generally older than the control group and included between 20 percent and 35 percent in a category who were over 21 years of age. (See Table 6.3 and Figure 6.2.) These numbers reflect those noted in Chapter 4 and are the result of the inclusion of two adult re-entry only schools as USANET targeted schools.

Table 6.3 Distribution of survey respondents by age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (Years)</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>USANET</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;19</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>39.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-21</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
Not all respondents indicated their age.

Analysis of the socio-economic status of respondents supports the findings of Chapter 4 that the bulk of USANET bonus and non-bonus students live in postcode areas classified as being Low SES. (See Figure 6.3.) The proportion of
Low SES students in these groups was significantly greater than the proportion among the control group, illustrating the program’s success in attracting its target group of people from Low SES backgrounds.

Figure 6.3  Distribution of survey respondents by SES defined by postcode

It is important to remember that the definition of Low SES used is that recommended by DEETYA, based on postcode of home address. All bonus and non-bonus students have been assessed individually as being from financially disadvantaged backgrounds but may not live in postcode areas that have been designated as Low SES according to the DEETYA definition. The limitations of the postcode indicator are clearly illustrated here, with a number of bonus and non-bonus students being identified here as high or medium SES.

Additionally, it is interesting to note that the other USANET school group was less likely to live in Low SES postcodes than the USANET bonus and non-bonus students but was also the least likely group to be living in high SES postcode districts. It should be noted that some of this group may have met the criteria for admission through USANET but chose not to apply through the scheme.
6.4 Language spoken at home

Respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they spoke a language other than English at home, and if so, which language. As can be seen from Table 6.4 and Figure 6.4, among the control group and those from USANET schools but not in the USANET program, the overwhelming majority spoke English at home. However, for the USANET non-bonus group, nearly 50 percent indicated that they spoke a language other than English at home, while for the USANET bonus group, a remarkably high 56 percent were in this category. Of the languages other than English spoken at home, Vietnamese was spoken at home by 37 percent and 35 percent of the USANET bonus and non-bonus groups respectively. Those speaking various other languages made up between 15 percent and 19 percent of the two groups. The concentration of students from non-English speaking, particularly Vietnamese, backgrounds among the USANET students supports the findings of Chapter 4.

For those students from the USANET targeted schools who did not apply through USANET, the Vietnamese language was less evident, although still relatively highly represented among the non-English speaking students. This finding indicates that the Vietnamese students from the USANET schools were more likely to have applied through the scheme than other students, either because they were more likely to meet the criteria of individual disadvantage and/or because they were better informed, more motivated and willing to take action to increase their likelihood of achieving entry into a university course of their choice.

Table 6.4 Distribution of survey respondents by language spoken at home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>USANET Bonus</th>
<th>USANET Non-Bonus</th>
<th>Other USANET School</th>
<th>Total Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Only</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>87.7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Not all respondents answered this question.
Further analysis of respondents by main language spoken at home by faculty reveals that among the control group, languages other than English spoken at home were most commonly reported by respondents from the Faculties of Business and Management, Health and Biomedical Sciences and Nursing. Among the small group of USANET bonus group respondents, those speaking a language other than English at home were particularly highly represented in the Faculty of Health and Biomedical Sciences, with 63 percent of the bonus students enrolled in that faculty (12 of the 19) speaking Vietnamese at home. Of the USANET non-bonus group, on the other hand, the largest group of non-English speakers is the Vietnamese speakers concentrated in the Faculty of Business and Management. It should be noted that cut-off scores for entry to this faculty are generally lower than those in the Faculty of Health and Biomedical Sciences, and it is therefore less likely that bonus points may have been required for entry.
6.5 Support to attend university

As shown in Table 6.5 and Figure 6.5, the majority of respondents in all groups tended to live with their families or in rental/share accommodation.

Table 6.5 Distribution of survey respondents by accommodation type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accommodation</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>USANET Bonus</th>
<th>USANET Non-Bonus</th>
<th>Other USANET</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No. %</td>
<td>No. %</td>
<td>No. %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>27 65.9</td>
<td>52 65.0</td>
<td>72 74.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>2 2.5</td>
<td>2 2.1</td>
<td>18 4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental/Share</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>6 14.6</td>
<td>9 11.3</td>
<td>11 11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>6 14.6</td>
<td>9 11.3</td>
<td>3 3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeless</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0 0.0</td>
<td>0 0.0</td>
<td>1 1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2 4.9</td>
<td>8 10.0</td>
<td>8 8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>41 100.0</td>
<td>80 100.0</td>
<td>97 100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Not all respondents answered this question.

Figure 6.5 Distribution of survey respondents by accommodation type

Those in the control group were more likely than either of the USANET groups to be residing with families or in a residential college, while those in the USANET groups were more likely than those in the control group to be in rental/share accommodation.
accommodation or to be living alone. These results probably reflect the younger average age of the control group, but may also indicate the more complex range of pressures on the USANET students, including the small number who have come from rural or isolated areas to study at the University.

Table 6.6 and Figure 6.6 indicate that AUSTUDY was a more important source of support for both groups of USANET students than for either the non-USANET students from USANET targeted schools or for the control group, indicating that the USANET students have less private financial resources. Full time work was not an important source of support for any group. Part time work was most important for the bonus point students, but was less important for the USANET non-bonus students than the other three groups. Family support and support from savings were much more important sources of income for both of the non-USANET groups than for the two USANET groups. Clearly, the students identified through USANET as being the most financially disadvantaged are much more reliant on AUSTUDY with less support available from their families or from savings.

The fewer sources of income available to USANET students and the lack of private financial support increase USANET students’ exposure to financial hardships. In an earlier EIP investigation into *Outcomes of a University’s Flexible Admission Policies*, the authors indicated that financial issues were the second most common reason for withdrawal of Low SES students from their university courses (1996, p. 83).
### Table 6.6 Distribution of survey respondents by source of income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Income</th>
<th>Control Group</th>
<th>USANET</th>
<th>Other USANET School</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Only %</td>
<td>Main %</td>
<td>Minor %</td>
<td>Not %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUSTUDY</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>62.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUSTUDY Loan</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>97.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pension/Other Social Security Benefit</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>98.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Time Work</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>98.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Time Work (&gt; 10 hrs/week)</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>80.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Time Work (&lt; 10 hrs/week)</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse/Partner</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>96.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>31.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savings</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>59.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 6.6  Distribution of survey respondents by source of income
Figure 6.7 provides further detail on the type of AUSTUDY received by those respondents who indicated that they were in receipt of AUSTUDY (no respondents received ABSTUDY).

Figure 6.7 Distribution of survey respondents by AUSTUDY type

Figure 6.7 highlights the high proportion of USANET students who rely on AUSTUDY, both as Dependent and Independent students, again differentiating the two USANET groups from both the other students from their schools and from the control group, and indicating that the program is reaching the most financially disadvantaged students. The relatively high rates of Special AUSTUDY within the USANET cohort also indicate that, in these groups, there are students who are in particularly difficult circumstances, e.g. homeless, who are being reached by the program.

### 6.6 Factors influencing enrolment

When asked whether the course in which respondents were currently enrolled was their first choice, the majority of all groups indicated that this was the case. Despite the addition of bonus points, however, it appears that the bonus group were the least likely group to report that they were enrolled in their first preference course. Table 6.7 illustrates that the non-bonus group, those admitted without the assistance of bonus points, were more likely to have enrolled in their first preference course. Analysis of these groups by faculty reveals that these results are linked to the demand for the programs the different groups of respondents are choosing. The control group and other USANET school group are both more evenly spread across the faculties than the USANET students, with highest
numbers enrolled in the Faculties of Business and Management, Education and Humanities and Social Sciences with reasonable, but not high, cut-off scores. Around a quarter of the non-bonus point USANET students were concentrated in the Faculty of Business and Management whereas nearly half the bonus point students were enrolled in the high demand courses in Health and Biomedical Sciences. These courses have high cut-off scores but these students often had higher preferences for a different course in that faculty or for one of the high demand health-related courses at the University of Adelaide (e.g. Medicine or Dentistry). This result is closely linked to the high proportion of NESB students in this group and the status many NESB students place on these courses.

Table 6.7  Enrolment preference by response category and faculty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>First Preference</th>
<th>Lower Preference</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and Islander Studies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art, Architecture and Design</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Management</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering and The Environment</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Biomedical Sciences</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities and Social Sciences</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whyalla</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

USANET Bonus Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>First Preference</th>
<th>Lower Preference</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and Islander Studies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art, Architecture and Design</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Management</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Biomedical Sciences</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities and Social Sciences</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 6.7 Enrolment preference by response category and faculty continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>First Preference</th>
<th></th>
<th>Lower Preference</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>USANET Non-Bonus Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and Islander Studies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art, Architecture and Design</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Management</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering and The Environment</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Biomedical Sciences</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities and Social Sciences</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other USANET School Group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and Islander Studies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art, Architecture and Design</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Management</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering and The Environment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Biomedical Sciences</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities and Social Sciences</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td>302</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Not all respondents identified the faculty in which they were studying.*
A range of factors was identified by the research team as possible influences on respondents' decisions to enrol at university. Figure 6.8 illustrates that for each of the USANET and the control respondent groups, immediate family and post-study employment opportunities were the most significant factors identified as positively influencing the decision to attend university.

Immediate family was identified as a stronger factor, however, for the generally younger control group, and employment opportunities were stronger for the control group and non-bonus group than for the bonus group. Friends and school teachers had a positive influence, although less so again for the bonus group, while the factors which more negatively influenced respondents were the need to move to Adelaide (particularly for USANET students) and the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (interestingly, this was more negative for the control group).
Figure 6.8  Factors influencing the decision to enrol at university

Note: Scale of 1-5 used, with 1 being strongly negative and 5 being strongly positive.
The strong influence of future employment prospects and immediate family are highlighted further in the qualitative responses collected via respondents' comments. Comments included:

**Control Group**
- employment opportunities
- I want better for myself and future family
- location of uni and cost of accommodation
- I've seen many people made redundant and cannot get other employment because of lack of qualifications
- I love the area I am studying and it's all I want to do
- personal goals and wants

**USA NET Bonus Group**
- close to home
- yes, it is a dream of being someone in the future, employment opportunities
- transport
- my future- I didn't want to work in a supermarket

**USA NET Non-Bonus Group**
- future lifestyle for myself and my children, give them a positive outlook on education
- prestige image for the Asian
- no uni, no education, no good job after study
- to provide a chance for my son free of government assistance
- being able to decide my own future
- the aid in providing a better future for my family

**Other USA NET School Group**
- to have a good job, better future and set examples for my brothers
- set a good example to siblings and make family proud
- to get out of a dead end job
- change of career opportunities
- to change the cycle of uneducated people in my family, for my children, positive role model

It is interesting to note the mention of location issues, particularly in the small bonus point group, and the emphasis placed on improving opportunities for siblings and children, particularly in the three USA NET groups.

Peer pressure as a factor was not identified as particularly important for any group, nor were examples set by other students from school. It is of interest also that, in the comments, the influence of personal goals tended to appear only among the control group.
6.7 Impact of HECS

Table 6.8 and Figure 6.9 provide additional data on the influence of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) on respondents' decisions to enrol at university. This question was included in the survey instrument at the request of the Project Advisory Committee to help ascertain the effects, if any, of the 1996 Federal Budget changes to the Scheme.

Table 6.8 Influence of HECS on the decision to enrol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Very Negative</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Very Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USANET Bonus</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>19.0</td>
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<td>12.2</td>
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<td>15.0</td>
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</table>

Note: Not all respondents answered this question.

Figure 6.9 Influence of HECS on the decision to enrol at university by category
The USANET bonus group responses tended to indicate the most negative influence, with almost 20 percent indicating ‘a very negative influence’. Interestingly, this group also indicated that HECS had the most positive influence on their decision to enrol. Also interesting was the negative response of the control group to HECS in comparison to the response of the USANET groups. This may indicate that the control group, in general, has expectations that they should not have to pay for higher education, while the USANET groups may have lesser expectations.

It should be noted here that the students most negatively influenced by HECS would not have enrolled at all. The survey sample is thus already biased against a negative response.

In a separate question, students were asked whether they had changed courses/subjects/load because of the increased charges and the introduction of differential HECS. Only 10 percent of respondents answered this part of the question and indicated that the changes had induced them to alter their course or subjects or to reduce their study load. See Figure 6.10.

Figure 6.10  Impact of HECS changes on study by category of respondent

USANET non-bonus students were more likely to report that they had changed course but less likely to have altered subjects or load as a result of the changes to HECS, while USANET bonus students were the most likely to have changed subjects or reduced load but not to have changed course. The control group reported a relatively high level of changing course but were much less likely to have altered their subjects or reduced their load.
6.8 Influences on attendance at the University of South Australia

Figure 6.11 illustrates the strength of a range of factors influencing student decisions to attend the University of South Australia rather than another university.

Figure 6.11 Factors influencing preference for the University of South Australia

Note: Scale of 1-5 used, with 1 being unimportant and 5 being most important.
The most important factors influencing respondents' decisions to enrol at the University of South Australia were that the course was the only or the best of its type in South Australia, employment opportunities, location of campus (for USANET students particularly), written publicity material and (for USANET students) USANET outreach activities. The importance of these factors varied somewhat between the different groups of respondents. For the control group, the course itself, and its availability and perceived quality, were clearly the most important factors. For the USANET bonus group, the availability and quality of the course were again important, but the location of the campus was more important than for the control group, and the USANET outreach information and the fact that the University of South Australia was the only offer received were more important for this group than for the others. For the USANET non-bonus group, the location of the campus where the course is taught appeared to be more important than any other factor, including the quality of the course and employment opportunities. This may reflect the average older age of this group and the likelihood of them being more settled geographically.

A range of other factors were generally viewed as less important by all groups. These included being with friends at the University of South Australia, the availability of childcare and the USANET outreach activities (for the control group). Timetable flexibility, the advice of school staff, the University of South Australia Open Day, advertisements, speaking with University of South Australia staff, University of South Australia student support services and the advice of friends/relatives who have studied at the University of South Australia were all less important factors for the control group but more important for the bonus and non-bonus groups.

Among the comments added by respondents to this question, the following are typical.

**Control Group**
- the only place that offers physio in SA;
- getting a job;
- it had my preferred course;
- they offer the best course and variety of subjects;
- they offered the course I wanted to do;
- mainly because it's closest to my home.

**USANET Bonus Group**
- Occupational therapy is only offered at USA so I didn't have any other choice;
- yes, it is the uni of the state;
- close to home.

**USANET Non-Bonus Group**
- USA was where I was accepted, so that's where I went;
- it's the only uni with a campus in rural SA;
- USANET, but I didn't get the extra five points for some reason yet I was approved for it.

(Students do not see their adjusted TER score but this student, as a non-bonus student, would not have needed bonus points to have received an offer to his or her first preference course.)
These comments support the earlier analysis, where the course, its quality, employment outcomes and campus location were the most important factors reported by respondents.

6.9 Support systems

A wide variety of support systems are available to students when they enrol at the University. These include the student association, library, computer services, counselling, student loans, study skills and, for USANET students, USANET orientation and a mentor scheme. Table 6.9 shows the respondents' awareness of a range of support systems, their use of these supports, the ease of access to them and respondents' views on the quality of the services. Figures 6.12 and 6.13 graphically present responses on the reported use and quality of the services.

All respondents reported a high level of awareness of the library and computing resources, counselling services, the student association and the cafeteria. As expected, control group awareness about USANET-specific activities was very low. However, the level of awareness of USANET students about the USANET orientation and mentoring programs was also relatively low and suggests that these supports may need more promotion. Students who had been involved in the mentoring program reported that it was very helpful, however. USANET bonus group awareness of study skills support, student employment services and student loans availability was also low, and is of concern. Increased usage of USANET support programs would help increase awareness of mainstream support services as students are directed to the full range of services available.

Although all USANET students are informed at orientation of the range of support services available, both those specific to USANET and those generally available, it would appear that USANET students need better exposure to the support services available, particularly involvement in ongoing assistance such as mentoring. Visits to the student support centres on each campus may be a useful part of orientation, as some students commented that they were unable to ‘find’ services. However, as the USANET support program is voluntary, the University can do no more than ensure that USANET students are informed and well aware of what is available to them.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
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<th>Use (2)</th>
<th>Access (3)</th>
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</table>

Notes:
(1) Awareness of Service: answered Yes or No and coded as 1 and 2 respectively; average is shown, i.e. lower number implies more aware.
(2) Use Made of Service: answered Never to Very Often on a 1-5 scale; average is shown, i.e. 5 is Very Often.
(3) Ease of Access to Service: answered Very Difficult to Very Easy on a 1-5 scale; average is shown, i.e. 5 is Very Easy.
(4) Quality of Service: answered Very Poor to Excellent on a 1-5 scale; average is shown, i.e. 5 is Excellent.
Figure 6.12 Use of student support services

Note: Scale of 1-5 used, with 1 being never used and 5 being very often used.

All groups of respondents reported strong usage of library resources, with computing resources and the cafeteria also being well used. The range of other services were infrequently or never used. The USANET support services were more frequently used by the USANET groups but still had a low reported rate of usage. This result may be because both the orientation and mentoring programs are active early in the year, with less activity by the time the survey was run. However,
there is clearly room for improvement in the promotion and targeting of support services to their intended users.

Overall, access to most student support services was seen as easy to very easy and this was particularly the case for the most commonly used services, the library and cafeteria. The notable exception to this was access to student loans, a concerning outcome, particularly because the USANET students reported considerable difficulty in accessing these loans. Computer services and the USANET orientation program were also reported as less accessible, again indicating that more work is needed with the USANET support programs.

Generally, the quality of student support services was perceived positively. Once again, responses to the student loans scheme were less positive, especially from USANET bonus students. The quality of clubs and societies and the student employment service was also questioned. The USANET orientation program received some negative feedback from bonus point students, but was perceived more positively by non-bonus point students. Overall, the bonus students were generally less positive than the other groups about the quality of support services despite the low level of usage. USANET students considered the mentoring program to be slightly above average quality.
Figure 6.13 Quality of student support services

Note: Scale of 1-5 used, with 1 being very poor and 5 being excellent.
Additional comments provided by respondents focused on the need for more promotion of support services and reflected a recurring concern about access to computer pools. Examples of comments include:

**Control Group**
- More promotion needed for counselling services, clubs and societies orientation.
- Need more computers, access hours poor.
- Student support needs to be advertised and made more accessible.
- I find usually whoever I ask within the uni very helpful.
- Student support centre is great and they are always helpful.
- Counsellors should be introduced in lectures.

**USA NET Bonus Group**
- Where are they?
- Not enough textbooks and computers and the food in the cef is a bit expensive.
- Update the computers at campus.

**USA NET Non-Bonus Group**
- A uniform leaflet on services (all services) given at enrolment would be beneficial.
- Require more computer pools and the student intranet is hard to access - always has errors.
- Not promoted enough.
- Initially found difficulty in finding where to go for some services.
- I have found them to be comprehensive.

**Other USA NET School Group**
- There should be more computers.
- Often knows a service exists but not where or how to access it.
- Computer services - felt very intimidated by computer room.
- No one free to help out.
- Do not know half of them existed.
- The services were excellent and very useful.
- Although I don't know much about some the areas I have used have been of top quality.
6.10 Experience at the University of South Australia

Respondents were asked to rate other aspects of their experience at the University and were generally positive, as illustrated in Figure 6.14.

The USANET and control groups all expressed some concerns over how well school had prepared them for university, ease of access to childcare and getting time on computers. Students from each of the three groups indicated that it was difficult financially to study full time, and difficult to mix work and study, and family and study. On the other hand, there was a feeling that staff were approachable, university was enjoyable, and they were satisfied with their university experience. In all cases, the USANET bonus and non-bonus groups had similar response patterns. The control group was more likely to report having family support and finding it easy to make friends at university but were less likely to report that they found staff approachable and helpful, or to report problems with childcare or mixing university with other commitments. These latter differences probably reflect the younger average age of the control group, who are therefore less likely to have family and other commitments. Interestingly, the control group was the most likely to report that they had to spend a lot of time travelling to get to university, perhaps due to their greater likelihood to be living with their families rather than in the rental/share accommodation more common for the USANET groups.
Figure 6.14 Experience at the University of South Australia

Note: Scale of 1-5 used, with 1 being strong disagreement with the statement and 5 being strong agreement.
Respondents’ comments generally reveal a greater degree of concern about their experience at the University than do their responses to the statements discussed above.

The following examples were typical of those who added comments to their responses:

**Control Group**
- Computers sometimes not working - library needs more resources
- Distance from family means uni and family are completely separate
- Student support centre is wonderful and the tutors are lovely and help me a lot
- Hard to make new friends and financial problems
- Students coming from high school to uni aren’t prepared, the expectations are extremely different and we are not told what is expected of us, lecturers/tutors need to be more considerate
- There are a lot of really good lecturers and teachers in tutorials who are keen to help and are all very nice

**USANET Bonus Group**
- Not enough computers at City West campus for the amount of students
- Difficult to travel between two campuses
- It is freedom but is very easy to lose track
- I am enjoying both socially and educationally

**USANET Non-Bonus Group**
- The teaching staff aren’t very helpful
- Overall very unsatisfied - I had to defer to find work and at this stage I’m not sure I can return
- I found being an older, mature age student no barrier with social or academic life at uni in Whyalla
- So far I have not had any problems, my experience has been entirely pleasurable

**Other USANET School Group**
- Sometimes quite difficult to find a spare computer to use
- Didn’t find lecturers/tutors particularly helpful - they were very hard to track down when I needed to speak to them, too many students in classes - not enough time to speak to lecturer
- Information can be difficult to obtain in relation to courses

The range of views expressed by respondents and reflected above are further reinforced by the summative comments provided by respondents in response to the invitation to do so at the end of the questionnaire. The following samples indicate the overall flavour:

**Control Group**
- Management of uni schedules and subjects is far from adequate, there needs to be a complete overhaul, more computer pods, hopeless!!
I believe that the changes to the HECS may impact on my future choices for study, should I choose to further my education at a later date.

I don't object to slightly increased HECS but what I do oppose is having to pay upfront and the decrease in financial support for undergraduates.

more computers are needed;

I was worried about HECS and thought about not going to uni because of it, and if I had to pay upfront I would have no way of being able to go to uni;

HECS is a major factor for any study, commencing or existing. I'd say many people are now avoiding going to uni because of the HECS fees.

although HECS fees are extremely high for my course, I did not allow that to influence my decision;

the HECS changes concerned me and did put me off studying a bit, living only on AUSTUDY is very difficult.

USA NET Bonus Group

I don't know what the student association is doing, what is their job? why do I have to pay some money for them? it seems like they have been doing nothing.

high school did not prepare me for uni, I was thrown in the deep end and because of this I am taking six months break for my sanity.

it would be a great idea if uni can employ Asian people as study adviser, especially Vietnamese; they need to understand more about the differences between two cultures and the way of life.

USA NET Non-Bonus Group

I was not happy about the HECS increases, deferring HECS was my only choice as I don't have money to pay upfront;

overall, my uni experience to date has been positive although, consistency of info given by all staff would make life easier; eg study guidelines, etc;

I had a hard time getting help in the subjects I needed it in; difficult to access computers except after hours,

I think the support and activities available to students are excellent.

Other USA NET Stu Group

difficult adapting from county life leaving home for first time at a young age; lack of financial support for county students; high cost of having to live away from home compared to city students;

although there seem to be many support services provided by the uni, access to it seems to be quite difficult, especially if...
you're a first year student and don't know much about the way uni operates;

overall, I feel my experience at uni so far has been excellent, it is very different to Year 12 but the tutors and lecturers made the transition easier, also the various orientation classes were also very beneficial;

I commenced studies as a part time student because of full time work commitments, all the courses at Leeds were mostly day. Uni should cater for full time workers;

computers should be more accessible and updated, uni should have more social activities.

These comments cover a range of issues and a range of experiences in relation to these issues. They confirm some levels of concern over communication of information, computer facilities, preparation for university and loneliness on campus. They also indicate a much greater degree of concern about the changes to HECS than indicated by the responses discussed earlier in this chapter.

6.11 Interviews with key staff at targeted schools

In order to obtain a picture of the impact of the USANET program on the targeted schools and their students, a number of key staff in USANET targeted schools were interviewed. (See Appendix F for interview instrument.) These staff provided a valuable additional perspective on the USANET program to that of the students who had been admitted through USANET. All staff viewed USANET as a success, with some giving suggestions for its improvement or expansion. Generally, it was felt that USANET was useful in fostering longer term cultural change within the schools, and that students who may not previously have seen university as an option, now see such study in a positive light. All school staff were impressed by contact with USANET staff and the outreach component of the program. They felt that USANET staff had helped demystify the University for potential students and had helped motivate students to consider and apply for entry to higher education. This is a gratifying outcome for the University. USANET was always intended to address the long term issue of changing the culture of a number of schools with very low rates of progression to university and to extend the attitudes and aspirations of students at these schools. While the program is still very new and student numbers have not been high, the comments of the school staff indicate that this long term objective is beginning to be achieved.

A number of issues facing rural and isolated students were raised by respondents, many of which have now been addressed with the commencement of the new stream which targets all South Australian schools designated as isolated by the State Government. One area of possible development is a further adjustment of entry rank for those Year 12 students who enrolled in distance education subjects. Clearly, the resources available to such students are limited in comparison to those available to students studying in more traditional classroom settings with a teacher on location. On the other hand, subjects available by the distance mode offer isolated students a greater range of subject choices to assist their preparation for university entrance. Given the consistently higher attrition rates and lower success
rates of tertiary students studying by distance mode, it would appear that the University should consider some further assistance for secondary students needing to study in this mode.

In response to a question to gauge general impressions of the USANET program, the following comments from key secondary school staff reveal the generally positive feelings of staff about the program. In fact, an interesting finding is that the staff responses were generally more positive than the student responses.

- the students view it as valuable, most that are eligible for the program apply for it and places at UniSA, some only at UniSA;
- good and positive program;
- good support for isolated students to cope once they arrive.

Views about particularly successful aspects of the program included:
- bonus points and mentoring system particularly useful;
- support once in is very good and vital to students' success in first few months;
- school visits are vital to success.

Clearly, all the aspects of access support (bonus points) and close interaction with the school community (outreach) are regarded as important and significant aspects of the program's effectiveness. It is interesting to note that while the school staff felt that students valued the awarding of bonus points the most, the staff themselves saw the increased awareness levels and the support provided following enrolment as the most important benefits of the program:

- students would say the bonus points, but staff would select support to help students succeed after they get to uni;
- students identify bonus points, staff indicated increased levels of awareness;
- bonus points and support, getting students into university and keeping them there.

However, there are components of USANET which school staff would like to see improved. In particular, respondents focused on developing closer links with the schools, better information and extending eligibility for the program. Examples of comments are:

- not enough school visits;
- concept of mentoring very useful, would also encourage social group for mature age students or students from similar areas to aid transition;
- possibility of expansion of the program and inclusion of STAT test entrants into bonus point scheme;
- more detailed information in the brochures, particularly about the types of support they will receive;
- get successful students from the school to return to the school;
- link potential students with actual students for an on-campus visit, attend real lectures and tutes.
consider additional bonus points per open access (distance education) subject taken, as students are advised now not to take them due to the increased difficulty with that mode of study; the criteria for eligibility needs looking at. All students are country students and disadvantaged (country high school).

As mentioned above, a number of these matters have been addressed for 1998 admissions, e.g. the new stream includes all isolated secondary school students in the program, and the attempt to use USANET students as mentors as much as possible.

In answer to a question about the administrative load for students, school staff respondents indicated that, in general, the administrative load was not significant and did not appear to deter students. It was suggested, however, that the application deadline should either be the same at that for the South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre (SATAC) or later, rather than the current pre-SATAC deadline.

School staff raised several further issues that could be addressed, firstly in order to increase students’ awareness of their options for further education and secondly to assist their progress to university study. These included the expansion of the ‘Taste of Uni’ days and other activities to further raise the profile of the University. However, school staff respondents did believe that the program had heightened student awareness of the University of South Australia and was important in motivating students to consider university as a realistic option:

\[
\text{program has provided positive motivation at both high and low levels, i.e low entrants now get in and high achievers reach their goals.}
\]

School staff respondents indicated that there was generally a high level of awareness of and support for the program amongst other staff of the targeted schools. They were supportive of the University expanding its awareness programs into lower years (Year 9 or Year 10) in order to help students gain an earlier familiarity with the notion of higher education and to clarify subject requirements for higher education entry:

\[
\text{Tertiary Education Week should be for Year 9 students as they are about to be making preclusive decisions for Year 10;}
\]

\[
\text{ideally, USA NET needs to reach students by half way through term three of Year 10. This reaches potential drop outs and help students make the decisions necessary to proceed to uni;}
\]

\[
\text{end of Year 9, early Year 10 before students turn 15 years and can leave. In particular, ATSI students need intervention to keep them interested in school and the possibility of university;}
\]

\[
\text{middle of Year 10, before choices are made about Year 11, we lose 30-40 students from Year 10-11. If the program could encourage some of these to stay on and try for university, it would be wonderful.}
\]
6.12 Interviews with key university staff

The research team also interviewed several key University staff involved with supporting the USANET program. The following discussion summarises their responses to a series of questions.

Successful aspects of the USANET program included:

- the 'Taste of Uni' program, with many positive responses to the program, particularly for motivating students and demystifying the university experience;
- the creation of a profile for the USANET program with students, schools and University staff as an accessible and positive scheme, encouraging students to see the University of South Australia as accessible to students from Low SES backgrounds, i.e. the program is being accepted into the culture of the target group;
- the school visits by USANET staff were very useful in allowing students to follow up written information and seek clarification about questions and concerns they might have;
- the mixing of the USANET cohort with mainstream support has been a success. Students receive all the support required but are not identified as a deficit group; and
- students are happy to help the program in their second year as mentors to commencing students, implying that the program is seen as worthwhile by the students.

Aspects of the USANET program which USANET support staff felt needed modification included:

- increasing the resources available to support the students, particularly continuity of the project officer position;
- increasing the number of participating schools/ re-evaluation of the selection basis of the program. Staff feared that the program excludes many students in need, e.g. schools which are marginally out of the program but with large numbers of students who would be eligible individually. Some staff proposed that individual evaluation be considered;
- monitoring and evaluation of the program should be ongoing and systematic;
- extending the availability of distance education opportunities for students in isolated schools targeted under the expanded scheme, who may prefer to remain in the country, particularly during the early stages of their course;
- transition to university appears to be the key time for USANET students. If they can be welcomed and made to feel part of the culture, they are much more likely to stay on and succeed; and
- more attention should be paid to the two sub-groups of metropolitan, and rural and isolated, students. They share some characteristics but differ in many fundamental ways.
University staff identified a number of issues they believed should be addressed by the USANET program to better support Low SES and isolated students at the University of South Australia. These included:

- rural and isolated students tend to have a different set of needs and some targeted support would be useful, given the commencement of Stream Two;
- the creation of a buddy system to help rural and isolated students to cope with the details of city life; ideally, meeting the student on arrival (before the commencement of the academic year);
- better support for those suffering financial hardship while at university;
- the creation of a rural services position to coordinate the support needs of Stream Two students (and other rural and isolated students);
- the provision of a bridging course for USANET students to help students meet prerequisite and presumed knowledge requirements of some courses; and
- the support of the student association is seen as useful and could possibly be expanded.

In answer to a question about the reaction of other University staff to the program, USANET staff reported that other key staff are aware of the program, as are more senior staff within the faculties. Some components, like the 'Taste of Uni', are well known by most staff but otherwise there was a relatively low level of awareness amongst staff in general. It was also felt that a minority of staff in some faculties have very conservative views on USANET students, based on the assumption that TER indicates ability and therefore that USANET students are less capable of being successful, require additional resources to progress, implying that they are more costly to teach. These assumptions are unfounded, however, as most USANET students receive very good TER scores, despite their often less advantaged economic and educational backgrounds. On the whole, however, the USANET key staff interviewed indicated that most faculties accept USANET as a positive program.

### 6.13 Summary

The USANET students who responded to the survey had a similar profile to the overall USANET student profile discussed in Chapter 4. Both the bonus point and non-bonus point USANET students are more likely to be older, Low SES, dependent on AUSTUDY, living alone or in rental accommodation and NESB (Vietnamese speaking), clearly indicating a greater degree of social and economic disadvantage than the control group.

It is clear from the feedback from each group of respondents that all three components of the USANET program are perceived as important. It is, in fact, the combination of the outreach (school visits, etc), access (bonus points) and support (orientation, mentor scheme, etc) which makes the scheme effective and which will achieve the long term objective of changing the culture of the targeted schools and the aspirations of their students. It is also clear that there is still considerable work to be done to improve the scheme and to improve its effectiveness as a means to enhance access to and success at university of students disadvantaged by Low SES.
backgrounds. While the introduction of the new isolated schools stream will go some way to improving the scheme's effectiveness, due to the high proportion of isolated postcode areas which are also designated Low SES, a further expansion of the program to other disadvantaged urban schools may be warranted. The expansion of the scheme to include all isolated schools will also highlight any need to address better the specific needs of rural and isolated students within the program, including consideration of distance education subjects in Year 12. Improved promotion of the scheme and targeting of the younger years of secondary school are also required, as well as greater promotion of the range of support programs available once students are enrolled. It appears that the impact of the changes to HECS may have been stronger than the early findings so far suggest. This is an area which could be pursued with further research at a later date.
7. Conclusions and recommendations

A key principle behind the major reforms outlined in the Green and White Papers of the late 1980s was that universities should be accessible to all. The White Paper recommended the development of ‘a statement of national equity objectives’. This statement, *A Fair Chance for All* (1990), emphasised that higher education institutions had a responsibility to provide opportunities for all sections of the Australian community and needed to ensure that the student population more closely reflected the composition of society as a whole. The statement identified six groups of students as particularly disadvantaged in their access to higher education and established objectives and targets for the system as a whole. It also recommended that universities develop their own objectives, targets and strategies to improve the participation and success rates of these groups of students. From 1991, all universities have been required to develop annual equity plans as part of their Educational Profile for DEETYA, incorporating objectives, targets and strategies and reporting progress against these.

7.1 Low SES and educational disadvantage

One of the more complex of the targeted equity groups is people from low socio-economic backgrounds (Low SES). A difficult group to define (Martin 1994), it is also one of the largest and overlaps significantly with the other designated equity groups. The joint NBEET/HEC report *Equality, Diversity and Excellence Advancing the National Equity Framework* (1996) identified that progress in access and participation rates for students from Low SES backgrounds has been particularly slow.

The NBEET publication Resource Implications of the Introduction of Good Strategies in Higher Education for Disadvantaged Students (1994) highlighted the potential for structural barriers to prevent the entry of Low SES students to higher education, despite the proliferation of special entry programs. An important strategy to help address these structural barriers is the extension of outreach programs by universities to the junior years at secondary schools where there are low levels of progression to Year 12 and to higher education.

Students from Low SES backgrounds can face cultural and social barriers in their aspirations, pursuit and achievement of university study. Inadequate information, the perceived complexity and remoteness of application and enrolment procedures, peer or family disapproval, low self confidence and the lack of role models may prevent students even aspiring to enter university (Williams et al. 1993; Clarke, Zimmer & Main 1997). Financial constraints too have a major impact on limiting higher education opportunities for the socio-economically disadvantaged. There is some anecdotal evidence that Low SES students are more hesitant to assume the debt involved with HECS than higher SES students and Low SES students with
little economic capital are likely to be placed at an increasing disadvantage with the recent increases to HECS and the expansion of the number and range of fee-paying courses.

7.2 Special access programs at the University of South Australia: USANET

In its Act of Establishment the University of South Australia is specifically charged with responsibility for providing educational opportunities for groups in the community who have suffered educational disadvantage. The University has consistently enrolled a relatively high proportion of students from Low SES backgrounds (between 20 percent and 24 percent). However, despite the implementation of a range of strategies aimed at increasing access and participation of the various targeted equity groups, there has been little increase in the participation rates of Low SES students at the University. In 1995 the University therefore introduced a program designed specifically to enhance the educational opportunities for people from Low SES backgrounds, focusing on secondary students from schools with low progression rates to university.

This Special Access Scheme, entitled USANET, aims to address the particular needs of students whose individual economic and educational disadvantage, arising from their Low SES status, is compounded by attendance at schools with significant numbers of students from similar backgrounds. The scheme aims to target some of the underlying causes of low university participation by these students through increasing the level of familiarity with higher education options within a number of designated 'disadvantaged' secondary schools. Students are identified as eligible for the scheme on the basis of demonstrated individual need, as endorsed by the appropriate school principal. In 1998, the University expanded the scheme to target all students enrolled at isolated country schools. At these schools eligibility for the program was based on geographic isolation itself, rather than on individual circumstances, although there is a considerable degree of overlap between the isolated and Low SES students.

USANET incorporates three components. The outreach component focuses on Year 12 and sometimes Year 11 students, but will increasingly target the lower years of secondary school, aiming to see a gradual increase in Year 12 retention rates at these schools. It includes school visits, information dissemination and campus visits by school students. The access component allows for the adjustment of the tertiary entrance score of eligible students from the designated target schools by the addition of a number of ‘bonus points’, where required, to help compensate for demonstrated educational/economic disadvantage.

Once students are admitted to the University, a range of support provisions is available. These include the general student support services, as well as USANET-specific programs, which include Mentor Support, Specialised Orientation Program, Face to Face Support and the USANET Social Network.

In 1996 the University received 299 applications under the scheme. In 1997 applications increased to 325, and in 1998 USANET applications for both the original program and the new isolated stream increased to 396. The majority of offers made to these students did not require the addition of bonus points and for
the 40 or so students admitted each year with bonus points, the adjusted score was more likely to assist their entry to a higher preference course, rather than to university altogether. It appears that in each year only a few students, between a quarter and a third of the students admitted with bonus points, would not have managed to gain access to one course or another without assistance.

Compared with other school leaver entrants, both the USANET bonus students and the USANET applicants admitted without bonus points (non-bonus students) tend to be older, studying on a full time basis, much more likely to be from a Low SES or non-English speaking background (particularly Vietnamese) and, in 1996 and 1997, were less likely to be rural, isolated or Indigenous. The commencement of the new isolated stream in 1998 has seen an enormous increase in the proportion of rural and isolated USANET students.

In 1996 and 1998 females were more highly represented in each USANET group than amongst other school leavers, while the reverse was true in 1997. In all years female non-bonus group students were highly represented in the WINS (women in non-traditional studies) fields of study, particularly Business, while the bonus point students were less likely to be WINS than were the other school leavers, until 1998, when there was a considerable increase, again mostly in the field of Business.

USANET bonus students are concentrated in the high demand and quantitatively-based faculties of Health and Biomedical Sciences, Business and Management and Information Technology, reflecting the high proportion of NESB, particularly Vietnamese, students in this group. USANET non-bonus students are more evenly spread across faculties with a concentration in the Faculty of Business and Management but significant numbers also in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

USANET students are more likely to be dependent on AUSTUDY and living alone or in rental accommodation, indicating a greater degree of social and economic disadvantage than other commencing students. Based on a financial needs allocation model, a high proportion of the University's equity-based HECS exemption scholarships have been allocated to USANET students, (24 of 49 scholarships in 1997 (49 percent) and 27 of 45 scholarships in 1998 (60 percent)) providing further evidence of the level of socio-economic hardship experienced by these students. In the comments section of the student survey USANET students reported a degree of concern about the impact of the changes to HECS which may warrant further research.

Both USANET bonus and non-bonus groups were less likely to withdraw from their studies than other school leavers, with an overwhelming majority of students having re-enrolled in their second year. Bonus students were more likely than non-bonus students to re-enrol in 1997 but this was reversed in 1998. Over one-quarter of students in each of the USANET bonus and non-bonus groups reduced load between 1996 and 1997.

In terms of pass rates (or success rates), 1996 USANET bonus and non-bonus students passed a greater proportion of their enrolled load than the comparative group of all other undergraduates, but a lesser proportion than the other school leavers group. When weighting for average marks (WAM), both USANET groups had lower weighted average marks than the other two groups, with the bonus point students having lower WAM than non-bonus students in both 1996 and 1997. It appears, therefore, that USANET students have lower rates of success but
nevertheless continue at a very high rate. This pattern follows that of NESB students found in an earlier study at the University of South Australia (Ramsay et al. 1996) and probably reflects the high proportion of NESB students amongst the USANET students. It also suggests a high degree of motivation amongst these students, despite the sometimes difficult educational and socio-economic backgrounds from which they have come. These high levels of motivation, possibly with the addition of effective support mechanisms, are assisting these students to persevere and succeed.

7.3 Programs targeting low SES students
In order to determine good practice in the provision of outreach, access and support for Low SES students and potential students, a sample of special access programs from a range of other Australian universities was reviewed. This review confirmed the need for long term relationships between the universities and the schools to be developed in order for outreach to be successful. This cannot be achieved during the second half of Year 12 alone. In order to redress the cultural barriers to university entrance that exist in some disadvantaged schools, longer term contact is essential through a series of outreach actions over the course of a secondary student's career, commencing in Year 8 or 9.

School-based advice is critical to creating a continuity of outreach within a familiar environment for students. School staff should be able to provide a first port of call for information with easy referral to the university contact if the need arises. School staff should also be able to provide assistance to students applying under the program but access to the program's project officer is necessary for both the school staff and students during the application process.

Support components focus on the two key areas of transition to university and ongoing support. It would appear from discussions with USANET staff as well as evidence collected by other programs and highlighted in the literature, that transition is a critical time of concentrated risk on which student support services should focus. Ongoing support is also critical for Low SES and for rural and isolated students, for whom external support mechanisms (financial resources, as well as peer networks and family) may not exist, placing these students in a more vulnerable position in relation to both internal (university) and external pressures.

7.4 Student experiences
The survey of students administered as part of this study included a number of questions about the factors influencing students to enrol at university, and their experience once enrolled at university. Survey respondents all indicated that future employment prospects, immediate family members and the location of university campuses were important factors influencing their decision to enrol. USANET outreach activities were a positive influence for USANET students.

As far as their experience at the University was concerned, respondents expressed concerns regarding their level of preparation for university and getting access to
computer facilities. They also reported financial difficulties studying full time and difficulties combining work and study.

Staff were generally considered to be approachable (particularly by USANET students) and university to be enjoyable. The control group reported generally higher levels of family support and greater ease in making friends than the USANET group and were less likely to experience difficulties with family and work commitments.

Respondents' experiences of the University's student support systems were generally positive, with high levels of awareness, usage and satisfaction reported for the library, computer facilities and cafeteria, particularly. Low levels of awareness of and satisfaction with specialist USANET support programs are a concern, together with reported poor access to the University's student loans scheme and computer services, and concerns regarding the quality of the student loans and student employment services. Students' comments focused on concerns regarding access to computer pools, the changes to HECS and the need for better communication of information and promotion of the support services.

Key staff at a number of USANET targeted schools were interviewed in order to gauge their opinions about the program. These staff members were very positive about the program and indicated that it had already been successful in fostering longer term cultural change within schools and in motivating students to consider and apply for university entrance. They supported the expansion of the outreach program to the younger year levels. Staff indicated that while the students appeared to place a higher value on the bonus points component of the program, the staff themselves valued the outreach component and the subsequent changes in awareness, attitudes and aspirations of the students, together with the program of support provided for students once they were enrolled.

7.5 Conclusion

All three components of the USANET program are perceived as important and it appears to be the combination of outreach, access and support which makes the scheme effective in progressing toward the long term objective of changing the culture of the targeted schools and the aspirations of their students. However, there is still work to be done to improve the scheme and to enhance its effectiveness as a means to improve the access to and success at university of students from Low SES and from rural and isolated backgrounds. While the expansion of the scheme to include all isolated schools is an improvement and will increase the pool of both isolated and Low SES students eligible for the scheme, a further expansion of the program to other, urban, disadvantaged schools may be warranted. The addition of the isolated schools stream also exacerbates the need to address the specific requirements of rural and isolated students within the program, including consideration of the impact of distance education subjects in Year 12. Improved promotion of the scheme and targeting the younger years of secondary school are also important, as well as greater promotion of the range of support programs available once students are enrolled.
Recommendations

This study has identified a range of issues which require attention if the University is to further enhance access, participation and success rates of students from Low SES and rural and isolated backgrounds. Many of these are applicable across the sector. The further development of programs specifically targeting Low SES students across the sector is crucial if their representation at university and amongst graduates is to more accurately and fairly reflect their representation in the Australian community.

Recommendation 1
- Outreach programs targeting Low SES school students should extend from junior secondary school levels to Year 12.

Recommendation 2
- Given the considerable overlap between the indicators of disadvantage for Low SES students, and for isolated students, both groups should be specifically targeted during their secondary school years to increase the access to higher education of school leavers in these two equity groups.

Recommendation 3
- Support for Low SES and isolated students to improve their retention and success at university needs to be designed to address the specific and different issues faced by these two groups.

Recommendation 4
- Distance education and open access studies undertaken by rural and isolated students, particularly those in Year 12, should be supported in a way which acknowledges the additional educational difficulties these students experience.

Recommendation 5
- Programs targeting increased access, participation and success for specified groups of students need to be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis with respect to their effectiveness in making both short term improvements and longer term changes to the equity performance indicators for these groups.

Recommendation 6
- Further research should be undertaken to assess the longer term impact of such programs on student attitudes towards higher education within the targeted schools, including application rates and course preferences.

Recommendation 7
- Given the range of programs specifically targeting Low SES school leavers, collaborative arrangements between these should be considered as a means of enhancing their overall effectiveness and impact, with DEETYA facilitating an initial meeting between relevant institutions.
Appendix A
University of South Australia
mission statement

Mission
To advance, disseminate and preserve knowledge through the provision of a teaching, learning and research environment which fosters excellence in scholarship, innovation and social responsibility.

Values
In educating professionals, applying knowledge and serving the community, the University is committed to:

- acknowledgment of staff as our principal resource and students as our primary concern;
- collegiality and trust that enable leadership and teamwork to operate to the advantage of all;
- a participative organisational and workplace culture dedicated to social justice and professional interaction;
- the highest ethical standards for an inclusive, humane and fair society, where people accept their responsibilities as well as acknowledge their rights;
- intellectual openness, independence of thought and rigorous critical enquiry;
- advancement of knowledge and technology in socially and environmentally responsible ways;
- excellence in all of our activities.

Goals
- To provide quality teaching which facilitates independent student learning.
- To provide quality educational programs designed to meet the needs of students, government, industry, commerce, the professions and other community groups.
- To conduct research and consultancy with an emphasis on application of knowledge in collaboration with government, industry, commerce, the professions and other community groups.
• To ensure that the learning and research environment enables students and staff to engage in responsible social and cultural analysis and debate.

• To promote access and equity of educational participation and outcomes for groups for whom higher education opportunities have been limited and ensure that teaching and research programs identify, respond to and reflect a diverse student population.

• To meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by providing culturally appropriate education, employment and research programs.

• To be a university recognised nationally and internationally for educating professionals, applying knowledge and serving the community.

• To be an efficient and effective organisation.
Appendix B
Definition of equity groups

The definitions of equity groups that the University of South Australia uses are those recommended in Equity and General Performance Indicators in Higher Education (Martin 1994). These definitions are being trialled Australia wide for a three year period and may be slightly modified in the future.

1. **Women in non-traditional study (WINS)**

   Women students enrolled in any category such as field of study or type of course for which the percentage of female enrolments is less than 40 percent.

   Currently these fields of study are Agriculture, Architecture and Building, Business, Administration and Economics, Engineering and Surveying, and Science. In relation to type of course, research degrees have been identified as WINS.

2. **People from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB)**

   Those students who were born overseas and arrived in Australia less than 10 years ago, and who speak a language other than English at home.

3. **People with disabilities**

   Those students who responded positively to the following questions used to collect DEETYA student data at enrolment:
   
   - Do you have a disability, impairment or long term medical condition which may affect your studies?
   - Would you like to receive advice on support services, equipment and facilities which may assist you?

   In 1998, this definition was revised to include those students who respond positively to the first question only.

4. **People from rural and isolated areas**

   A student’s geographic status is determined from postcode of home location and identified as one of three groups, urban, rural and isolated. The 1993 classification
of postcodes devised by the Department of Primary Industry and Energy is used to group postcodes into these three categories.

5. **People from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Low SES)**

Those whose postcodes of home location fall within the lowest quartile of the population of a given catchment region (national, state or urban), determined by the value of the ABS Index of Education and Occupation (EdOcc).

(The allocation of each postcode in Australia in the 1991 census to each of the SES categories for the national, relevant state and urban ranking is available from the Planning Unit of the University of South Australia.)

6. **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**

Defined through self-identification by a positive response to the following question used to collect the DEETYA student data at enrolment:

*Are you an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?*
Appendix C
Equity performance indicators

The equity performance indicators used in this study are:

Access: Percentage of all commencing students who are of a particular equity category, e.g. Low SES:

\[
\text{Access} = \frac{\text{equity group commencers \times 100}}{\text{all commencers}}
\]

Participation: The proportion of each equity group’s participation in higher education as a ratio of what might be expected from each equity group’s share of the total relevant population, derived from census or other data.

In the case of Low SES for a given catchment area, this is defined as:

\[
\text{Participation} = \frac{\text{total Low SES students}}{\text{total High SES students}}
\]

For isolated or rural students, the participation indicators are defined as:

\[
\text{Participation} = \frac{\text{total isolated or rural students \times 100}}{\text{total students \times isolated/ rural persons as a percentage of 15-64 years state population}}
\]

Success: Ratio of student pass rate (SPR) for a particular equity student group to student pass rate of all other students where:

\[
\text{SPR} = \frac{\text{sum of passed student load}}{\text{sum of certified student load}}
\]

Retention: Ratio of apparent retention rate for a particular equity student group to that for all other students where apparent retention rate is:

\[
\text{Retention} = \frac{\text{students enrolled in year n +1 who were also enrolled in year n}}{\text{students enrolled in year n - completions in year n}}
\]
Appendix D
Student survey instrument: 1997 access and support survey

Not available for inclusion in report.
For copies contact Anne Herbert (02) 240 9280.
Appendix E
Interview instrument: University of South Australia staff interviews

1. What is your involvement with the USANET program/USANET students?
2. In your view, which aspects of the USANET program are successful?
3. Which aspects of the USANET program need modification to operate more effectively and how would you modify these?
4. Have you noticed any trends or special features of the USANET students group or program that may be useful in providing support to the students?
5. Have USANET students raised issues or concerns/provided positive feedback about the USANET program, other support programs or their experience at university?
6. Are there any additional issues or functions you feel USANET needs to address to support Low SES students at this University?
7. In your opinion, what is the single most important aspect of support the University offers Low SES students?
8. In your view, how have other University staff received the USANET program?
9. Do you have any other comments regarding the USANET program or Low SES students?
Appendix F
Interview instrument: Target school staff interviews

1. What are your general impressions of the USANET program?
2. In your view, which aspects of the USANET program are successful?
3. Which aspects of the USANET program would you like to see modified to operate more efficiently and how would you modify these?
4. Have you noticed any impact on the levels of awareness of university options, and the University of South Australia in particular, among your students since the commencement of USANET?
5. Do you believe that there has been any impact on student aspirations for a place at university, as a result of USANET?
6. Are there any additional issues or functions you feel USANET needs to address to assist students to firstly, be aware of their options for further education, and secondly, progress onto university study?
7. Do you have any comments about the administrative aspects of USANET (e.g. the application form)?
8. The University is considering expanding its awareness programs into lower years (Year 8 or Year 10) in order to help students gain an earlier familiarity with the notion of higher education and to clarify subject requirements, etc. Do you have any comments on this proposal? Which year level(s) do you think would be most appropriate?
9. In your opinion, what is the single most important aspect of the USANET program for your school and its students?
10. In your view, how has the school staff received the USANET program? Are most of your staff aware USANET exists and what we are trying to achieve with it?
11. Do you have any other comments regarding the USANET program?
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