

7 Other equity issues and achievements

7.1 Developments in relation to the National Strategy for Equity in Schooling

The needs of students in equity groups identified in the *National Strategy for Equity in Schooling* (NSES) were addressed in 1997 through a range of school-based, regional and system-wide initiatives funded through both State and Commonwealth sources. For instance, the Commonwealth introduced its new Literacy Programme, the aim of which was to foster the acquisition of appropriate literacy and numeracy skills by all students, and specifically to measurably improve the literacy and numeracy outcomes of educationally disadvantaged students. This and other Commonwealth initiatives, such as the ESL for Indigenous Language Speaking Students Programme, are treated in more detail elsewhere in this Report.

7.2 Key equity initiatives

Students from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB)

These students were either born in a non-English speaking country, or in Australia with one or both parents born in a non-English speaking country, or are Indigenous students for whom English is a second or other language.

Initiatives undertaken in 1997 in respect of students from non-English speaking backgrounds covered a wide range of projects and services and were sometimes developed as a cooperative venture between the education sectors. Included were school-based projects for English as a second language (ESL) students, funded through the Commonwealth Literacy Programme. Special programs, teaching assistance and supplementary resources supported students in all schooling sectors.

New South Wales

In 1997, 83,822 ESL students in the New South Wales government sector received additional English language assistance from over 1,400 specialist ESL teachers in 548

primary and 208 secondary schools and in 17 Intensive English Centres.

A range of initiatives was also implemented to support improved English language assessment and teaching of ESL students using the ESL Scales. They included a statewide ESL Scales training program and documenting effective teacher uses of the ESL Scales. ESL Scales were also incorporated into the New South Wales Board of Studies' revised English K-6 Syllabus.

Additional English language support was provided by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training for recently arrived post-compulsory school age students through expanding provision of the competency-based Certificate in Spoken and Written English course.

In addition to this project, anti-racism education and an ethnic communications strategy were developed for schools, NESB parents and community members, in order to promote the positive values of cultural diversity. The *Celebrate Diversity by Learning and Living Together* initiative invited students to submit artworks and written work with the theme of celebrating diversity and the *Multicultural Perspectives Public Speaking Competition* involved almost 1,000 entries from 508 primary schools.

Victoria

In Victoria, 23.5 per cent of all students in government schools in 1997 were from a language background other than English. To help foster English language skills, new arrivals received either an intensive English language program in one of the English language schools or centres in the metropolitan regions or English language support.

The Victorian independent sector reported provision for special ESL tuition, culturally inclusive curricula celebrating multicultural aspects of school life and language services for parents.

Queensland

Anti-racism initiatives were conducted in a range of education districts by Education Queensland. Members of participating school communities included teachers, parents, administrators, community education counsellors and district/regional personnel. Other initiatives were:

- the Cultural and Language Diversity in Education Policy (CALDE), which provided support materials for a culturally inclusive curriculum and for ESL;
- the English as a Second Language Program, which provided interpreting and translating services to facilitate more effective communication with parents

from language backgrounds other than English and their participation in schools; and

- the Racist and Gendered Violence Project, which was managed by Education Queensland and funded by the Commonwealth, under the National Professional Development Program (NPDP). The project included primary and secondary sectors from both rural and metropolitan locations, as well as Catholic education representatives. The project aimed at developing understanding of racist and gendered violence within local contexts.

Also in the Catholic sector, 1997 saw completion of a study on identifying ESL learners and their needs, which will assist with future language education policy and planning.

South Australia

In addition to the ESL programs in government schools supporting students from non-English speaking backgrounds, there are seven New Arrival Centres where intensive programs are provided. New developments in 1997 included the provision of resources for ESL learning including ESL-moderated work samples, teaching and learning strategies for R-7 students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and the finalisation of a CD-ROM teacher training package in teaching ESL. Case studies were also developed to support teachers in the delivery and assessment of English teaching strategies.

A key initiative within the South Australian independent sector during 1997 was the support offered to schools to develop an approach to integrating literacy and numeracy for ESL students with other school literacy initiatives.

With respect to NESB students in South Australian Catholic schools, specialist ESL teachers were placed in 21 primary and six secondary schools. A further ten schools received assistance from itinerant teachers.

Children of non-English speaking background are supported in their transition from preschool to school through the preschool bilingual assistants program which facilitates communication between preschool staff and parents, supports the child's language and literacy development, and assists preschools to initiate and develop culturally inclusive programs.

Western Australia

Initiatives in the government schooling sector included:

- extension of the visiting teacher cell model for the provision of ESL services to primary Stage 2 students in mainstream schools;

- establishment of a new junior secondary intensive language centre to service new-arrival Stage 1 ESL students in the northern suburbs of Perth;
- provision of English language classes for the parents of students in primary ESL cell programs; and
- establishment of a website dedicated to ESL services in government schools.

Two Catholic primary schools and one secondary school in the Perth metropolitan area had intensive language centres for new arrivals, while support in other schools and in country areas was delivered according to need. In addition, general support programs for students from linguistically or culturally diverse backgrounds who were either born in Australia or had been resident for more than a year operated in 69 schools.

NESB students were enrolled at a number of independent secondary schools and a wide range of support services was available, including special orientation programs and additional English classes. Some schools had learning enrichment centres where students undertook specially arranged courses and classes at appropriate times during the school day, e.g. during LOTE classes these students took extra English lessons.

Tasmania

Developments in Tasmanian government schools included continued support for ESL students—who are mainly refugees and, in many cases, severely traumatised—through the provision of specialist teachers. Improved monitoring of this group using the ESL scales demonstrated significant improvement in English language skills.

The Tasmanian independent sector allocated funding to assist eligible ESL students to develop their English language competence and facilitate their participation in mainstream educative processes.

A total of 163 students of non-English speaking backgrounds, including 16 eligible for ESL New Arrivals funding, were supported in mainstream Catholic schools. Advice from a consultant and some professional development was made available to teachers employed to support these students.

Northern Territory

The government sector allocated considerable resources to coordinators and in most regions the employment of ESL teachers in a large number of schools. A variety of system-wide and school-based projects which targeted the needs of

ESL students through professional development for their teachers, part-time instructor support in the classroom and the purchase of appropriate materials were also implemented. The two intensive English units continued to operate for primary and secondary new arrivals.

Funding from the Commonwealth Targeted Programme Literacy component was used to provide ongoing support for students of non-English speaking backgrounds in Catholic schools in the Northern Territory.

Australian Capital Territory

The ESL program in ACT government schools had as its major focus the support of students who speak or understand a language other than English in the home. The program aimed to foster the development of literacy skills in English in order to promote equity in schooling across all levels from preschool to college. Preschool children with limited English were offered places for the semester before normal entry through the Early Entry Preschool program. Specialist ESL teachers worked in government preschools with identified students and their teachers to improve language and learning outcomes for students in the year before formal schooling began.

In the Catholic sector, ESL New Arrivals funding provided intensive teaching assistance to enable one student to participate in mainstream classroom activities. A detailed review of student outcomes was prepared by the specialist support staff.

Gender initiatives and outcomes

Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools, the Gender Equity Taskforce report endorsed by MCEETYA in 1996, identified strategies for action on understanding the process of construction of gender; curriculum, teaching and learning; violence and school culture; post-school pathways; and supporting change. It also provided a framework for systems and schools to report on school policies and practices in relation to these strategies.

During 1997, the *Gender Equity Needs Analysis* was developed for use by schools to address the strategic directions of the *Framework* report. This provided a resource to assist school principals and staff in examining their schools' gender needs and determining what action they need to take to bring about gender equity reform.

Strategies and policies promoting equitable access, participation and learning outcomes for females and males were reported by most States as a priority for 1997.

In New South Wales government schools, initiatives to promote equitable access, participation and learning outcomes from schooling for both girls and boys were informed by *Girls and Boys at School: Gender Equity Strategy 1996–2001*. The Strategy is underpinned by the equity principles and theoretical framework outlined in *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools*.

During 1997, schools were assisted to address the four focus areas of the State gender equity strategy: teaching and learning, school culture and organisation, the school and its community, and monitoring, evaluation, review and development. Statewide training and development and the provision of targeted gender-based resources were the main means of assisting schools to implement the strategy.

Initiatives included:

- the Whole School Integrating Equity pilot project conducted in 13 schools in two districts. The project examined the links between issues of gender and other equity factors, the school curriculum, practices and policies, and student learning and social outcomes. Each school used an action research model to identify an issue they wished to address and then worked collegially to develop strategies to bring about improvement. Most schools focussed on improving literacy, interpersonal relations, or school climate;
- a gender in education and training development activity designed for Aboriginal educators. The training package, *Getting it Together*, was delivered to key State office and district personnel. It helped participants recognise and accept the need to understand Aboriginal perspectives of gender and violence, in order to address the needs of Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students and improve their outcomes from schooling; and
- the development and dissemination of body image, curriculum support materials in the English and Personal Development, Health and Physical Education key learning areas for the middle years of schooling. The resource *No Body is Perfect!* was informed by the understanding that gender is socially constructed. It included three units of work designed to encourage girls and boys to develop healthy and realistic ideas about their bodies and a booklet with advice for school principals on supporting students with eating disorders.

The government sector in Queensland used *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools* in its intended role as a companion document to the *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools*. Consistent with

the existing gender education policy in terms of its focus on gender issues in education, it provided strong support for Education Queensland's ongoing commitment to fair and equitable practices in the area of gender equity.

Other gender-related initiatives by Education Queensland included:

- the Queensland Rural Students Body Image, Eating and Exercising Research Project;
- the Prevention and Early Intervention of Self-harming Behaviours Project; and
- the Racist and Gendered Violence Project.

South Australia's government sector identified a research project by the Gender Equity team on the use and effectiveness of single-sex methodology as a key initiative in 1997. The project looked at literacy learning and how single-sex methodology was strategically used for girls in maths, science, technology and physical education and for boys in LOTE.

Additional gender-related developments in South Australia in 1997 included:

- the involvement of 22 schools in trialling the *No Fear* kit to address issues around gender and violence and whole-school culture change;
- attendance by a total of 1,200 personnel at 30 sessions which explored the implications for South Australian government schools of the *Gender and School Education Report* and *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools*;
- schools addressing boys' issues through a range of strategies based on understanding and working towards gender equity, examples including single-sex boys' classes in primary and junior primary schools; and
- the development of civics and citizenship education materials focussing on gender and race relations for years 4–7 in metropolitan and country schools.

Catholic schools in South Australia were funded by SACCS for the promotion and implementation of the *Gender Equity: A Framework for Australian Schools*. Particular projects included Gender Equity and Discourse in the Middle Years and Gender, Power and Violence.

Students with disabilities

A number of features were common to the initiatives taken by the States and sectors in 1997 to help students with disabilities. These included an increased emphasis on early integration and support for preschool students and their

families and transition programs for senior and post-compulsory school students. States also reported special transport facilities and travel skills training, provision of equipment such as laptop computers and professional development and consultant support for teachers.

Inclusion support was mentioned by several States and throughout the sectors. For example, both the government and Catholic authorities in the Northern Territory and Western Australia encouraged inclusion support for students with moderate to severe disabilities. Schools also implemented a range of projects to support other eligible students within the whole school setting.

Support for the integration of students with disabilities continued within government schools in Tasmania and Commonwealth Special Education program support was included in mainstream schools within the Catholic sector.

In the Australian Capital Territory a plan was developed in consultation with stakeholders, following a major review of special education. The plan maps Learning Support Centres and provides a range of models for integration into school settings.

Some States reported on the development of Individual Education Programs (IEPs) for students whose disabilities necessitated specialised placements. IEPs are developed in a multi-disciplinary context and focus on achievable outcomes for the individual student, often assisting the student to achieve the necessary skills for living after they leave school.

Professional development in this area was a significant aspect reported by the Association of Independent Schools of Queensland (AISQ).

Western Australia reported the successful delivery of individualised programs to students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities and/or multiple disabilities and patients at the Princess Margaret and Royal Perth Rehabilitation hospitals.

Educational certification for students with severe or multiple disabilities was a focus for some States. The Western Australian government and Catholic sectors considered that general curriculum achievement levels were inappropriate for these students and instead measured their performance against their own personal benchmarks.

In Queensland, a working party review of the certification of the achievement of post-compulsory school students, including those with special needs, led to the proposal that

a quality Certificate of Achievement in Post-compulsory School Education be issued, with information about the achievements of students completing courses that cannot be reported in terms of national or Statewide standards.

New South Wales was one of a number of States reporting on significant initiatives to assist students with disabilities attending government schools. One key achievement, the consultation process for *The Integration/Inclusion Feasibility Study* outlining the options for students with disabilities in New South Wales, was completed in March 1997. Other initiatives for students with disabilities reported by that State included:

- a review of the special education policy;
- the development of transition guidelines for young children with special learning needs;
- increased health care support for students with disabilities; and
- distribution of the resource document *Vision Impairment: A Reference for Schools*.

In Victoria, new methods of funding for regular schools enrolling students with disabilities and impairments and specialist schools were introduced in 1997. There has been increased retention of adult students with disabilities and impairments at schools pending the implementation of the Futures for Young Adults Program by the Department of Human Services. This program will result in approximately 1,200 students with disabilities over 18 years of age in regular and specialist schools moving to appropriate adult programs.

A number of initiatives were implemented through the Commonwealth Special Education Programme for students in government schools in Queensland in 1997. Initiatives included:

- the development of teacher-skilling packages as self-learning packages for schools to focus on the education of students with hearing, vision, physical and intellectual impairments; and
- the implementation of an identification process for students with speech language impairments.

Programs and support offered for students in government schools in South Australia included:

- transport assistance for students attending special schools, classes or programs;
- a program for students with disabilities and severe behavioural difficulties at Modbury Special School using non-aversive management strategies;

- counselling and provision of additional teacher time in local schools for families of children with newly diagnosed hearing loss; and
- AUSLAN as a South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) Stage 1 subject for deaf and hearing students at Daws Road High School.

In the Northern Territory government sector, a project officer was appointed to distribute information to Aboriginal schools about implementing the Special Education Policy in Aboriginal schools.

Numerous initiatives were reported from both independent and Catholic sectors across Australia. Information from the independent sector, for example, indicated a range of developments for students with disabilities.

Programs in Victoria included the employment of teacher aides, therapists and special education teachers, modifying the curriculum, professional development for teachers and developing individual student programs.

In South Australia, where the size of this group of students is estimated to be increasing by around 20 per cent per year, the government sector's special education team supported schools with new enrolments but also took a planned and coordinated approach with Flinders University to professional development in behaviour management, Autism and alternative, augmentative communication.

A number of independent schools in Western Australia enrolled students with disabilities and had a wide range of programs in place to support them. Initiatives undertaken in 1997 included occupational and speech therapy and language programs and programs to aid transition to TAFE or vocationally-oriented courses.

In the Northern Territory, funding was used to provide inclusion support and specialist equipment such as sound amplification for students with hearing loss. The latter directly benefited 110 students, including two class groups of Indigenous students with hearing loss for whom sound field assistance was provided.

The Catholic sector also noted a broad range of initiatives to help students with disabilities, reporting in particular an emphasis on services to improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities and adequate provision of support services within schools in 1997.

The Queensland Catholic Education Office rewrote enrolment procedures in the light of the Disability Discrimination Act and the requirement that institutions increase their capacity to provide access to students with disabilities.

The South Australian Catholic sector extended and modified the current moderation process on disability funding, developed a data base to enhance equity processes in service delivery and funding and restructured consultancy positions for special education.

Catholic Special Education programs in the Northern Territory emphasised inclusive practices by providing therapy and essential support services to enable students to improve their participation in mainstream schooling and gain appropriate educational outcomes.

Cross-sector developments received limited reporting, but were important in contributing to the education of students with disabilities. For example, in the Northern Territory, some funds were accessed for students with significant levels of disability through a tri-sectoral committee and Catholic schools in remote communities continued to have access to Commonwealth targeted programs funding through the Department of Education.

Western Australia also reported significant involvement in joint agency initiatives, in areas including:

- transition support for post-compulsory students;
- assistance for school leavers in obtaining supported employment;
- development of foundation outcome statements; and
- inclusive practices in sport and physical education.

Geographically isolated students

There was a significant number of programs intended to benefit students attending schools in rural and isolated areas. Resources and projects were funded through Commonwealth, State and occasionally, private sources. As an example of the latter, the RACV Energy Breakthrough program funded by the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria, the Department of Education and the Goldfields Shire in Central Victoria, encouraged students to examine and use the latest technology, while considering its impact on the environment and the way people live locally and globally.

The Commonwealth's Country Areas funding was identified by some States as a major source of additional funding for initiatives to benefit students living in isolation. Funded programs were locally-targeted and frequently designed to address student needs across the schooling sectors and educational levels.

Several States noted greater levels of local community involvement in addressing the educational disadvantage that arises from geographic isolation. For example, government school communities in the Northern Territory

were encouraged to work collaboratively to establish links with other agencies and groups wherever possible, and to use technology to overcome distance barriers. Projects were required to be part of a coordinated and integrated school plan. Community professional development was seen as a major initiative in both Victoria and Queensland.

The use of a wide range of technology and computer-based communications by the Western Australian Schools of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) exemplified the role of the States' distance education providers in meeting the educational needs of geographically isolated students. In 1997, the main focus was on telematics, which connected teachers and students through telephone, modem-linked computers, fax, scanners, CD-ROM and e-mail.

The Volunteers for Isolated Students Education project in the Northern Territory, which also operated in some other States, provided travel for volunteer tutoring assistance over a period of six to eight weeks to remote families who had children participating in distance education programs.

The Literacy through Libraries project gave opportunities to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes by improving library resources in remote schools in the Northern Territory. The project offered an integrated, Territory-wide approach to updating remote school libraries in all regions in consultation with relevant school and regional staff.

Other projects provided by government sectors across the States to benefit geographically isolated students included:

- camps to provide enrichment and extension in areas such as language, science and sport;
- programs targeting isolated gifted and talented students;
- the appointment of resident artists and authors and the development of cultural pursuits programs;
- technology and instrumental music programs;
- the introduction of vocational education and training programs aimed at improving student retention and increasing post-schooling options;
- transition and motivation programs for senior students;
- the appointment of field officers; and
- the provision of urban accommodation for city-based camps and professional development for students and teachers from schools in geographically isolated areas.

Support for geographically isolated students by the independent sector in 1997 included:

- the provision of vocational education programs;

- developing initiatives to encourage and support participation in work placements;
- professional development for staff, including the provision of videos and video-conferencing facilities;
- the employment of support staff; and
- use of visiting specialist teachers to conduct student workshops in specialist areas.

Some students from geographically isolated areas attended independent boarding schools and had to contend with vastly different living and learning environments. Special tutorial assistance and out-of-school help were provided during the transition period to help them adapt, with ongoing support provided through pastoral care systems.

For isolated students, access to on-line technology presented difficulties. Apart from the capital expense, the costs of using STD telephone calls to access Internet service providers limit the use of on-line facilities even when phone lines are available.

Catholic schools worked closely with their local communities to identify the programs most beneficial to geographically isolated children, with funding distributed according to location and enrolments. Excursion support and school-based projects aimed at minimising the effects of isolation were priorities, together with computer consultancy and literacy inservice training for isolated schools such as those in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds

All sectors and States reported a variety of educational support programs and financial assistance schemes for students of low socioeconomic status (SES). Sources of funding targeted to help these students included State-specific programs and the Commonwealth Literacy Programme and Commonwealth Targeted and Quality programs.

The method of identification of schools and students varied amongst the States. For example:

- in Victoria, information is collected at annual census time from the schools' student administration records about six different family background characteristics of each student. This information is combined into a relative indicator of educational need on which special learning needs funding is based; and
- in the Australian Capital Territory, the index of relative socioeconomic disadvantage (IRSED), developed by the

Australian Bureau of Statistics, was used to identify eligible schools for assistance under the Schools Equity Fund. The process used to identify socioeconomic disadvantage was reviewed in 1997 in consultation with stakeholders and will be refined in 1998.

At the school level in all sectors and States, funding focussed on improving outcomes in literacy and numeracy, but also addressed other areas such as curriculum practices, organisational skills and health. Regional support was mentioned by some States in the areas of professional development and development of effective learning and teaching strategies. In some instances, reviews of school policy helped to promote participation by students from this equity group. In addition to literacy programs, other projects helped to improve self-esteem and learning outcomes, through offering camps, excursions and breakfast assistance for students as well as training programs for teacher aides, liaison officers and parents.

Direct financial support for students from low SES came from programs such as the following:

- Education Maintenance Allowance;
- Student and Secondary Assistance Scheme;
- Boarding Away From Home Allowance;
- Needy Child Grant;
- Free Bus Pass Scheme;
- Junior Secondary Bursary Scheme;
- School Resource Packages; and
- Clothing assistance.

Some independent schools undertook a range of measures to support students, including fee reduction, bursaries, resource teachers and tutor programs, and other learner support programs. In Western Australia, the low socioeconomic status of students was a particular concern for rural and remote Aboriginal independent community schools with low overall levels of literacy and numeracy and low participation rates among male secondary students. These challenges were met by the joint use of programs to develop culturally appropriate curriculum initiatives.

The Catholic sector also focussed on the literacy and numeracy skills of students from low SES backgrounds and introduced writing and reading programs and other literacy support with Commonwealth funding.

Gifted and talented students

Four States reported details of special initiatives for students with high intellectual potential (SHIP).

Implementation of the Bright Futures policy in Victoria has seen an increase in the number of schools addressing the needs of gifted students. Initiatives include:

- professional development programs for teachers;
- programs which explore ways of identifying and extending gifted students in secondary schools located in low socioeconomic areas and employ the resources of scientific, cultural and tertiary experts; and
- application of interactive technology, e-mail and the Internet to deliver programs to rural students.

Education Queensland's policy for the education of students who are potentially gifted was the basis for GATE Way, a project initiated in 1997 designed to:

- raise awareness and implement public relations strategies;
- increase the number of gifted and talented programs in schools; and
- develop focus schools as centres for training, visitation and research.

The Unicorn Project was a joint professional development project between Education Queensland and the Association of Independent Schools of Queensland, which focussed on optimising learning and teaching conditions for potentially gifted students.

In South Australian government schools:

- highly gifted preschool children were enrolled early under the Early Enrolment Policy allowing them to commence schooling from four and a half years of age;
- the R-7 SHIP Focus School Program continued to assist teachers identify gifted students and deliver appropriate programs within the classroom and across the school; and
- the Heights R-12 School, selected as the first special interest secondary school with a SHIP program, commenced its program in 1997 with 30 students.

The Western Australian government sector reported school-based and supplementary programs for gifted and talented students in primary and secondary schools in a variety of subject areas and the development of guidelines for talented preschool students.

Students at risk

Some States provided programs and services targeted at students identified as being at risk of leaving school early. Such initiatives included:

- two vocational education programs in New South Wales that specifically target students at risk of leaving school early — Work Education Course for students in years 9 and 10 and Individual Work Plans for students in years 9 and 10. In 1997, the New South Wales Board of Studies approved the Work Education Course as an Other Endorsed Studies Course that would contribute to the New South Wales School Certificate.
- the Ready, Set, Go project in South Australian government schools, allocated funds to support improved transition practices and documentation of competencies gained by students with disabilities;
- the implementation of the MARSSS (Managing and Retaining Secondary Students in School) Program in Tasmanian government schools; and
- the Youth Connection service for government students in the Australian Capital Territory, which provided preventative support, assistance and advocacy for young people at risk of leaving school early and who need access to services outside the school system.

South Australia also reported on the first stage of the Students Completing Schooling project. Interviews were conducted with approximately 200 young people who left school early, including a high proportion of students from low SES backgrounds. The project is a collaborative research project for the Department of Education, Training and Employment, the Flinders Institute for the Study of Teaching and the Senior Secondary Assessment Board with a focus on students who do not complete studies for the South Australian Certificate of Education.

Professional development

All States reported professional development for teachers as a key element of meeting the objective of providing equal access and participation for students in targeted equity groups. Conferences, workshops and training kits were offered on a wide range of equity issues, including gender and literacy, gender and violence, workplace assessor training for students with disabilities, ESL in the Mainstream and use of ESL scales, inclusive teaching and learning, and literacy and language development. Tasmanian government teachers were able to access professional development on the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and classroom planning via the Internet.

Some government authorities developed a broad perspective for such training, including parent and community members in their program support reviews and delivery. For instance, community development officers

were appointed in 1997 by the New South Wales government sector in response to the priority area of awareness and commitment among the education community. In the South Australian government sector, traineeships were provided through the Enterprise Agreement of 1996 to increase the skills of non-teaching staff in supporting students with disabilities.

Professional development initiatives in the independent and Catholic sectors included provision of in-service training workshops for special education and gender equity programs and seminars, network meetings and support materials for the implementation of inclusive curriculum and literacy development, often as a result of an expressed need from teachers for strategies to include all students in their classrooms. ESL in the Mainstream professional development was offered to both ESL and generalist teachers.

Indigenous students

Detailed information on initiatives targeted at Indigenous students is provided in Section 6 of the National Overview.

7.3 Work towards defining equity target groups

Discussion and the progression of approaches to addressing the needs of a range of student groups occurred in a number of States.

While all States accepted the major identified student groups as needing additional support, there were variations in the definitions of some target categories. For example, low SES students were sometimes defined in terms of those receiving student assistance scheme funding, but this was not consistent across the States. For instance, New South Wales identifies for assistance schools serving low socioeconomic status communities through a voluntary survey of families and an index which includes factors such as parents' occupation and educational level and size of family. Reporting from the States also suggested some additional perspectives on the identity of student groups in need of specific support. For example:

- some States included provision for students with high intellectual potential as a target group, due to their specific educational and other needs;
- the Northern Territory Department of Education identified health matters and residential mobility as additional, key factors contributing to educational disadvantage; and

- the South Australian government sector reported transient students as a separate category, with strategies being developed for future data collection and analysis.

As an example of the in-depth nature of the work undertaken in some States, the Ministerial Advisory Council on Government Schooling in the Australian Capital Territory examined issues including approaches to defining disadvantage and allocating funds, the implications of each definition for the allocation of funds (particularly in terms of program effectiveness), and other factors such as administrative cost and program accountability.

7.4 Expenditure on equity target groups

In 1997, all sectors continued their efforts to improve access to and participation in the full range of educational and schooling experiences for students in targeted equity groups. Funding from both State and Commonwealth sources provided human and physical resources, specialised curriculum support and direct financial assistance for students in each of these categories. An indication of the range of system/authority expenditure in 1997 is provided below.

New South Wales

The 1997 commitment by the Department of School Education to expenditure for priority groups of students was evident in the total of \$15.6m distributed as direct financial assistance to DSP schools.

The Catholic school sector also reported a strong commitment to a range of funding initiatives including support for geographically isolated students in the Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes, where schools worked closely with their local communities to identify appropriate programs for funding.

Table 7A. Expenditure (a) on equity target groups, government schools, New South Wales, 1996/97 (\$ million)

Special education	353.3
Rural education	59.1
Socioeconomically disadvantaged students	50.0
Indigenous students	24.5
Students from non-English speaking backgrounds	78.1
Other equity programs including gender equity	6.2

(a) Includes both State and Commonwealth funding.

Source: Department of School Education, NSW

Table 7B. School Global Budget funding from all sources, targeted student groups, government schools, Victoria, 1997 (\$ million)

<i>SGB component</i>	<i>Payments to schools</i>
Disabilities and Impairments (a)	160.2
Special Learning Needs	28.6
English as a Second Language	36.7
Rurality and Isolation	23.9
Priority Programs (b)	68.6

- (a) Reduction from 1996 due to transfer of provision for 19+ students to TAFE
- (b) Includes funding for LOTE, Country Areas Programme and Koorie education

Source: Department of Education, Victoria

Victoria

In all, 309 primary schools and 107 secondary schools in the government sector received funding of from \$251 to \$3,580 per student under the ESL component of the School Global Budget. A total of 30,531 primary students and 8,541 secondary students received support through the application of this funding.

A new method of funding for government schools enrolling students with disabilities and impairments was implemented. Grants ranging from just over \$3,400 to \$25,000 for each eligible student were paid to schools.

Queensland

Additional funds facilitated more effective communication with parents from language backgrounds other than English and their participation in government schools. Increased funding was provided for the ESL Program, including the salary costs of an additional ten ESL teachers to enhance ESL support programs in low incidence areas.

Table 7C. Additional expenditure on equity target groups, all sources, government schools, Queensland, 1997 (a) (\$ million)

Students with disabilities	61.1
Indigenous	17.7
NESB students	7.2
Disadvantaged gifted and talented students	1.1
Geographically isolated students	12.5
Socioeconomically disadvantaged students	8.4

- (a) These figures do not include State funding of special and distance education teaching at a higher average cost than in regular schools.

Source: Education Queensland

Table 7D. Expenditure of Commonwealth funds on target students, Catholic schools, Queensland, 1997, (\$ million)

Geographically Isolated	0.5
ESL New Arrivals	1.3
Literacy (ESL and Poverty)	2.7
Special Learning Needs	1.8
Indigenous Education	1.8

Source: Education Queensland

Educational provision for students with disabilities was maintained, with extra funding allocated to employ an additional 60 teachers.

Commonwealth funds were also administered by the Priority Country Area Program (PCAP), administered jointly by Education Queensland and the Queensland Catholic Education Commission. The program supported some 35,328 students in 250 schools in the three sectors.

Ten independent schools in Queensland also received support through the AISQ Disadvantaged Literacy Program. These schools were declared the most significantly educationally disadvantaged in terms of the incidence of students identified under a mapping of equity target group enrolment and socioeconomic disadvantage.

South Australia

Estimated operating expenditure on the provision of programs and services supporting the education of educationally disadvantaged students attending government schools in South Australia was in excess of \$114.2m. Of this, some \$15.8m stemmed from Commonwealth grants.

In South Australia, the School Card Concession Scheme provides financial assistance to lower income families for school expenses. Approvals were 36 per cent of enrolments in all schools in 1997 (41.4 per cent of government school enrolments and 22.7 per cent of non-government school enrolments), requiring grants in the vicinity of \$7m for students in government and non-government schools.

A total of \$5.1m was allocated under the Disadvantaged Schools component of the Commonwealth Literacy Programme. Commonwealth Early Literacy Component (ELC) funding in the order of \$405,000 was distributed among 214 Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP) schools.

Students in rural and remote areas were provided with programs funded through the Country Areas Program totalling \$1.3m.

Additional State Government funding of \$4.25m was allocated in 1997 through the DECS Enterprise Agreement

to provide additional support to students with disabilities or learning difficulties. A further \$0.3m provided for the employment of additional Aboriginal Education Workers.

Funding of \$2m was allocated under the Targeted Literacy and Numeracy Programme to an initiative involving the three schooling sectors in South Australia. The program aimed to improve educational outcomes for students of low SES backgrounds and for students of a language background other than English.

During 1997, funding for independent schools was allocated through direct school grants, partly-funded workshops and in-service courses, and projects involving single and cluster schools. Some 37 independent schools accessed Commonwealth funding to run school-based ESL support programs. A component of the funding was made available to schools to identify and assess the ESL students in the school population.

The Catholic Education Office reported extension and modification to the current moderation process for disability funding and the development of a database to enhance equity processes in service delivery and funding. In addition:

- \$71,000 was allocated to assist Catholic schools through the Country Area Program;
- \$1.948m was allocated to assisting students with disabilities, \$1.338m of which was provided by the South Australian Commission for Catholic Schools (SACCS) and the remainder through the Commonwealth's Special Education Programme; and
- \$95,000 was allocated by SACCS to the Indigenous Education Program in addition to the \$277,000 provided by the Commonwealth under the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme.

Western Australia

In government schools, staffing costs for ESL services totalled \$5.6m. It was also reported that:

- 21,911 government school students were supported under the Secondary Assistance Scheme. Students under the age of 17 whose families hold Department of Social Security or Department of Veterans' Affairs pensioner concession cards received assistance totalling \$3.7m;
- \$2.4m, intended to help defray the costs of textbook purchases and school charges, was paid to schools through the School Grant in three instalments, while

parents received direct payments for clothing assistance through outlays of \$1.2m;

- the Boarding Away From Home Allowance of \$500 per child per year was available to parents whose children were eligible for the Commonwealth Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) scheme, while a special boarding allowance of \$1,000 was paid to students boarding at agricultural colleges who were ineligible for the AIC; and
- a Needy Child Grant of \$110 per year assisted qualified families (ie those holding one of the cards nominated above) with the payment of fees at community preschools: expenditure totalled \$12,000.

Significant expenditure to meet the additional needs of target group students in Western Australia's non-government schools was provided from within the resources of individual schools and systems. Schools and systems also applied Commonwealth funding to address the needs of target group students (Table 7F).

Table 7E. Commonwealth funding (a) applied to equity target groups, government schools, Western Australia, 1997 (\$ '000)

Priority Schools Program	6,313
Priority Country Areas Program	2,231
Students with disabilities	570.7
Students from non-English speaking backgrounds	
a) English as a second language	3,875
b) New Arrivals	2,237
Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme	7,701

(a) Details of separate or additional State funding to target programs are not available.

Source: Education Department of Western Australia

Table 7F. Commonwealth funding support, independent schools, Western Australia, 1997

<i>Component</i>	<i>(\$)</i>
<i>Literacy</i>	
ESL General Support Component	406,200
Disadvantaged Schools Component	123,700
Early Literacy Component	38,700
Total	568,600
<i>Special needs</i>	
ESL New Arrivals Component	247,478
Country Areas Component	66,200
Special Education	730,600
Total	1,044,278

Source: Association of Independent Schools Western Australia

Tasmania

Funding was devolved to schools to best meet the needs of individual students. Approximately 38 per cent of all students received additional financial support through the Student Assistance Scheme.

In the Catholic sector, 386 geographically isolated students attended three primary schools, which received support from the Country Areas Program.

Students from low SES backgrounds in Catholic schools formed a large proportion of the approximately 730 educationally disadvantaged students assisted in the attainment of literacy and numeracy skills through the Literacy Programme.

Northern Territory

Through the Commonwealth's Targeted and National Priority Programmes, funds were provided to supplement Northern Territory Department of Education initiatives conducted at the school, regional and Territory level which focussed on improving the literacy and numeracy outcomes for educationally disadvantaged students.

Two new committees with Territory-wide representation made decisions relating to the equitable distribution of available funds for students with disabilities. Approximately 75 per cent of these funds provided inclusion support for students with moderate to severe disabilities and their teachers through the employment of Inclusion Support Assistants.

In the independent sector, Commonwealth funding of \$69,740 provided under the School Support element of Special Education and \$84,579 under the joint element were used to provide inclusion support for students with moderate to severe disabilities.

Table 7G. Expenditure for priority groups, government schools, Tasmania, 1997

	\$
Community Languages	23,662
Country Areas	442,000
Disadvantaged Schools	2,741,619
Early Literacy	347,923
ESL (General)	341,458
ESL (New Arrivals)	192,840
Special Education	1,648,100
Students with Disabilities	274,920

Source: Department of Education, Community and Cultural Development, Tasmania

Table 7H. Expenditure on priority groups, Catholic schools, Tasmania, 1997

	Commonwealth Programmes \$	Other \$
Indigenous students	356,695	—
NESB Students	—	—
a) ESL New Arrivals	51,750	—
b) Literacy Program	87,830	—
Isolated Students	—	—
a) Country Areas	45,026	—
b) Boarding Facility	—	29,396
Educationally Disadvantaged (Literacy Program)	314,361	—
Students with Disabilities	—	—
a) Special Education	390,438	9,000
b) SWD Component	48,347	—

Source: Department of Education, Community and Cultural Development, Tasmania

Table 7I. Commonwealth Targeted & National Priority Programs, government schools, Northern Territory, 1997

	(\$)
<i>Literacy</i>	
Disadvantaged Schools	1,379,760
English as a Second Language—General Support	1,059,586
Early Literacy	183,654
<i>Special Learning Needs</i>	
Schools Support	375,596
Intervention Support	263,404
Country Areas Programme	732,000
English as a Second Language—New Arrivals	382,466
<i>Languages</i>	
National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools	236,330
Community Languages	36,493
Priority Languages	8,503
<i>School to Work Programme</i>	
School to Work	18,840
<i>General Recurrent</i>	
Students with Disabilities	286,463

Source: Northern Territory Department of Education

Commonwealth funding of \$85,360 supported programs for students from non-English speaking backgrounds in five independent schools. Students were mainly Indigenous and a number also had significant hearing loss, a critical obstacle to language learning. In addition:

- three schools catering for geographically isolated students received funding totalling \$21,824 under the Country Areas Program; and
- Commonwealth funding of \$39,737 to address socioeconomic disadvantage was made available to three schools—one primary and two secondary. In each case,

the main beneficiaries were Indigenous students, although one school had a small group of non-Indigenous students from low socioeconomic status.

The Catholic Education Council (NT), through the services of the Catholic Education Office, addressed the needs of the students identified as priority groups in the *National Strategy for Equity in Schooling* through a range of school-based initiatives and centrally conducted professional support. Funding through Commonwealth targeted programs and the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme contributed to their implementation.

Commonwealth targeted program monies enabled the implementation of initiatives in Literacy, Special Education — School Support and Country Areas programs in urban and rural Catholic schools. Joint Intervention funds were accessed through a tri-sectoral committee, for students with significant levels of disability.

In joint ventures, Catholic schools in remote communities continued to access Commonwealth targeted programs funding through the Northern Territory Department of Education. Commonwealth funding of \$239,600 provided under the School Support element of the Special Education Programme and \$111,000 under the Joint Intervention element was used to provide inclusion support for students with significant disabilities.

Australian Capital Territory

A total of \$31.6m was spent on equity programs in government schools in the Australian Capital Territory. This included a Schools Equity Fund which provided \$165,419 to assist students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds in government schools. The Australian Capital Territory Government provided \$75,419 of this amount. In addition, ESL program expenditure in government schools was \$3.6m in 1997. This assisted:

- Four Introductory English Centres providing assistance to 548 newly-arrived and kindergarten students with minimal English skills;
- ESL assistance in mainstream schools; and
- through the Language for Understanding across the Curriculum program, a specialist ESL field officer to work with mainstream teachers to promote learning outcomes for a further 1,183 ESL students.

In the Australian Capital Territory independent schools surveyed, Commonwealth literacy funding provided teaching assistance and supplementary resources to support ESL programs.

A total of \$17.7m was spent on programs for students with disabilities in government and non-government schools.

In Catholic schools, ESL New Arrivals funding of \$2,922 provided intensive teaching assistance to enable one student to participate in mainstream classroom activities.

Table 7J. Expenditure on equity programs, government schools, Australian Capital Territory, by source of funding, 1997

	<i>Commonwealth</i> (\$)	<i>ACT gov't</i> (\$)
English as a second language	1,183,097	2,451,000
Special education	734,966	14,422,706
Special needs transport	—	1,692,439
Schools Equity Fund	90,000	75,419
Early Literacy Component	25,000	—
Junior Secondary Bursaries	—	409,787
Free school bus passes	—	679,872
Reading Recovery/Learning Assistance	—	5,251,805
Behaviour management services	—	3,786,560
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education	326,900	346,150
Distance education	2,375	48,125
Gender equity	—	69,673

Source: Department of Education and Training, ACT

Table 7K. Commonwealth funding for equity programs, independent schools, Australian Capital Territory, 1997

	(\$)
English as a second language education	13,376
Special education	11,790
Early Literacy Component	10,024

Source: Department of Education and Training, ACT

Table 7L. Funding for equity programs, Catholic schools, Australian Capital Territory, by source of funding, 1997

	<i>Catholic Education Office</i> (\$)	<i>C'wlth</i> (\$)	<i>ACT gov't</i> (\$)
Special education	50,000	559,894	234,023
Early literacy/ESL/Disadvantaged Schools Programme	39,000	485,000	—
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education	128,600	137,000	—
Total expenditure	217,600	1,181,894	234,023

Source: Department of Education and Training, ACT

7.5 Access, participation and attendance of students in equity groups

All States continued their efforts to increase participation and retention in the full range of schooling and educational experiences for targeted equity groups of students in 1997. Although figures were not reported consistently by all States, the following data was provided. Data on attendance rates by student target group was generally not available.

Queensland

The level of participation by target group students in Catholic and independent schools is indicated in Tables 7M and 7N.

Through the Commonwealth Literacy Programme, the independent school sector in Queensland supported 34 students (17 boys and 17 girls) attending a total of 16 independent schools under the ESL — New Arrivals element. Funding to provide ESL assistance to support other targeted students attending independent schools is indicated in Table 7O.

Table 7M. Participation by target group students, by category of student, Catholic schools, Queensland, 1997

	<i>Students</i>	<i>Change 1996–97</i>
ESL	4,844	-14
Indigenous students	1,885	19
Disabled students	1,626	50
Isolated	2,570	2
Boarding Fee Concessions	234	-16

Source: Education Queensland

Table 7N. Equity group participation figures for students in independent schools, Queensland, 1997

	<i>Students</i>	<i>Change 1996–97</i>
ESL	1,751	37
Indigenous students	1,275	75
Disabled students	472	65
Isolated	1,267	79
Boarding Fee Concessions	107	-20

Source: Education Queensland

Table 7O. Students supported under the ESL – New Arrivals, independent schools, Queensland, 1997

<i>Proficiency Level</i>	<i>Primary</i>		<i>Secondary</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>
Level 1	14	16	14	3
Level 2	86	75	146	137
Level 3	89	75	182	215
Level 4	50	53	143	140

Source: Education Queensland

Table 7P. Target group participation, Catholic schools, Western Australia, 1997 (FTE)

	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>	<i>Combined (K–12)</i>
ESL New Arrival	54	46	0
Literacy	5,275	1,487	1,860
Special education	571	248	0
Country Areas	873	66	1,008
Indigenous	541	22	959
Total	7,314	1,869	3,827

Source: Catholic Education Office, Western Australia

South Australia

South Australia reported that government sector monitoring of attendance and absence rates in 1997 collected reasons for non-attendance by gender, cultural background and school-card status to provide baseline data. Attendance services, provided by district offices, then used this data to target schools and sectors of the community in the greatest need.

Western Australia

Reporting from Western Australia detailed the participation in that State's Catholic schools by students in the various target groups (Table 7P).

Tasmania

Tasmania reported a range of information on participation in schooling by students in target groups in government schools in 1997.

The reporting focus for Tasmania's Catholic schools was the enrolment of Indigenous students.

Tasmania was also able to provide some data on the attendance of equity group students, compared with the overall student population.

Table 7Q. Participation by target group, government schools, Tasmania, 1997

<i>Group</i>	<i>% of school population</i>
Geographically isolated	9.0
Low SES	37.8
Aboriginal	4.8
Students with high needs	1.0

Source: Department of Education, Community and Cultural Development, Tasmania

Table 7R. Enrolment of Indigenous students, Catholic schools, by gender and level of schooling, Tasmania, 1997

<i>Year level</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Persons</i>
Prep	10	22	32
1–6	122	116	238
7–10	67	81	148
11–12	8	11	19

Source: Department of Education, Community and Cultural Development, Tasmania

Table 7S. Attendance rates of Indigenous and other students, years K–10, Catholic schools, by level of schooling, Tasmania, 1997 (per cent)

<i>Year level</i>	<i>Indigenous students</i>	<i>Other students</i>
Prep	92.9	93.3
1–6	95.2	98.1
7–10	91.1	94.1

Source: Department of Education, Community and Cultural Development, Tasmania

The Tasmanian government school figures for Term I in 1997 compared the attendance of equity groups as an average daily absence rate and found:

- geographically isolated students had an average daily rate of absence of 5.4 per cent, compared with 5.9 per cent for other students;
- Indigenous students had an 8.3 per cent average daily rate of absence, compared with 5.7 per cent for non-Indigenous students; and
- students from a low SES background (those receiving Student Assistance Scheme funding) had a 6.3 per cent average daily rate of absence, compared with 5.5 per cent for other students.

Tasmania also reported an average daily rate of absence of 6.0 per cent for boys enrolled in government schools, in comparison with 5.7 per cent for girls.

Catholic sector reporting on attendance rates of target group students focussed on Indigenous students, comparing their attendance with non-Indigenous students.

Table 7T. Access and participation by students in target groups, all schools, by sector, Northern Territory, 1997 (per cent of all students)

<i>Category of student</i>	<i>Gov't</i>	<i>Catholic</i>	<i>Independent</i>
Low SES students	61	64	9
NESB students	10	—	—
Indigenous students	40	19	—
Geographically isolated students	40	19	—

Source: Northern Territory Department of Education

Northern Territory

Some limited reporting was available from the Northern Territory concerning the participation in schooling in each of the three schools sectors by target group students. Reporting indicated the percentage of students in each sector who belonged to four of the identified target student groups.

The data provided confirmed that students from low SES backgrounds were the most highly represented target group in Northern Territory schools. The information also indicated that the numbers of males in target categories seemed to be consistently higher than females across all three schooling sectors.

7.6 Retention and completion rates to year 12

Only limited information on the apparent retention rates for target group students is available. However, from among the information reported:

- the government sector in New South Wales reported declining apparent retention rates to year 12 for low SES and Indigenous students in 1997;
- Education Queensland figures indicated that apparent retention rates for Indigenous students increased in 1997 but still remained well below those of non-Indigenous students, for each of years 10, 11 and 12;
- according to data from the Northern Territory government and Catholic sectors, apparent retention rates to years 11 and 12 for females from low SES backgrounds were higher than for males from similar backgrounds. In government schools, the same pattern applied to Indigenous students and also gifted and talented students; and
- the Australian Capital Territory indicated that a new school administration system, currently under

development, will enable the reporting of data in respect of government schools when it is introduced.

In general, independent schools found retention rates of students in equity groups were about the same as or lower than other students. Reports indicated a number of contributing factors such as:

- financial hardship (affecting students from low socioeconomic backgrounds);
- resource constraints, limiting the ability of schools to meet the full range of needs of students;
- different cultural priorities and language within the home environment;
- poor self-esteem;
- family breakdown;
- parental education levels and expectations;
- ill-health; and
- distance and isolation.

Indigenous schools in the independent sector reported a much higher proportion of students from all four categories of disadvantage and correspondingly greater difficulties in maintaining student retention. Factors affecting retention rates were said to include inadequate community support,

limited funding, lack of employment opportunities and career paths and resource limitations.

There was a wide range of initiatives being undertaken by independent schools to improve the retention of students from all equity groups, including:

- engagement of specialised teaching staff and teachers' aides;
- full integration of students with disabilities into the school community;
- development of individualised special learning programs;
- increased professional development of staff;
- physical modifications to schools to improve access;
- employment of extra funds from within the school to boost learning assistance;
- introduction of peer support programs; and
- provision of intensive ESL tuition for NESB students.

Completion to year 12

To provide a picture of the extent to which disadvantaged students stay on at school, the Commonwealth and States have agreed to use data from State boards of secondary

Table 7U. Year 12 completion rates (a), by SES (b), State (c) and gender, 1997 (p) (per cent)

State	Low socioeconomic status deciles			High socioeconomic status deciles			Total		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
New South Wales	53	63	58	72	80	76	59	69	64
Victoria	49	64	56	70	87	78	61	77	69
Queensland	58	66	62	74	80	77	64	73	69
South Australia	46	58	52	73	87	80	57	71	64
Western Australia	31	46	38	53	68	60	43	57	50
Tasmania	58	73	65	97	102	99	68	82	75
Northern Territory	11	17	14	(d)	(d)	(d)	24	35	29
Australian Capital Territory	(e)	(e)	(e)	82	87	84	81	85	83
Australia	49	61	55	71	82	76	59	71	65

(p) Preliminary – subject to finalisation of 1997 estimated resident population.

(a) These figures are estimates only. They express the number of year 12 completions (year 12 certificates issued by State education authorities) as a proportion of the estimated population that could attend year 12 in that calendar year. Different jurisdictions have different minimum requirements for issuing year 12 certificates. For example, some jurisdictions issue certificates for subjects completed in each year of study at years 11 and 12, thereby making it possible to have over 100 per cent completion rates.

(b) The IRSED has been used to calculate SES on basis of postcode of students' home addresses. The use of postcodes corrupts State data to some extent as some postcodes straddle State boundaries. 'Low SES' is the average of the lowest three deciles and 'High SES' is the average of the top three SES deciles.

(c) For the completion rates presented in this Table, population deciles are calculated from the national 15–19-year-old population. State SES completion rates are based on national population deciles. For example, first decile rates are calculated for those postcode districts in a State which are part of the first national decile.

(d) On the basis of this index, Northern Territory has no High SES deciles.

(e) On the basis of this index, Australian Capital Territory has no Low SES decile.

Note: Some States have higher TAFE participation rates which affects their year 12 completion rates.

Source: Commonwealth DEETYA (derived from data provided by State accreditation authorities and the ABS)

studies on numbers of year 12 certificates awarded. This information includes student home postcodes, and so permits analysis of the number of students who have received certificates by locality (e.g. urban, rural and remote) and socioeconomic background (using ABS indices of the socioeconomic status of areas).

The resulting data provide a broad measure of the holding power of schools in relation to students facing two kinds of disadvantage. However, though they are called completion rates, they do not describe the proportion of school students who complete year 12. Rather, they tell us about that proportion of all young people in the relevant age-group who gain year 12 certificates.

The rates are most appropriately used as indicators of trends over time and long-term differences in completion rates between groups, and not as precise measures. In view of the process used in calculating the rates, the data needs to be interpreted with some caution. This applies particularly to estimated rates for the smaller States, where small changes in population or completion can affect rates quite significantly.

Data reported by the States do not permit a national perspective on completion to year 12 by students in all target groups. However, the information which was provided directly relates to one of the equity target groups and provides a perspective on the relationship between gender and year 12 completion.

Completions by socioeconomic status

Data provided in Table 7U indicates that students from high SES backgrounds completed year 12 at a rate far higher than

that for students from low SES backgrounds. This relative difference was evident in all States. Some 76 per cent of students from high SES backgrounds across Australia completed year 12 compared with only 55 per cent of low SES students.

Consistent with the trend in year 12 retention rates, Table 7V reveals an overall slow decline in completion rates from 1993 to 1997, although high SES students consistently had higher rates than low SES students. The decline over the period appeared to be marginally less for girls than for boys.

Completions by gender

In 1997, as in 1996, 65 per cent of the potential year 12 population received a year 12 certificate, with the percentage being markedly higher for girls than for boys. While the overall completion rate varied from 83 per cent of students in the Australian Capital Territory to 29 per cent of students in Northern Territory, the rate for girls was higher in every State than for boys and in some States the gender difference was extremely large. From Table 7U it is also evident that girls from high socioeconomic backgrounds completed year 12 at a far higher rate than girls from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

A comparison of national year 12 completion rates in the years from 1993 to 1997 reveals an overall decline. However, the rate of completion dropped less for girls than for boys in both socioeconomic groupings reported. The change appears to have been marginally more noticeable for girls from low socioeconomic backgrounds than for those from high socioeconomic status backgrounds.

Table 7V. Year 12 completion rates (a), by SES (b) and gender, Australia, 1993–1997 (per cent)

Year	<i>Low socioeconomic status deciles</i>			<i>High socioeconomic status deciles</i>			<i>Total</i>		
	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>
1993	57	66	61	74	85	80	64	75	69
1994	55	66	60	74	85	79	63	74	68
1995	53	65	59	73	83	78	61	73	67
1996 (r)	50	62	56	71	82	76	59	71	65
1997 (p)	49	61	55	71	82	76	59	71	65

(r) Revised.

(p) Preliminary – subject to finalisation of 1997 estimated resident population.

(a) These figures are estimates only. They express the number of year 12 completions (year 12 certificates issued by State education authorities) as a proportion of the estimated population that could attend year 12 in that calendar year.

(b) The ABS's IRSED has been used to calculate SES on basis of postcode of students' home addresses. The use of postcodes corrupts State data to some extent as some postcodes straddle State boundaries. 'Low SES' is the average of the lowest three deciles and 'High SES' is the average of the top three SES deciles.

Source: Commonwealth DEETYA (derived from data provided by State accreditation authorities and the ABS)

Data relating to gender and achievement was reported by several States. Figures provided by the New South Wales government sector indicated that the trend for girls to participate in the full range of schooling at higher rates and have higher average achievement than boys continued in 1997. In response, the Department of School Education introduced a gender equity strategy to address the needs of all students.

In all sectors in Queensland:

- females had higher retention rates at all stages;
- year 12 apparent retention rates increased among both males and females; and
- analysis of the mean achievement level of year 12 students showed higher achievement levels of girls in each key learning area, notably in the arts, English, and studies of society and the environment, although boys achieved higher in the top third of the distribution.

7.7 Progress towards achieving equity goals for students with disabilities

A wide range of support programs and strategies was reported by the States in relation to the equity goals. All sectors mentioned the importance of professional development for teaching and support staff and an inclusive curriculum approach in order to improve student outcomes.

During 1997, the New South Wales Board of Studies enhanced curriculum access to students with special education needs through the ongoing development of support documents and materials in a number of Key Learning Areas. Support documents were developed to assist teachers cater for students with special education needs in the K–6 subjects across the curriculum. The Board also undertook a curriculum project to enhance access to Vocational Content Endorsed Courses by students with special education needs and investigated how these students could be provided for in the Higher School Certificate.

In Victorian government schools, the transition of students with disabilities into post-school options was a major priority in 1997. There was close cooperation with the Department of Human Services in the Futures for Young

Adults program which involves joint planning processes, funding and other support necessary for students with disabilities to access appropriate post-school education, work or other settings.

Queensland reported several inter-systemic strategies to help remove barriers to the certification of achievements of students with disabilities, including the development of guidelines to assist school communities to implement procedures for special consideration in their own schools and the appointment of a project officer to support the implementation of special arrangements. In addition, year 11–12 syllabuses were monitored to identify potential barriers to demonstrating achievement.

To provide equity for students with disabilities, the Northern Territory Department of Education continued to provide a range of direct, advisory and consultative services and professional development activities as well as introducing Negotiated Inclusion Plans and Education Needs and Resources Profiles. Specific projects included support for transition to work for secondary age students and for the implementation of its Special Education Policy in urban, rural and remote schools.

In government schools in the Australian Capital Territory, programs included a range of early intervention services. Early entry to preschool was provided for children with hearing impairment or for children whose parents have hearing impairment. Other services included early intervention playgroups, special units within preschools and an Autistic Intervention Unit.

Initiatives under the Transition Program in the Australian Capital Territory included coordination of professional development and of transition meetings for teachers, facilitation of liaison between work experience coordinators, Australian Scaling Test coordinators and Special Teachers Assistants and publication of *Clear for Taking Off*, a directory of transition services. Commonwealth funding provided work experience for students in the final six months of schooling. They were then assessed and assisted in the first six months of the placement.

Independent schools reported programs and financial assistance to improve retention rates of students with disabilities and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Individualised learning programs were mentioned by most States, with professional development frequently focussing on the Disability Discrimination Act

of 1992. Several States expressed concern about funding with the increase in enrolments in 1997.

The Australian Capital Territory Non-government Schools Special Education Program was set up in 1997 with State Government funding. The program targeted students with sensory impairment and provided an assessment service to non-government schools. It included a series of behaviour

management workshops aimed at assisting schools to develop and update behaviour management policies.

Catholic sector progress towards achieving equity goals also involved the philosophy of inclusive curriculum, consultant assistance with placements and programming and rewriting enrolment criteria to include a wider range of students with disabilities.