

UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA

2017 UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA STUDENT FINANCES SURVEY

AUGUST 2018

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FOREWORD

Every five years or so, since the mid-1970s, the peak body for Australia's universities has undertaken a detailed study of the cost of living challenges for our students.

Universities Australia (UA) funds this survey to enable us to understand the financial circumstances of students across the nation. This information has value for students, their families, university staff and leaders, including Vice-Chancellors who commission the survey through UA. It's also valuable to the Australian public, and—of course—the nation's policy-makers and Parliamentary decision-makers.

So we begin by thanking the more than 18,500 students who contributed their time and information to help us gather this latest data snapshot in 2017. Your data informs public policy.

The picture revealed in the *2017 Universities Australia Student Finances Survey* is one that warrants our continuing concern. While the data suggests a slight improvement in the financial circumstances for students overall, the financial hardship faced by some groups of students—particularly for some Indigenous students and some from the poorest one-fifth of Australian households—is particularly stark.

One in seven domestic students say they regularly go without food or other necessities because they can't afford them. And three in five domestic students say their finances are a source of worry.

One Indigenous full-time student told us: "I don't eat much anymore." Another undergraduate student put it this way: "The stress of constantly worrying about how to pay next (month's) rent or simply paying for food is really hard." A postgraduate student undertaking a higher degree by research was even more bleak: "I am seriously considering deferring or withdrawing from my study due to extreme hardship."

Beyond its findings on those students in financial hardship, the Universities Australia Student Finances Survey 2017 also reveals a large number of university students support themselves through paid work. **Four in five domestic students have a job while studying.** For some, this is a chance to gain valuable work experience and skills that will help to fast-track them into a full-time job after they graduate. But, **for many uni students, the amount of paid work they need to do to support themselves financially comes at a cost to their studies.** For students who are financially independent—that is, those without a partner or family helping to support them financially—this is even more acute. **One in two financially-independent students said their paid work adversely affects their university performance. And one in three regularly missed uni lectures or classes because they had to work.**

This latest snapshot is another valuable contribution to the nation's understanding of university students' financial circumstances. We thank everyone who worked on and contributed to this important project—and we commend it to you.

Catriona Jackson
Chief Executive
Universities Australia

Professor Margaret Gardner
Chair
Universities Australia

Professor David Lloyd
Chair
2017 UA Student Finances
Survey Steering Committee

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Universities Australia (UA) commissioned and funded the Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education (Melbourne CSHE) at the University of Melbourne to undertake the delivery and analysis of the 2017 Universities Australia Student Finances Survey. The survey instrument was based primarily on the previous iterations of the survey, undertaken by the Melbourne CSHE for Universities Australia in 2012 and 2006. We acknowledge the work of the project working groups from those two years. Additionally, the work of Dr Michael Long and Professor Martin Hayden, who conducted the 2000 study of student finances, provided the basis upon which subsequent iterations have been built.

We also acknowledge the work of the 2017 Steering Committee, chaired by Professor David Lloyd, Vice-Chancellor of the University of South Australia, and which included Deputy Vice-Chancellors Academic and International, Planning Directors, the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), the National Union of Students (NUS) and UA. The Working Group—a subcommittee of the Steering Committee—was tasked with updating and designing the survey instrument. It consisted of experts in higher education equity, student experience, and teaching and learning, and provided valuable insight and feedback on the development of the survey instrument. Members of the Steering Committee are listed in Appendix B.

The Statistical Consulting Centre at the University of Melbourne constructed the sample design and proportions and undertook the statistical analysis. Universities Australia arranged for the recruitment of the universities to be sampled and the National Union of Students provided valuable promotion and endorsement of the survey.

We thank the staff of the thirty-eight participating universities who assisted in communication with students, promotion of the survey, and in arranging for a smooth delivery of the survey invitations. We would also like to thank the students who responded to the survey, whose contributions provide the invaluable data upon which the insights of this report have been drawn.

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July 2018
Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education
The University of Melbourne

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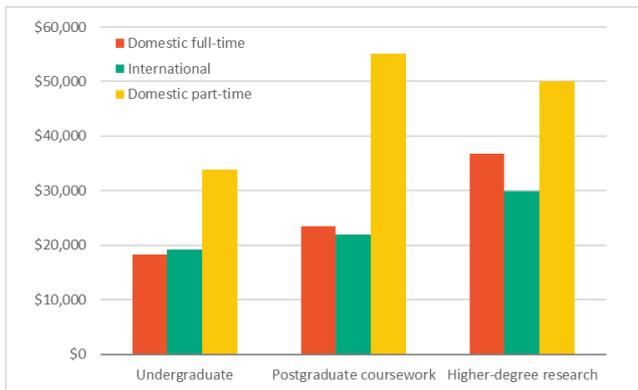
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SNAPSHOT OF 2017 KEY FINDINGS

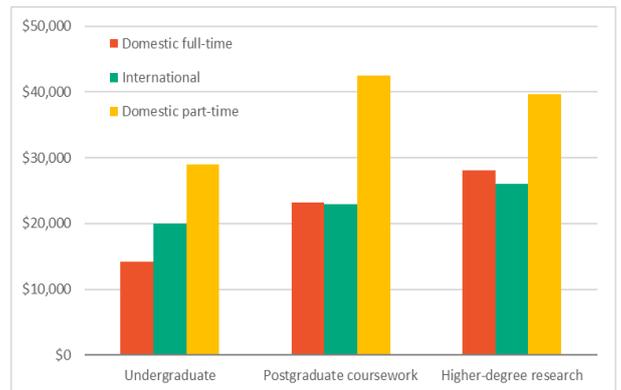
Total respondents = 18,584

MEDIAN ANNUAL INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

Median annual income

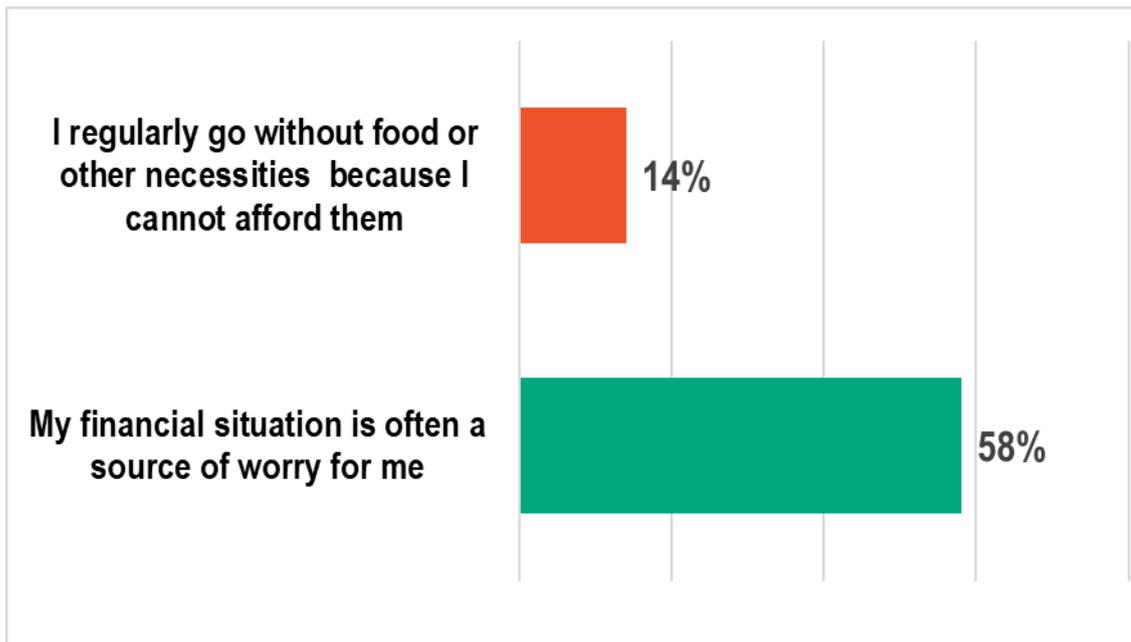


Median annual expenditure



DOMESTIC STUDENTS' FINANCIAL WELLBEING

N = 11,186



STUDENTS—BOTH DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL—RECEIVING FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM FAMILY/PARTNERS

‘Financially supported’

Of all who indicated they received financial support:

51%

Feel their finances are often a source of worry

10%

Regularly go without food/necessities because they cannot afford them

20%

Regularly miss classes to attend paid employment

34%

Feel their work commitments adversely affect their performance at university

10 hours

Full-time students’ median hours worked per week

21 hours

Part-time students’ median hours worked per week

‘Financially independent’

Of all who indicated they were financially independent:

63%

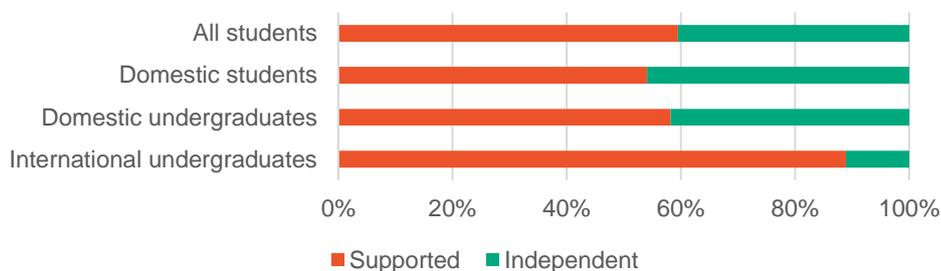
19%

33%

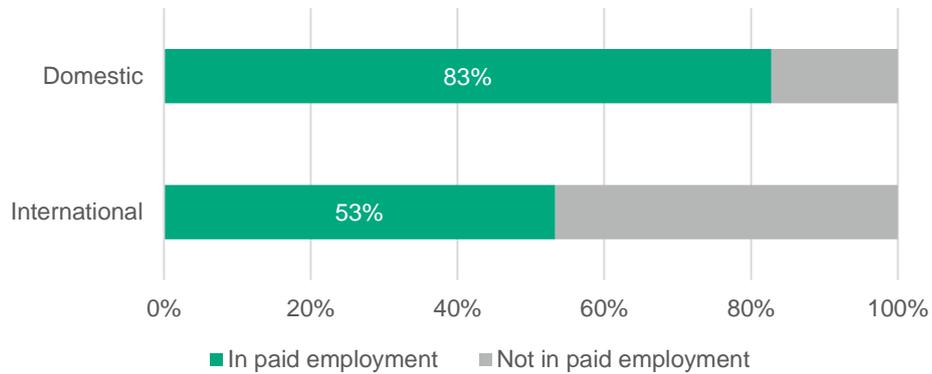
52%

15 hours

38 hours

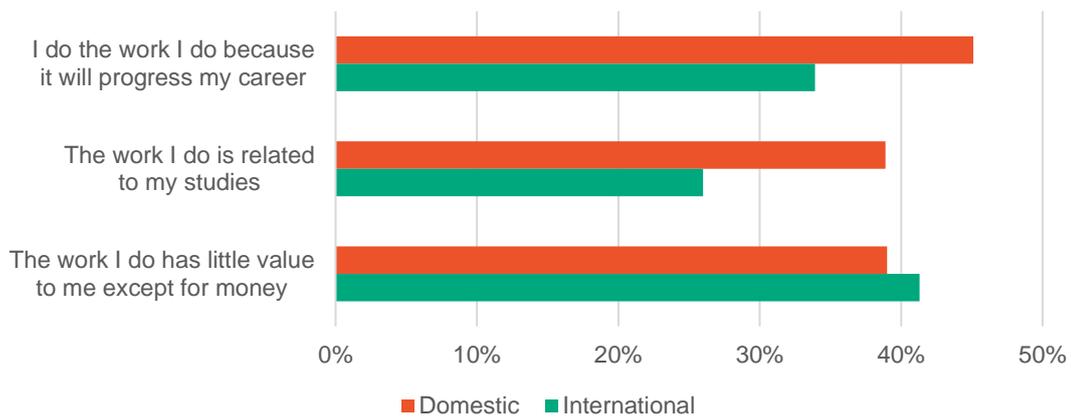


PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS EMPLOYED IN 2017

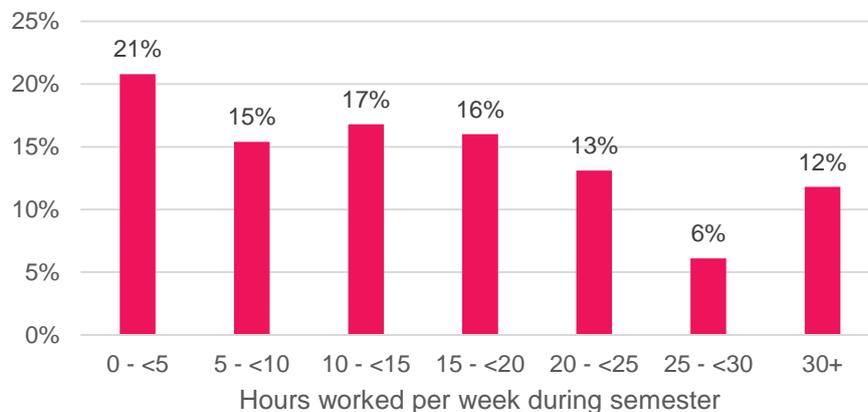


EMPLOYED STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS WORK

Percentage of employed students who agree or strongly agree...



FULL-TIME DOMESTIC UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' HOURS WORKED PER WEEK



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2017 Universities Australia Student Finances Survey provides an evidence-based picture of the financial situation of students at Australian universities. Students from 38 Universities Australia (UA) member universities participated in the survey. The survey covers both domestic and international students at all levels of study. It collects data on:

- Income and spending
- Paid work and its impact on study
- Access to income support
- The costs of living and studying
- Borrowing and debt

The 2017 survey follows earlier studies in 2012 and 2006.

UA undertakes this study at regular intervals to provide our members, government and the public with a better understanding of students' financial circumstances. The 2017 report shows that many students are still 'doing it tough', to the extent of being unable to afford basic necessities and being forced to miss classes to work. While this report deals with the facts, it tells an important story of the type of lives being lived by students all around Australia.

DOMESTIC STUDENTS

While there has been slight improvement in domestic students' financial circumstances overall, a significant proportion of students is doing it tough.

Most domestic students are worried about their finances. One-third of domestic students have estimated expenses that are greater than their estimated income. Some groups of students (low SES, Indigenous and regional) are more likely to experience financial difficulty.

Domestic students' average income hasn't increased since 2012, but average spending has fallen. Thus any improvement in students' finances is not because students are earning more, but because they are spending less.

INCOME AND SPENDING

Median annual income for full-time domestic undergraduate students is \$18,300, while their median spending is \$14,200.

One-third of domestic undergraduate students have estimated expenses exceeding their estimated income. This figure is slightly higher for low SES (37 per cent) and regional (38 per cent) students. Some 43 per cent of Indigenous students have income that doesn't cover their expenses.

STUDENTS' CONCERNS ABOUT THEIR FINANCES

Most domestic undergraduate students (58 per cent) are worried about their financial situation. Low SES students are more likely (63 per cent) to be worried about their finances, as are regional students (64 per cent).

Nearly three-quarters (72 per cent) of Indigenous students are worried about their finances.

Only 38 per cent of domestic undergraduate students feel they are in control of their financial situation. This falls to 35 per cent of low SES students and only 27 per cent of Indigenous students.

SOME STUDENTS CAN'T AFFORD TO EAT

Some 15 per cent of domestic undergraduate students regularly go without food or necessities because they can't afford them. Again, the figures are slightly higher for low SES (18 per cent) and regional (19 per cent) students.

More than one in four Indigenous students regularly go without food or necessities.

WORK

More than four in five domestic undergraduate students (82 per cent) are in paid employment. Full-time undergraduate students who work do a median of 12 hours per week.

Nearly a third (30 per cent) of full-time domestic undergraduate students work more than 20 hours a week and more than 10 per cent work more than 30 hours. The share of students working more than 20 hours has increased steadily since earlier surveys.

More than one quarter of full-time domestic undergraduates regularly miss classes because they have to work. Some 41 per cent report that work has a negative impact on study.

For part-time domestic undergraduates, these figures rise to 36 per cent regularly missing classes to work and 52 per cent reporting that work has a negative impact on study.

Only 35 per cent of students who work believe that their work/study balance is satisfactory.

Some 39 per cent of domestic students say that their work has little value to them apart from the money.

INCOME SUPPORT

A third of domestic undergraduates receive student income support (Austudy, ABSTUDY or Youth Allowance).

Some 42 per cent of low SES students and 45 per cent of regional students receive student income support. Nearly half (49 per cent) of Indigenous domestic undergraduates receive student income support.

SAVINGS

Most domestic undergraduate students (61 per cent) have some savings that they can draw on in case of serious financial difficulty. Of those who have savings, nearly half report that they have had to use them.

Low SES students (55 per cent) and regional students (57 per cent) are less likely to have savings that they can draw on. Fewer than half (42 per cent) of Indigenous students have savings.

More than half of regional domestic undergraduates with savings (52 per cent) report that they have had to draw on their savings.

DEBT

Most of the debt for domestic students is made up of tuition fees deferred through the HELP scheme. Full-time domestic undergraduate students' median estimate of their debt at graduation is \$38,200. For full-time domestic postgraduates, the median estimate is \$54,100.

“... I now often eat meals at university, rely on friends to bring food over or pay for the ingredients so I can cook for them. I don't eat much anymore ...”

(Indigenous full-time undergraduate student)

“... The stress of constantly worrying about how to pay next [month's] rent or simply paying for food is really hard.”

(Domestic full-time undergraduate student)

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Almost one in two (49.2 per cent) international undergraduate students have estimated expenses greater than their estimated income. International undergraduate students have a median income of \$19,200 but a median annual spending of \$20,000.

One half of international undergraduate students are in paid employment. International students who work do a median of 15 hours a week. Nine in ten (89 per cent) international undergraduate students are financially supported by family or partner.

Around 50 per cent of international undergraduate students are worried about their financial situation, compared to almost 60 per cent for full-time domestic students. Some 14 per cent regularly go without food or other necessities because they can't afford them, which is consistent with domestic students.

Almost 55 per cent of international undergraduate students have some savings that they can draw on in case of serious financial difficulties, with 38 per cent of students reporting that they have had to use savings in 2017.

International undergraduates estimate much higher levels of debt at graduation than domestic undergraduates. The median estimate is \$68,000.

“To make my way to this study, I actually have limited myself a lot, in terms of living standard, since I am on my family’s support... I am worried about my diet because I’ve been eating poorly. However. That’s the only expense I can cut down flexibly and easily, compared to public transport or textbook cost...”

(International undergraduate student)

“I am an international student with scholarship funding by the Australian Government through DFAT. Hence, I understand and appreciate that my circumstance is actually much better than a majority of other students who are struggling to make ends meet, working many jobs while also studying. I believe that my financial situation is adequate and stable to see me through to the end of my studies.”

(International postgraduate coursework student)

1 TECHNICAL NOTES TO ASSIST IN READING THE REPORT

The following notes are intended to assist in interpreting the data used in this report. For a full summary of the methodology followed in the survey, see Appendix C.

1.1 STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANCE TESTING AND INDICATIVE MARGINS OF ERROR

Due to the large number of potential comparisons that could be made using the results in the report, formal hypothesis tests were largely avoided. Reporting of the results of multiple hypothesis tests is not usual practice in reports focusing on estimating population percentages from survey results. Additionally, it would be onerous to provide P-values in this way, as there are potentially hundreds, if not thousands, of comparisons to be made. Such an approach would run the risk of falsely identifying differences simply as an artefact of carrying out many tests (finding “false positives”). Hence, the emphasis in reporting on the uncertainty in the estimates from the 2017 UA Student Finances Survey has been to consider the relevant indicative margin of error.

The margin of error quantifies the uncertainty or precision of an estimate of a population percentage. For example, if an estimate is 50 per cent with a margin of error of 3 per cent, a plausible range of values for the population percentage is between 47 per cent and 53 per cent. More formally, this range of values is referred to as a confidence interval.

Standard practice in reporting survey results is to provide margins of error (corresponding to 95% confidence levels) for the estimates. In the report of the UA Student Finances Survey 2017, there are a large number of estimates of percentages (by different groups and in many different categories, for example). Reporting a margin of error for every percentage would double the size of the tables in the report.

The table below lists some typical sample sizes for groups considered in this survey and a corresponding indicative margin of error, assuming that there is no further breakdown into full-time and part-time students:

Table 1.1: Indicative margins of error

	Undergraduate	Postgraduate coursework	Higher degree research
Domestic (all)			
typical sample size	4000	3000	3000
indicative margin of error	1.6%	1.8%	1.8%
International			
typical sample size	1000	1000	2000
indicative margin of error	3.1%	3.1%	2.2%
Indigenous			
typical sample size	1000	160	80
indicative margin of error	3.1%	8.0%	11.4%

The margins of error of two quantities can sometimes give an indication of whether the difference is statistically significant. If the 95% confidence intervals do not overlap, the difference will be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). The converse does not hold: it is possible for the difference to still be statistically significant even when the confidence intervals overlap.

For example, it is reported that 59.6 per cent of international students receive regular income from paid employment with a sample size of 627, and 78.8 per cent of domestic students receive regular income from paid employment with a sample size of 3,847. Using the table above, the margin of error is found to be under 4.5 per cent, resulting in a confidence interval of 55.1 per cent to 64.1 per cent for international students. This interval does not overlap with the confidence interval produced above for the domestic students, so we can conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the percentage of international students and domestic students receiving income from paid employment.

1.2 THE USE OF MEDIANS

For the 2006 and 2012 surveys, students' income and expenditure was reported primarily using mean amounts.

For the 2017 survey it was decided that medians provided a more accurate measure of students' financial circumstances, given the range of figures that were reported. In order to make comparisons between this year's data and previous years' results, medians from previous years were used whenever possible and means were used only when the median was unavailable.

2 STUDENTS' FINANCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

This chapter includes information on income, financial support, expenditure, savings, assets and debt for all domestic, Indigenous and international students in the three degree levels of undergraduate, postgraduate coursework and higher degree research.

We also include low SES and regional students in the undergraduate data.

This chapter does not present comparisons across these different student groups as it seeks to provide an overview of the student population as a whole. Comparisons across student groups are provided in Chapter 5.

2.1 STUDENT INCOME

Students were asked to estimate their income from various sources and total annual income was calculated. Table 2.1 shows a snapshot of total median income from 2006, 2012 and 2017.

Overall, the income for all domestic undergraduate students in 2017 (\$20,900) was similar to the CPI-adjusted median in 2012 (\$20,400) and slightly higher than in 2006 (\$18,900).

A similar trend can be observed for full-time postgraduate coursework (PGCW) and higher-degree research (HDR) students.

For part-time PGCW students, there was a slight increase in estimates of median income in 2017 (\$55,100) compared to 2012 (\$52,000), but it was significantly lower than in 2006 (\$60,400). This trend was also observed for the part-time HDR students, although the differences in income were not as much as in PGCW students.

There was a slight decrease in annual median income for international undergraduate students in 2017 (\$18,300) compared to 2012 (\$19,700). Of note was the substantial decrease in the median income for international PGCW students: \$21,900 in 2017 compared to \$33,700 in 2012.

Table 2.1: Median annual student income from 2006-2017

Student median income <i>(Rounded to nearest 100s)</i>	2006	2012	2017
Domestic undergraduate			
All domestic undergraduates	\$18,900	\$20,400	\$20,900
Full-time	\$16,600	\$18,300	\$18,300
Part-time	\$41,500	\$34,700	\$33,900
Domestic postgraduate coursework			
All domestic PGCW	No data	\$40,600	\$41,000
Full-time	\$15,100	\$23,000	\$23,600
Part-time	\$60,400	\$52,000	\$55,100
Higher-degree research			
All domestic HDR	No data	\$36,900	\$39,600
Full-time	\$38,200	\$35,600	\$36,800
Part-time	\$55,000	\$48,100	\$50,000
International			
Undergraduate	No data	\$19,700	\$19,200
Postgraduate Coursework	No data	\$33,700	\$21,900
HDR	No data	\$29,900	\$30,000

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

Table 2.2 presents the median income for undergraduate students.

The median income for full-time domestic undergraduate students in 2017 was \$18,300, and just under \$34,000 for part-time students.

Full-time undergraduate students under the age of 20 had a median income of just \$12,900, while those aged 40 and above had a median income of \$27,900.

Indigenous full-time undergraduate students reported a slightly higher median income at \$22,000, while part-time Indigenous students' median income was slightly higher than overall domestic students' median income.

Regional students' median income was \$23,300, slightly higher than low SES median income of \$21,600.

Overall, there was hardly any increase in income for full-time domestic students from 2012 to 2017. International students' estimated median income was slightly lower than domestic students'.

Table 2.2: Undergraduate students' median total annual income

Median annual income, after tax (\$)	All domestic UG			Indigenous UG			Low SES UG			Regional UG			Int'l UG
	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time	All
Total income	\$20,900	\$18,300	\$33,900	\$25,500	\$22,000	\$37,700	\$21,600	\$18,300	\$34,600	\$23,300	\$20,900	\$34,600	\$19,200
n	3847	3048	799	919	721	198	847	665	182	1202	953	249	627

Table 2.3A shows the percentage of undergraduates who received income from different sources for 2017, and Table 2.3B presents the median income from those sources.

By far, the most common source of income for domestic undergraduate students was paid employment, with 79.1 per cent receiving income from this source (receiving a median total of \$18,000).

The second most common source of income was government support in the form of ABSTUDY, Austudy or Youth Allowance, with 33.2 per cent receiving some support (to the median value of \$9,900). For full-time domestic undergraduate students, 34 per cent of students received Youth Allowance in the 2017 survey and 9 per cent received Austudy (slightly down on the 11 per cent indicated in 2012; see Appendix Table A2 for more detail). The proportion of full-time undergraduate Indigenous students receiving ABSTUDY was 50 per cent —unchanged from 2012.

About 38 per cent of Indigenous students indicated receipt of income from scholarships, stipends or bursaries, and this proportion was significantly higher than other domestic students who participated in the survey.

Just over 60 per cent of international students indicated that they received income from paid employment. Their median estimated income of \$18,000 was higher than full-time domestic students'. International students' second main source of income was regular allowances, for example from family, with just over 51 per cent receiving income from this source (\$4,800 median income). These figures have increased compared to 2012 when 46 per cent received income from paid employment and 31 per cent received a regular allowance.

Table 2.3A: Percentage of undergraduates receiving different sources of income

Percentage of students receiving income from...	Domestic students				International students	All students
	All	Indigenous	Low SES	Regional		
Paid employment	79.1%	69.7%	72.0%	76.9%	60.5%	77.5%
Austudy/ABSTUDY/YA	33.2%	48.9%	42.4%	44.6%		30.5%
Other Centrelink payments	6.4%	12.5%	9.1%	8.5%		5.9%
Government family allowance	3.9%	10.1%	5.1%	5.3%		3.6%
Rent relief/assistance	7.0%	8.2%	11.1%	14.6%		6.4%
Scholarships, stipends or bursaries	10.1%	37.5%	12.4%	14.6%	12.6%	10.3%
Regular allowance, e.g. from family	15.1%	7.7%	12.8%	15.9%	51.4%	18.0%
Occasional amounts received	8.8%	4.9%	5.9%	8.1%	10.9%	9.0%
Other sources	6.0%	4.0%	5.3%	5.4%	4.8%	5.9%
Cash payments	3.5%	2.2%	3.2%	2.3%	3.4%	3.5%
n	3847	919	847	1202	627	4474

Table 2.3B: Undergraduate students' median income from specific sources

Median annual income, after tax (\$)	All domestic UG			Indigenous UG			Low SES UG			Regional UG			Int'l UG
	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time	
Paid employment	18,000	15,600	33,900	19,000	15,600	36,500	18,300	15,000	33,900	18,000	15,000	33,900	18,000
Austudy/ABSTUDY/YA	9,900	9,600	10,400	11,100	11,400	1,600	10,400	10,400	12,000	11,400	11,400	8,600	
Other Centrelink payments	12,000	10,400	15,600	13,000	13,800	13,000	11,200	10,400	14,300	8,000	6,800	13,000	12,000
Government family allowance	9,500	10,400	7,600	12,500	13,000	12,100	10,400	10,400	9,400	9,400	10,400	7,800	9,500
Rent relief/assistance	2,300	2,300	2,700	2,600	2,600	2,300	2,300	2,300	3,100	2,300	2,300	2,700	2,300
Scholarships, stipends or bursaries	3,000	3,000	2,000	5,000	5,000	2,600	3,000	3,000	2,000	3,000	3,000	1,500	3,500
Regular allowance, e.g. from family	3,000	2,600	4,200	2,600	2,600	2,400	3,000	2,600	8,400	5,200	5,200	8,400	4,800
Occasional amounts received	600	600	500	1,000	1,000	1,000	400	500	200	600	600	400	600
Other sources	500	400	1,400	1,000	1,700	1,000	500	500	6,000	500	400	8,200	500
Cash payments	2,600	2,600	2,300	3,100	3,100	5,000	2,500	2,500	1,000	2,600	2,600	1,000	2,600

POSTGRADUATE COURSEWORK STUDENTS

The median income for full-time domestic PGCW students was just under \$23,600 (Table 2.4).

The median incomes of this student cohort showed substantial variation based on age, increasing from \$18,900 for those aged 20–24 to \$34,200 for students aged 40 and above.

Part-time domestic students' estimated median income was more than twice their full-time counterparts' median income.

The median income for Indigenous full-time and part-time students was \$32,900 and \$52,100 respectively.

International students reported a slightly lower median income compared to domestic full-time students.

Table 2.4 Postgraduate students' median total annual income

Median annual income, after tax (\$)	All domestic PGCW students			Indigenous PGCW students			International PGCW
	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time	All
Total income	\$41,000	\$23,600	\$55,100	\$41,900	\$32,900	\$52,100	\$21,900
n	2845	1245	1600	161	78	83	1090

The most common source of income for domestic PGCW students was paid employment (87.6 per cent reporting this) with a median income of \$43,800 (Tables 2.5A and B).

About 72 per cent of Indigenous PGCW students reported an income from paid employment, with an estimated median income of \$44,300, although this item had a low response rate and caution needs to be taken in interpreting these results.

Government allowances were the second main source of income for domestic PGCW students. 24 per cent of full-time domestic PGCW students received Youth Allowance and over 18 per cent received Austudy. About 65 per cent of Indigenous full-time PGCW students received ABSTUDY (see Appendix Table A2), a slight decrease from the 2012 survey.

31.1 per cent of full-time Indigenous students received scholarships, stipends and bursaries, with an estimated median amount of \$5,000.

For international students, 71 per cent received income from paid employment (with a median income of \$15,600). A regular allowance from family (median income of \$15,600) was the second most common source of income for international students (34.8 per cent of students). Just over 19 per cent of international students indicated that they received scholarships, stipends and bursaries, with a median amount of \$24,000.

Table 2.5A: Percentage of postgraduate coursework students receiving different sources of income

Percentage of students receiving income from...	Domestic students		International students	All students
	All	Indigenous		
Paid employment	87.6%	72.3%	71.0%	83.3%
Austudy/ABSTUDY/YA	18.2%	36.4%		13.5%
Other Centrelink payments	7.2%	16.2%		5.4%
Government family allowance	5.1%	12.7%		3.8%
Rent relief/assistance	4.6%	7.5%		3.4%
Scholarships, stipends or bursaries	6.5%	31.1%	19.3%	9.8%
Regular allowance, e.g. from family	6.7%	3.2%	34.8%	13.9%
Occasional amounts received	6.1%		11.4%	7.5%
Other sources	8.6%		6.2%	8.0%
Cash payments	2.2%		3.6%	2.5%
n	2845	161	1090	3935

Multiple responses were allowed, so column percentages do not add up to 100%.

Table 2.5B: Postgraduate coursework students' median income from specific sources

Median annual income, after tax (\$)	All domestic PGCW students			Indigenous PGCW students			International PGCW
	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time	
Paid employment	\$43,800	\$19,300	\$54,800	\$44,300	\$18,000	\$52,100	\$15,600
Austudy/ABSTUDY/YA	\$11,500	\$11,500	\$10,400	\$23,500	\$23,500	\$1,000	
Other Centrelink payments	\$11,500	\$11,100	\$12,000	\$13,600	\$14,200	\$12,600	
Government family allowance	\$6,500	\$7,600	\$6,500	\$9,900	\$15,600	\$6,300	
Rent relief/assistance	\$2,300	\$2,300	\$3,100	\$2,600	\$2,100	\$3,700	
Scholarships, stipends or bursaries	\$4,000	\$5,000	\$4,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$2,500	\$24,000
Regular allowance, e.g. from family	\$5,200	\$5,200	\$6,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$700	\$15,600
Occasional amounts received	\$1,200	\$1,000	\$2,000	\$1,000	\$2,000	\$400	\$5,000
Other sources	\$2,500	\$1,300	\$3,600	\$9,600	\$3,100	\$9,600	\$400
Cash payments	\$4,200	\$3,000	\$5,000	\$2,600	\$2,600	\$39,100	\$6,000

HIGHER-DEGREE RESEARCH STUDENTS

The median income for full-time domestic HDR students was \$36,800 (Table 2.6).

Full-time Indigenous students reported a higher median income at \$48,100, although only 48 Indigenous students responded to this item and therefore caution should be used in generalising these figures to the broader population.

International students reported a lower median income of \$30,000.

Table 2.6: Higher-degree research students' median total annual income

Median annual income, after tax (\$)	All domestic HDR students			Indigenous HDR students			International HDR
	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time	All
Total income	\$39,600	\$36,800	\$50,000	\$49,700	\$48,100	\$62,600	\$30,000
n	2837	1897	940	74	48	26	2107

Table 2.7A indicates that the main source of income for all domestic research students was paid employment (80.1 per cent, with a \$22,400 median income).

Stipends, scholarships or bursaries were the most common source of income for international students (88 per cent) and second most common source of income for domestic students (56.5 per cent). The value of scholarships, stipends and bursaries was similar for both groups, at \$26,600.

Further comparisons between the various student groups are presented in Chapter 5.

Table 2.7A: Percentage of higher-degree research students receiving different sources of income

Percentage of students receiving income from...	Domestic students		International students	All students
	All	Indigenous		
Paid employment	80.1%	70.7%	46.2%	70.6%
Austudy/ABSTUDY/YA	0.9%	19.2%		0.6%
Other Centrelink payments	6.7%	11.9%		4.8%
Government family allowance	6.1%	5.4%		4.4%
Rent relief/assistance	2.1%	2.3%		1.5%
Scholarships, stipends or bursaries	56.5%	50.2%	87.9%	65.3%
Regular allowance, e.g. from family	4.9%	3.1%	10.8%	6.6%
Occasional amounts received	8.2%	3.8%	7.4%	8.0%
Other sources	12.3%	4.6%	4.5%	10.1%
Cash payments	3.0%	7.3%	3.0%	3.0%
n	2837	74	2107	4944

Multiple responses were allowed, so column percentages do not add up to 100%.

Table 2.7B: Higher-degree research students' median income from specific sources

Median annual income, after tax (\$)	All domestic HDR students			Indigenous HDR students			Int'l HDR
	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time	All
Paid employment	\$22,400	\$15,000	\$50,000	\$31,300	\$26,100	\$62,600	\$11,500
Austudy/ABSTUDY/YA	\$11,500	\$11,500	\$10,400	\$26,100	\$26,100	\$600	
Other Centrelink payments	\$11,200	\$11,000	\$11,900	\$3,500	\$2,600	\$26,100	
Government family allowance	\$6,500	\$7,300	\$5,000	\$4,500	\$3,600	\$5,000	
Rent relief/assistance	\$3,100	\$2,600	\$3,300	\$3,500		\$3,500	
Scholarships, stipends or bursaries	\$26,600	\$26,700	\$13,300	\$26,700	\$26,700	\$11,700	\$26,600
Regular allowance, e.g. from family	\$7,800	\$7,800	\$12,000	\$2,800	\$2,800		\$12,000
Occasional amounts received	\$1,200	\$1,200	\$2,000	\$2,600	\$3,000	\$2,600	\$1,200
Other sources	\$1,300	\$1,000	\$6,000	\$10,000	\$28,900	\$10,000	\$800
Cash payments	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,200	\$5,200		\$6,000

OTHER OBSERVATIONS

There was no screening question in the survey about whether students earned any income at all. However, very few students (15 respondents, < 0.1 per cent) who completed any of the questions about income did not indicate receiving income from any of the sources in the table above.

Of the students who indicated receiving any source of income, 53 per cent reported that they received income from one source, 32 per cent had two sources of income, and 16 per cent indicated that they received income from three or more sources.

Students who received Austudy/ABSTUDY/Youth Allowance were less likely to be in paid employment (62 per cent, compared to 83 per cent for students not receiving Austudy/ABSTUDY/Youth Allowance) and less likely to receive a family allowance (10 per cent compared to 19 per cent).

Students who received a family allowance were much less likely to be in paid employment (56 per cent, compared to 82 per cent of those who did not receive an allowance from family).

ANNUAL STUDENT INCOME DISTRIBUTION BY INCOME BANDS

Table 2.8A shows the distribution of student income by income bands from 2006 to 2017.

There was a significant increase in the proportion of full-time domestic undergraduate students who reported that their annual income was over \$30,000. In 2017, 20.3 per cent reported their total annual income as over \$30,000, compared to 6.7 per cent in 2012, and 4.3 per cent in 2006. In addition, there was a decrease in the proportion of this cohort whose total income was less than \$10,000 (CPI adjusted) from 2006 to 2017, although little changed from 2012 to 2017. It should be noted that there are large variances due to the age of the student (see Table 2.8B).

Just under 40 per cent of full-time PGCW students reported an annual income of less than \$20,000, which was less compared to 2012 and 2006. One in five full-time PGCW students reported incomes above \$40,000.

The proportion of full-time HDR students who indicated an annual income above \$40,000 was 43 per cent – a marked increase from previous surveys.

Table 2.8A: Percentage of domestic students in total annual income categories

Domestic Undergraduate	Under \$10,000		\$10,000 - \$19,999		\$20,000 - \$29,999		\$30,000 - \$39,999		\$40,000 and over	
	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT
2006	41.8	12.2	42.0	20.4	11.1	20.5	2.8	21.1	1.5	25.8
2012	21.0	9.3	40.3	13.0	27.0	23.4	3.1	17.4	3.6	36.9
2017	19.9	6.0	34.6	14.7	25.2	18.6	11.0	21.9	9.3	38.7
Domestic PGCW	Under \$10,000		\$10,000 - \$19,999		\$20,000 - \$29,999		\$30,000 - \$39,999		\$40,000 and over	
	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT
2006	32.4	7.3	31.0	7.5	15.0	9.7	8.5	18.9	13.1	56.6
2012	14.4	5.4	31.2	6.9	24.1	9.9	16.0	14.1	14.2	63.8
2017	10.2	2.5	29.0	5.6	24.8	8.8	13.4	10.3	22.5	72.8
Domestic HDR	Under \$10,000		\$10,000 - \$19,999		\$20,000 - \$29,999		\$30,000 - \$39,999		\$40,000 and over	
	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT
2006	6.5	6.9	15.3	13.6	46.0	12.3	20.7	8.5	11.5	51.8
2012	3.9	5.2	6.0	11.9	29.2	14.1	30.1	13.2	30.8	55.6
2017	2.8	4.5	5.4	9.2	20.1	13.1	28.6	11.7	43.0	61.5

Table 2.8B shows the median annual income for full-time domestic students by age, across degree levels. It shows that undergraduate (UG) students under the age of 20 reported the lowest annual income. Older students tended to have higher median incomes in UG and PGCW. There is little difference across age levels for HDR students.

Table 2.8B: Median annual income for full-time domestic students, by age and degree level

	Undergraduate	Postgraduate coursework	Higher-degree research
under 20	\$12,800		
20 - 24	\$18,300	\$19,300	\$34,300
25 - 29	\$24,600	\$22,300	\$32,400
30 - 39	\$28,000	\$30,000	\$35,000
40 and above	\$29,600	\$34,200	\$36,300

2.2 FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM FAMILY OR PARTNER

As in the previous surveys, students were asked to indicate if they received financial support from their family or partner. Table 2.9 shows the trends from the last three surveys.

There was an increase in the proportion of students who received some sort of financial support from family or partners from 2006 to 2017. This increase was more noticeable for part-time undergraduate and part-time PGCW students.

Table 2.9: Percentage of domestic students receiving financial support from family or partner

	2006	2012	2017
Undergraduate			
Full-time	62.3	54.1	62.0
Part-time	33.6	34.6	41.5
Postgraduate coursework			
Full-time	53.8	47.9	54.9
Part-time	20	24.3	29.3
Higher-degree research			
Full-time	37.2	40.8	43.4
Part-time	23.7	28.5	33.7

The proportion of students being supported by family or partner reduces with age. Over 82 per cent of domestic students under 20 years old received such support, but this percentage dropped sharply and remained steady at around 40 per cent for students aged 25–39.

At every age, international students were more likely to receive financial support than domestic students.

Indigenous students were less likely to receive financial support when compared to non-Indigenous students.

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

Table 2.10A shows the percentage of undergraduate students who received financial support from family or partner.

Almost 43 per cent of all domestic undergraduate students and almost 63 per cent of Indigenous undergraduates received no financial support. The proportion of low SES and regional domestic undergraduates who received no financial support was around 49 per cent and 53 per cent, respectively.

Almost 12 per cent of international undergraduate students received no financial support from their parents, which was a slightly smaller proportion than in the 2012 survey (15 per cent).

Table 2.10A: Percentage of undergraduate students receiving financial support

Percentage of students receiving financial support from...	Domestic students				International students
	All	Indigenous	Low SES	Regional	
None	42.6%	62.9%	48.6%	53.2%	11.8%
Parents/guardians/family	48.7%	24.4%	38.6%	35.1%	82.3%
Partner	10.0%	14.3%	13.4%	12.7%	6.0%
Other	0.9%	1.0%	2.1%	1.2%	2.5%
n	4747	1103	941	1304	1313

POSTGRADUATE COURSEWORK STUDENTS

Just over 77 per cent of Indigenous postgraduate coursework (PGCW) students received no financial support from family or partner compared to 60.3 per cent of all domestic PGCW students and 17 per cent of international PGCW students. This again highlights the international students' reliance on family financial support at undergraduate and postgraduate coursework levels.

Table 2.10B: Percentage of postgraduate coursework students receiving financial support

Percentage of students receiving financial support from...	Domestic students		International students
	All	Indigenous	
None	60.3%	77.3%	17.0%
Parents/guardians/family	19.8%	7.8%	71.8%
Partner	21.4%	17.0%	11.6%
Other	1.0%	2.0%	3.9%
n	3491	181	2251

HIGHER-DEGREE RESEARCH STUDENTS

Just over 60 per cent of all higher-degree research (HDR) domestic students received no financial support from family or partner (Tables 2.10C). About 74 per cent of Indigenous HDR students reported receiving no financial support, compared to 82 per cent in 2012, although the number of respondents was very low for both 2017 (n=85) and 2012 (n=110).

Over 63 per cent of international HDR students indicated that they received no financial support from family in 2017. This may be connected with the higher proportion of international students reporting scholarships as a main source of income in 2017 (88 per cent) compared to in 2012 (65 per cent).

Table 2.10C: Percentage of higher degree research students receiving financial support

Percentage of students receiving financial support from...	Domestic students		International students
	All	Indigenous	
None	60.5%	73.8%	63.3%
Parents/guardians/family	12.9%	3.3%	16.2%
Partner	27.9%	22.9%	15.5%
Other	0.9%	0.0%	7.4%
n	3272	85	2716

2.3 STUDENT EXPENDITURE

Students were asked to estimate their study-related and living expenses in several different categories as in previous surveys. Study-related expenses included textbooks, stationery, computer costs, student union fees, other university fees, and any additional costs associated with studying.

In the 2017 survey, a total annual expenditure was calculated for students who provided information about at least one study-related expense and at least one living expense.

TOTAL EXPENDITURE

Table 2.11 shows a snapshot of median total expenditure in 2006, 2012 and 2017.

Across all student cohorts, overall median expenditure was lower than the CPI-adjusted medians in the 2012 and 2006 surveys. This is most observable for domestic undergraduate students in 2017 (\$16,300 compared to \$20,200 in 2012 and \$18,900 in 2006), but can be seen also for domestic part time PGCW and HDR students. A similar observation can be made for international students in comparison with the respective 2012 figures.

The only cohort that does not follow this trend is full-time domestic PGCW students, whose reported expenditure has increased substantially since 2006 (from \$15,100 to \$23,200).

Table 2.11: Median annual student expenditure (living and study-related) from 2006-2017

Student Expenditure <i>(Rounded to nearest 100s)</i>	2006	2012	2017
Domestic undergraduate			
All domestic undergraduates	\$18,900	\$20,200	\$16,300
Full-time	\$17,100	\$18,300	\$14,200
Part-time	\$28,200	\$35,800	\$29,000
Domestic postgraduate coursework			
All domestic PGCW	No data	\$36,100	\$32,500
Full-time	\$15,100	\$24,300	\$23,200
Part-time	\$60,400	\$44,000	\$42,400
Higher-degree research			
All domestic HDR	No data	\$32,300	\$31,500
Full-time	\$38,100	\$29,900	\$28,100
Part-time	\$55,000	\$42,200	\$39,700
International			
Undergraduate	No data	\$22,000	\$20,000
Postgraduate Coursework	No data	\$24,500	\$22,900
HDR	No data	\$29,800	\$26,000

TYPES OF EXPENDITURE

Table 2.12A shows the annual study-related and living expenses for domestic students in 2017.

Living expenses account for over 90 per cent of all expenses for students across all degree levels, part-time and full-time. Greatest among these expenses was housing (mortgage or rent), followed by food and groceries, and loan repayments.

For domestic students at all degree levels, study-related expenses accounted for less than 10 per cent of total expenditure, and for PGCW and HDR students the proportion was even lower at under 5 per cent. In terms of study-related expenses, loans and credit were the largest study cost for both domestic and international students across all degree levels. This was followed by computer costs.

Table 2.12A: Domestic students' median expenditure

Median annual expenditure (\$)	All domestic students											
	Undergraduate			Postgraduate Coursework			Higher Degree Research			All degree levels		
	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time
Study-related expenses												
Total	\$1,300	\$1,300	\$1,300	\$1,300	\$1,500	\$1,200	\$1,400	\$1,300	\$1,500	\$1,300	\$1,300	\$1,300
n providing any study expense	3472	2776	696	2512	1147	1365	2302	1545	757	8286	5468	2818
Living expenses												
Total	\$14,500	\$12,300	\$27,000	\$30,800	\$21,100	\$40,400	\$28,800	\$25,800	\$37,600	\$17,100	\$13,900	\$32,800
n providing any living expense	3657	2925	732	2648	1190	1458	2625	1784	841	8930	5899	3031
Total expenditure	\$16,300	\$14,200	\$29,000	\$32,500	\$23,200	\$42,400	\$31,500	\$28,100	\$39,700	\$19,000	\$15,800	\$34,900
n	3397	2726	671	2432	1121	1311	2233	1512	721	8062	5359	2703

REGIONAL AND LOW SES STUDENTS

The median expenditure of undergraduates from both low SES and regional backgrounds was \$18,600 and \$19,600, respectively. As discussed in Chapter 5, the estimated median expenditure of low SES students was higher than that of other domestic students. This was partly explained by the higher proportion of low SES students (16 per cent compared to 11 per cent of non-low SES) who reported that they were financially supporting dependents (See Appendix Table A3). Regional students had higher living expenses, in part due to accommodation costs.

Table 2.12B: Median expenditure for specific undergraduate student groups

Median annual expenditure (\$)	Low SES UG students						Regional UG students			International UG students
	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time				
Study-related expenses										
Total	\$1,400	\$1,400	\$1,400	\$1,400	\$1,400	\$1,300	\$1,200			
n providing any study expense	831	652	179	1179	935	244	633			
Living expenses										
Total	\$16,200	\$14,300	\$30,800	\$18,100	\$16,800	\$27,200	\$17,300			
n providing any living expense	882	696	186	1237	982	255	721			
Total expenditure	\$18,600	\$16,400	\$33,700	\$19,600	\$18,500	\$32,300	\$20,000			
n	823	648	175	1171	931	240	625			

2.4 OVERALL ESTIMATED ANNUAL INCOME COMPARED TO EXPENDITURE

The analysis revealed that a substantial proportion (over 30 per cent) of students at all degree levels estimated their income was less than their estimated expenses (Table 2.13).

Notably, at the undergraduate level, a significantly larger proportion of Indigenous students (43.3 per cent) and international students (49.2 per cent) was estimated to experience a shortfall in their finances compared to all domestic students (34 per cent).

The picture changed slightly at the PGCW level, with a higher proportion of international students (42.4 per cent) reporting higher expenditure than income compared to domestic students (36.9 per cent).

At the HDR level, there were no significant differences among the demographic subgroups.

Table 2.13: Percentage of students with less estimated income than expenses

	Domestic students				International students
	All	Indigenous	Low SES	Regional	
Undergraduate					
% in estimated shortfall	34.0%	43.3%	36.5%	38.0%	49.2%
n	3195	755	776	1118	488
Postgraduate coursework					
% in estimated shortfall	36.9%	37.6%			42.4%
n	2299	131			799
Higher degree research					
% in estimated shortfall	32.8%	33.4%			30.6%
n	2157	56			1393

2.5 ASSETS AND DEBT

SAVINGS AND ASSETS

In 2017, most domestic students (60.5 per cent UG, 64 per cent PGCW, 71.3 per cent HDR) had some type of savings that could be used if they were in serious financial difficulty. Of those with savings, less than half (45.7 per cent UG, 43 per cent PGCW, 40.9 per cent HDR) had to use some of those savings in 2017 (Tables 2.14A, B, and C). Slightly higher percentages of HDR students reported having savings compared to UG and PGCW students (Table 2.14C).

Indigenous students seemed to be the exception in both savings and assets. Fewer than half of Indigenous students reported having savings (42.3 per cent UG, 40.4 per cent PGCW, 40.5 per cent HDR). Likewise, a higher percentage of Indigenous students had fewer assets and a lower percentage had larger assets (Tables 2.14 A, B, and C). More detail on Indigenous students' financial situation can be found in Chapter 5.

International students appeared to be slightly less likely than domestic students to have savings. Over half of international students reported that they did have savings (54 per cent UG, 53.3 per cent PGCW, 63.2 per cent HDR). International PGCW and HDR students seemed to be about as likely as domestic students to have had to use some of their savings in 2017, with international undergraduates slightly less likely (37.8 per cent international UG compared to 45.7 per cent domestic UG) (Table 2.14A). The more notable difference between domestic and international students was in the distribution of assets. International students were much more likely to report assets under \$10,000 (73.7 per cent UG, 69.2 per cent, PGCW, 63.4 per cent HDR) compared to domestic students (53.4 per cent UG, 31.8 per cent PGCW, 26.9 per cent HDR).

It is interesting to note that there were domestic students in all degree levels who reported having assets worth over \$100,000 (8.8 per cent UG, 32.5 per cent PGCW, 37.8 per cent HDR). However, the high-asset domestic students appeared to be predominantly mature-age students aged 30 or above, more likely to be studying part-time, predominantly living in homes they own, more likely to be financially supported by their partner, and much less likely to be financially supported by their parents.

Table 2.14A: Undergraduates' savings and assets

	Domestic students											Intl. students	
	All			Indigenous			Low SES			Regional			
	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time		Part-time
Have savings for use in serious financial difficulty	60.5%	61.3%	57.2%	42.3%	42.6%	41.1%	54.5%	53.8%	57.3%	56.9%	55.7%	62.1%	54.0%
Used savings in 2017	45.7%	48.2%	35.0%	43.9%	47.7%	29.2%	47.7%	50.4%	36.9%	52.4%	54.3%	44.3%	37.8%
n	3951	3137	814	913	718	195	941	740	201	1305	1032	273	1010
Value of personal assets													
under \$10,000	53.4%	58.0%	33.3%	54.5%	60.0%	33.9%	49.4%	55.4%	25.5%	50.3%	56.6%	22.9%	73.7%
\$10,000 to \$20,000	22.1%	23.2%	17.3%	20.0%	20.3%	18.6%	22.3%	23.7%	17.0%	24.4%	25.6%	19.1%	13.2%
\$20,000 to \$50,000	12.2%	11.3%	16.3%	12.4%	10.9%	18.1%	12.2%	10.2%	19.9%	11.0%	9.4%	18.2%	8.4%
\$50,000 to \$100,000	3.5%	2.3%	8.8%	3.2%	2.0%	7.8%	4.4%	3.4%	8.1%	3.8%	2.0%	11.5%	1.7%
over \$100,000	8.8%	5.2%	24.4%	9.9%	6.8%	21.6%	11.8%	7.2%	29.6%	10.5%	6.4%	28.3%	2.9%
n	3879	3084	795	903	710	193	932	732	200	1299	1026	273	938

Table 2.14B: Postgraduate coursework students' savings and assets

	Domestic students						Intl. students
	All			Indigenous			
	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time	
Have savings for use in serious financial difficulty	64.0%	59.5%	67.6%	40.4%	35.8%	45.1%	53.3%
Used savings in 2017	43.0%	54.6%	33.9%	40.0%	50.5%	29.4%	39.8%
n	2876	1284	1592	149	72	77	1724
Value of personal assets							
under \$10,000	31.8%	47.7%	19.1%	37.0%	45.6%	28.2%	69.2%
\$10,000 to \$20,000	14.7%	17.0%	12.9%	17.8%	23.6%	11.9%	14.8%
\$20,000 to \$50,000	13.3%	12.7%	13.8%	11.6%	7.0%	16.2%	8.7%
\$50,000 to \$100,000	7.6%	5.4%	9.4%	7.4%	6.3%	8.4%	2.5%
over \$100,000	32.5%	17.2%	44.7%	26.3%	17.6%	35.2%	4.8%
n	2813	1267	1546	148	72	76	1599

Table 2.14C: Higher-degree research students' savings and assets

	Domestic students						Intl. students
	All			Indigenous			
	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time	
Have savings for use in serious financial difficulty	71.3%	73.6%	67.3%	40.5%	40.9%	39.7%	63.2%
Used savings in 2017	40.9%	43.3%	36.8%	39.5%	39.4%	39.7%	40.8%
n	2803	1871	932	69	47	22	2295
Value of personal assets							
under \$10,000	26.9%	32.7%	16.4%	32.0%	33.6%	28.2%	63.4%
\$10,000 to \$20,000	14.3%	17.3%	9.1%	11.9%	10.9%	14.1%	16.5%
\$20,000 to \$50,000	13.3%	14.4%	11.3%	14.4%	12.1%	19.7%	10.7%
\$50,000 to \$100,000	7.7%	7.5%	8.0%	8.5%	10.3%	4.2%	5.0%
over \$100,000	37.8%	28.1%	55.1%	33.3%	33.0%	33.8%	4.4%
n	2755	1846	909	67	47	20	2167

TUITION FEES

Table 2.15A shows the reported fee type and method of payment for domestic students.

In 2017, as in 2012, the majority of domestic undergraduate students (87.7 per cent) were enrolled in Commonwealth Support Places (CSPs) and deferred their fees for later payment through HECS-HELP.

Just over half (53.2 per cent) of domestic PGCW students—who responded to the survey—were in CSPs and deferred their fees for later payment through HECS-HELP, while 37 per cent of PGCW students were full-fee paying students. This represented a small increase from 2012, when 33 per cent of PGCW students were full-fee paying. The difference can be explained by a large increase in the proportion of part-time PGCW students who paid full fees, from around 36 per cent in 2012 to 44 per cent in 2017, while the proportion of full-time PGCW students who paid full fees remained at around 28 per cent. 66 per cent of full-time fee-paying students selected to defer payment of their fees through FEE-HELP, while most full fee paying part-time postgraduate coursework students (55 per cent) paid their fees up front.

Table 2.15A: Percentage of domestic students by fee type and method of payment

	All domestic students					
	Undergraduate			Postgraduate Coursework		
	All	Full-time	Part-time	All	Full-time	Part-time
CSP, paid up front	2.6%	2.2%	4.1%	4.5%	4.1%	4.8%
CSP, deferred through HECS-HELP	87.7%	89.6%	79.4%	53.2%	64.4%	44.6%
Full fees, paid up front	7.3%	6.2%	12.0%	17.8%	9.5%	24.1%
Full fees, deferred through FEE-HELP	1.6%	1.3%	2.9%	19.1%	18.4%	19.7%
Fee-exempt student	0.5%	0.3%	1.0%	2.7%	2.1%	3.1%
Other	0.4%	0.3%	0.7%	2.7%	1.5%	3.7%
n	4343	3439	904	3183	1400	1783

Table 2.15B shows the fee payment method for international students.

In 2017, as in 2012, the vast majority of international undergraduate (90.7 per cent) and PGCW students (83.9 per cent) paid their fees up front.

11.1 per cent of international HDR students paid their fees up front, but most (86.5 per cent) had received a scholarship or sponsorship. These findings are similar to those reported in the 2012 study.

Table 2.15B: Percentage of international students by method of fee payment

	All international students		
	Undergraduate	Postgraduate Coursework	Higher Degree Research
Fees paid by you, your family, friends or relatives	90.7%	83.9%	11.1%
Fee scholarship or sponsorship	5.8%	11.2%	86.5%
Other (including partial payment up front)	3.5%	4.9%	2.4%
n	1119	1900	2429

ESTIMATED DEBT

Students were asked to estimate the level of debt upon completion of their studies, including government loans for study (e.g. HECS, FEE-HELP) and loans from other sources related to their study.

Domestic students' self-reported estimates of total debt at the completion of their degree (Table 2.16) have not changed much since 2006.

Table 2.16: Domestic students' mean estimated total debt at completion of degree

	Undergraduate		Postgraduate Coursework		Higher Degree Research	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
2017 trimmed mean	\$38,200	\$33,800	\$54,100	\$35,200	\$36,900	\$31,800
n	2559	594	1055	1033	967	304

Note, "2017 trimmed mean" is a 98% trimmed mean, i.e., the top and bottom 1% of values were excluded.

For international students who expect to have debt upon completion of their degree, the median total debt was estimated to be \$50,000 at all degree levels. International undergraduates reported an estimated \$68,000 total debt upon completion (see Appendix Table A4), over twice the median value of expected total debt for domestic undergraduates of \$32,000 (see Appendix Table A5). This was not surprising given that international students typically pay much higher course fees than domestic students and 77 per cent of international undergraduates reported not receiving any type of scholarship (see Appendix Table A6).

The median value of new loans obtained by international undergraduate students in 2017 was \$20,000, compared to \$4,000 for domestic undergraduate students (see Appendix Table A7).

3 WORK AND STUDY

3.1 STUDENTS IN PAID EMPLOYMENT

In 2017, as in 2012 and 2006, most domestic university students were in paid employment during the 12 months prior to completing the survey (Table 3.1). While in 2012 there had been a substantial decrease (compared to 2006) in the proportion of domestic students in paid employment, there appeared to have been a slight increase since then, although the difference is insignificant.

Unsurprisingly, a higher proportion of part-time students continued to be in paid employment than full-time students, although the difference was less significant at the undergraduate level.

Table 3.1: Percentage of students in paid employment, 2006-2017

	2006	2012	2017
Domestic Undergraduate			
All	85.5	80.6	81.8
Full-time	85.1	79.7	80.4
Part-time	87	84.5	87.9
Domestic Postgraduate Coursework			
All	-	86.4	87.3
Full-time	80.7	78.6	80.1
Part-time	93.6	91.1	92.8
Domestic Higher Degree Research			
All	-	81.6	82.2
Full-time	80.7	78.0	78.5
Part-time	93.6	90.6	88.6
International			
Undergraduate	-	55.7	49.5
Postgraduate Coursework	-	60.7	56.7
Higher Degree Research	-	58.2	56.1

International students were significantly less likely to be working than domestic students at all degree levels, with less than half of undergraduate international students in paid employment and only 56 per cent of PGCW and HDR students in paid employment. This represents a decline since 2012.

3.2 HOURS OF PAID WORK DURING STUDY PERIODS

Students who reported having been in paid employment were asked to indicate the number of hours they worked in a typical week during study periods.

Domestic full-time undergraduate and PGCW students worked a median of 12 hours per week. International students worked longer, at 15 hours per week for undergraduates and PGCW students (Table 3.2).

Most full-time HDR students worked less than 10 hours per week, with the median being 8 hours for domestic HDR students and 5 hours per week for international HDR students.

Part-time domestic students worked more than twice as many hours as full-time students, with the majority of part-time PGCW students indicating that they worked 38 hours or more in a typical week during study periods. This was unsurprising given that many PGCW degrees are undertaken by students in full-time professional employment.

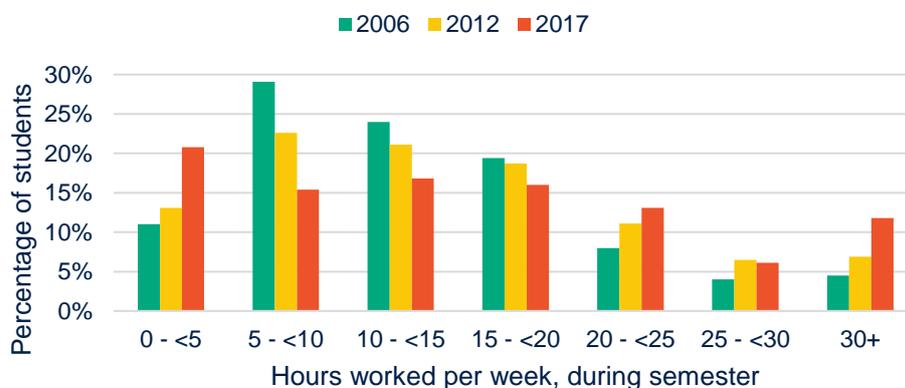
Table 3.2: Median hours in paid employment per week during study periods

	Median hours worked per week
Domestic Undergraduate	
Full-time	12
Part-time	30
Domestic Postgraduate Coursework	
Full-time	12
Part-time	38
Domestic Higher Degree Research	
Full-time	8
Part-time	32
International students	
Undergraduate	15
Postgraduate Coursework	15
Higher Degree Research	5

CHANGES IN EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS OVER TIME

Figure 3.1 shows the total hours worked per week by full-time domestic undergraduate students as reported in the three UA Student Finances Surveys from 2006-2017. It shows a shift in the percentage of students who worked between 5 and 20 hours during study periods, as well the percentage of those who worked fewer than 5 hours and more than 30 hours per week.

In 2017, a smaller proportion of students worked between 5 -20 hours (46 per cent compared to 62 per cent in 2012, and 72 per cent in 2006). A higher proportion were working less than 5 hours a week (21 per cent in 2017, compared to 13 per cent in 2012 and 11 per cent in 2006) and a growing proportion of full-time undergraduate students was working more than 20 hours a week. In 2017, 30 per cent of full-time domestic undergraduate students reported working more than 20 hours a week compared to 24 per cent in 2012, and 16 per cent in 2006.

Figure 3.1: Full-time domestic undergraduate students' hours worked per week, 2006-17


Further analysis showed that students who were financially supported by family worked fewer hours than financially independent students, even after adjusting for full-time/part-time study load. For full-time students, those who were financially independent worked a median of 15 hours per week while students with family support worked a median of 10 hours per week. For part-time students, the difference was even

more pronounced, with financially independent students having worked a median of 38 hours per week and students with family support having worked a median of just 20 hours per week.

WORKING HOURS AND FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

Analysis of the data also revealed that, compared to students who worked less than 20 hours per week, students who worked 20 or more hours per week were more likely to be worried about their financial situation (63 per cent compared to 53 per cent) and more likely to go without food or necessities because they could not afford them (19 per cent compared to 12 per cent).

3.3 REASONS FOR WORKING

The 2017 survey included items exploring students' reasons for working and whether their work was related to their studies. Table 3.3 shows that a substantial proportion of domestic students in paid employment (45.1 per cent) work to progress their careers, although a slightly smaller proportion (38.9 per cent) reported working in an area related to their studies. Over a third of all domestic students indicated the work they did had little value to them except for money it brought in.

Domestic students who worked more than 20 hours per week were more likely to be employed in an area related to their studies than students who worked less than 20 hours per week (34 per cent compared to 23 per cent) and more likely to work because they thought it would help their career (44 per cent compared to 32 per cent).

For international students, the picture was different, with a significantly smaller proportion indicating that their work was related to their studies (26 per cent, compared to 38.9 per cent of domestic students) or that they worked to progress their careers (33.9 per cent, compared to 45.1 per cent of domestic students). Instead, a larger proportion of international students (41.3 per cent) indicated that the work they did had little value to them except for money. This was an increase from the 2012 survey when 37 per cent of international students agreed that the work they did had little value to them except for money.

Table 3.3: Reasons for working

Percentage of students who agree or strongly agree	Domestic students	International students
I do the work I do because it will progress my career	45.1	33.9
My line of work is related to my studies	38.9	26.0
The work I do is of little value to me except for money	39.0	41.3

3.4 HOW WORK AFFECTS STUDY

Following the 2012 survey—where it was reported that there had been a large increase in the percentage of undergraduate students indicating that their work commitments were adversely affecting their study—the 2017 study showed a significant decrease back to proportions similar to those reported in the 2006 survey (see Table 3.4).

Consistent with the patterns reported in previous studies, the proportion of part-time undergraduate students who indicated that their work commitments were adversely affecting their study was significantly higher than that of full-time students, with over a third of part-time students (35.7 per cent) indicating that they regularly missed classes to attend paid employment, and over half (52.4 per cent) agreeing that their work commitment adversely affected their performance at university.

A slightly higher proportion of low SES full-time students (43.5 per cent, compared to 40.7 per cent for all full-time domestic undergraduates) indicated that their work commitments adversely affected their academic performance.

A significantly smaller proportion of undergraduate international students (17.1 per cent) reported that they regularly missed classes because of employment obligations, and less than a third (30.9 per cent) agreed that their work commitments adversely affected their university performance.

Table 3.4: Effects of work on study, 2006-2017

Percentage of undergraduate students in paid employment who agree or strongly agree with...		2006	2012	2017
I regularly miss classes because I need to attend paid employment	Domestic FT	22.7	31.5	27.2
	Domestic PT	37.4	41.3	35.7
	Low SES FT	-	31.4	28.1
	Low SES PT	-	44.8	34.5
	International	-	14.3	17.1
My work commitments adversely affect my performance at university	Domestic FT	40.2	50.1	40.7
	Domestic PT	55.3	65.7	52.4
	Low SES FT	-	53.3	43.5
	Low SES PT	-	68.9	50.4
	International	-	30.1	30.9

Table 3.5A shows the proportion of undergraduate students by student groups in paid employment who agree with statements about how their work affected their studies. One third of Indigenous undergraduate students (32.8 per cent) indicated that they regularly missed classes to attend work, compared to 28.9 per cent for all domestic undergraduates. Almost one in two Indigenous students (47.7 per cent) indicated that their work commitments adversely affect their university performance.

Table 3.5A: Effects of work on study — undergraduate students

Percentage of undergraduate students in paid employment who agree or strongly agree with...	Domestic students				International students
	All	Indigenous	Low SES	Regional	
Undergraduate					
Regularly miss classes because need to attend paid employment	28.9%	32.8%	29.5%	28.8%	17.1%
Work commitments adversely affect my performance at university	43.0%	47.7%	45.1%	45.2%	30.9%
Often need to use online alternatives because of work	38.7%	42.7%	41.2%	40.2%	24.2%

Tables 3.5B and 3.5C show the proportion of PGCW and HDR students (respectively) who agreed with statements about how their work affected their studies. Over 49 per cent of domestic PGCW students and over 41 per cent of HDR students reported that their work commitments adversely affected their performance at university.

The proportions were even higher among Indigenous students, and significantly so for Indigenous HDR students, with 58.1 per cent who agreed that their academic performance was being adversely affected by their work commitments.

For both kinds of postgraduate degree, the largest differences could be seen between the international students and domestic students, with a significantly smaller proportion of international PGCW students reporting that they missed classes to attend employment (14.1 per cent compared to 24.9 per cent for domestic students) and that work adversely affected their performance at university (25 per cent compared to 48.6 per cent of domestic students). Similarly, a far smaller percentage of international PGCW students indicated that they often needed to use online alternatives because of work (17.4 per cent compared to 42.7 per cent of domestic students). The pattern was similar among HDR students, with a significantly smaller proportion of international students who reported that their work adversely affected their studies (Table 3.5C).

Table 3.5B: Effects of work on study — Postgraduate coursework students

Percentage of students who agree or strongly agree with...	Domestic students		International students
	All	Indigenous	
Postgraduate coursework			
Regularly miss classes because need to attend paid employment	24.9%	30.5%	14.1%
Work commitments adversely affect my performance at university	48.6%	56.5%	25.0%
Often need to use online alternatives because of work	42.7%	49.8%	17.4%

Table 3.5C: Effects of work on study – HDR

Percentage of students who agree or strongly agree with...	Domestic students		International students
	All	Indigenous	
Higher-degree research			
Regularly miss classes because need to attend paid employment	18.1%	25.9%	5.1%
Work commitments adversely affect my performance at university	41.3%	58.1%	18.7%
Often need to use online alternatives because of work	23.1%	28.7%	6.3%

Overall, at all degree levels, our analysis revealed that students who were financially supported by family were less likely to miss classes, less likely to have work commitments affecting their performance at university, and less likely to be using online alternatives due to work commitments.

However, students who were financially independent were more likely to believe their work will progress their career and more likely to work in an area related to their studies.

3.5 WORK/STUDY BALANCE

In 2017, students were asked about their satisfaction with work/study balance. Table 3.6 shows the proportion of students in paid employment who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “My work/study balance is satisfactory”.

Less than 40 per cent of domestic students at all degree levels agreed that their work/study balance was satisfactory, with Indigenous undergraduate and PGCW students significantly less likely to indicate that they were satisfied with work/study balance than other domestic students. However, this pattern was reversed at the HDR level with a higher proportion of Indigenous students who indicated satisfaction with work/study balance.

Again, differences were observed between domestic and international students. Significantly higher proportions of international students at the PGCW, and HDR levels indicated satisfaction with work/study balance. The majority of international HDR students in paid employment (55.8 per cent) reported being satisfied with their work/study balance.

Domestic students who worked more than 20 hours per week were less likely to believe their work/study balance was satisfactory (25 per cent compared to 41 per cent of students working less than 20 hours per week). These students were more likely to miss classes due to paid employment (47 per cent compared to 18 per cent) and more likely to use online alternatives due to work commitments (54 per cent compared to 26 per cent).

Table 3.6: Satisfaction with work/study balance

		% of students in paid employment agreeing or strongly agreeing
“My work/study balance is satisfactory”		
Undergraduates		
	All domestic	35.2%
	Indigenous	29.0%
	Low SES	32.1%
	Regional	32.9%
	International	39.2%
Postgraduate coursework		
	All domestic	34.7%
	Indigenous	25.1%
	International	42.7%
Higher-degree research		
	All domestic	38.0%
	Indigenous	43.1%
	International	55.8%

STUDENT COMMENTS

An indicative sample of students’ comments about the impact of their employment on their studies is provided below. Overall, students’ comments were mostly about how their work affected their performance:

“I work [as] much as I can to earn money so they [parents] do not have to pay for me but with full time study my mark definitely reflects this.”

(UG domestic full-time student)

“My income is necessary for the household, and my need to work impacts significantly on my study options.”

(UG domestic part-time student)

“I worked casually and supported myself through my undergrad. I tried to do the same during my postgrad medical degree but the time conflict [led] to some failed exams and I had to stop working.”

(PGCW domestic full-time student)

“I am a full-time student and a part-time worker. It is incredibly hard to financially support myself and keep on top of my studies. This certainly has a negative impact on my ability to apply myself fully to my studies and places significant stress on my life. My current job has recently been unable to give me the hours required, which means I am now reliant on my partner and my parents for some form of financial support. Even with this help I am living on approximately \$17/day after setting aside necessary expenses for rent and bills (which I still require support to pay).”

(UG domestic full-time student)

4 SOME EFFECTS OF STUDENTS' FINANCIAL SITUATIONS

The data suggests that a majority of students in 2017 were coping slightly better financially compared to students in 2012, and living within their means.

However, over half of the students across all degree levels indicated that their financial situation was a source of worry for them. The open-ended responses also provided some insight into the personal impact of students' financial circumstances. Here we look more closely at those effects at the general level.

4.1 FINANCIAL WELLBEING

Overall, fewer domestic non-Indigenous students in 2017 indicated that they worried about their financial situation, compared to students in the 2012 survey.

However, it is worth noting that there were only small changes in the number of those who reported regularly going without food or other necessities because they could not afford them. In addition, fewer than four out of ten full-time UG and PGCW students felt in control of their financial situation.

Table 4.1 presents the trends from the last two surveys. (For a detailed overview of the responses from 2017, see Appendix A8.)

Table 4.1: Domestic non-Indigenous students' financial wellbeing from 2012 to 2017

		Undergraduate		Postgraduate coursework		Higher-degree research	
		FT	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT
My financial situation is often a source of worry for me	2012	68.4	64.3	74.1	49.7	67.0	57.6
	2017	58.4	56.0	66.6	46.2	57.4	49.5
I regularly go without food or other necessities because I cannot afford them	2012	18.2	14.5	18.0	9.5	12.4	11.9
	2017	14.6	13.2	16.2	8.4	9.4	9.2
I feel in control of my financial situation	2012	32.1	38.7	33.1	57.0	44.8	50.3
	2017	36.9	41.3	34.0	56.8	46.2	50.9

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

58.2 per cent of domestic undergraduate students reported being worried about their finances, which was similar to 2006, but lower than 2012 (where the figure was 66 per cent).

A higher proportion of Indigenous students (72.2 per cent) were concerned about their finances compared to all domestic students. Again, this was slightly lower compared to 2012 (76 per cent). Indigenous students were the most likely undergraduates to experience financial distress, with over one quarter indicating that they regularly went without food or necessities because they could not afford them.

Low SES and regional students indicated higher levels of financial stress compared to all domestic students.

Just over half of international undergraduate students were concerned about their financial situation, a figure comparable to the 2012 level.

Table 4.2A: Financial concern – Undergraduate students

	Domestic students				International students
	All	Indigenous	Low SES	Regional	
Undergraduate					
My financial situation is often a source of worry for me	58.2%	72.2%	62.7%	64.2%	50.3%
I regularly go without food or necessities; I can't afford them	14.6%	27.2%	17.5%	18.7%	13.9%
I feel in control of my financial situation	37.5%	27.1%	34.9%	37.7%	38.8%
n	4595	1063	940	1301	1204

Percentage of students who agree or strongly agree with statements about financial circumstances

POSTGRADUATE COURSEWORK STUDENTS

Over half of all domestic PGCW students reported being worried about their finances.

A higher proportion of Indigenous PGCW students compared to all domestic students reported financial concern. Just under one quarter of Indigenous students indicated that they went without food (23.7 per cent), and a lower proportion indicated that they felt in control of their financial situation when compared to all domestic PGCW students. Overall, a higher percentage of Indigenous PGCW students appeared to experience financial stress, and this is analysed further in Chapter 5.

Table 4.2B: Financial concern – Postgraduate coursework students

	Domestic students		International students
	All	Indigenous	
Postgraduate coursework			
My financial situation is often a source of worry for me	55.1%	65.2%	47.2%
I regularly go without food or necessities; I can't afford them	11.9%	23.7%	10.8%
I feel in control of my financial situation	46.7%	32.7%	42.1%
n	3383	177	2076

Percentage of students who agree or strongly agree with statements about financial circumstances

HIGHER-DEGREE RESEARCH STUDENTS

A higher proportion of Indigenous higher degree research (HDR) students (72.2 per cent) were worried about their finances compared to all domestic (54.7 per cent) and international students (52.9 per cent). Over one quarter of Indigenous HDR students reported regularly going without food or necessities, and this was similar to percentages reported in 2012. Fewer Indigenous students felt in control of their financial situation. Taken together, higher proportions of HDR Indigenous students indicated concern over their financial situation, compared to other student groups.

Table 4.2C: Financial concern – Higher degree research students

	Domestic students		International students
	All	Indigenous	
Higher -degree research			
My financial situation is often a source of worry for me	54.7%	72.2%	52.9%
I regularly go without food or necessities; I can't afford them	9.5%	28.5%	8.6%
I feel in control of my financial situation	47.8%	35.9%	50.7%
n	3208	84	2582

Percentage of students who agree or strongly agree with statements about financial circumstances

CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS WORRIED ABOUT THEIR FINANCIAL SITUATION

Students—both domestic and international—who were worried about their financial situation had a lower estimated annual income than those who were not (median income of \$22,000 compared to \$25,200), as well as substantially higher estimated annual expenses (median expenses of \$21,500 compared to \$16,100). Similarly, students who felt in control of their financial situation had a higher estimated annual income than those who did not feel in control (median of \$26,100 compared to \$20,200), as well as lower estimated annual expenses (median expenses of \$18,600 compared to \$20,500). In both cases, most of the difference in expenditure came from living expenses rather than study expenses.

Students' level of worry about their financial situation increased with age until it reached a plateau from ages 25 – 39, after which it decreased slightly. At any age, undergraduate students were more likely to be worried about their financial situation than PGCW or HDR students.

Further analysis of the data revealed the following:

Degree level and study load

There were slight differences in the level of worry about finances between different degree levels, with undergraduates reporting the most (57 per cent) and PGCW reporting the least (52 per cent). Likewise, full-time students (57 per cent) were slightly more likely to be worried about finances than part-time students (52 per cent).

Hours worked

For full-time students, the level of worry about finances increased with the number of hours worked, from 52 per cent for students who worked 5-10 hours to 67 per cent for students who worked over 30 hours per week. Students who worked fewer than five hours per week were an exception to this trend, with 57 per cent who agreed that their financial situation was a source of worry.

For part-time students, the trend was stronger and in the reverse direction, with 69 per cent of students who worked 5-10 hours per week being worried about finances compared to students who worked over 30 hours per week where only 45 per cent were worried. Once again, part-time students who worked fewer than five hours per week were an exception to the trend, with 64 per cent being worried about their financial situation.

Savings and assets

Students who had savings were much less likely to be worried about their financial circumstances (43 per cent, compared to 76 per cent of those without savings) and much less likely to go without food or other necessities (6 per cent compared to 25 per cent of those without savings).

The rate of students reporting worry about their financial situation generally decreased with assets, from 63 per cent for students with under \$10,000 to 42 per cent for students with \$50,000- \$100,000. In the top asset group (over \$100,000) the trend was slightly reversed, with 44 per cent reporting worry about their financial situation, possibly because the assets were associated with a mortgage debt.

Worry and feeling in control

The level of students' worry about their financial situation was strongly associated with whether or not they felt in control of their finances. Only 28 per cent of students who agreed or strongly agreed that they were in control of their financial situation also regularly worried about their financial situation, while 86 per cent of people who disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were in control of their financial situation were worried about their financial situation.

Financial worry and work/study balance

The level of worry about financial circumstances was strongly associated with students' levels of satisfaction with work/study balance, with only 37 per cent of those who agreed or strongly agreed that their balance was satisfactory being worried about their finances, whereas 74 per cent of those who disagreed or strongly disagreed indicated they were worried about their finances.

Some of the concerns regarding financial wellbeing are reflected in the following student comments:

"My financial situation is bad. If anything changes even a little, I would have to drop out of university and would most likely not be able to afford rent. Not sure what would happen."

(UG domestic full-time student)

"It is really hard needing to live off \$1,000 a fortnight, due to being unable to gain paid employment as a restriction from the government as I am a full-time carer for my Mum (can only be away for 25 hours, and full-time uni, including travel uses this time), so things like pensioner discounts, or payment plans in regards to things like textbooks would be extremely useful, as it takes roughly 8 weeks of keeping money aside to be able to purchase needed books."

(UG Indigenous full-time student)

"The costs associated with being an international student are astronomical. Combine that with the stress of being alone in a new place without a strong support system and with restrictions that force us into poverty, this leaves international students at a severe disadvantage and most cannot seek out career advancing opportunities like internships, advanced courses etc. Many international students are not able to see doctors for medical reasons, let alone to seek out care for mental health problems that may arise because of these challenges."

(PGCW international student)

“Affording life as a student is extremely hard. Budgeting at times can become crippling to a person's wellbeing - by avoiding social activities, training opportunities and simple luxuries like more than toast for dinner. I can't work - any spare hour is spent at unpaid internship placements which are necessary for my degree. I think Centrelink payment rates are extremely unrealistic and consideration should be given to the number of students that this survey shows have expenses that are much higher than Centrelink payment rates. My Centrelink payment is \$530 a fortnight in total (which is the full rate), and my rent alone is \$485 per fortnight. Tell me how that works out. People would tell me not to live in [XX City] because rent is so high, but this is the only university offering the course I am doing. I've already eaten into more than half of my savings I put aside to study, and I'm not halfway through my course yet... Wish me luck!”

(PGCW domestic full-time student)

“Financial stress takes my time away from study too much. I always worry about buying food and not running out of money. I have a wife and two kids whom I should support (although not entirely dependent on me). Finding affordable accommodation is difficult in [XX City]. I have to travel an hour and half to my campus every morning and evening (3hrs of round trip per day) because that is where I could afford to live.”

(Full-time HDR international student)

CHARACTERISTICS OF FINANCIALLY-SUPPORTED AND FINANCIALLY-INDEPENDENT STUDENTS

To gain a better picture of both domestic and international students' financial position, the data were analysed to explore the extent to which the financially-supported students differed from the financially-independent students.

Table 4.3 shows the relationship between family financial support and students' financial wellbeing in 2017.

Interestingly, about half of the students who were financially supported by family or partners indicated that they worry about their finances compared to 62.8 per cent who were not financially supported by family. About two in five students in both groups felt in control of their financial situation, although one in five of the financially-independent group regularly went without food.

Table 4.3 Relationship between family financial support and financial wellbeing

Proportion of students who agree or strongly agree with...	Financially supported by family, partner or other	
	Yes	No
My financial situation is often a source of worry for me	51.2%	62.8%
I regularly go without food/necessities because I cannot afford them	9.6%	19.1%
I feel in control of my financial situation	39.4%	41.0%
n	8791	8223

Further analysis sought to distinguish some of the differences between the financially-supported and the independent students as related to their financial wellbeing.

Hours worked and study load

Students who were financially independent were more likely to be studying part-time (34 per cent compared to 13 per cent of students supported by family).

In contrast, the financially-supported students worked fewer hours than the financially-independent students, even after adjusting for full-time/part-time study fraction. For full-time students, the financially-independent students worked a median of 15 hours per week, compared to a median of 10 hours per week for students who were financially supported. For part-time students, the difference was even more pronounced, with financially-independent students working a median of 38 hours per week compared to a median of just 20 hours per week for the financially supported.

Financial wellbeing

Students who were financially supported by family were less likely to be worried about their financial situation (51 per cent compared to 63 per cent of financially independent students) and less likely to go without food or other necessities (10 per cent compared to 19 per cent).

Work/study balance

Students who were financially supported by family had better work/study balance outcomes while those who were financially independent felt better about the work they did.

Specifically, students who relied on financial support from family or their partner were more likely to feel their work/study balance was satisfactory, less likely to miss classes, less likely to have work commitments affecting their university performance and less likely to be using online alternatives due to work commitments.

However, the financially-independent students were more likely to believe their work would progress their career, more likely to value their work for more than just money, and more likely to work in an area related to their studies.

Savings and assets

Students who were financially supported by family were slightly more likely to have savings (63 per cent compared to 57 per cent of students without family support) but less likely to have over \$50,000 available than financially-independent students (11 per cent compared to 25 per cent).

4.2 INFLUENCE ON STUDY

Financial concerns influenced students' decisions about whether to defer their studies or reduce their course load. In 2017, a lower proportion of students indicated that they had reduced their course load or deferred due to financial concerns than students in 2012.

Table 4.4 shows the percentage of all undergraduate students who responded to this question.

A higher proportion of Indigenous students (14 per cent) reported having deferred for financial reasons compared with all domestic (9 per cent) and international students (7 per cent). In addition, Indigenous students (27 per cent) were more likely to have reduced their course load compared with all other student groups.

Table 4.4: All undergraduate students who deferred or reduced course load for financial reasons

Percentage of students who...		All UG	Domestic UG			International UG	
			All	Indig.	Low SES		Regional
Deferred studies because could not afford to continue	At any time	9.4%	9.7%	14.3%	9.7%	12.7%	7.3%
	Prior to commencing	5.7%	5.8%	8.5%	6.5%	9.4%	4.5%
	During course	4.6%	4.8%	7.4%	4.4%	4.2%	3.2%
	n	5526	4401	1026	923	1284	1125
Reduce course load for financial reasons	%	19.7%	20.5%	26.5%	23.3%	22.2%	13.4%
	n	5661	4495	1048	942	1306	1166
Of students who had to defer...							
Number of years deferred prior to commencing	median	2	2	2	2	1	2
	n	319	284	77	64	123	35
Number of years deferred during course	median	1	1	1	1	1	1
	n	266	243	71	56	72	23

Students comments about their financial concerns focus on the impact on their studies and wellbeing. An indicative selection is provided below:

"I can't do my degree part time. I have to simply choose between starving or going into university. There aren't many jobs that can be scheduled around 50 hours of study every week. I did have one that provided 3 hours a fortnight work, but unfortunately, I wasn't needed, so I lost that job. I also broke off my relationship with my partner of four years this year. Moving houses mid-lease, and trying to do so quickly, meant that I was left financially destitute. I now often eat meals at university, rely on friends to bring food over or pay for the ingredients so I can cook for them. I don't eat much anymore. But it's hard when you can't afford to live. I left one degree due to financial pressure and mental health reasons, I really don't want to leave my second."

(UG Indigenous full-time student)

“In my personal experience, moving away from home to study is extremely difficult. Multiple times I have thought of deferring because it was financially becoming too hard. Services available are just not accessible and fitting work and university together, whilst maintaining even above average mental health is near impossible. I have many friends in similar situations. Those who have moved to study struggle and I think there should be more services to help because it feels extremely isolating and defeating. Further, being recognised as dependent upon parents even though they really don't support you is extremely difficult. The stress of constantly worrying about how to pay next [month's] rent or simply paying for food is really hard.”

(UG domestic full-time student)

“Undertaking higher level studies has put me in extreme financial difficulty and has had significant negative consequences on my life. This may be more so in my situation, as a female mature age student who likely has more financial responsibility than a young adult. It has also negatively impacted significant life choices, like deferring family, deferring buying a house, reduced / minimal contact and visits with family living overseas. The long term financial impact of undertaking this study is severe. Whilst I value higher education and believe there are both individual and societal benefits to undertaking higher education, the current system places mature aged females like myself at significant disadvantage, and places real boundaries for someone like myself to both enter and complete the course of study. I am seriously considering deferring or withdrawing from my study due to extreme hardship.”

(HDR domestic full-time student)

Overall, 18 per cent of all survey participants indicated that their finances influenced their university choice, and 11 per cent reported that it influenced their study choice. These figures did not vary dramatically between degree levels, but were slightly higher amongst Indigenous students, with 25 per cent reporting that they were limited in their choice of university and 15 per cent in their choice of course. These figures were consistent with those reported in 2012.

For domestic students specifically, financial circumstances featured prominently in decisions about whether to study full-time or part-time. Just over half of part-time domestic students (55 per cent) would have preferred to be studying full-time, if finances had permitted, consistent with the 2012 survey.

5 SPECIFIC STUDENT GROUPS

In this chapter, we analyse the financial circumstances of four student groups: Indigenous, low SES, regional, and international students.

It is important to note that there was considerable overlap between the three domestic groups—Indigenous, low SES, and regional students—in our survey participants. Most notably, within the Indigenous student cohort, 38 per cent were also identified as low SES and approximately half (52.2 per cent) were regional students. Similarly, about half (53.7 per cent) of all low SES students were from regional areas and 39.8 per cent of regional students were also low SES.

These large intersections were not surprising; however, because of these crossovers, these three groups were not mutually exclusive and did not represent entirely different cohorts.

Table 5.1: Demographic overlap of domestic subpopulations

Domestic Undergraduates	Indigenous	Low SES	Regional
Non-Indigenous		97.0%	97.0%
Indigenous		3.0%	3.0%
Medium/High SES	62.0%		60.2%
Low SES	38.0%		39.8%
Major Cities	47.8%	46.3%	
Regional	52.2%	53.7%	

5.1 INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

Over 1,300 Indigenous students responded to the survey, making up 7 per cent of total respondents and 12 per cent of the domestic student participants. Within this group, three quarters were female and approximately one third were between 20 and 24 years old. Eight-four per cent were undergraduates, most commonly studying in Other/Allied Health (16 per cent), Society and Culture (15 per cent), Education (12 per cent), and Nursing (11 per cent) (see Appendix A1).

At first glance, the financial circumstances for Indigenous students in the 2017 study seemed to have improved since the last survey was conducted in 2012, with an increased median reported income at all degree levels. However, our analysis revealed that Indigenous students remained financially far worse-off than non-Indigenous students.

Indigenous students were less likely to have savings and less likely to receive financial support from their family or partners. They were also more likely to report having had to defer studies or reduce their course load for financial reasons.

In addition, finances were a source of worry for the majority of Indigenous students in 2017 (71.3 per cent), and over a quarter (26.8 per cent) reported that they regularly went without food or other necessities because they could not afford them. This was significantly higher than for non-Indigenous students (13.6 per cent) and indicated that there continued to be a considerable gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in terms of their financial wellbeing.

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

Table 5.2 shows the median total annual income for Indigenous students and non-Indigenous domestic students.

At all degree levels in 2017, full-time Indigenous students reported a higher median income than their non-Indigenous counterparts. The largest difference was observed at the HDR level with the median income for Indigenous students being \$10,200 more than for non-Indigenous students. For part-time PGCW students however, the median income of Indigenous students was smaller than that of non-Indigenous students.

While the data on student income may paint an overall positive picture of Indigenous students' financial positions, analysis of students' estimated expenditure showed that Indigenous students had significantly higher expenses than non-Indigenous students (Table 5.3), and Indigenous students were more likely to have a shortfall of estimated income in relation to their expenses (Table 5.4).

Table 5.2: Median total annual income

		Non-Indigenous	Indigenous
All degree levels			
All	median	\$23,500	\$27,000
	n	8375	1154
Full-time	median	\$19,600	\$23,900
	n	5343	847
Part-time	median	\$42,900	\$41,000
	n	3032	307
Undergraduate			
All	median	\$20,900	\$25,500
	n	2928	919
Full-time	median	\$18,300	\$22,200
	n	2327	721
Part-time	median	\$33,900	\$37,700
	n	601	198
Postgraduate coursework			
All	median	\$41,000	\$41,900
	n	2684	161
Full-time	median	\$23,500	\$35,900
	n	1167	78
Part-time	median	\$55,200	\$52,100
	n	1517	83
Higher-degree research			
All	median	\$39,500	\$49,700
	n	2763	74
Full-time	median	\$36,700	\$48,100
	n	1849	48
Part-time	median	\$50,000	\$62,600
	n	914	26

In 2017, as was the case in 2012, the total estimated median expenditure for Indigenous students at all degree levels (\$23,900) was significantly larger than that for non-Indigenous students (\$18,900).

The difference was particularly large at the undergraduate level among full-time students, with the median expenditure for full-time non-Indigenous students being \$6,400 less than the median expenditure for Indigenous students (Table 5.3), and a higher proportion of Indigenous students (42.2 per cent compared to 34.3 per cent of non-Indigenous students) reported a shortfall in estimated income compared to estimated expenses (Table 5.4).

The difference in the median expenditure between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students can be partly explained by the fact that a significantly higher proportion of Indigenous students (31 per cent compared to

18 per cent of non-Indigenous students) were financially supporting dependants (see Appendix Table A3). As well, a significantly lower proportion of Indigenous students (36 per cent) reported receiving financial support from family/partners than their non-Indigenous student counterparts (54 per cent) (see Appendix Table A9 for full table).

Table 5.3: Median total annual expenditure for Indigenous students

		Non-Indigenous	Indigenous
All degree levels			
All	median	\$18,900	\$23,900
	n	7085	977
Full-time	median	\$15,700	\$21,400
	n	4624	735
Part-time	median	\$34,900	\$37,100
	n	2461	242
Undergraduate			
All	median	\$16,200	\$22,300
	n	2609	788
Full-time	median	\$14,100	\$20,500
	n	2097	629
Part-time	median	\$28,800	\$34,400
	n	512	159
Postgraduate coursework			
All	median	\$32,500	\$32,600
	n	2299	133
Full-time	median	\$23,200	\$28,500
	n	1054	67
Part-time	median	\$42,400	\$43,200
	n	1245	66
Higher-degree research			
All	median	\$31,400	\$36,100
	n	2177	56
Full-time	median	\$28,100	\$33,100
	n	1473	39
Part-time	median	\$39,700	\$39,800
	n	704	17

Table 5.4: Percentage of Indigenous students whose estimated income is less than their estimated expenses

		Non-Indigenous	Indigenous
All degree levels		34.3%	42.2%
n		6709	942
Undergraduate		33.8%	43.3%
n		2440	755
Postgraduate coursework		36.9%	37.6%
n		2168	131
Higher-degree research		32.8%	33.4%
n		2101	56

FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

Indigenous students stood out as a group who were significantly less likely to report having savings compared with non-Indigenous students. This was the case for Indigenous students at all degree levels and for both full-time and part-time students.

Overall, 42 per cent of Indigenous students reported having savings for use in serious financial difficulty, compared to 62 per cent of non-Indigenous students (see Appendix Table A10 for full table).

This may partly explain why a significantly higher proportion of Indigenous students (71.3% compared to 57.2 per cent of non-Indigenous students) reported that their financial situation was often a source of worry for them, and why a smaller proportion reported feeling in control of their financial situation (28.2 per cent compared to 39.9 per cent of non-Indigenous students).

Of particular concern was the finding that over a quarter of Indigenous students (26.8 per cent) reported regularly going without food or necessities because they cannot afford them (Table 5.5).

Table 5.5 Percentage of Indigenous students who agree or strongly agree with statements about financial circumstances

	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous
All degree levels		
My financial situation is often a source of worry for me	57.2%	71.3%
I regularly go without food or necessities; I can't afford them	13.6%	26.8%
I feel in control of my financial situation	39.9%	28.2%
n	9848	1324
Undergraduate		
My financial situation is often a source of worry for me	58.0%	72.2%
I regularly go without food or necessities; I can't afford them	14.3%	27.2%
I feel in control of my financial situation	37.7%	27.1%
n	3531	1063
Postgraduate coursework		
My financial situation is often a source of worry for me	55.0%	65.2%
I regularly go without food or necessities; I can't afford them	11.8%	23.7%
I feel in control of my financial situation	46.9%	32.7%
n	3193	177
Higher-degree research		
My financial situation is often a source of worry for me	54.5%	72.2%
I regularly go without food or necessities; I can't afford them	9.3%	28.5%
I feel in control of my financial situation	47.9%	35.9%
n	3124	84

Our analysis revealed that the financial circumstances of some Indigenous students were adversely affecting their studies, with 16 per cent reporting that they deferred their studies because they could not afford to continue and 28 per cent having reduced their course load for financial reasons. This is significantly higher than the proportion of non-Indigenous students who deferred (10 per cent) or reduced course loads (21 per cent) because of financial reasons, and the pattern was similar at all degree levels (see Appendix Table A11).

Some indicative comments on Indigenous students' experiences are included below:

"Scholarships awarded me have reduced my money worries and supported me in my studies to perform well. I have a full accommodation scholarship which enables me to live away from the Northern Territory in order to study at a Go8 university. The Indigenous student support centre is a haven in supporting Indigenous students to cope with studying at university and being away from family and friends. Such places are invaluable and provide a safe place on campus. Much of my savings [I] use to return home over the breaks in response to being homesick and helps maintain my wellbeing. Being Indigenous it is very important to maintain my cultural links and return on Country to visit places and people. Doing so reminds my community that [I] have not forgotten my heritage and keeps me grounded because tertiary studies is only one of many knowledge systems [I] need to draw upon in order to survive in two worlds."

(Full-time Indigenous UG student)

"I think the [HELP] loans which are repaid after you start earning a certain amount should continue. Without them many younger people will miss out on the opportunity to have a higher education."

(Part-time Indigenous UG student)

5.2 LOW SES UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

To identify students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, students' postcode during secondary school was used as an indicator. This identification method allowed for comparability with previous years' data. However, because of the decreasing relevance of this postcode as students mature, it was only used to identify low SES undergraduates. Thus, all reference to low SES students in this section pertains to undergraduates only.

Overall, students from low SES backgrounds in 2017 were more likely than non low SES domestic undergraduate students to experience financial hardship.

While the median annual income of low SES students was similar to that of non-low SES domestic students, the median estimated expenditure for low SES students was higher than non low SES students' expenditure, meaning that a greater proportion of low SES students reported a shortfall in estimated income in relation to estimated expenses.

Low SES students were less likely to have savings for use in serious financial difficulty, less likely to have financial support from family/partners, and more likely to be financially supporting dependants. This may explain why a higher proportion of low SES students reported that their financial situation was a source of worry for them (62.7 per cent compared to 56.4 per cent of non-low SES students).

While it seemed that the financial situation of low SES students in 2017 had improved since 2012 when the last student finances study was conducted, a gap remained between low SES and non-low SES undergraduate domestic students, with a higher proportion of low SES students experiencing financial hardship.

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

The median income for undergraduate students from low SES backgrounds is shown in Table 5.6.

For full-time students in 2017, the median income of \$18,300 was the same for both low SES and non-low SES students; although, for part-time students, the median income for low SES students was slightly higher (by \$2,000) than that for non-low SES students.

The estimated annual expenditure, on the other hand, revealed larger differences between low SES students and other domestic students. As shown in Table 5.7, the estimated median expenditure for low SES students (\$18,600) was substantially higher than that for non-low SES students (\$15,200).

This was the case for both full-time and part-time students, although the difference was greater for part-time students with the total median expenditure for low SES being \$6,800 more than that for non-low SES students. This means that a higher proportion of low SES students (37 per cent compared to 33 per cent for non-low SES students) reported shortfalls in income in relation to estimated expenses.

Table 5.6 Median total annual income for low SES students

		Non-low SES	Low SES
Undergraduate			
All	median	\$20,300	\$21,600
	n	2440	847
Full-time	median	\$18,300	\$18,300
	n	1979	665
Part-time	median	\$32,600	\$34,600
	n	461	182

Table 5.7 Median total annual expenditure for low SES students

		Non-low SES	Low SES
Undergraduate			
All	median	\$15,200	\$18,600
	n	2306	823
Full-time	median	\$13,600	\$16,400
	n	1876	648
Part-time	median	\$26,900	\$33,700
	n	430	175

One of the possible reasons for the difference in median expenditure between low SES students and non-low SES students was that a higher proportion of low SES students (16 per cent compared to 11 per cent of non-low SES students) reported that they were financially supporting dependants (see Appendix A3). Moreover, a smaller proportion of low SES students (52 per cent compared to 60 per cent of non-low SES students) reported receiving financial support from family/partners (see Appendix Table A12).

FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

Overall, undergraduate students from low SES backgrounds in 2017 were more likely to experience financial hardship than non-low SES students.

In terms of savings, 55 per cent of low SES students reported having savings for use in serious financial difficulty compared to 63 per cent for their non-low SES counterparts (see Appendix A13 for full table). In addition, a higher proportion of low SES students (62.7 per cent, compared to 56.4 per cent of non-low SES students) indicated that their financial situation was often a source of worry for them, and a larger proportion reported regularly going without food or necessities because they could not afford them (Table 5.8).

Table 5.8 Percentage of low SES students who agree or strongly agree with statements about financial circumstances

	Non-low SES	Low SES
Undergraduate		
My financial situation is often a source of worry for me	56.4%	62.7%
I regularly go without food or necessities; I can't afford them	13.8%	17.5%
I feel in control of my financial situation	40.1%	34.9%
n	2663	940

While a substantial proportion of low SES students experienced financial hardship, they were not any more likely than non-low SES students to have deferred studies because of their financial circumstances. They were, however, more likely (23 per cent compared to 18 per cent of non-low SES students) to have reduced their course load for financial reasons (see Appendix Table A14).

5.3 REGIONAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

The 2017 *Universities Australia Student Finances Survey* includes analysis of regional students' circumstances for the first time.

In this report, regional students were identified via their postcode during school. Using the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) scale of 'remoteness', postcodes were identified as either regional or non-regional, with students from postcodes outside of the major cities considered regional. Major cities included most capital cities and major urban areas. As with the low-SES identification, this variable was applied only to undergraduates because of the limitations of using this postcode for postgraduate students. About 7 per cent of the undergraduate response sample was identified as regional students.

While the median annual income of regional students was slightly higher than major cities students', regional students reported a much higher estimated median expenditure than their counterparts, meaning that a greater portion of regional students showed a shortfall between estimated income and estimated expenses. Regional students were more likely to have higher costs associated with living expenses.

Similar to low SES students, regional students were less likely to have savings to use in serious financial difficulty, less likely to have financial support from family/partners and more likely to be financially supporting dependants. The analysis showed that a higher proportion of regional students were experiencing financial hardship when compared with major cities' students.

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

The estimated median income for regional students was \$23,300, higher than that reported by students in major cities (\$19,200) (Table 5.9). Full-time and part-time regional students' median income was higher compared to their major cities counterparts.

As with the other groups of students, the most common source of income for regional students was paid employment (received by 77 per cent of regional students), followed by Austudy/ABSTUDY/Youth Allowance (received by 45 per cent). A higher percentage of regional students (compared to students in major cities) received Austudy/ABSTUDY/YA, rent relief/assistance, and scholarships or stipends. About 40 per cent indicated that they received no government or university income support. This percentage was similar to low SES students, and lower than major cities' students.

Table 5.9: Regional undergraduate students' median total annual income

		Major Cities	Regional
Undergraduate			
All	median	\$19,200	\$23,300
	n	2089	1202
Full-time	median	\$17,600	\$20,900
	n	1695	953
Part-time	median	\$32,300	\$34,600
	n	394	249

Despite an estimated higher median income, Table 5.10 shows that the estimated annual expenditure of undergraduate regional students (\$19,600) was higher compared to that of major cities' students (\$13,500). Specifically, the estimated median expenditure of full-time regional students was \$18,500, which was much higher than that of students from major cities (\$11,700).

Table 5.10: Regional undergraduate students' median total annual expenditure

		Major Cities	Regional
Undergraduate			
All	median	\$13,500	\$19,600
	n	1962	1171
Full-time	median	\$11,700	\$18,500
	n	1597	931
Part-time	median	\$26,700	\$32,300
	n	365	240

A slightly higher proportion of undergraduate regional students were financially supporting dependants (15 per cent compared to 11 per cent of major cities students) (see Appendix Table A3).

A lower proportion of regional students (48 per cent) also indicated that they received financial support from family or partner compared with major cities students (63 per cent) (see Appendix Table A15).

FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

All the above point to the higher risk of regional students experiencing financial difficulties. Regional students (64 per cent) were more likely to say that their financial situation was a source of worry for them, compared to 55 per cent of city students.

Around 19 per cent of regional students reported regularly going without food or necessities because they could not afford them, compared to 13 per cent of major cities students (Table 5.11).

Table 5.11: Percentage of regional students who agree or strongly agree with statements about financial circumstances

	Major Cities	Regional
Undergraduate		
My financial situation is often a source of worry for me	55.0%	64.2%
I regularly go without food or necessities; I can't afford them	13.0%	18.7%
I feel in control of my financial situation	39.5%	37.7%
n	2306	1301

In addition, they were more likely to have had to defer from their studies because they could not afford to continue (13 per cent of regional students compared to 7 per cent major cities) (see Appendix Table A16).

While regional students were able to access a range of financial supports that resulted in higher estimated annual income, the findings of the survey indicated that some regional students were struggling financially.

5.4 INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International students made up 20 per cent of the survey participants. They included students currently studying in Australia who had been issued a student visa. This excluded New Zealand citizens, humanitarian visa holders, and Australian permanent residents.

The international students who participated in the survey were predominantly aged 20-24 (51 per cent), a high percentage were studying Management and Commerce (22 per cent), at the undergraduate (47 per cent) and postgraduate coursework (46 per cent) levels, and the majority were female (55 per cent).

While we report on international students as a single cohort, we acknowledge that international students are not a homogenous group. Given international students can only study full-time due to their visa restrictions, discussion in this section focuses on the circumstances of international students compared to full-time domestic students.

In 2017, international students were more likely to experience a shortfall between estimated income and estimated expenses when compared with domestic students. Just under 90 per cent of international undergraduates were financially supported by their family/partners but 14 per cent reported that they regularly went without food or other necessities, only slightly below full-time domestic undergraduate students (15 per cent).

While differences were small between international PGCW and HDR students and their domestic counterparts, over 30 per cent of HDR and 40 per cent of PGCW international students still experienced a shortfall between estimated income and estimated expenses. These findings challenge common assumptions about international students' financial circumstances.

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

Unlike in 2012 when their reported median income was higher than that of their domestic student counterparts, international PGCW and HDR students in 2017 reported lower total income than full-time domestic students. Comparisons with full-time domestic students revealed a slight difference at the PGCW level, and the largest difference at the HDR level (Table 5.12).

International undergraduate students' estimated median income was a little higher than full-time domestic undergraduate students'.

Table 5.12: International students' median total annual income

Median annual income, after tax		Domestic students	International students
		Full-time	
Undergraduate	Total income	\$18,300	\$19,200
	n	3048	627
Postgraduate coursework	Total income	\$23,600	\$21,900
	n	1245	1090
Higher-degree research	Total income	\$36,800	\$30,000
	n	1897	2107

In addition, there was a higher proportion of international students (82.3 per cent) who were financially supported by family or partner, compared to full-time domestic students (60.5 per cent). Just under 90 per cent of undergraduate international students were financially supported compared to 62 per cent of full-time domestic undergraduate students. On the other hand, international HDR students (37.4 per cent) were more likely to be financially independent compared to their domestic counterparts (43.4 per cent) (Table 5.13).

Table 5.13: Percentage of international and domestic students receiving financial support from family, partner or other

	Domestic students Full-time	International students
All degree levels	60.5%	82.3%
Undergraduate	62.0%	88.9%
Postgraduate coursework	54.9%	83.7%
Higher-degree research	43.4%	37.4%

Table 5.14 shows the median estimated expenditure of undergraduate international students was notably higher (\$20,000), compared to full-time undergraduate domestic students (\$14,200).

In contrast, international PGCW and HDR students' estimated expenditure was slightly less than their full-time domestic counterparts'. International undergraduate students appeared to have higher living expenses compared to domestic undergraduates, with some of the highest costs associated with rent or mortgage.

Table 5.14: International and domestic students' median total annual expenditure

		Domestic students Full-time	International students
Undergraduate	median	\$14,200	\$20,000
	n	2726	625
Postgraduate coursework	median	\$23,200	\$22,900
	n	1121	1049
Higher-degree research	median	\$28,100	\$26,000
	n	1512	1473

Higher proportions of international undergraduate and higher degree research students demonstrated a shortfall between estimated income and estimated expenses in 2017 when compared to full-time domestic students. The proportion of international students in all degree levels who experienced a shortfall was notable (49.2 per cent UG, 42.4 per cent PGCW, 30.6 per cent HDR) (Table 5.15).

At the HDR level there appeared to be little difference between domestic and international students' income and expenditure.

Table 5.15: Percentage of international and domestic students whose estimated income is less than their estimated expenses

		Domestic students Full-time	International students
Undergraduate	% in estimated shortfall	33.6%	49.2%
	n	2558	488
Postgraduate coursework	% in estimated shortfall	44.3%	42.4%
	n	1049	799
Higher degree research	% in estimated shortfall	28.7%	30.6%
	n	1477	1393

International undergraduate and PGCW students reported higher total value of new loans (see Appendix Table A7). International undergraduate students' median estimated value of new loans in 2017 was \$20,000, compared to \$4,000 for domestic undergraduate students, and international PGCW students' median value of new loans was \$34,000, compared to \$8,000 for domestic PGCW students.

Table 5.16 shows international students were significantly less likely to have been in paid employment in the last 12 months.

International students are restricted by the conditions of their visa to a maximum of 40 hours of work per fortnight during study period. As we reported in Chapter 2, international students who were in paid employment reported a lower median annual income from employment than domestic students across all degree levels.

Table 5.16: Percentage of international and domestic students employed during the last 12 months

		Domestic students	International students
		Full-time	
Undergraduate	% Employed	80.4%	49.5%
	n	3884	1437
Postgraduate coursework	% Employed	80.1%	56.7%
	n	1571	2447
Higher degree research	% Employed	78.5%	56.1%
	n	2199	2856

FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

Table 5.17 shows international students were less likely to feel concern over their financial situation (Table 5.17) compared to full-time domestic students, and there were only small differences between domestic and international students regarding their feelings of control over their financial situation.

However, 13.9 per cent of international undergraduate students regularly went without food or other necessities because they could not afford them, compared with 14.8 per cent of full-time domestic undergraduate students.

At the PGCW level, fewer international students than full-time domestic students reported regularly going without food or other necessities (10.8 per cent compared to 16.4 per cent). There was little difference at the HDR level in the proportion of international and domestic students who reported regularly going without food or other necessities.

Table 5.17: Percentage of international and domestic students who agree or strongly agree with statements about financial circumstances

	Domestic students Full-time	International students
All degree levels		
My financial situation is often a source of worry for me	59.5%	49.1%
I regularly go without food or necessities; I can't afford them	14.8%	12.0%
I feel in control of my financial situation	36.8%	41.3%
n	7255	5869
Undergraduate		
My financial situation is often a source of worry for me	58.6%	50.3%
I regularly go without food or necessities; I can't afford them	14.8%	13.9%
I feel in control of my financial situation	36.7%	38.8%
n	3647	1204
Postgraduate coursework		
My financial situation is often a source of worry for me	66.7%	47.2%
I regularly go without food or necessities; I can't afford them	16.4%	10.8%
I feel in control of my financial situation	33.8%	42.1%
n	1487	2076
Higher-degree research		
My financial situation is often a source of worry for me	57.7%	52.9%
I regularly go without food or necessities; I can't afford them	9.6%	8.6%
I feel in control of my financial situation	46.1%	50.7%
n	2119	2582

Fewer international students have savings in case of serious financial hardship than domestic students. Albeit over half reported that they have some savings (54 per cent UG, 53 per cent PGCW, 63 per cent HDR). International students were more likely than domestic full-time students to report assets under \$10,000.

Around 40 per cent of international students have had to use some of their savings in 2017 (Appendix Table A17).

Some quotes that exemplify the international student experience are below:

“I am not talking about working at fast-food joints to pay the bills - I am talking about getting relevant work experience in the student's desired field of study, i.e. in my case, that would be electrical engineering. I am aware of the fact that a lot of the summer internship applications I have made over the past year to engineering firms in order to get relevant experience have mostly declined my application because of me not being a permanent resident of Australia/NZ.”

(UG international student)

“My Uni classmate from Mexico dropped out from [XX Uni] due to his serious financial problem, Uni does not give any support for these students, even give some support for getting a job. We are both students with a long time working experience, and we always receive no reply from employers.”

(PGCW international student)

“I am an international student with a scholarship funding by the Australian Government through DFAT. Hence, I understand and appreciate that my circumstance is actually much better than a majority of other students who are struggling to make ends meet, working many jobs while also studying. I believe that my financial situation is adequate and stable to see me through to the end of my studies.”

(PGCW international student)

“To make my way to this study, I actually have limited myself a lot, in term of living standard, since I am on my family's support. My family doesn't know this because I have never told them. I am worried about my diet because I've been eating poorly. However, that's the only expense I can cut down flexibly and easily, compared to public transport or textbook cost. I felt awful when I had to ask for money from family. The way they are supporting my tuition is already too much for me to ask for anything else. Therefore, I tried to squeeze in whatever I got paid from my current job. I know many of my international-student friends are suffering the same.”

(UG international student)

“I gave up on continuing my PhD on several occasions mainly because it was very stressful to ask for more money as a grown-up adult from my family all the time. I was also afraid of not being able to finish my PhD in three years as I cannot afford the extension fees. I hesitated to go on a holiday or even have a proper weekend break. Sometimes, I was silly that I just starved because buying food or even a coffee felt expensive. ... Ultimately, I'm responsible for finishing my PhD in time as I cannot afford to pay more fees. Whatsoever, I feel very proud that I stayed back through the hardships and completed a great project, all because of the kind support and extreme motivation from my supervisor. I don't know if other international (and domestic) students who are in a similar situation can have such a positive relationship with their supervisors, I doubt.”

(HDR international student)

APPENDIX A: SUPPORTING TABLES

Table A1: Sample composition

Number of responses by gender, enrolment fraction, degree level, age and field of study, separated into domestic non-Indigenous, international and Indigenous cohorts.

Responses were weighted by stratum (i.e. domestic non-Indigenous/international/Indigenous and undergraduate/postgraduate coursework/higher degree research status) and by age to better represent the student population.

	Domestic							
	Non-Indigenous		Indigenous		International		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Number of Responses	10390	78.3%	1394	1.3%	6800	20.4%	18584	100.0%
Gender								
Female	6998	69.2%	1043	74.8%	3615	55.1%	11656	66.4%
Male	3293	29.7%	331	23.8%	3122	43.8%	6746	32.5%
Enrolment Fraction								
Full-time	6646	73.9%	1022	74.4%	6800	100.0%	14360	78.8%
Part-time	3744	26.1%	372	25.6%			4224	21.2%
Level of Course								
Undergraduate	3755	77.0%	1126	84.0%	1453	46.6%	6334	70.9%
Postgraduate coursework	3385	18.4%	183	12.7%	2476	45.5%	6044	23.9%
Higher-degree research	3250	4.6%	85	3.3%	2871	8.0%	6206	5.3%
Age at Start of Year								
under 20	1304	25.9%	330	22.4%	483	11.7%	2117	22.9%
20 - 24	2575	35.3%	330	29.1%	2160	51.2%	5065	38.5%
25 - 29	1733	12.4%	174	13.9%	1963	20.2%	3870	14.0%
30 - 39	2128	13.3%	246	16.0%	1532	9.2%	3906	12.5%
40 and above	2427	11.1%	287	16.7%	287	1.6%	3001	9.2%
Field of Study								
Agriculture	319	2.5%	39	2.8%	404	2.8%	762	2.5%
Architecture and Building	174	1.7%	8	0.6%	175	2.7%	357	1.9%
Creative Arts	538	5.7%	86	6.0%	147	3.7%	771	5.3%
Economics	236	2.8%	18	1.3%	550	10.2%	804	4.3%
Education	1267	12.4%	167	12.0%	304	2.8%	1738	10.4%
Engineering	665	6.7%	49	3.7%	1114	15.1%	1828	8.4%
Food, Hospitality, Tourism	32	0.4%	6	0.5%	62	1.4%	100	0.6%
Information Technology	304	3.2%	26	1.9%	480	9.6%	810	4.5%
Law	516	6.6%	99	7.3%	130	1.8%	745	5.6%
Management and Commerce	805	8.8%	104	7.8%	1035	21.5%	1944	11.4%
Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary	967	6.7%	71	5.1%	512	4.5%	1550	6.2%
Natural and Physical Sciences	966	7.5%	94	6.9%	603	4.3%	1663	6.8%
Nursing	537	7.0%	148	10.8%	152	5.0%	837	6.6%
Other Health	1675	16.4%	220	15.6%	531	7.5%	2426	14.6%
Society and Culture	1159	9.5%	219	14.9%	450	4.7%	1828	8.5%

Table A2: Domestic students receiving different types of government support

	Full-time		Part-time	
	All Domestic	Indigenous	All Domestic	Indigenous
Undergraduate				
Youth Allowance	33.9%	12.5%	6.8%	4.5%
Austudy	9.3%	3.4%	3.2%	2.3%
ABSTUDY	1.2%	50.3%	0.7%	23.1%
Disability support / pension	0.7%	2.8%	3.5%	5.1%
Other government income support	4.1%	9.9%	11.9%	17.8%
Carers' support	0.8%	1.9%	2.0%	6.4%
Health Care Card	26.2%	27.9%	13.4%	17.5%
Government scholarship	4.1%	24.1%	3.6%	10.8%
University-funded scholarship	10.0%	27.4%	3.5%	12.7%
None of these	45.3%	17.3%	68.4%	43.1%
n	3524	815	921	227
Postgraduate coursework				
Youth Allowance	24.1%	5.4%	2.2%	3.2%
Austudy	18.4%	2.7%	1.9%	2.1%
ABSTUDY	1.2%	64.5%	0.2%	17.1%
Disability support / pension	1.0%	1.0%	1.3%	7.9%
Other government income support	8.2%	11.5%	7.8%	13.0%
Carers' support	0.8%	4.4%	1.7%	6.6%
Health Care Card	28.2%	32.8%	6.4%	17.7%
Government scholarship	6.4%	13.8%	4.1%	14.3%
University-funded scholarship	8.1%	33.5%	3.6%	14.9%
None of these	43.7%	13.3%	78.8%	45.1%
n	1446	79	1817	94
Higher-degree research				
Youth Allowance	2.1%	0.0%	0.4%	3.1%
Austudy	2.4%	0.0%	3.6%	4.1%
ABSTUDY	0.4%	33.7%	0.3%	15.5%
Disability support / pension	0.9%	0.0%	2.2%	3.1%
Other government income support	7.4%	7.1%	9.4%	6.2%
Carers' support	1.3%	0.0%	2.0%	11.3%
Health Care Card	11.5%	15.8%	8.2%	13.4%
Government scholarship	53.9%	34.5%	13.0%	9.3%
University-funded scholarship	35.5%	48.1%	12.3%	26.8%
None of these	14.7%	10.3%	62.8%	42.3%
n	2081	53	1062	27

Note that multiple responses were possible, so percentages do not add up to 100%.

Table A3: Students financially supporting or caring for dependents

	Domestic (all)	Non- Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Low SES UG	Low SES UG	Major Cities UG	Regional UG	Int'l	All students
Supporting somebody financially dependent on you?	18.0%	17.8%	31.2%	11.1%	16.4%	11.2%	14.8%	11.4%	16.6%
n	11766	10375	1391	2668	942	2308	1306	6792	18558
Provide care for family members that are dependent on you?	19.8%	19.6%	32.6%	12.9%	19.4%	13.7%	16.0%	12.6%	18.3%
n	11752	10363	1389	2665	942	2306	1305	6752	18504

Table A4: International students' estimated total debt upon degree completion

Estimated debt at end of degree, from...		All international students			
		Undergraduate	Postgraduate coursework	Higher-degree research	All degree levels
Home country organisations	median	\$48,000	\$40,000	\$30,000	\$40,000
	n	78	205	206	489
Family and friends	median	\$64,000	\$40,000	\$10,000	\$45,000
	n	171	322	285	778
Other sources	median	\$15,000	\$20,000	\$8,900	\$16,000
	n	19	53	62	134
Total	median	\$68,000	\$46,000	\$20,000	\$50,000
	n	230	484	466	1180

Each category only includes students who expect to have debt of that type.

Table A5: Domestic students' expected total debt upon degree completion

		All Domestic	Indigenous
Undergraduate			
Government	median	\$31,200	\$30,000
	n	3122	740
Other sources	median	\$9,000	\$7,000
	n	346	99
Total	median	\$32,000	\$30,000
	n	3153	745
Postgraduate coursework			
Government	median	\$40,000	\$40,000
	n	2003	120
Other sources	median	\$10,000	\$19,000
	n	337	21
Total	median	\$40,000	\$40,000
	n	2088	121
Higher-degree research			
Government	median	\$30,000	\$38,000
	n	1097	28
Other sources	median	\$12,000	\$15,000
	n	319	19
Total	median	\$30,000	\$35,000
	n	1271	39
All degree levels			
Government	median	\$32,000	\$30,000
	n	6222	888
Other sources	median	\$10,000	\$8,000
	n	1002	139
Total	median	\$33,000	\$30,400
	n	6512	905

Each category median only includes students who expect to have debt of that type.

Table A6: International students receiving government or university scholarships

	Undergraduate	Postgraduate coursework	Higher-degree research
Receiving scholarship	23.5%	29.8%	92.9%
Not receiving scholarship	76.5%	70.2%	7.1%
n	841	1495	2382
Percentage of those receiving a scholarship who are receiving...			
Australian government scholarship	4.2%	18.6%	21.8%
Australian university scholarship	43.4%	37.7%	61.1%
Overseas government scholarship	28.7%	21.2%	15.6%
Overseas university scholarship	9.7%	7.8%	7.0%
Other scholarship	23.5%	22.1%	11.0%

Note that multiple responses were possible, so percentages do not add up to 100%.

Table A7: Median value of new loans obtained by students in 2017

		Domestic students				International students
		All	Indigenous	Low SES	Regional	
All degree levels	median	\$5,000	\$2,800			\$27,700
	n	1418	239			914
Undergraduate	median	\$4,000	\$2,000	\$3,000	\$3,200	\$20,000
	n	593	181	148	214	159
Postgraduate coursework	median	\$8,000	\$6,000			\$34,000
	n	447	36			403
Higher-degree research	median	\$8,000	\$8,000			\$5,000
	n	378	22			352

Each category only includes students who obtained loans of that type in 2017.

Some students did not provide information on the interest status of their loans; such loans are still included in the total amount

Table A8: Effects of financial circumstances

Percentage of students who agree or strongly agree with...	Domestic students				International students
	All	Indigenous	Low SES	Regional	
Undergraduate					
My financial situation is often a source of worry for me	58.2%	72.2%	62.7%	64.2%	50.3%
I regularly go without food/necessities because I cannot afford them	14.6%	27.2%	17.5%	18.7%	13.9%
I feel in control of my financial situation	37.5%	27.1%	34.9%	37.7%	38.8%
I have no problem with the cost of travel in attending classes	49.0%	37.2%	45.0%	46.9%	53.3%
I do not have access to medical/dental treatment due to cost	26.8%	36.9%	29.7%	32.5%	30.9%
I had to move house to be able to take my course	23.5%	32.4%	32.1%	46.6%	23.6%
n	4587	1063	937	1299	1203
Postgraduate coursework					
My financial situation is often a source of worry for me	55.1%	65.2%			47.2%
I regularly go without food/necessities because I cannot afford them	11.9%	23.7%			10.8%
I feel in control of my financial situation	46.7%	32.7%			42.1%
I have no problem with the cost of travel in attending classes	52.8%	38.1%			52.7%
I do not have access to medical/dental treatment due to cost	25.2%	35.4%			30.0%
I had to move house to be able to take my course	15.9%	23.7%			21.5%
n	3369	176			2076
Higher-degree research					
My financial situation is often a source of worry for me	54.7%	72.2%			52.9%
I regularly go without food/necessities because I cannot afford them	9.5%	28.5%			8.6%
I feel in control of my financial situation	47.8%	35.9%			50.7%
I have no problem with the cost of travel in attending classes	59.2%	43.7%			58.0%
I do not have access to medical/dental treatment due to cost	24.9%	40.6%			35.0%
I had to move house to be able to take my course	18.0%	21.6%			24.3%
n	3210	84			2581

Table A9: Percentage of Indigenous students receiving financial support from their family, partner or other

	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous
All degree levels		
All	54.4%	35.9%
n	10141	1369
Full-time	60.8%	39.0%
n	6469	1002
Part-time	36.4%	26.9%
n	3672	367
Undergraduate		
All	58.5%	38.2%
n	3644	1103
Full-time	62.3%	40.5%
n	2911	863
Part-time	41.8%	29.3%
n	733	240
Postgraduate coursework		
All	40.6%	23.6%
n	3310	181
Full-time	55.3%	22.9%
n	1454	84
Part-time	29.4%	24.2%
n	1856	97
Higher-degree research		
All	40.0%	26.2%
n	3187	85
Full-time	43.5%	36.9%
n	2104	55
Part-time	34.0%	7.4%
n	1083	30

Table A10: Indigenous students' savings and assets

	All		Full-time		Part-time	
	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous
All degree levels						
Have savings for use in serious financial difficulty	62.0%	42.0%	61.9%	41.9%	62.1%	42.1%
Used savings in 2017	45.0%	43.2%	48.7%	47.7%	34.8%	29.7%
n	8499	1131	5455	837	3044	294
Value of personal assets						
under \$10,000	48.2%	51.6%	55.8%	57.9%	26.6%	32.2%
\$10,000 to 20,000	20.4%	19.4%	22.3%	20.3%	15.0%	16.7%
\$20,000 to \$50,000	12.5%	12.3%	11.6%	10.6%	15.0%	17.7%
\$50,000 to \$100,000	4.5%	3.9%	2.9%	2.6%	9.0%	7.8%
over \$100,000	14.5%	12.8%	7.4%	8.6%	34.4%	25.6%
n	8329	1118	5368	829	2961	289
Undergraduate						
Have savings for use in serious financial difficulty	60.8%	42.3%	61.6%	42.6%	57.5%	41.1%
Used savings in 2017	45.8%	43.9%	48.3%	47.7%	35.1%	29.2%
n	3038	913	2419	718	619	195
Value of personal assets						
under \$10,000	53.4%	54.5%	58.0%	60.0%	33.2%	33.9%
\$10,000 to 20,000	22.1%	20.0%	23.3%	20.3%	17.2%	18.6%
\$20,000 to \$50,000	12.2%	12.4%	11.3%	10.9%	16.2%	18.1%
\$50,000 to \$100,000	3.5%	3.2%	2.3%	2.0%	8.8%	7.8%
over \$100,000	8.8%	9.9%	5.2%	6.8%	24.4%	21.6%
n	2976	903	2374	710	602	193
Postgraduate coursework						
Have savings for use in serious financial difficulty	64.3%	40.4%	59.8%	35.8%	67.8%	45.1%
Used savings in 2017	43.0%	40.0%	54.6%	50.5%	33.9%	29.4%
n	2727	149	1212	72	1515	77
Value of personal assets						
under \$10,000	31.8%	37.0%	47.7%	45.6%	19.0%	28.2%
\$10,000 to 20,000	14.7%	17.8%	16.9%	23.6%	12.9%	11.9%
\$20,000 to \$50,000	13.3%	11.6%	12.8%	7.0%	13.8%	16.2%
\$50,000 to \$100,000	7.6%	7.4%	5.4%	6.3%	9.4%	8.4%
over \$100,000	32.6%	26.3%	17.2%	17.6%	44.8%	35.2%
n	2665	148	1195	72	1470	76
Higher-degree research						
Have savings for use in serious financial difficulty	71.7%	40.5%	74.0%	40.9%	67.6%	39.7%
Used savings in 2017	41.0%	39.5%	43.4%	39.4%	36.7%	39.7%
n	2734	69	1824	47	910	22
Value of personal assets						
under \$10,000	26.8%	32.0%	32.7%	33.6%	16.3%	28.2%
\$10,000 to 20,000	14.4%	11.9%	17.4%	10.9%	9.0%	14.1%
\$20,000 to \$50,000	13.3%	14.4%	14.5%	12.1%	11.2%	19.7%
\$50,000 to \$100,000	7.7%	8.5%	7.4%	10.3%	8.1%	4.2%
over \$100,000	37.8%	33.3%	28.0%	33.0%	55.3%	33.8%
n	2688	67	1799	47	889	20

Table A11: Percentage of Indigenous students who deferred or reduced course load for financial reasons

		Domestic	
		Non-Indigenous	Indigenous
All degree levels			
Deferred studies because could not afford to continue	At any time	10.1%	16.0%
	Prior to commencing	6.3%	9.8%
	During course	4.7%	8.4%
	n	9445	1274
Reduced course load for financial reasons	%	20.8%	27.9%
	n	9640	1301
Of students who had to defer...			
Number of years deferred prior to commencing	median	2	3
	n	662	118
Number of years deferred during course	median	1	1
	n	445	105
Undergraduate			
Deferred studies because could not afford to continue	At any time	9.6%	14.3%
	Prior to commencing	5.8%	8.5%
	During course	4.7%	7.4%
	n	3375	1026
Reduced course load for financial reasons	%	20.4%	26.5%
	n	3447	1048
Of students who had to defer...			
Number of years deferred prior to commencing	median	2	2
	n	207	77
Number of years deferred during course	median	1	1
	n	172	71
Postgraduate coursework			
Deferred studies because could not afford to continue	At any time	11.2%	24.0%
	Prior to commencing	7.8%	16.8%
	During course	4.4%	13.3%
	n	3048	171
Reduced course load for financial reasons	%	22.7%	34.8%
	n	3118	173
Of students who had to defer...			
Number of years deferred prior to commencing	median	2	3
	n	234	30
Number of years deferred during course	median	1	1
	n	139	23
Higher-degree research			
Deferred studies because could not afford to continue	At any time	13.0%	27.3%
	Prior to commencing	9.4%	17.0%
	During course	4.4%	14.4%
	n	3022	77
Reduced course load for financial reasons	%	20.5%	38.1%
	n	3075	80
Of students who had to defer...			
Number of years deferred prior to commencing	median	3	2
	n	221	11
Number of years deferred during course	median	1	1
	n	134	11

Table A12: Percentage of low SES students receiving financial support from family, partner or other

	Non-low SES	Low SES
Undergraduate		
All	60.2%	51.8%
n	2670	941
Full-time	64.2%	54.8%
n	2160	740
Part-time	41.0%	40.0%
n	510	201

Table A13: Low SES students' savings and assets

	All		Full-time		Part-time	
	Non-Low SES	Low SES	Non-Low SES	Low SES	Non-Low SES	Low SES
Undergraduate						
Have savings for use in serious financial difficulty	63.2%	54.5%	64.1%	53.8%	58.6%	57.3%
Used savings in 2017	47.1%	47.7%	49.2%	50.4%	37.1%	36.9%
n	2665	941	2156	740	509	201
Value of personal assets						
under \$10,000	54.1%	49.4%	58.2%	55.4%	34.3%	25.5%
\$10,000 to 20,000	22.8%	22.3%	23.7%	23.7%	18.2%	17.0%
\$20,000 to \$50,000	12.3%	12.2%	11.5%	10.2%	16.3%	19.9%
\$50,000 to \$100,000	3.3%	4.4%	2.1%	3.4%	8.9%	8.1%
over \$100,000	7.5%	11.8%	4.5%	7.2%	22.3%	29.6%
n	2646	932	2142	732	504	200

Table A14: Percentage of low SES students who deferred or reduced course load for financial reasons

Undergraduate		Non-low SES	Low SES
Deferred studies because could not afford to continue	At any time	8.7%	9.7%
	Prior to commencing	5.4%	6.5%
	During course	3.9%	4.4%
	n	2629	923
Reduced course load for financial reasons	%	17.9%	23.3%
	n	2669	942
Of students who had to defer...			
Number of years deferred prior to commencing	median	2.0	2.0
	n	164	64
Number of years deferred during course	median	1.0	1.0
	n	127	56

Table A15: Percentage of regional students receiving financial support from their family, partner or other

	Major Cities	Regional
Undergraduate		
All	63.0%	47.5%
n	2311	1304
Full-time	67.3%	50.0%
n	1874	1030
Part-time	42.6%	36.6%
n	437	274

Table A16: Percentage of regional students who deferred or reduced course load for financial reasons

Undergraduate		Major Cities	Regional
Deferred studies because could not afford to continue	At any time	7.3%	12.7%
	Prior to commencing	4.0%	9.4%
	During course	3.9%	4.2%
	n	2272	1284
Reduced course load for financial reasons	%	17.8%	22.2%
	n	2309	1306
Of students who had to defer...			
Number of years deferred prior to commencing	median	2.0	1.0
	n	105	123
Number of years deferred during course	median	1.0	1.0
	n	111	72

Table A17: International students' savings and assets

	Domestic students			International students
	All	Full-time	Part-time	
Undergraduate				
Have savings for use in serious financial difficulty	60.5%	61.3%	57.2%	54.0%
Used savings in 2017	45.7%	48.2%	35.0%	37.8%
n	3951	3137	814	1010
Value of personal assets				
under \$10,000	53.4%	58.0%	33.3%	73.7%
\$10,000 to 20,000	22.1%	23.2%	17.3%	13.2%
\$20,000 to \$50,000	12.2%	11.3%	16.3%	8.4%
\$50,000 to \$100,000	3.5%	2.3%	8.8%	1.7%
over \$100,000	8.8%	5.2%	24.4%	2.9%
n	3879	3084	795	938
Postgraduate coursework				
Have savings for use in serious financial difficulty	64.0%	59.5%	67.6%	53.3%
Used savings in 2017	43.0%	54.6%	33.9%	39.8%
n	2876	1284	1592	1724
Value of personal assets				
under \$10,000	31.8%	47.7%	19.1%	69.2%
\$10,000 to 20,000	14.7%	17.0%	12.9%	14.8%
\$20,000 to \$50,000	13.3%	12.7%	13.8%	8.7%
\$50,000 to \$100,000	7.6%	5.4%	9.4%	2.5%
over \$100,000	32.5%	17.2%	44.7%	4.8%
n	2813	1267	1546	1599
Higher-degree research				
Have savings for use in serious financial difficulty	71.3%	73.6%	67.3%	63.2%
Used savings in 2017	40.9%	43.3%	36.8%	40.8%
n	2803	1871	932	2295
Value of personal assets				
under \$10,000	26.9%	32.7%	16.4%	63.4%
\$10,000 to 20,000	14.3%	17.3%	9.1%	16.5%
\$20,000 to \$50,000	13.3%	14.4%	11.3%	10.7%
\$50,000 to \$100,000	7.7%	7.5%	8.0%	5.0%
over \$100,000	37.8%	28.1%	55.1%	4.4%
n	2755	1846	909	2167

APPENDIX B: STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Members of the steering committee are listed below. An asterisk is used to denote Working Group members

- Professor David Lloyd, Chair (Vice-Chancellor and President, the University of South Australia)
- Professor Denise Kirkpatrick (Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Western Sydney University)
- Professor Jill Downie (Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic, Curtin University)
- Professor Sally Kift (Adjunct Professor, James Cook University) *
- Professor Sue Trinidad (Director and Program Leader, The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Curtin University) *
- Mrs Winnie Eley (Deputy Vice-Chancellor (International and Advancement), The University of Newcastle)
- Professor Iain Watson (Deputy Vice-Chancellor (External Engagement), the University of Queensland)
- Mr Rongyu Li (Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Future Students), the University of Queensland)
- Ms Mary Kelly (Director, Equity, Queensland University of Technology) *
- Mr Omer Yezdani (Director, Planning and Strategic Management, Australian Catholic University)
- Ms Sue Mikilewicz (Director of Business Intelligence and Planning, University of South Australia)
- Mr Paul Koshy (Research Fellow, The National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Curtin University) *
- Ms Sophie Johnston (Former President, National Union of Students) *
- Mr Mark Pace (President, National Union of Students)
- Additional subcommittee member: Ms Jill Molloy (Former Welfare Officer, National Union of Students) *

APPENDIX C: BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The 2017 *Universities Australia (UA) Student Finances Survey* delivers an updated evidence-based understanding of students' financial circumstances and offers an understanding of how those circumstances have changed over time. The survey has been conducted about every five years since the mid-1970s, allowing for a long-term picture of students' changing financial situations. The methodology has changed significantly over the various iterations of the survey. In this report, we compare trends, where possible, from 2006-2017.

SURVEY DESIGN

This UA project was coordinated by Universities Australia's policy team and overseen by a Steering Group that was chaired by Professor David Lloyd, Vice-Chancellor of the University of South Australia. It included representatives from Deputy Vice-Chancellors Academic and International, Planning Directors, the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), the National Union of Students (NUS) and UA. A subcommittee of the Steering Group was tasked with updating and designing the survey instrument. It consisted of experts in higher education equity, student experience, and teaching and learning.

The subcommittee worked together to update the survey. Effort was made to modernise the survey while simultaneously ensuring that the main points of comparison would be able to be made with previous years' data. Questions were removed that were no longer relevant to current policy, technology, or student experience, and additional questions were added or adapted to reflect modern practices, concerns, technology, and policy changes. A small preliminary testing session was conducted to test the question formats and to identify technical issues with the survey structure.

The final survey instrument consisted of 74 questions and question groups and took approximately 20 minutes to complete. It was designed using Qualtrics and individual survey files were created for each participating university on Qualtrics.

SAMPLING PROCESS

The 2017 survey sampled students from 38 of UA's member universities. One member university chose not to participate due to scheduling conflicts.

The survey included undergraduate and postgraduate students, both international and domestic. Postgraduate students included both coursework students (PGCW) and higher-degree research students (HDR). Offshore students were excluded from the sample.

Each university was asked to draw a sample of their currently enrolled students, stratified by HEIMS element codes. There were six strata considered in the sampling process: domestic and international students in three degree levels – undergraduate, postgraduate coursework and higher degree research. The proportions for the strata were chosen to achieve similar precision for the estimates in each of the six strata. The same proportions of students were requested in each university's sample (Table C1). This choice was made to give the maximum statistical power for the total sample size planned.

The total population of international HDR students was too small to achieve the same margin of error as the other strata, so all students in this cohort were invited to participate. A census of all Indigenous students was also performed for similar reasons.

Table C1: Sampling proportions of each strata

	Undergraduate	Postgraduate coursework	Higher-degree Research
Domestic non-Indigenous (including permanent residents and New Zealand citizens)	5%	20%	50%
International	20%	33%	Census
Indigenous Australian	Census for all degree levels		

Each university identified their students for the sample and sent de-identified files of the sampled students to the Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education (Melbourne CSHE) for distribution of the electronic survey invitations.

SURVEY DISTRIBUTION

Universities were asked to supply a sample of students from their currently enrolled student population, with offshore students excluded. The sample was stratified by degree level (undergraduate, postgraduate and higher degree research) and student subpopulations (domestic Indigenous and non-Indigenous and international). This stratification was done to best match the 2015 national student enrolment figures from the Department of Education and Training.

Personalised email invitations were sent to each student via Qualtrics. The electronic survey was open for 4 weeks from 13 September to 11 October 2017. One university required a slightly altered schedule, and, for its students, the survey ran from 30 August 2017 to 15 September 2017. Students who had not yet completed the survey were sent email reminders via Qualtrics once per week.

A student was considered to have responded to the survey if they had progressed far enough through their survey to determine their stratum membership. Specifically, this required knowing at which university the student was enrolled, the type of degree they were undertaking, whether they were a domestic or international student, and whether they were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. A response rate of 11.7 per cent was achieved for the survey, with 18,584 responses completed to the point where stratum membership could be identified.

International students comprised 36.6 per cent of the total response (compared to 25.8 per cent of the national population), and domestic students 63.4 per cent (compared to 74.2 per cent of the national population). Within the domestic student population, 11.8 per cent identified as Indigenous (7.5 per cent of total responses).

Table A1 in the Appendix provides an overview of the students who responded to the survey. Roughly a third of the respondents were from each degree level: undergraduate, postgraduate coursework, and higher degree research. Over 10,000 domestic non-Indigenous, 1,300 domestic Indigenous, and 6,800 international students completed the survey.

Students in the Health fields (Medicine/Health/Nursing/Allied Health) were overrepresented, collectively making up 25.9 per cent of the sample (compared to 15.7 per cent of the 2015 student profile). Other fields overrepresented, probably due to the small populations in these fields, were Agriculture (4.1 per cent of the sample vs. 1.31 per cent of the population) and Food, Hospitality, and Tourism (0.5 per cent of the sample vs. 0.04 per cent of the population)

In contrast, underrepresented fields included Management and Commerce (14.8 per cent of the sample vs. 26.25 per cent of the population) and Society and Culture (13.8 per cent of the sample vs. 21.81 per cent in the population).

Certain student groups were oversampled to ensure sufficient numbers for analysis, and these numbers have been adjusted in the weighting of the final data set in order to better represent the overall student population.

DATA CLEANING MEASURES

Each student's email address was used to identify which university the student attended. Responses to the question of whether students were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) descent were recoded into a binary non-Indigenous/Indigenous split. Students indicating "rather not say" were treated as non-Indigenous.

Any responses which did not answer at least the questions relating to domestic/international status, ATSI status and level of degree were removed from all further consideration. This is because these variables were important stratification variables and/or were used in the weighting of responses. Age was calculated from the question on birth year.

Undergraduate students were additionally identified by low SES or regional backgrounds, based on the postcode they indicated they had lived in during secondary school. Regional postcodes were based on the ABS Remoteness Area index from 2011. Any postcode that was not part of the 'Major Cities of Australia' category—capital cities and major urban areas—was considered to be regional in our analysis. This included inner regional, outer regional and remote areas.

Low SES postcodes were based on the ABS Socio-economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) 2011. Adult residents within any postcode were all assigned the same SEIFA index, and the postcodes representing the most disadvantaged quartile of the Australian population were considered to be low SES in our analysis.

WEIGHTED ESTIMATES

Each response was given a weighting based on the student's university, age group, degree level (undergraduate, postgraduate coursework or higher degree research) and which group the student belonged to (domestic non-Indigenous, Indigenous or international).

Weighting by age was new for the 2017 survey and was introduced because there was some evidence of response bias by age, as shown in Table C3. Different age bands were used for weighting depending on degree level and group, reflecting the differences in age demographics of each cohort.

Due to low total numbers, Indigenous students were not weighted separately according to university. The exact strata used are shown in Table C2.

Table C2: Strata used for weighting survey responses

	Institutional strata	Age strata
Domestic non-Indigenous		
UG	Yes	<20, 20–24, 25–29, 30–39, 40+
PGCW	Yes	<25, 25–29, 30–39, 40+
HDR	Yes	<30, 30–39, 40+
Indigenous		
UG	No	<20, 20–24, 25–29, 30–39, 40+
PGCW	No	<30, 30–39, 40+
HDR	No	<40, 40+
International		
UG	Yes	<20, 20–24, 25+
PGCW	Yes	<25, 25–29, 30+
HDR	Yes	<30, 30+

The weighting was proportional to the ratio of the total population in the student's stratum to the number of valid survey responses received from students in that stratum. Total student population numbers were sourced from the Department of Education and Training. For the purposes of determining the weighting, the age at the start of the year was used, in order to match the definition used by the DET population numbers. The latest population numbers available at the time of analysis were from 2016, so there may be slight differences between population numbers used and the true population in 2017. A small proportion of respondents (3.4 per cent) did not provide their year of birth, so their age is not known. These students were assigned a weight based on their other demographic characteristics.

RESPONSE BIAS BY AGE GROUP

Comparing the age distribution of the survey respondents to the age distribution of the Australian student population, we found evidence of a slight response bias by age. Students below the age of 30 were typically underrepresented while older students were overrepresented. This age distribution is shown in Table C3.

Table C3: Age distribution at start of year, by degree level, student population vs. survey respondents

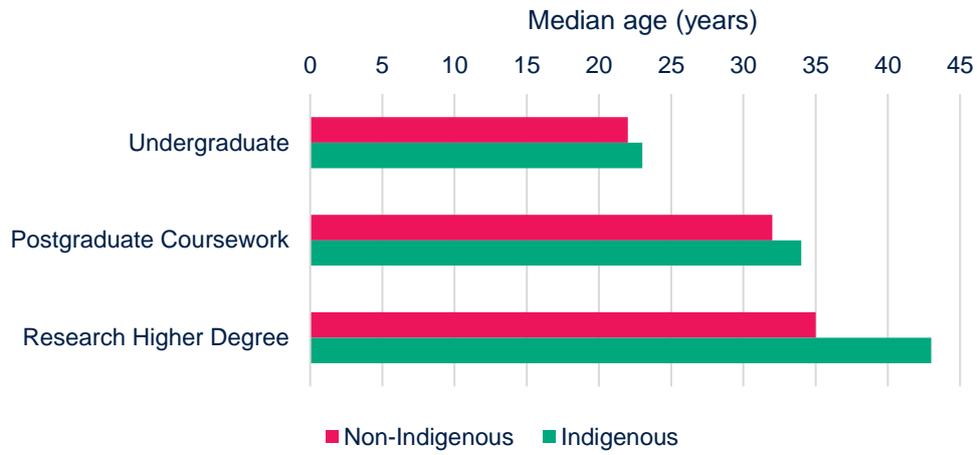
	% of population	% of survey respondents
Undergraduate		
under 20	33.0%	34.0%
20 - 24	42.4%	38.6%
25 - 29	9.9%	8.6%
30 - 39	8.5%	9.8%
40 and above	6.2%	9.1%
Postgraduate coursework		
under 25	35.8%	35.0%
25 - 29	26.1%	24.7%
30 - 39	22.3%	21.6%
40 and above	15.7%	18.7%
Higher-degree research		
under 25	10.5%	11.2%
25 - 29	28.4%	31.9%
30 - 39	33.3%	34.2%
40 and above	27.8%	22.7%

The use of age-based weighting means that the results presented here take into account the differences in age distribution between the survey respondents and the overall population.

The age distributions for regional and low SES undergraduates were similar to the overall undergraduate age distribution. All groups had a median age of 22, and the proportions in each age group were within the margin of error of the remaining population.

Indigenous students were generally older than non-Indigenous domestic students, with the discrepancy being most notable for higher degree research students. The median age for Indigenous undergraduate students was one year older than that for non-Indigenous students. For postgraduate coursework students, the difference in medians was 2 years. For higher degree research students, the difference was 8 years.

Figure C1: Median age of Indigenous and non-Indigenous domestic students



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