

MEDIA RELEASE

University expansion fastest for more than two decades: Census

4 September 2012: New data from the Australian Census shows that the growth in university students in Australia over the five years from 2006 to 2011 was the fastest recorded for at least the past twenty years, according to a research briefing by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

The latest ACER *Joining the Dots* research briefing analyses data from the 2011 Census, released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in August 2012, to provide insight into the characteristics of Australian university students and how they have changed since the previous Census and in the first decade of the 21st century.

The analysis revealed growth in university student numbers of 25.1 per cent between 2006 and 2011 (from 745 445 students to 932 526 students). This increase contrasts with the previous five year period (2001 to 2006) where the university student population only grew by 3.2 per cent. No other Census period in the past 20 years has recorded the rate of growth identified in this new Census data.

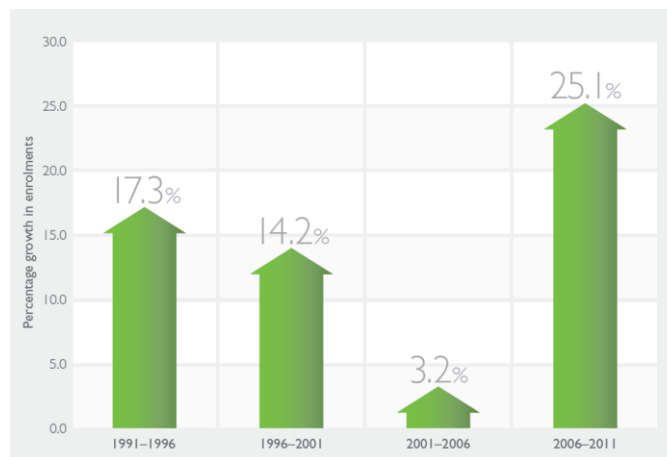


Figure 1: Percentage change in university student numbers, Australia 1991 to 2011

Authors, ACER Senior Research Fellow Dr Daniel Edwards and ACER Research Fellow Ms Eva van der Brugge, said that while the precise reason for this growth is not clear, changes in government policy aimed at increasing participation in university and a new emphasis on higher education which began with the Bradley Review of Higher Education in 2008 were likely to have had a positive impact on the appeal of university.

The research briefing found that growth in the number of university attendees between 2006 and 2011 was recorded in all age groups, suggesting that the increasing appeal of university appears to be occurring across generations.

The report also found that after a decline in the number of people aged 25 and above in university between 2001 and 2006, the growth in mature age students between 2006 and 2011 was as large as the growth in students aged below 25.

Joining the Dots is a subscription-based resource provided by ACER to those with an interest in Australian higher education. Details for subscriptions are available at www.acer.edu.au/jtd or by emailing jtd@acer.edu.au

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Media enquiries: Megan Robinson, 03 9277 5582 or 0419 340 058 communications@acer.edu.au