

## MEDIA RELEASE

### In completing university, are all things equal?

**6 May 2015:** Analysis of the latest university completions data has found that students from disadvantaged groups have a lower completion rate than the national average, according to the latest *Joining the Dots* research briefing released by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).

Dr Daniel Edwards, ACER Principal Research Fellow, said the retrospective cohort study, tracking the progress of four cohorts of bachelor degree commencers since 2005, showed that those from a low socioeconomic status (SES) background, Indigenous background, or regional or remote location are less likely to complete their degree.

“In terms of outcomes, are all things equal once students are through the gates of the university? The data suggests not,” Dr Edwards said.

Funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) at Curtin University and based on the latest available data, the *Joining the Dots* research briefing indicates that 73.6 per cent of all students who commenced university in 2005 had completed a degree by 2013, but low SES students had a completion rate of 68.9 per cent.

“Low SES students are more likely than their medium or high SES peers to drop out during their first year or later in their degree,” Dr Edwards said.

The research briefing also found that regional students had a completion rate of 69.8 per cent, remote students had a completion rate of 59.5 per cent and Indigenous students had a completion rate of 46.7 per cent.

“While low SES has a significant impact on non-completion, the analysis indicates that a range of compounding factors works to limit the likelihood of completion for many students in higher education, particularly those belonging to equity groups,” Dr Edwards said.

“Students from low equity groups are more likely than average to be in more than one equity category, and also face a higher prevalence of other characteristics linked to lower completions, including type and mode of attendance, age, gender and prior achievement,” Dr Edwards said.

NCSEHE Director, Professor Sue Trinidad, welcomed the report and agreed that a more nuanced picture of undergraduate completions in Australia was required.

“This retrospective study highlights the experience of equity students in higher education. Since 2005, governments, secondary schools, and universities have continued to develop support systems for students. That effort needs to be maintained and the outcomes for students improved,” Professor Trinidad said.

“While there is room for improvement in completion rates, the great majority of the equity students who commenced their degrees in 2005 have now completed their studies and in 2015 are likely in the workforce or have proceeded to further study. For these students, their higher education will be key in allowing them to unhook themselves from the socio-economic situation into which they were born, realise their potential, and contribute to Australia’s social and economic prosperity.”

The NCSEHE aims to inform public policy design and implementation and institutional practice to improve the higher education participation and success for marginalised and disadvantaged people.



## *Improving Learning*

*Joining the Dots* is a resource developed by ACER for those with an interest in Australian higher education. Details available at [www.acer.edu.au/jtd](http://www.acer.edu.au/jtd) or by emailing [jtd@acer.edu.au](mailto:jtd@acer.edu.au). Completing University in Australia is also available from the [NCSEHE website](#).

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