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APPLYING TO UNIVERSITY THROUGH THE EARLY OFFER SCHEME: INSIGHTS FROM THE GENERATION STUDY

NOVEMBER 2025

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APPLYING TO UNIVERSITY THROUGH THE EARLY OFFER SCHEME: INSIGHTS FROM THE GENERATION STUDY

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Abstract

Many Australian universities offer secondary school students a place in a higher education course before they have completed their senior secondary studies. This Early Offers Scheme enables eligible Year 12 students to receive conditional acceptance into an undergraduate course from September, before completing their final Year 12 exams. This report presents quantitative and qualitative findings from Year 12 students in 2024, using data from the GENERATION Study, a longitudinal survey of the education and aspirations of young people in Australia. Almost half (46 per cent) of Year 12 students planned to or had already applied for an early offer place when surveyed in May-July of 2024. Early offer applications were most common amongst students from New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. Additionally, females, students from Independent schools, and students from non-English-speaking backgrounds had higher rates of planning to apply for an early offer. Qualitative findings suggest that common reasons for applying for an early offer include securing an early place at university, relieving the stress and pressure of Year 12, or having a fall-back option.

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Executive Summary

- Forty-six per cent of Year 12 students in GENERATION planned to or had already applied for an early offer when surveyed in May-July of 2024.
- Most students who planned to apply for an early offer indicated they intended to go to university after finishing school.
- Common reasons for applying for an early offer include:
 - securing an early place at university,
 - relieving the stress and pressure of Year 12, or
 - having a fall-back option.
- Given that 31 per cent of Year 12 students reported significant levels of distress, the capacity to reduce students' stress levels is an important benefit of the early offer process.
- Many students saw the early offers pathway as a mechanism to reduce the stress of Year 12 and their final exams. Applying for university through the early offer scheme gave students an opportunity to focus more on their studies rather than stressing over university plans. Moreover, less than 2 per cent of students directly referenced putting in less effort in their studies.
- Most students who had already applied for an early offer found the process relatively straightforward. Areas for improvement varied substantially, with the most common difficulty being that applications were time-consuming, especially when applying to multiple institutions directly to the university rather than via a Tertiary Admissions Centre.
- Early offers were most common in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, where there were centralised application mechanisms through the University Admissions Centre.
- Females, students in independent schools, and students of non-English speaking backgrounds were more likely to plan to apply for an early offer.
- More highly engaged students planned to apply for an early offer compared to students who were less engaged at school.
- Some students reported planning to apply to universities that did not have an early offer scheme, suggesting a limited understanding of the process.

Introduction

Many Australian universities allow final year (i.e., Year 12) secondary school students to apply for a university undergraduate place before the completion of their final year of secondary school. The scheme allows eligible Year 12 students to receive early conditional acceptance into an undergraduate program prior to completion of their final Year 12 exams.

In this report, we use data from the third wave of the GENERATION Study, collected in May-July of 2024, to determine which Year 12 students were applying for early offers, for which universities, and which type of schools they attended. We provide information about:

- proportions of Year 12 students who applied or planned to apply for an early offer;
- qualitative insights from students explaining why they wanted to apply for an early offer and (for students who had applied) the process of applying for an early offer;
- early offers by school characteristics (state, sector);
- early offers by student characteristics (gender, equity group, level of school engagement at Year 11); and
- the most popular universities students planned to apply for.

The GENERATION Survey

The [GENERATION Study](#) is a longitudinal survey of the education and aspirations and pathways of young people in Australia (Edwards et al., 2024). GENERATION started in 2022, a representative cohort of Year 10 students. The study aims to run for a decade, concluding in 2032 when this cohort is aged 25.

GENERATION is conducted in partnership between the Australian National University (ANU) and the Australian Department of Education (DoE), with advice from educational units of all Australian state and territory governments. GENERATION aims to track the interests, hopes, and aspirations of a generation, providing young people, policy makers and educators with valuable insights into career interests and post-school plans of young people. The research that forms the basis of this report was commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Education as part of the Research Services for a University Admissions Framework Project.

This report uses preliminary and unpublished data¹ from the third wave of the GENERATION survey, conducted between May and July in 2024. This wave of the survey was the first year that included survey items pertaining to early offer university admission schemes.

The data analysis was restricted to students still in school in 2024, leaving a maximum sample of 3,821 students. Note that there were no student responses from the Northern Territory and consequently Northern Territory was not included in the analysis. In addition, there were small numbers of students from the Catholic school sector and students who identify as non-binary or use another term, and results from these should be interpreted with caution.

¹ Data used in the analysis consisted of 4,011 young people who participated in the third wave of the GENERATION survey. As the dataset used in this analysis was preliminary, the number of responses presented here differs slightly to the final data release. The Wave 3 GENERATION dataset was publicly released in July 2025, via the Australian Data Archive.

Where noted, population weights were applied to the analysis. Population weights adjust for different survey response rates across certain school and student characteristics.² Aligning respondents with the population on these characteristics means that the survey dataset can be used to make inferences about the Australian student population.

Year 12 Cohort in 2024

As a cohort, the Year 12 students in Wave 3 of the GENERATION survey have faced unique challenges. These students were in years 8 and 9 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and many experienced school closures. During their late secondary schooling, they have faced increasing cost-of-living pressures.

Mental health is a significant issue for young people (McHale et al., 2024). In 2024, the mental health of the GENERATION participants was measured using the Kessler-6 (Kessler et al. 2002). The Kessler-6 is a six-item widely used and validated measure of depressive and anxiety symptoms. Thirty-one percent of the GENERATION sample reported high levels of psychological distress, indicative of a probable serious mental illness. This rate is higher than that of previous national surveys of youth, with 22% of 20-year-olds in 2020 (the Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth 2015 cohort, Department of Education 2017) and 20% of 11–17-year-olds in 2014 (the Young Mind Matters survey, see Lawrence et al., 2015) reporting high levels of psychological distress. The prevalence rate of psychological distress in young people highlights both the high levels of psychological pressure experienced during the final year of school and the increasing mental health challenges reported by young people since the pandemic.

As will be explored in more detail in other sections of the whole project report, early offer programs are open for different time periods throughout the year, depending on the state or institution. The earliest programs opened in March 2024, and many closed by September or October. For example, in New South Wales, some institutions opened their early offers applications from March and April 2024, while others were not open until after July. In Western Australia, all applications were open from May 2024. Conditional early offers are made from institutions from September 2024 onwards, and therefore, students would not yet have received an offer at the time of the survey.

Students' University Plans Post-School

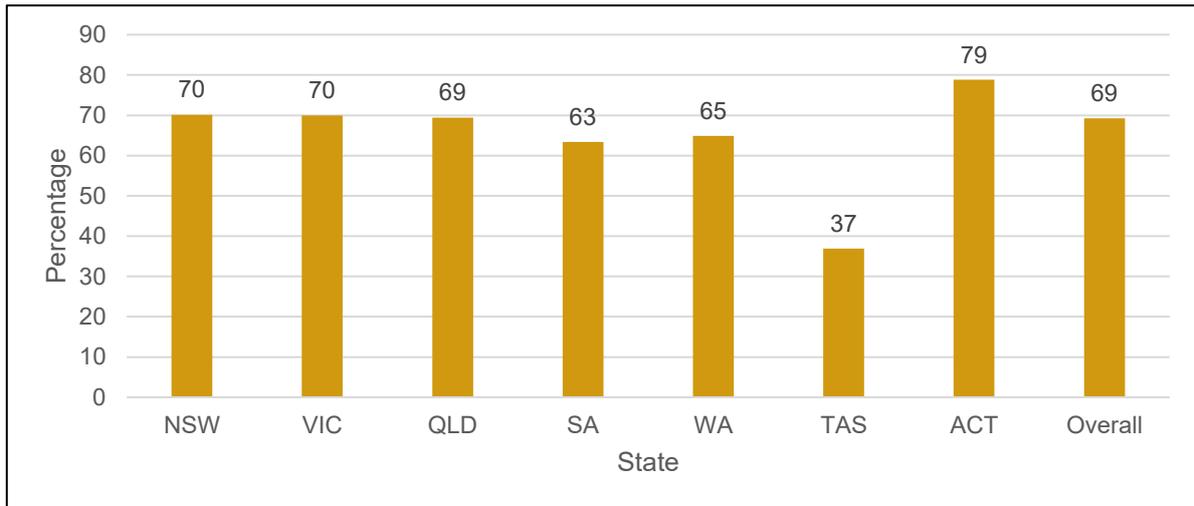
Many Year 12 students (69%) in GENERATION reported planning to go to university, either immediately after finishing school or sometime in the future. In 2023, 53% of recent Year 12 graduates commenced an undergraduate degree, indicating that not all students with university plans enrol in an undergraduate place the year after completing Year 12.³

Within the GENERATION cohort, there are state-based differences in university-plans, with more students in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland having university-plans. By contrast, only 37% of students in Tasmania had university-plans (Figure 1).

² The calculation of population weights is described in detail in the GENERATION Data User Guide (Edwards et al., 2023), but the characteristics adjusted for included school size, sector, state and socioeconomic status, and geographical area of Australia.

³ See <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/student-data/selected-higher-education-statistics-2023-student-data/key-findings-2023-student-data>

Figure 1- Percentage of Students with University-Plans by State



Source: Generation Survey Wave 3, weights applied.

Females more commonly reported planning to attend university, with 79% of female planning to study at university, compared to 64% of males and 56% of students who described their gender as non-binary or used another-term.

72% of students in Independent schools reported university-plans, compared to 70% of students in Government schools and 66% of students in Catholic schools.

Students' Career Activities

A summary of career advice received by the students in GENERATION is provided in Appendix A.

Findings

This section discusses the key insights from the GENERATION survey about which students were planning to apply to university via an early offer scheme, the reasons for applying, the characteristics of students applying, and which universities students planned to apply for.

How Many Students Considered Applying?

Students were asked about their plans to apply to a university through an early offer scheme. This survey item is shown in full in Figure 2.

We classified students as “intending to apply for an early offer” if they reported planning to apply to a university through their early offer scheme, were in the process of applying, or had applied already (i.e., response 1, 2 or 3). We use these terms interchangeable.

Figure 2- GENERATION Early Offer Survey Item (Wave 3)

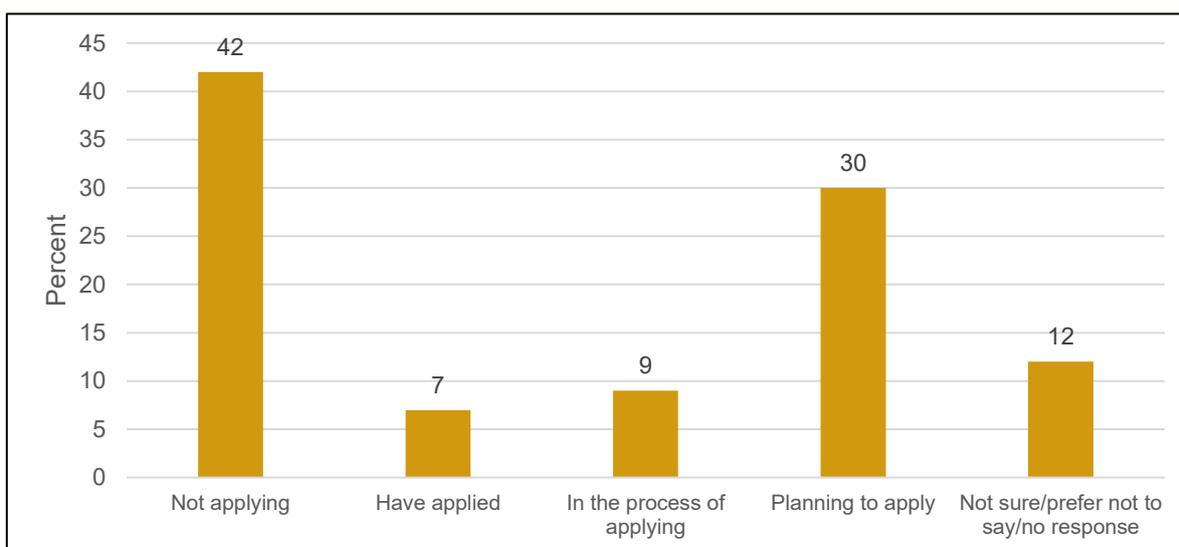
PE8: Have you or are you applying to any universities through their early offer scheme?

1. Yes, I am planning to apply
2. Yes, I am in the process of applying
3. Yes, I have applied already
4. No
98. Not sure
99. Prefer not to say

Overall, 46% of students in Wave 3 of GENERATION reported planning to apply, were in the process of applying, or had already applied to a university through an early offer scheme during Term 2 of 2024 (Figure 3). 42% of students reported that they would not apply to universities through an early offer scheme. 12% of students were unsure, preferred not to say, or had missing data. This suggests that, across Australia, almost 1 in 2 students had applied or were planning to apply for an early university offer in mid-2024.

In the remainder of the report, we combine students who “have applied”, were “in the process of applying”, and were “planning to apply”, and refer to these students as “**planning to apply for an early offer**”.

Of the students who planned to apply for an early offer, 93% also had university-plans suggesting that most early offer applicants genuinely intend to pursue higher education. The remaining 7% of students who planned to apply for an early offer had other non-university plans, such as going to TAFE, pursuing an apprenticeship, working, taking a gap year, or joining the Australian Defence Force or Police. The group of students who were not planning to go to university after school finished are referred to “**non-university plans**” in the remainder of this report.

Figure 3- Percentage of Students Planning to Apply for an Early Offer

Source: Generation Survey Wave 3, weights applied.

Among students who planned to apply for an early offer, 62% reported speaking with a school career advisor about their career plans in 2024, while 38% had not. This suggests that a significant proportion of students were considering early offer programs without guidance from a career advisor.

Qualitative Findings

It is important to understand the reasons why final-year students want to apply for early offer schemes in Australia. GENERATION Wave 3 included two qualitative questions which elicited young people's reasons for applying for an early offer and their thoughts on the application process.

Students who said they were planning to apply or were in the process of applying for an early offer were asked:

- There are several reasons why people might decide to apply to universities through their early offer scheme. What are your reasons for applying? [GENERATION Wave 3 item PE12]

Students who said they had already applied for an early offer were asked:

- There are several reasons why people might decide to apply to universities through their early offer scheme. What are your reasons for applying? Could you also tell us your experience of the process? [GENERATION Wave 3 item PE13]

1,374 students answered PE12 (1,371 valid answers), and 271 students answered PE13. Not all students who answered PE13 provided both a reason why and a reflection on the process. These qualitative responses were coded using thematic analysis, conducted by two members of the GENERATION research team, and further refined via discussion with all members of the GENERATION research team.

Upon examining these responses, the analysis highlighted three key themes as to why students were applying and two themes on the application process, detailed in Table 1. These themes are discussed in depth below. State, Sector, and Gender differences by theme are shown in Appendix B and discussed in later sections.

Themes are not mutually exclusive. Students may have incorporated multiple reasons in their responses and therefore these are coded across multiple subthemes. There was no limit on the number of codes per response.

Table 1- Summary of Qualitative Analysis Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme	Sub-theme	Number
Strategic future planning		923
	Securing a spot	266
	Personal preference for the university	126
	Secure a position in their desired degree	114
	Easier path into university and may increase their chances of getting in	106
	Securing a position at a conveniently located university	104
	Aligns with career plans	83
	To secure a university place or to get a degree	81
	Immediate future planning	53
	Applying for scholarships and other financial reasons	52
	Secure a position early	46
	Secure a place with Year 11 grades	38
Reduce stress		512
	Reduce final-year stress	250
	Reduce stress during exam period	214
	Less pressure on ATAR results	70
Fallback option		342
	Back-up option	238
	Why not/ nothing to lose / meet criteria to apply	70
	In case of low ATAR	59
Other Reasons		188
Process of applying		
	Easy	106
	Room for improvement	34

Note: Themes are not mutually exclusive. Students may have incorporated multiple reasons in their responses and therefore these are coded across multiple subthemes.

Reasons For Applying for An Early Offer

Strategic Future Planning

Throughout our analysis, we observed that most students viewed the early offer pathway as a means to aid in planning for their futures. Overwhelmingly, the most common reason for applying, with 923 responses, was that the early offers pathway served as a form of strategic planning. Young people saw this pathway as a way to secure a spot at university early and to have the security of knowing they were in their dream course, or university before they commenced their exams.

Securing a spot

For many students receiving an early conditional offer would provide a sense of “security” to students by knowing they were on their way to securing a position at university. Students spoke about wanting to guarantee or secure a spot. Students wanted to ensure that they received their conditional offer to university before they began their exam period.

“To have the security having a place in a university.” Female, government school, VIC

“Security and assurance while doing the HSC, and to have a solid plan before its too late.” Female, government school, NSW

“The early bird gets the worm.” Male, independent school, WA

Personal preference for the university

Some students indicated that their reason for applying to an early offer was motivated by their preference for a particular institution, often derived from prior knowledge or university experience.

“I love the university places and the courses they offer.” Female, government school, NSW

“Enjoyed their campuses and facilities the most on open day and would prefer to go to those Uni’s.” Male, independent school, ACT

Another important factor for many students considering applying for an early offer was based on the academic prestige of a particular university or a course at that institution. Some students responded simply with “good university” or “good reputation” or “best courses”. In their responses, students identified the overall quality of education in certain areas of knowledge as a critical element when deciding to apply for an early offer in that institution.

“It looks like a good uni and the best languages courses are there.” Male, government school, NSW

“The ANU is a strong university in history and international relations, which are the fields that I’m interested in.” Female, government school, ACT

Secure a position in their desired degree

Closely related, early offers were seen as a good way to guarantee a spot in the degree of their preference. Many respondents mentioned the degrees they wanted to pursue as their primary motivation. Some of the key degrees highlighted by students included nursing, engineering, law, psychology, design, arts and music degrees, and business and economics. Interestingly, some students mentioned wanting to study degrees not eligible for entry via an early offer, such as medicine. This may reflect the timing of the GENERATION survey or alternatively could reflect limited understanding of the early offer process (or both).

“To complete a Bachelor of Information Technology (Game Development) or a Bachelor of Creative Arts (Game Production).” Male, government school, SA

“I’ve always wanted to do something in medicine.” Female student, government school, SA.

“I am choosing USYD and UNSW as they offer neuroscience as a major for science based courses and likely have better facilities. University of Wollongong is one of the only universities that are somewhat close that have neuroscience as a standalone degree rather than a major.” Female, government school, NSW

Easier path into university and may increase their chances of getting in

Students also felt that by applying through an early offer pathway, they were somehow increasing their chances of getting into higher education. This reason is expressed in different ways, including but not limited to ideas such as just wanting a better chance to enrol in their preferred course or believing that applying for an early entry would show their enthusiasm for higher education, something that universities might positively value. By doing so, students were giving themselves the best chances of obtaining a conditional offer to the course they want to pursue:

“Increased chances of getting the degree you want.” Male, government school, NSW

“So I can show my high interest in attending the school and hoping to get an early offer.” Female, government school, VIC

“Lots of Unis have early application and they are more likely to be accepted than those who doesn’t, so I took that chance. I also need to try and get into whatever Uni I can, so this is my best shot.” Male, independent school, ACT

Some students clearly expressed that accessing university through an early offer is a comparatively easier way to get into higher education compared to standard entries. For them, ideas such as ‘easier to get it’ or just simply ‘easy’ were more prevalent, indicating an increased chance of getting into higher education.

Securing a position at a conveniently located university

Students also mentioned that a convenient location was an important factor when considering an early offer application. By attending a university close by, students can continue living at home, ultimately saving money on travel or renting/accommodation.

“It’s convenient for me to travel back and forth.” Female, government school, VIC

“It’s close to home, so I can stay with my parents and not worry so much about cost of living, while building up some savings.” Male, independent school, TAS

While others mentioned the importance of getting an early offer to find a spot at a residential college on campus as soon as possible due to the high demand for university accommodation, especially in highly demanded universities.

“Guarantees accommodation in some cases, and a sooner offer means I can plan earlier.” Female, independent school, QLD

“It’d be nice to know for certain where I’m going for uni so I can plan for accommodations.” Male student, government school, NSW

“Relieve stress during hsc and allow myself time to plan accommodation if needed.” Male, government school, NSW

Aligns with career plans

Some students indicated that getting into university was a necessary step in their career journey. In this sense, an early offer was positively valued for its role in facilitating the development of each student’s professional career. A small number of students specifically mentioned the importance of gaining admission to a university to achieve their career goals in the ADFA, which requires a university education, depending on the specific role they are pursuing:

*“Applying for early entry can fast-track my earning, career advancement, and my personal goals.”
Female, government school, NSW*

“To reach my goal of becoming a Tax Auditing Partner.” Male, government school, SA

“Well I’m applying for the Bachelor of Health Science in hope to become a medical doctor and specialise within the Cardiothoracic field of medicine to become a surgeon.” Male, catholic school, ACT

To secure a university place or to get a degree

Another important reason to apply for an early offer was simply to attend university and get a bachelor’s degree. When asked about the reason for applying through the early offer pathway, many students said they wanted “to get a higher education and degree” or, more simply, “I want to get into Uni.”

Immediate future planning

Students also indicated that applying for an early offer would allow them to facilitate life planning after Year 12. In this sense, by getting an early offer, students could get a sense of certainty regarding their short-term future.

*“And also, to get more certainty about what the next couple of years are going to look like for me.”
Female, independent school, TAS*

“To try and secure a spot in my degree of interest, to more effectively plan my future.” Male, government school, ACT

“For me, applying for the process was really interesting because it really helped me to think about what do I really want to do with my life, what my goals are and what I want to achieve.” Male, catholic school, ACT

Applying for scholarships and other financial reasons

Some students pointed out that an early offer can facilitate access to scholarships and other financial support.

“My reasons for applying are purely because of the scholarship application that is complimentary to the early offer scheme; specifically, ANU.” Female, government school, SA

*“I want to be well considered for scholarships and other programs to help me pay for my education.”
Male, independent school, TAS*

However, many of these students were talking about scholarships for high-achieving students.

“I applied to ANU through their early offer scheme, due to their prestigious Tuckwell Scholarship having applications open at the same time.” Female, independent school, TAS

Secure a position early

Students also indicated that the top reason for applying was to secure their place early. In this sense, receiving a conditional offer was considered a positive aspect, as students opted to apply for an early offer because they wanted to begin their studies as soon as possible.

“See if I can get in and start early.” Female, government school, QLD

“To get into university earlier than I could.” Male, independent school, ACT

A less prominent reason for students applying for early entry was to gain admission in case students took a gap year. They wanted to secure their spot and avoid competing with later cohorts of students. After receiving certainty of a spot, students would then be able to defer their position.

*“So I have a pathway when I defer it and take a gap year and then come back and start studying.”
Female, catholic school, ACT*

“To have some security to come back to something after a gap year.” Male, independent school, WA

Students spoke about how they wanted to take advantage of the “lower ATAR” which would be required if they applied via an early offer pathway.

“Using early offers is considered standard practice among students now, and there is potential to get adjustment factors which can be of benefit.” Male, catholic school, ACT

“It would be nice to have a guaranteed pathway into a uni before exams, and the lower atar is helpful as well.” Female, government school, VIC.

Secure a Place with Year 11 Grades

Finally, a small group of students declared that they wanted to apply for the early offers pathway due to good grades in Year 11. They mentioned that their Year 12 grades might not be as good as their previous results in Year 11, potentially due to the increased pressure of Year 12 or other personal circumstances. Therefore, they preferred to use their Year 11 grades instead of relying on their final year grades.

“I have had good marks in Year 11 and am worried they might drop, so my actual ATAR would be lower than what it is predicted to be right now.” Female, government school, ACT

“My grades are really good, so it should be easy for me to get in an early offer program.” Male, independent school, WA

One student spoke about how they were specifically applying for the Macquarie University early offer scheme for students who performed well in their year 11 studies in conjunction with leadership skills and participation in extracurricular activities.

“Macquarie has a lot of benefits just for applying at their university, like 15 points of adjustment for the Leaders and Achievers application, and 5 points just for a close commute.” Female, government school, NSW

Reducing Stress

The second most prevalent response from students when describing why they were intending to or already had applied for an early offer was to reduce stress. Overall, 512 students reported that applying for (and receiving) an early offer was a way to alleviate some of their pressure and stress.

Some students put it simply and responded with sentiments like “so there is less stress” or “don’t need to worry as much”. Others described the early offers pathway as a mechanism to relieve some of the pressure they were feeling or anticipated feeling throughout their final year of schooling, particularly throughout their final exams and the pressure to perform and achieve a high ATAR.

Reduce Final-Year Stress

Students commonly reported applying for an early offer to reduce stress at different points of the year. They frequently expressed a sentiment that Year 12 was a challenging and stressful period for them. They saw the early offers pathway to mitigate some of the stress that came with Year 12:

“Year 12 is stressful and I’m not sure I will get it through my atar also I want some security before I do the hsc.” Female, government school, NSW

“To guarantee a spot and reduce stress in year 12.” Male, independent school, NSW

“I chose to apply in the hopes of achieving early access that guaranteed me a place in my course, and therefor meaning i would not have additional stress in year 12.” Female, government school, SA

Reduce stress during exam period

While some students spoke about Year 12 overall being a stressful time, others discussed their exam periods later in the year and expressed a desire to “minimise stress for exams.” Students said they applied for a university offer earlier in the year in the hope of receiving a conditional offer before the exam period. This would then be one less thing to worry about. They said they did not want to have to think about the application process or worry about applying during their exams. For example:

“Early offers sounded like a good idea because if you are successful then it would take some stress away during end of year exams.” Female, independent school, QLD

“To remove some of the pressure off me as I approach my final exams, as I do get quite anxious and suffer from burnout. It also gets the stress of applying for uni out of the way early.” Female, independent school, TAS

“I believe I have the scores to get in. It would make me less anxious and give me a bit of protection.” Female, government school, NSW

“Also WACE and ATARA exams are at the end of the year and I don’t want to be stressing about applying during then - I want to focus on school.” Male, government school, WA

Students appeared more concerned with alleviating the stress of their exam period so they could focus more on their studies and perform to their best potential rather than not studying for their exams.

Less Pressure on ATAR Results

When reporting on the stress of year 12 exams, many students described the pressure to perform well and the need to achieve a high HSC result or ATAR score.

“Confirmation - less pressure on end of year results.” Female, government school, ACT

“Because it elevates so much pressure form [sic] the final hsc exam and im an anxious girlie.” Female, government, NSW

“I am applying so that I have to worry less about marks, and that overall somewhat toxic rat-race.” Male, catholic school, WA

Students felt that the pressure to excel in Year 12 could negatively impact their final exam results and ATARs. Thus, by applying for an early offer, they could alleviate the excessive stress that aiming for top marks in the HSC can produce and hopefully perform better (with the pressure off). For example:

“An early offer would take some pressure off my HSC marks, which would be good for my mental health.” Female, government school, NSW

“It will take some stress of my HSC exams, hopefully allowing me to do my best rather than pushing myself to over achieve.” Female, government school, NSW

“One of my main reason of applying for early offer is due to it reduces the HSC pressure. HSC is the one of the most stressful part of the student’s life however early offers makes it less stressful for students as well as it reduces exams stress preventing disappointing marks.” Female, government school, NSW

There were also a few students who spoke about how they have additional mental health concerns, and they saw the application process as being of benefit to them.

“I have had a lot of challenges thrown at me this year and believe it will hinder my atar for getting into uni so early entry would be a life saver.” Female, government school, NSW

“I have mental health problems and hhave [sic] experienced a recent death in the family.” Female, independent school, VIC

Fallback Option

Following on from young people wanting to secure their spot at university and wanting to reduce their stress levels, the third most reported reason for applying was that an early offer pathway acted as a fallback option for university. Overall, 342 students saw early offers as a backup plan in case they did not get into their first preference or if they did not do as well as anticipated in their final exams. An early offers pathway was a way to keep their options open and acted as form of a safety net to protect them and help secure a position in case something went wrong. Other students said they were applying for an early offer as they had nothing to lose, so why not apply? Some students were applying just to see if they could get in, as they knew they met the requirements.

Back-up option

Many students described the early offers pathway as a “backup” or a “safety net,” whereby they wanted to ensure that they were keeping their options open and had options to fall back on. Some students were planning to apply for an early offer as a “plan b” and were applying to courses or universities they did not necessarily intend to accept. They wanted to have the certainty of a position in a course even if it wasn’t their first choice.

“To have a back up University offer just in case I don't get my first option.” Male, independent school, VIC

“I want to have as many options as possible for university, and I think having early offers relieves a bit of stress and provides a safety net” Female, independent school, VIC

“ensure a plan B option if I do not achieve the requirements needed for my first choice degree/university.” Gender not disclosed, government school, NSW

Why not, nothing to lose by applying- meet the criteria to apply

While some students saw an early offer as a safety net or just in case, they did not get the required ATAR, others wanted to see if they could get in. There was also a small number of students who said they were applying for university through the early offer schemes because they felt like they had ‘nothing to lose, so why not?’ Some students also expressed a sentiment they were applying “for the sake of applying”, while others said “because there is no reason not to apply.”.

“For the sake of applying. I can't use early entry for the university I want but it's good to have a safety net.” Female, government school, NSW

Fallback in case of Low ATAR Results

Several students viewed the early offers pathway as a “safety net” option to turn to if they do not perform as well as they had hoped in their final exams or do not achieve the ATAR they are aspiring to. While some students indicated that applying for an early offer was ‘in case I don’t get the ATAR required’, others applied knowing or rather anticipating that they definitely wouldn't get a good ATAR.

“Allows me to have an option to turn to if my HSC goes wrong” Male, independent school, NSW

“Fallback to not rely on school grades in yr12” non-binary, independent school, SA

“Because I'm worried my ATAR isn't gonna be high enough” Male, government school, NSW

“My ATAR is not likely to be high enough for standard entry”. Female, government school, NSW.

Additional Reasons to Apply for an Early Offer

Along with applying for an early entry as part of a strategic future planning and fallback option, students also mentioned other reasons. In this section, we will briefly mention some of these less frequent motivations.

Some students spoke about how they were applying for an early offer because someone, including a parent, a teacher, or a careers counsellor had recommended them. Some students also mentioned they were applying to a particular university where their parents were alumni or current staff.

“Parents want me to.” Female, government school, SA

“My main reason for applying is because where I will live in Perth is closest to UWA and Curtin which both have my ideal courses, and my Mum went to Edith Cowan so suggested I apply there as well.” Female, independent school, WA

“Encouraged by my school to apply for early entry.” Non-binary, independent school, ACT

Others spoke about how everyone at their school or all of their friends were applying so they were too.

“Also did so because it's just been talked about so much by students and teachers that i just thought it was a natural thing to do.” Female, independent school, ACT

“Everyone else is doing it and I feel encouraged to by my school.” Female, independent school, ACT

One student who had already applied specifically said that he would recommend everyone apply.

"I believe everyone should apply just to give it a go." Female, government school, NSW

When answering questions regarding why they would apply for an early offer, some students just indicated simple and short answers, such as 'ldk' and "Not sure". In some cases, they briefly mentioned an extra bit of information, like 'just cause I should' or "its encouraged".

A few students indicated that the reason to apply for an early offer was "just to get it out of the way". In this case, respondents briefly indicated that applying was an alternative they could take but wanted to do it as soon as possible.

Interestingly, some students indicated that applying for early entry was associated with some social inequalities and disadvantages experienced by them. An early entry was seen as an alternative to access university in cases where either financial, health or socioeconomic inequalities may hinder students' chances of getting into higher education. Thus, by applying for an early entry, students believed that this could help them to get the necessary adjustments based on their needs.

"I live in one of the disadvantaged locations and my single mom receives Centrelink support for my little sister and I". Female, government school, NSW

"My mental health has been not that great this year, so I would like to be able to use my results from last year when I was not going through a mental health crisis instead." Non-binary, independent school, WA

"I come from a low-income family so being able to plan more in advance helps ease a lot of the financial concerns about moving, housing, etc. Also, I have spent a significant amount of time working really hard for my education so I would like to benefit." Male, catholic school, NSW

One concern with the early offer process is that once students apply, they may not try as hard in school and may become disengaged. While data collection occurred before most offers had opened and before students had received their offers, only 23 students clearly expressed a sentiment they were applying for an early offer "So I don't have to try that much...". While this might be a concern for schools, some students did hint at working less hard at the end of the school year, but this was not a strong sentiment, and those who did still seemed to have strong aspirations for example:

"Early offers produce a much lighter pressure on HSC exams and let me focus on easing out excessive class workloads in the short-term. Otherwise, they're an amazing opportunity for security in a career prospect almost necessary for professional workplaces." Male, government, NSW

"I applied to get a foot in the door, and have some lee-way when it comes around to the end of Yr12." Male, catholic school, ACT

Further, two students stated that an early offer might see them not try in their exams, or reduce their overall output, but as shown below they had bigger aspirations and were not actually planning on "giving up":

"... if i get into the course i want i can barely try in the actual HSC potentially, i dont plan on giving up on the exams if i get an offer but i anticipate it will make the HSC much less stressful. I am aiming to come top in the state in 2 subjects so i still need to try but i can always give up on that aspiration." Male, independent school, NSW

Process of Applying for an Early Offer

As described above, students who had already applied for an early offer were asked about the process of applying. As GENERATION Wave 3 was conducted in May-July 2024, most of the early offer programs were not yet available or had just recently opened, none of the programs had closed applications before the survey was completed. For example, all of the programs in Western Australia had recently opened at the start of May, but none of the Queensland programs were open at the time of the survey, opening from August 1.

Overall, only 272 had already applied for an early offer and, therefore, were asked to provide insights into the process of applying. While not all of the students provided insight to the process, of those who did, most reported it was easier or easier than anticipated. A few indicated that it was time-consuming or that there was room for improvement.

From our qualitative analysis, of the students who had already applied, most were from states with established systems, 66% were from New South Wales or the Australian Capital Territory, and 10% were from Western Australia. On the other hand, a quarter of those who had already applied were from either Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, or Tasmania. A similar number of students had already applied from both independent and government schools, with a slightly higher proportion of independent school students already applying.

Overall, 106 or around 40% of students who had already applied described the process positively, with responses including “It was very easy to apply.” Or “Very easy process.” Or “It was easy enough.”

Some students spoke about how they thought it was easier than they thought it was going to be, but they still experienced some frustrations or hic-ups along the way.

“In terms of the process, it has been pretty straight-forward with a few hiccups that were easily dismissed” Male, independent, NSW

“I thought the process was quite streamlined and easy despite appearing complicated. I believe that such processes are built up to be something they are not, which gives rise to a lot of unnecessary anxiety in graduating students. It was much easier than I thought it would be.” Female, government, WA

Selected students highlighted that they appreciated the opportunity to include other aspects of their student life in their application and that they were not judged solely based on their academics.

“very straightforward and easy and i liked how it included other areas not just academics.” Female, independent school, VIC

“The experience of applying to a degree at ANU meant that I had to obtain lots of documentation supporting my co-curriculars. This seemed strenuous at first but was very rewarding when I finally finished it all.” Female, government school, SA

Students reported the process of applying through a centralised process via a Tertiary Admission Centre such as the University Admissions Centre (UAC) (in NSW and the ACT) and the Tertiary Institutions Service Centre (TISC) (in WA).

“process was easy and done through UAC.” Gender not disclosed, Government, NSW

“Although complicated to find where to apply at first as some teachers are clueless or ignorant to the process, once I got logged into TISC it was very easy” Male, government school, WA

On the other hand, students reported difficulties and frustrations with the complex nature of having to apply directly to universities, and every institution has its own intricacies and requirements. They highlighted the process could be improved to make it easier and less time-consuming.

“It was a bit fiddly - for some universities, like Western Sydney, but for other universities it was pretty self explanatory.” Male, government school, NSW

“Process was difficult as websites were not intuitive or set up to accommodate for the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program, which is the course I take. I believe there could have been greater explanation of deadlines and processes.” Female, independent school, ACT

“I haven't looked at any universities other than ANU because the process of getting my grades from the school in the format the application requires has been difficult.” Non-binary, independent school, ACT

Students provided feedback on how the process can be improved, focusing on making the process less time-consuming and standardising websites, guidelines, and application platforms.

“The idea of applying was a bit confusing as there are so many different organisations, options and forms to fill out when trying to apply. Once I applied to uni on a specific universities site, it was a lot more straightforward.” Female, independent, NSW

There were some state-based differences observed based on the process. One student expressed that they did not feel well supported as a VCE student applying interstate:

“I applied to ANU early as it was a requirement to apply for a separate scholarship application and I also like the idea of having a guaranteed spot before sitting my exams. I found the process difficult as it did not cater for the VCE system and my career advisor was unhelpful.” Female, independent school, VIC

While there only limited numbers of students who reflected on their experiences of applying, our qualitative analysis showed that students of responded to this question varied by state or territory. In South Australia these students were the least likely to report a positive experience following their application, with 25% of these students expressing a positive sentiment; this compared with 50% of these students in Western Australia, 38% for New South Wales and 37% for these students from the Australian Capital Territory.

While more females had already applied for an early offer than males, a slightly higher proportion of the males who had applied rated the process easier than females (44% vs 39%). It was anticipated that independent school students would be more likely to report that the process was easy due to increased resources; however, there was a higher percentage of government school students who reported it was an easy process.

Summary of Qualitative Findings

Overall, our qualitative analysis shows that young people are invested in their own futures and want some certainty that they are on track to secure a spot at university for next year. Many students expressed a sentiment that applying early and having certainty would assist them with their immediate and long-term

planning beyond just going to university. In addition, students have high aspirations to go to university, earn a degree and get a job; a conditional early offer will help students get on the right path to achieving their plans.

Another key reason for students to apply was to actively manage their stress levels and their mental health throughout year 12, particularly heading into the end of the year and their exam period. They said they wanted to submit their university applications earlier in the year to have one less thing to worry about while studying or completing exams. Year 12 students saw the early offer pathway as a way to manage the stress and pressure they were feeling and so they could focus more on their exams and studies. Considering that almost one in three of all students were experiencing clinical levels of distress at the time of the survey and the evidence that high stakes exams undermine student motivation, concentration, and deep approaches to learning and increase anxiety rather than act as a motivator (French, Dickerson & Mulder, 2024), early offers may well enhance performance in final exams and reduce unnecessary psychological distress.

Finally, young people were keen on applying for an early offer to keep their options open and make sure they have a backup plan in case they do not do as well as anticipated with their ATAR results or if they do not get into their dream course. Students want certainty in their future, and if they are unable to get into their dream degree, it is nice to know they have a backup position to turn to.

Of the small number of students who have already applied, most of them thought it was an easy and straightforward process and that the primary difficulty they encountered was that the process was more time-consuming than anticipated.

Quantitative Findings

This section examines whether there are any differences in the percentage of students applying for an early offer by State, Sector, Gender, Equity Groups and Year 11 Engagement. The analysis compares all students, *university-aspiring* students, and students without university plans after completing school. While 46% of all students intended to apply for an early offer (see Figure 3), 63% of university-aspiring students planned to apply for an early offer compared to 10% of students without university plans.

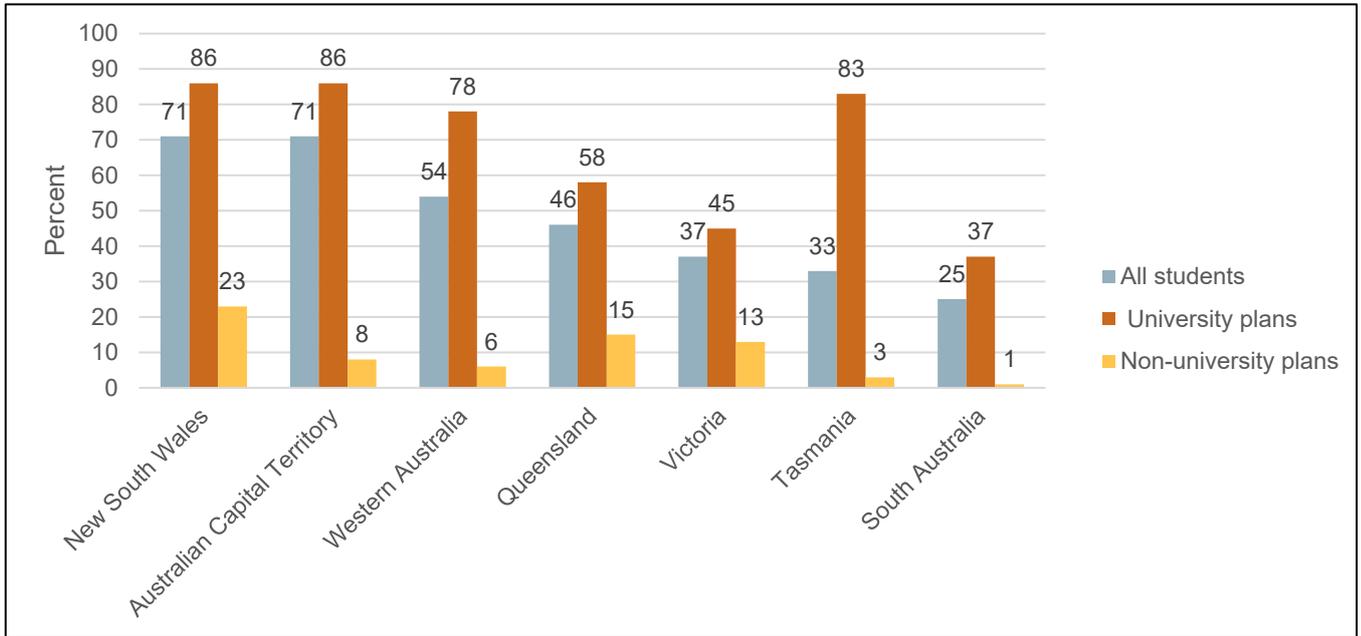
State

The percentage of students planning to apply for an early offer differed by State and students' post-school plans (see Figure 4). 71% of students in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory reported planning to apply for an early offer. This is consistent with data-mapping of universities with early offers, which showed that most universities in these two states have early offer schemes.

Almost all university-planning students in New South Wales, Australia Capital Territory, Tasmania and Western Australia reported intending to apply for an early offer in 2024. A large percentage of university-aspiring students in Tasmania plan to apply for an early offer, likely because the main university in Tasmania (The University of Tasmania) has an early offer scheme. Lower percentages of applying for an early offer were seen in Victoria and South Australia, likely because two of the largest universities in Victoria did not have an early offer scheme in place, and no universities in South Australia had an early offer scheme.

These figures also confirm that most students with university-plans intended to apply for an early offer, compared to students without university plans.

Figure 4- Percentage of Students Planning an Early Offer Application, by State and Post-School Plans



Source: Generation Survey Wave 3, weights applied. N = 3,567.

Students from states that had a more established early offer system and where the process of applying was more widespread, such as ACT, NSW, and Western Australia, were more likely to provide multiple reasons for applying for an early offer across our three key themes. Students in these states were more likely to indicate they were applying for an early offer as a fall-back or backup option, with 23% of students from the ACT, 25% of NSW students and 20% of Western Australian students reporting this, compared to 10% of Queensland students and 15% of South Australian students.

In addition, students from ACT, NSW and Western Australia were more likely to see early offers as a form of stress relief. Almost half (45%) of students in NSW, whereas only a quarter (23%) of Victorian and South Australian students saw the early offers pathway as a mechanism to relieve stress. For all states, the most common reason for applying for an early offer was strategic planning, which was between 49% and 67%.

Sector

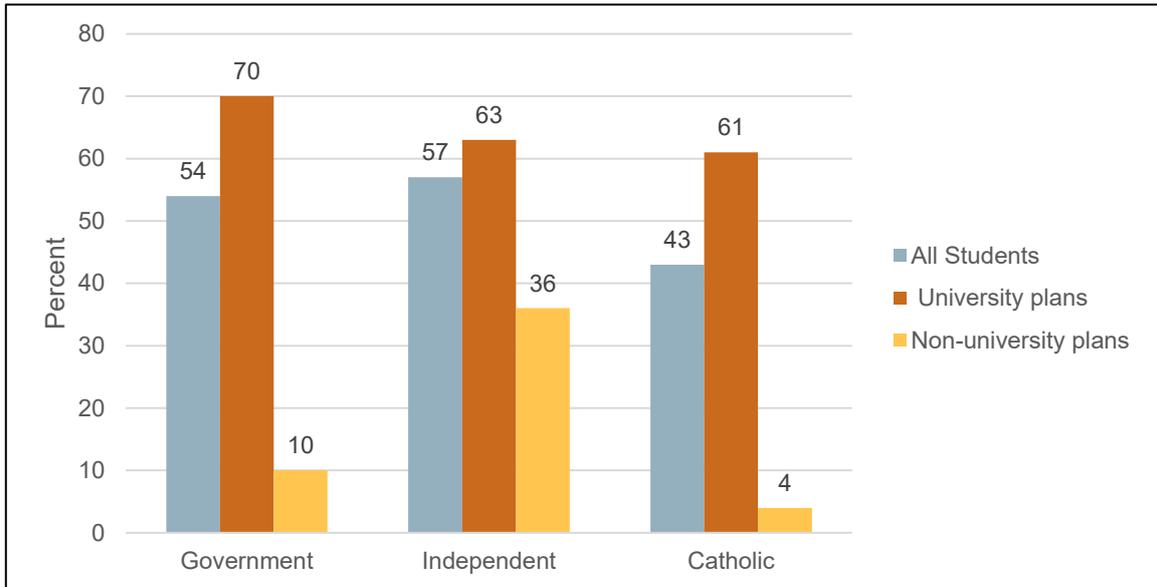
The percentage of students from the three different school sectors who planned to apply for an early offer is shown in Figure 5. Overall, the percentage of students in independent schools who planned to apply for an early offer was slightly higher than the percentage of students in government schools.

However, the share of *university-planning students* who planned to apply for an early offer was larger in the Government school sector compared to the Independent school sector. It is possible that these differences are due to different course preferences. For example, students in Independent schools may more often want to attend a Group of Eight University (most of which do not have early offer schemes) or apply for certain undergraduate courses that do not have an early offer scheme (such as Dentistry or Medicine). It's

also possible that university-planning students in Government schools seek earlier certainty about their future university destination.

Interestingly, a relatively large proportion of Independent school students who reported not planning to go to university still reported intending to apply for an early offer (36%). It is possible that these students want to try their luck at applying for a university place through the early offer scheme but are unsure whether they will ultimately take an offer.

Figure 5- Percentage of Students Planning an Early Offer Application, by School Sector and Post-School Plans

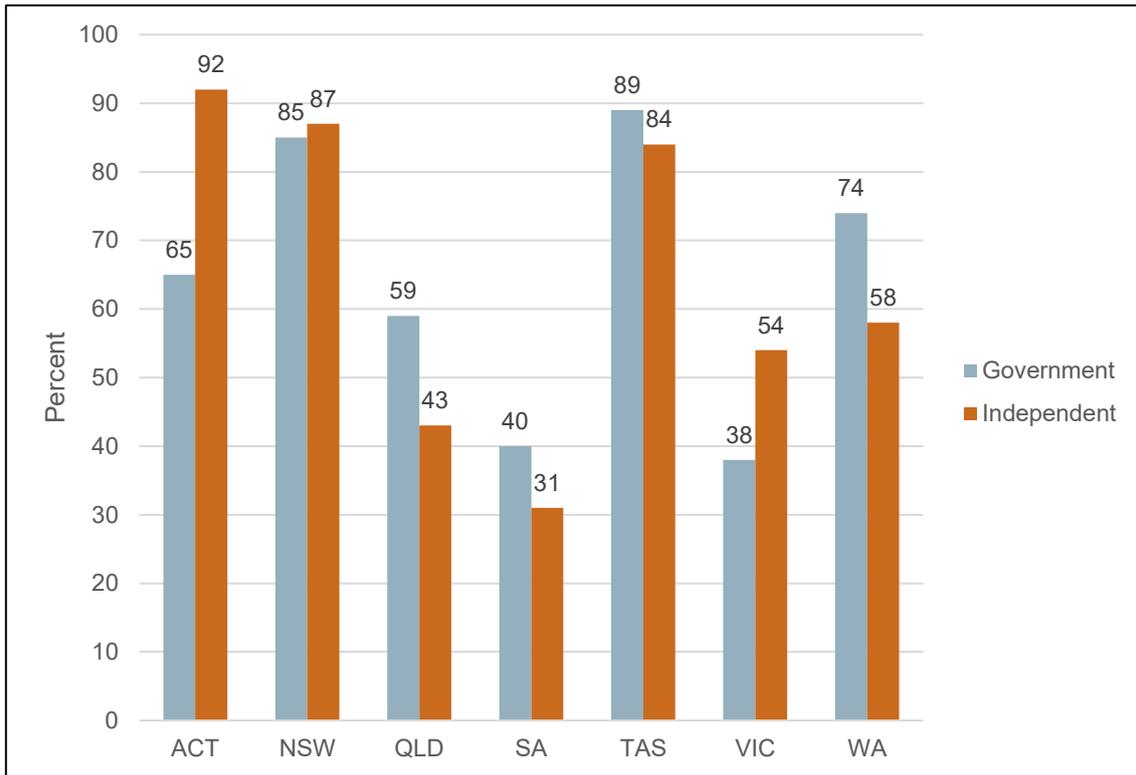


Source: Generation Survey Wave 3, weights applied. N = 3,552. Note there are small number of students from Catholic schools in Wave 3 of GENERATION, and these values should be interpreted with caution.

Our qualitative analysis showed there were limited variations across sectors in terms of why students were applying for an early offer. Across all three sectors, strategic planning remained the most common response, followed by stress relief and backup options.

A summary of the percentage of university-planning students who intended to apply for an early offer by State *and* Sector (Government and Independent) is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6- Percentage of Students Planning an Early Offer Application, by State and Sector



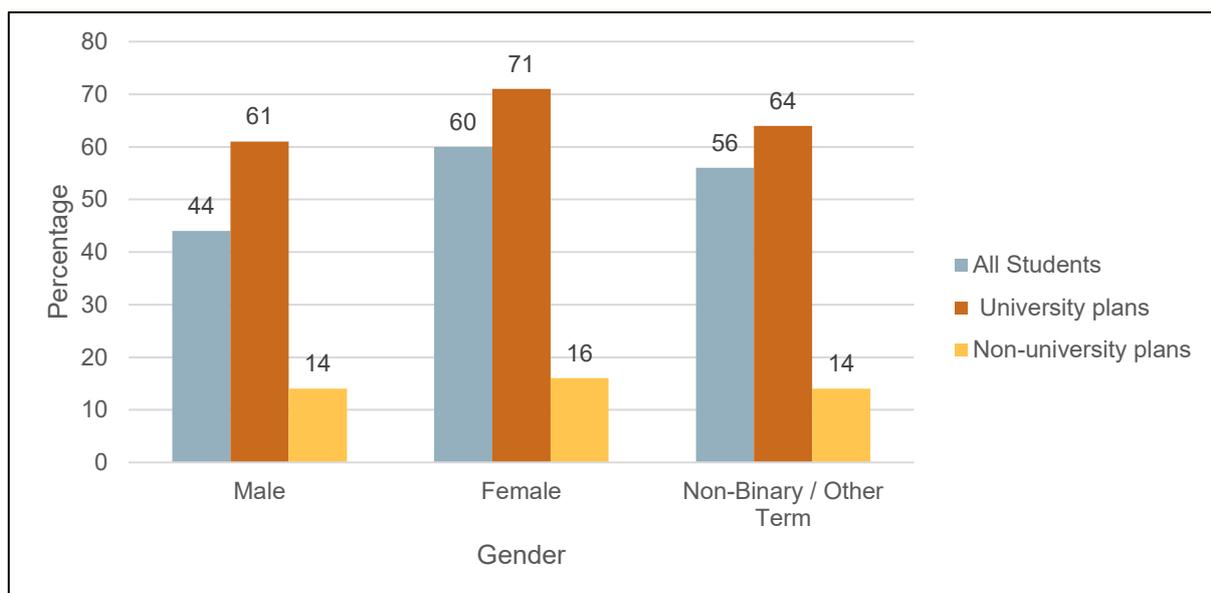
Source: Generation Survey Wave 3, weights applied. Analysis restricted to students with university-plans.

Note: Catholic schools are not shown due to a low number of responses in some states.

In Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, and Western Australia, there was a higher percentage of students from Government schools who reported planning to apply for an early offer compared to those from Independent schools. The percentages were lower in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, and Victoria. These findings highlight state and sector differences in early offer applications.

Gender

The percentage of students who planned to apply for an early offer by gender is shown in Figure 7. Overall, more females reported planning to apply for an early offer (60% of females) compared to males (44% of males). This was also the case for *university-planning* students; more females (71%) than males (61%) reported planning to apply for an early offer.

Figure 7- Percentage of Students Planning an Early Offer Application, by Gender and Post-School Plans

Source: Generation Survey Wave 3, weights applied. N = 3,418. Note there were small numbers of non-binary students – these results should be interpreted with caution.

From our qualitative analysis, we observed that there is an important gap between male and female students in terms of their reasons for applying for early entry offers. We can see that a third of female students indicated that applying for an early offer was motivated by relieving stress, compared to a quarter of male students. This finding aligns with existing evidence on Australian female students reporting significantly higher levels of stress compared to males.

On the other hand, the proportion of male students indicated that applying for early entry was motivated more in terms of their strategic thinking (including ideas such as ‘securing a spot’ or ‘university’s prestige’), which was more prevalent for males than for females. In general, almost 2 out of 3 male students reported these reasons, compared to around half of female students. These qualitative findings need to be considered in context, however, with fewer males than females applying for an early offer, but male students who did apply were proportionally more inclined to justify their motivation to apply for early entry based on strategic planning rather than relieving feelings of stress.

There is a low number of non-binary students with only 29 students included in our analysis. However, for non-binary students, the results showed that the distribution of cases across the three main themes was similar, with 41% of respondents motivated by a strategic planning, followed by 35% of cases indicating stress-relief, and 28% highlighting the importance of early entry offers as some sort of back-up.

Equity Groups

We next explored whether educationally disadvantaged students (i.e., students in an equity group) were more or less likely to report planning to apply for an early offer (Figure 8). Students were characterised as being in an equity group if they (weighted percentage shown in brackets):

- Attended a school in a regional/remote area during Wave 3 (2024) (20%)
- Identified as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (Wave 1 Data collection) (4%)
- Reported having a disability (Wave 3 Data collection, see Table 5 note for details) (30%), or

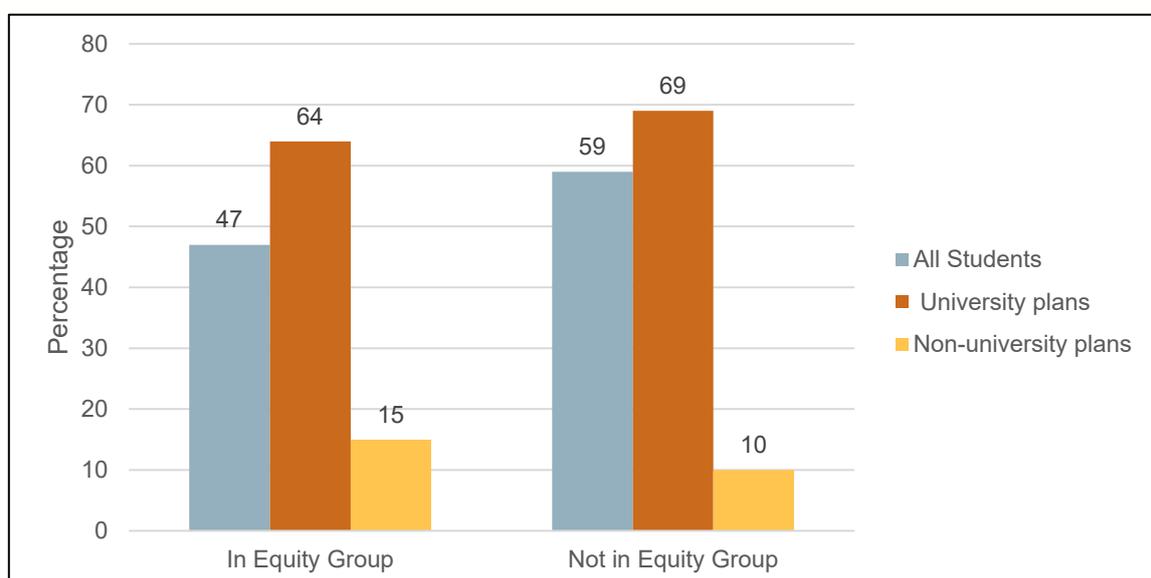
- Attended a school in the bottom 30% of area disadvantage (2021 SEIFA) (28%).

In the weighted sample, 55% of young people belonged to one of the four equity groups.

Overall, the percentage of students who intended to apply for an early offer was lower for equity students (47%) compared to students not in an equity group (59%). However, among university-planning students, the proportions of equity and non-equity students planning to apply for an early offer were similar – 64% and 69%, respectively.

Interestingly, 15% of equity students with non-university plans reported planning to apply for an early offer, compared to 10% of students not in an equity group (10%). While these differences are relatively small, this could possibly indicate that equity students who did not intend to go to university may “test the waters” to see if they get a university place through an early offer scheme.

Figure 8- Percentage of Students Planning an Early Offer Application, by Equity Group Status and Post-School Plans



Source: Generation Survey Wave 3, weights applied. N = 3,567. Equity Group refers to four equity categories: Regional/Remote, First Nations, Low-SES, Disability.

Qualitative findings revealed that the early offer admission scheme was seen as helpful for equity students. For example:

“My school is considered in a low socioeconomic area hence granting me access to several equity schemes that give me the chance to study at a prestigious university at a lowered requirement.” Male, government school, NSW

“Some universities offer equity scholarships for disadvantaged students. I’m a foster kid who left home to escape domestic violence and abuse, so these opportunities are really helpful.” Female, government school VIC

Breaking down this analysis into specific equity groups from Wave 3 of the quantitative data from GENERATION (See Table 2) shows that the share of equity students who planned to apply for an early offer was smaller compared to more advantaged groups, except for students with a non-English speaking background. However, the differences largely disappear when focusing on *university-planning* students.

Chi-square tests were conducted to assess whether the proportion of university-planning students who intended to apply for an early offer varied by equity group membership. No statistically significant differences were found between equity group membership. Due to the low sample size (i.e., if there are less than 20 people in the cell), we don't show the proportions of equity groups by students with non-university plans.

Table 2- Planning to apply for an early offer by equity group

Intend to Apply (%)	All Students	Students with University Plans	Non-University Plans
Regional / Remote	44	64	-
Metropolitan	54	67	15
Non-English Speaking Background ^a	62	69	-
English Speaking Background	51	66	12
First Nations	29	71	-
Doesn't Identify as First Nations	54	68	13
Self-Report Disability ^b	50	66	15
No Self-Report Disability	55	68	14
Bottom 30% School SEIFA	47	67	15
Top 70% of School SEIFA	55	67	14

Source: Generation Survey Wave 3, weights applied. ^a Non-English Speaking background are those who report another language than English as the language spoken at home most of the time (Wave 1). ^b Self reported disability of Intellectual or Learning (such as autism, ASD, ADHD, ADD), Physical (such as quadriplegia, muscular dystrophy, motor neurone disease, cerebral palsy), Acquired brain injury, Neurological (including epilepsy and Alzheimer's disease), Vision (encompasses blindness and vision impairment, not corrected by glasses or contact lenses), Hearing (encompasses deafness, hearing impairment, hearing loss), Speech (encompasses speech loss, impairment and/or difficulty in being understood), or Psychological (such as schizophrenia, anxiety disorders, personality disorders, stress, psychosis, depression) (Wave 3).

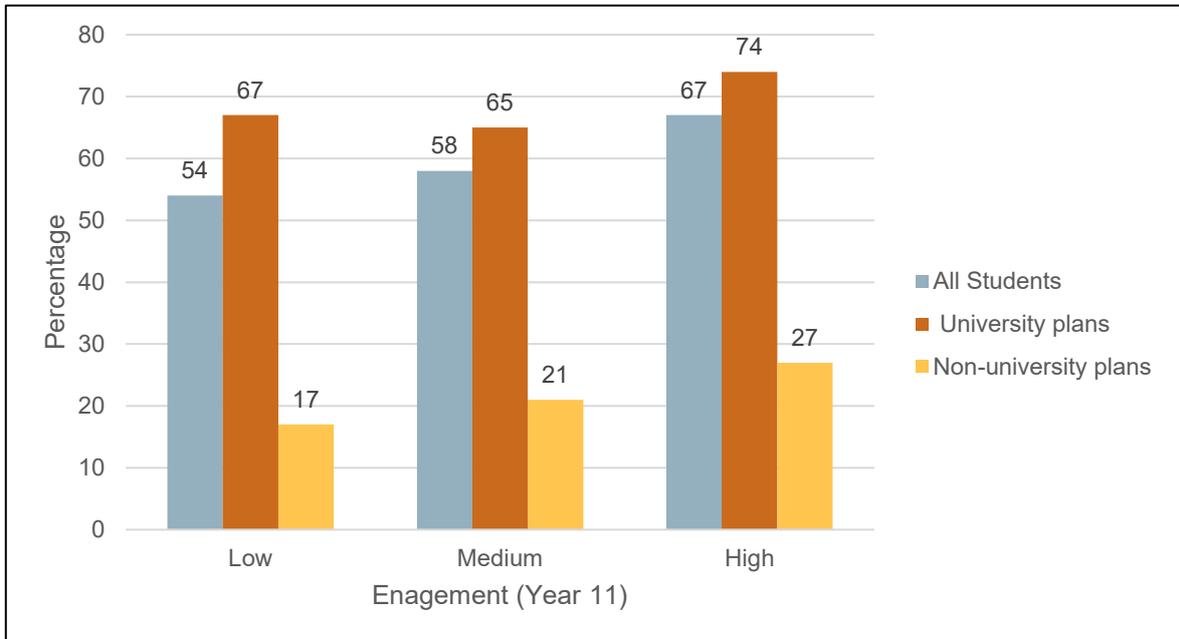
Student engagement and applying for early offers

One potential concern that has been raised by schools has been that students who secure an early offer no longer try as hard as previously. While the timing of the GENERATION survey means that we can't directly test this hypothesis (students were surveyed prior to getting offers), we did test whether levels of student engagement in Year 11 was associated with planning or applying for an early offer. The other advantage of using student engagement at Year 11 is that we do not confound the application decision with student's current level of engagement at school. We used the three-item scale "Active Learning and Academic Challenge" from Wave 2 of the GENERATION Survey (2023) to determine *low engagement* (bottom third of students), *medium engagement* (middle third of students) and *high engagement* (top third of students) in the year prior to applying for an early offer. Students who were highly engaged were those who reported asking questions, contributed to class discussion, worked with other students during class, and worked harder than they thought they could to meet teacher expectations.

Figure 9 shows that 74% of highly engaged, university-aspiring, students reported planning to apply for an early offer. Generally, proportions of students planning to apply for an early offer was higher with higher levels of student engagement which is not that consistent with the view that students are choosing to

apply for an early offer so that they can disengage from school. This trend can be seen across all students, students with university plans, and students with non-university plans. While early offer applications were still common in the low engagement group, they were far more common those with high levels of engagement.

Figure 9- Percentage of Students Planning an Early Offer Application, by Engagement and Post-School Plans



Source: Generation Survey Wave 3, weights applied.

The quantitative findings from GENERATION were consistent with the qualitative findings, with the impression that highly engaged students were looking to capitalise on their strong Year 11 results and being motivated by reducing stress and backup:

“My year 11 results were quite high and having the backup of early entry.” Male, independent school, NSW

“I received good results in year 11 so i am applying for early offer to reduce the stress i may face during the hsc exams.” Female, Independent school, NSW

“They take year 11 results. Because I moved schools, year 11 won’t count to my ATAR but I still wanted to use my good results.” Female, government school, ACT

Which Universities were Students Applying to?

Students who were planning to apply for an early offer were asked which universities they were planning on applying to (up to three). The most preferred universities by students in GENERATION (in 2024) are summarised by state in Table 3.

Table 3- Top University Preferences by State

State	Top 5 Universities (by State)	Notes
New South Wales	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. University of Sydney 2. University of New South Wales 3. University of Technology Sydney 4. Macquarie University 5. Western Sydney University 	The University of Sydney did not have an early offer program.
Australian Capital Territory	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Australian National University 2. University of Canberra 3. The University of Sydney 4. Australian Catholic University 5. University of New South Wales 	ANU and the University of Canberra both had early offer programs, but the University of Sydney did not.
Western Australia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Curtin University 2. University of Western Australia 3. University of Notre Dame 4. Murdoch University 5. Edith Cowan University 	All Top 5 Universities had an early offer program.
Tasmania	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. University of Tasmania 2. Other 3. University Outside Australia 4. University of Melbourne 5. Monash University 	The University of Tasmania had an early offer scheme. A large proportion of students from Tasmania plan to attend university out of state, mostly to either outside Australia or to Victoria.
Victoria	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Monash University 2. The University of Melbourne 3. RMIT University 4. Deakin University 5. Other 	The top two most popular universities in Victoria did not have an early offer program.
Queensland	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The University of Queensland (UQ) 2. Griffith University 3. Queensland University of Technology 4. James Cook University 5. CQ University 	The University of Queensland did not have an early offer scheme, but the remaining universities do.
South Australia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The University of Adelaide 2. Flinders University 3. University of South Australia 4. University Outside Australia 5. University of New South Wales 	The top three universities in South Australia did not have an early offer program.

Source: Generation Survey Wave 3, weights applied, multiple responses allowed.

Several universities were selected by students even when they did not have an early offer program. For example, The University of Sydney, Monash University, The University of Queensland, and the University of Adelaide were the most popular universities in their respective states, but did not have an early offer program in 2024. This could indicate that some students were unaware which universities had early offer pathways at the time the GENERATION Survey was administered (Term 2, 2024). As highlighted in the reasons students gave for applying for an early offer below, some students were unaware that universities in the Group of Eight did not have an early offer scheme:

“These Universities are the top in Australia for the fields I want to get into, Melbourne and Monash are the top schools in medicine and Deakin also has a good pathway into medicine. I chose Deakin as well as they are one of the top schools in Australia for Sport and Exercise Science, which will help give me a start into Sport Medicine, the medical speciality I want to do alongside orthopaedic surgery.” Male, independent school, VIC

"Its my ideal university (monash) as its the only one that allows direct entry to undergraduate medicine and then melbourne uni seems really good and im not sure about the last option." Female, government school, VIC

However, some students were aware of which universities had early offer admission schemes and were applying for other universities to ensure they had an option to fall back on. These students spoke about how their first preference course or even university of choice was not included in an early offer scheme.

"I can't use early entry for the university I want but it's good to have a safety net." Female, government school, NSW

"It gives me a fall back option, whilst some of the most prestigious universities don't offer early entry there are still some very good ones that do and it allows me to have an option to turn to if my HSC goes wrong." Male, independent school, NSW

Conclusion

This report summarises the findings of Year 12 students' intentions to apply for an undergraduate university place through the Early Offer Scheme, using a representative sample of students in the GENERATION longitudinal study.

Applying to university through an early offers scheme is a popular option for many Year 12 students; almost fifty per cent of participants in Wave 3 of the GENERATION study planned to or had already applied for an early offer when surveyed in May-July of 2024. The proportion of students applying were highest in NSW and the ACT, where applications are centralised through the TAC. Females, students in Independent schools, and students of non-English speaking backgrounds had higher rates of planning to apply for an early offer. Students reported that common reasons for applying for an early offer to university were securing an early place, relieving the stress and pressure of their studies and final-year exams, or having a fall-back option or a plan B if they did not get into their preferred course. Students stated that applying for university through an early offer scheme allowed them to focus more on their studies rather than stressing over university plans. Students in Year 12 report high levels of distress, and so the early offers scheme could be one way to reduce their stress levels.

As the data presented in this report was collected before most early offer schemes were open for applications and before any offers were actually made to students, we cannot determine the impact on students' performance after receiving an offer. However, while there are concerns that receiving an early offer to university may negatively impact students' effort and motivation during their final year, we find limited evidence that students applying for the early offers scheme intend to put in less effort to their studies. The fourth wave of the GENERATION study (scheduled to be conducted in September – November 2025) plans to capture further student experiences of the early offers scheme and will provide further insight into the impact of the scheme on students' motivation and educational outcomes. The fourth wave of the GENERATION study (scheduled to be conducted in September – November 2025) plans to capture additional student experiences of the early offers scheme and will provide further insight into the impact of the scheme on students' motivation and educational outcomes.

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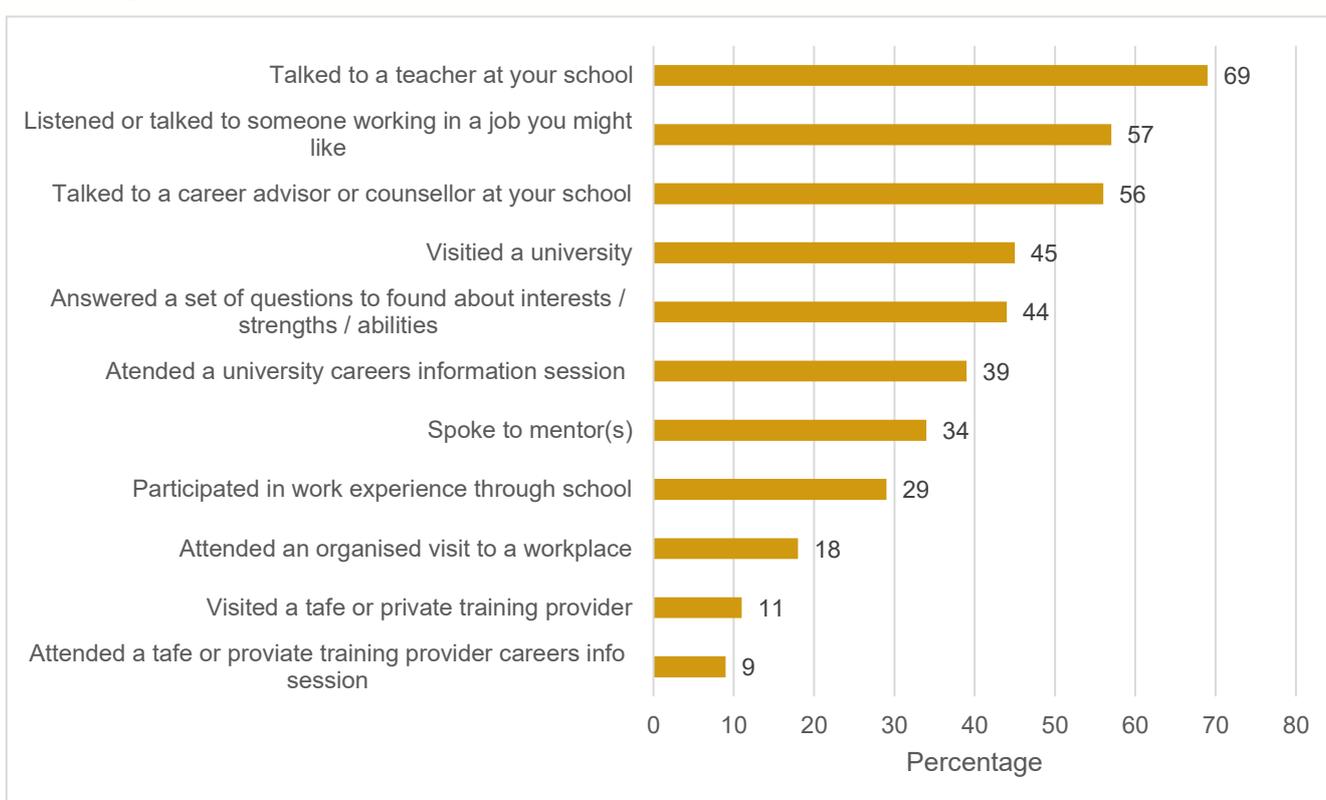
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Appendix A – Careers advice in Australian schools

Students' career planning (including university applications via early offer schemes) may in part depend on students' access to careers information. In Wave 3 of GENERATION, students were asked which 2024 career activities they had participated in to help make decisions about their future (see Figure A).

The most popular career activity was talking to a teacher at their school (69%). Less often, students reported talking to a school-based careers counsellor or career advisor (59%). Visiting a university (45%) or attending university career sessions (39%) were more common than visiting a TAFE (11%) or attending a TAFE career session (9%). Some students reported listening to or talking to someone with a job they might like (57%) or spoke with a mentor (34%).

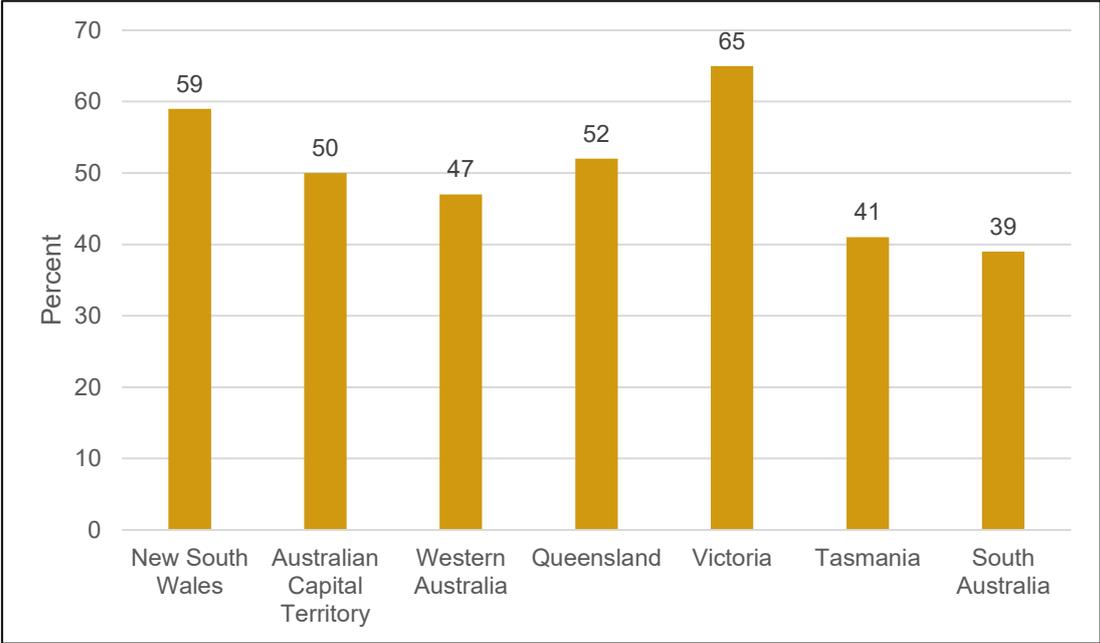
Figure A.1 - Careers Activities Students Reported Participating



Source: Generation Survey Wave 3, weights applied.

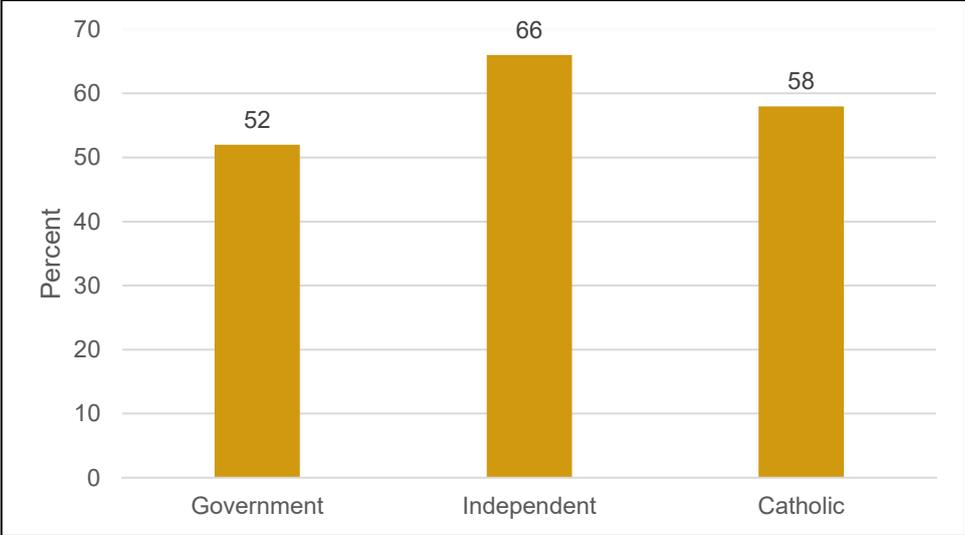
Some students may have different access or opportunity to receive careers advice, due to school differences. The percentage of students who reported speaking to a school-based career counsellor or advisors is shown by state and school sector in Figure B and C. The percentage of students who had talked to a careers advisor at their school differed between state. 65% of students in Victoria reported talking to a career's advisor, compared to 41% of students in Tasmania and 39% of students in South Australia. There were also different percentages between school sector: 66% of students in an independent school reported that they had spoken to a school-based careers' advisors, compared to 52% of students in government schools.

Figure A.2- Percentage of students who talked to a school career advisor by state



Source: Generation Survey Wave 3, weights applied.

Figure A.3- Percentage of students who talked to a school career advisor by sector



Source: Generation Survey Wave 3, weights applied.

Appendix B – Qualitative breakdown

Table B.1- Summary of key qualitative themes by gender, sector and state

	Reasons for applying		
	Strategic planning	Stress-relief	Backup
Gender			
Male	61%	23%	19%
Female	52%	35%	22%
Non-binary	41%	35%	28%
Sector			
Independent	53%	29%	22%
Government	58%	32%	19%
Catholic	55%	35%	17%
State			
NSW	49%	45%	25%
VIC	57%	23%	21%
QLD	61%	23%	10%
SA	67%	6%	15%
WA	59%	26%	20%
TAS	49%	31%	20%
ACT	56%	36%	23%