2017 Student Experience Survey

Methodological Report

August 2018

Social Research Centre

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Contents

List of tables

List of abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AGS	Australian Graduate Survey
AMSRS	Australian Market and Social Research Society
CATI	Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing
CEQ	Course Experience Questionnaire
EFTSL	Equivalent Full-Time Student Load
HEIMS	Higher Education Information Management System
HESA	Higher Education Support Act
ISO	International Standards Organisation
NUHEI	Non-University Higher Education Institution
QILT	Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching
SES	Student Experience Survey
SEQ	Student Experience Questionnaire
UA	Universities Australia
UEQ	University Experience Questionnaire
UES	University Experience Survey
WRS	Workplace Relevance Scale

1. Introduction

1.1. About this report

This report documents the methodological aspects of the 2017 Student Experience Survey (SES), conducted on behalf of the Australian Government Department of Education and Training (the department). The methodological review seeks to provide:

- a detailed record of the survey approach and procedures
- comments and analysis on the functioning of the survey approach and procedures
- a description and commentary of changes made to the 2017 questionnaire
- analysis of non-response and issues relating to sample characteristics and utilisation
- a consolidation of project documentation and assorted reports generated throughout the survey period
- a consolidation of issues for consideration relating to the improvement of the questionnaire and refinement of the methodology for future surveys.

The appendices attached to this report contain core survey materials (including the questionnaire, invitation and reminder communications), in field reporting module examples, details of participating institutions and respondent characteristics.

1.2. Background

The SES was developed in 2015 as part of the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) survey program initiated by the department to consolidate the University Experience Survey (UES), Australian Graduate Survey (AGS) and employer surveys.

The UES was designed and developed in 2011 by a consortium commissioned by the then Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). Its primary purpose at that time was to measure the levels of engagement and satisfaction of first and final year undergraduate students at Australian universities. The instrument was further refined in 2012 by the same consortium to ensure that the University Experience Questionnaire (UEQ) was relevant to both policy and practice while providing useful data to inform student decision making and continuous improvement.

For 2013 and 2014, the Department re-engaged Graduate Careers Australia, in conjunction with the Social Research Centre to work with universities and key stakeholders to administer the UES. In 2015 the UES was replaced by the SES in order to accommodate the inclusion of Non-University Higher Education Institutions (NUHEIs) under the QILT program administered by the Social Research Centre. The 2015 and 2016 SES built upon the foundation of the 2014 UES and showed a marked increase in response rates from 30.1 per cent in 2014 to 38.4 per cent in 2015 to 45.6 per cent in 2016.

The administration of the 2017 SES continued upon this strong foundation, while still providing robust and timely survey data and reports appropriate for use by the department and participating higher education providers.

Postgraduate coursework students were included for the first time in the 2017 SES.

1.3. Objectives

The broad aim of the SES is to provide a national framework for collecting feedback on the higher education student experience.

The SES focuses on aspects of the student experience that are measurable, linked with learning and development outcomes, and potentially able to be influenced by institutions.

The information collected helps both higher education institutions and the government improve teaching and learning outcomes, and provides the source data for the QILT website.

The QILT website informs the choices of prospective students by facilitating the comparison of official study experience and outcomes data from Australian higher education institutions at the study area (21) within institution level.

1.4. Overview

As can be seen at Table 1, a total of 99 higher education institutions covered under the Higher Education Support Act (HESA) participated in the 2017 SES, including all 41 universities and 58 NUHEIs (up from 55 NUHEIs in the 2016 SES).

Non-HESA institutions were able to participate in the 2017 SES for benchmarking and continuous improvement purposes, however, for consistency with the *2017 SES National Report*, they are excluded from all data presented in this report.

A total of 594,989 commencing and final years undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students were approached for the 2017 SES, with 568,976 identified as in-scope.

A total of 206,121 online surveys were completed across the main (August – September 2017) and secondary (September – October 2017) collections, giving a total overall response rate of 36.2 per cent.

The analytic unit for the SES is the course, rather than the student, so after adjusting for e.g. students completing double degrees, a total of 218,569 surveys were completed at the course level.

Table 1 2017 SES overview

Project element	Universites		NUHEIs		Higher Education Institutions		Project total
	Under-graduate	Post-graduate course-work	Under-graduate	Post-graduate course-work	Under-graduate	Post-graduate course-work	
Number of participating institutions	41		58		99		99
Number of students approached	382,680	163,559	32,758	15,992	415,438	179,551	594,989
Number of 'in scope' students	367,617	155,214	31,255	14,890	398,872	170,104	568,976
Data collection period	Aug - Oct 2017						
Primary data collection mode	Online						
Overall response rate	37.0	34.1	38.2	34.2	37.1	34.1	36.2
Number of completed surveys (students)	136,172	52,910	11,954	5,085	148,126	57,995	206,121
Number of completed surveys (course)	148,290	53,115	12,079	5,085	160,369	58,200	218,569
Analytic unit	Course						

Refer to Appendix 1 for summary project statistics over time.

1.5. Project milestones

Table 2 provides a summary of key data collection milestones.

As for previous iterations of the SES, there was the main August collection, with a secondary collection in September which lagged the main collection by approximately five weeks.

The secondary collection was created to accommodate three institutions with a significant break in their academic calendar during August.

For methodological reporting purposes, the outcomes from the August and September collection periods are combined.

Table 2 Key data collection milestones

Schedule milestone	August collection
Online survey accessible via 'authentication'	2 August
NUHEI soft online launch	3 August
Additional populations launch	4 August
Postgraduate coursework launch	5 August
Undergraduate launch	6 August
Email reminder strategy commences	8 August
Courtesy telephone calls commence	11 August
In field telephone reminders commence	16 August
In field telephone reminders close	31 August
Main online survey period ends	6 September
Post field telephone non-response activities commence	5 September
Post field telephone non-response activities close	19 September
Online survey closes	22 September

The launch of the 2017 SES was delayed by almost one week, due to unavoidable issues relating to IT security and the finalisation of QILT 2017-20 contract arrangements.

The lack of certainty related to the launch date impacted the ability of many institutions to deploy effective response maximisation strategies, as they had in previous iterations of the SES. This, in combination with several other factors discussed in more detail in Section 7.1, is thought to have reduced the effectiveness of response maximisation strategies for the 2017 SES.

2. Sample design

2.1. Target population definition

The target population for the SES comprises commencing and later years onshore undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students enrolled in Australian institutions.

Commencing and later years students are identified as follows:

2.1.1. Commencing students

Commencing students are first year university students who:

- are enrolled in an undergraduate or postgraduate coursework course
- are studying onshore
- commenced study in the reference year
- have been enrolled for at least one semester.

Commencing students can readily be identified from the sampling frame.

2.1.2. Later years students

Conceptually, later year students are enrolled in an undergraduate or postgraduate coursework course, studying onshore, and about to complete their studies. There is no indicator in the sampling frame which can be used to definitively identify students who are about to complete their studies.

In principle, student progression can be estimated by calculating the ratio of '*EFTSL* (Equivalent Full-Time Student Load) completed successfully' (E355) and 'currently in progress' (E339) to the total EFTSL for the course (E350).

In practice, identifying student progression using 'EFTSL completed successfully' is challenging, particularly for part time and external students, students taking a leave or absence, students transferring from one course to another, and students whose initial enrolment may have extended back by up to ten years. It can also be unclear what a student intends to do in future study periods, including Semester 2 or summer term.

For the purpose of identifying the SES target population, a full-time student in a three-year course is defined as 'later years' if their cumulative EFTSL is 83 per cent of the total EFTSL for the course. A part-time student is defined as 'later years' if their estimated cumulative load is 92 per cent of the total for the course.

Students in longer or shorter courses require correspondingly lower or higher ratios, and specific adjustments are also required to accommodate the idiosyncrasies of a small number of universities with less typical course structures.

2.2. Institutional participation

All 41 Australian universities participated in the 2017 SES, as well as 58 NUHEIs. Refer to Appendix 5 for a list of participating institutions.

2.3. Sample process overview

The sampling process for the SES is summarised as follows:

1. The Social Research Centre creates a student population file from the Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS) Submission 1 file for HEIMS reporting institutions, and from template-derived student data for non-HEIMS reporting institutions.
2. The Social Research Centre flags the records in the population file which meet the agreed definitions of 'commencing' and 'later years' students, applies exclusion rules, and creates a population file for each institution for institutional verification.
3. Institutions append student contact details to the population file, inspect the file for correctness (e.g. flag students who are not currently enrolled, so that they can be excluded from the SES, add students who were inadvertently omitted from the HEIMS Submission 1 file provided by the institution to the department), and return the population file to the Social Research Centre for final processing.
4. The Social Research Centre reviews and verifies the population file.
5. The Social Research Centre sets targets for completed surveys at the 45 study area within institution level, and determines the number of selections by stratum, in accordance with a sample design agreed in consultation with the department.
6. Institutions identify the 'additional populations', such as 'middle years' students, that they would like to include in the SES on a fee-for-service basis. Students meeting the additional population definition are selected and flagged in the population file, as required.

Each of these stages is briefly discussed in the following sections.

2.4. Population file creation

For institutions submitting to HEIMS, the sampling frame for the SES is the national HEIMS Submission 1 student file, covering students enrolled between 1 January and 31 March 2017. The variables to extract from HEIMS and provide to the Social Research Centre were agreed in consultation with the department, and included student background variables and course-related elements (refer to Appendix 2, Table 3.1 for details).

For the small number of non-university providers which do not submit to HEIMS, a sampling frame for the 2017 SES was created to the same parameters as HEIMS reporting institutions. Non-university providers not submitting to HEIMS populated a template provided by the Social Research Centre, comprising 61 variables (refer to Appendix 2, Table 3.1 for details), from information held in their local student administrative systems.

Student data from HEIMS and template derived student data, taken together, comprised the population frame for the 2017 SES.

2.5. Population file initial processing

2.5.1. Derivations

A number of variables were derived and appended to the population file to assist with analysis and the identification of the target population, including:

- age (E913) - calculated at 31 December in the year prior to the reference year
- concurrent/major course indicator (E331) - flags 'the major course' in which students were enrolled for inclusion in the survey
- cumulative Equivalent Full Time Student Load (E931)
- groups excluded from the SES sample frame (Exclusions) - refer to discussion below
- extra quota group flag (*ExtraQuota)* – identifies additional populations for inclusion in the SES on a fee-for-service basis, along with the extra quota group description (*ExtraQuotaDesc*)
- commencing and final year student flag (Stage) - undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students meeting the agreed 'commencing' and 'later years' definitions
- sample frame categories (Strata)
- 45 study areas derived from E461 (Area1) and E462 (Area2).

2.5.2. Sample exclusions

Unless specifically identified for inclusion in the SES as an 'additional population' (refer to Section 2.8), students were flagged for exclusion if they were:

- students in postgraduate research (E310=1, 2 or 3)
- students in non-award courses (E310= 30, 41, 42 or 50)
- undergraduate offshore international students (E358=5)
- students in the middle of their courses (i.e. not 'commencing' or 'later years')
- students with a concurrent enrolment (E331=3)
- part of a stratum in which six or fewer students were enrolled.

Sample exclusions for NUHEIs closely matched the procedures for universities with the exception of the inclusion of middle years students in the 'later years' student definition, and the size of the strata included in the sample frame. In consultation with the department, NUHEI strata with six or less students were included in the SES due to the smaller overall number of students enrolled at these institutions.

2.6. Institutional verification process

Following the application of exclusion rules, a population file for each institution was created for review, verification and the appending of student contact details by the institution.

Institutions were asked to 'inspect the sample data file for correctness' as the HEIMS Submission 1 file, unlike HEIMS Submission 2, is not formally verified and may contain errors and omissions related to e.g. mid-year intakes, early attrition, mid-year completions and commencing students transferring from one course to another at the end of Semester 1.

As such, Survey managers were requested to:

- update student background information that was misreported in Submission 1 for the following data elements: E315, E316, E327, E348, E358, E386 or E913 (optional)
- not append mid-year intakes to the data file as these students would be excluded from the SES because they had not been enrolled at the institution for at least one semester
- not update the file for the small number of commencing students that managed to affect a mid-year transfer in their first year of study, as current course of enrolment was confirmed in the survey.

In addition, Survey managers were also asked to append the following information to the sample files:

- the current enrolment status details for each student (enrolled, withdrew, graduated, deferred or leave of absence, excluded from the survey for other reasons determined by the institution)
- the student's institutional email address, and personal email address (if available)
- the student's mobile phone number and landline number (if available), used for SMS and telephone non-response follow up activity, as required
- the student's mailing address, where the state code was used to ensure telephone non-response follow up activity was undertaken at an appropriate time of day.

On receipt of verified population files from institutions, proposed exclusions and other changes made by the institution were reviewed, and the files consolidated into the master population file. As for previous implementations, there was no evidence to suggest that institutions flagged records for exclusion inappropriately.

2.7. Sample design

2.7.1. Stratum parameters

Strata for the SES are defined on the basis of institution, study area, student type (undergraduate / postgraduate coursework) and stage of studies (commencing / completing).

Whilst the QILT website reports SES results based on institution, student type (undergraduate / postgraduate coursework) and 21 study areas to maximise institution level reportability, the SES sample design is based on 45 study areas. This design seeks to maximise representativeness within the 21 study areas reported on the QILT website, and facilitate more nuanced analysis, and more detailed reporting, where required.

The fields of education (E461) within each of the 45 and 21 study areas are listed at Appendix 3. The supplementary FOE code (E462) was used to assign courses undertaken by students in combined/double degrees to a second study area variable.

Students in combined/double degrees were allocated to the study area stratum with the fewest students. For example, a student in an Arts/Law course was typically allocated to a Law rather than an Arts stratum. Students still answered the SES for both degrees but for the purpose of initial stratum allocation, and progress reporting, they counted towards Law.

2.7.2. Setting stratum targets

Target achieved sample sizes were calculated at the stratum level taking into account the number of records available and the goal of reporting stratum-level results at a level of precision of ±7.5 percentage points at a 90 per cent level of confidence.

Refer to Appendix 4 for details of the method used to derive the target number of completed surveys by stratum for the 2017 SES.

When this information was overlaid with historical response rates, it was apparent that, for many strata, the response rate target would be aspirational.

Table 3 shows the number and proportion of strata in each target response rate band for university and NUHEI undergraduates and postgraduates. As can be seen, at the ±7.5% level, less than half (46.5 per cent) of the University undergraduate strata have an 'achievable' response rate, where for the purpose of this table 'achievable' is regarded as a response rate of less than 50 per cent.

Table 3 Strata count by target response rate category (±7.5% precision)

	University				NUHEI			
	Under-graduates		Postgraduate coursework		Under-graduates		Postgraduate coursework	
Response rate category	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
100%	38	3.6	66	7.8	22	14.0	17	27.9
75% to 99%	198	18.9	306	36.3	70	44.6	23	37.7
50% to 74%	324	30.9	275	32.6	42	26.8	8	13.1
25% to 49%	324	30.9	154	18.3	16	10.2	8	13.1
Less than 25%	163	15.6	42	5.0	7	4.5	5	8.2
Total strata	**1,047**		**843**		**157**		**61**	
Net 'achievable' (<50%)	*487*	*46.5*	*196*	*23.3*	*23*	*14.6*	*13*	*21.3*

For University postgraduate coursework, NUHEI undergraduate and NUHEI postgraduate coursework strata, the proportion of strata with an 'achievable' response rate is 23.3, 14.6 and 21.3 per cent respectively. Overall, aspirational stratum level response rates were higher for NUHEIs, relative to universities.

2.7.3. Selections

As a result of the sample design, the SES was effectively a census of all commencing and later years students at all universities and NUHEIs, with the exception of the University of Melbourne and University of Western Australia, where 52.9 and 61.2 per cent of students were randomly sampled, respectively.

Where an institution required a sample of greater than 90 per cent of students, a census was undertaken in order to minimise complexity in the promotion and administration of the SES within institutions.

After sampling and verification procedures were concluded, the number of students approached for the 2017 SES was 594,989; comprising 546,239 university students (382,680 undergraduates and 163,559 postgraduate coursework students) and 48,750 NUHEI students (32,758 undergraduates and 15,992 postgraduate coursework students).

2.7.4. Institution level targets

Appendix 5 shows that target response rates for the 2017 SES differed greatly by individual university, from a low of 19.5 per cent to a high of 67.8 per cent. Response rate targets are aspirational, and designed to shift institutions towards maximum reportability and representativeness. Response rate targets as presented to institutions are based on an expected proportion for the target variable of 50 per cent, a level of confidence of 90 per cent and a margin of error of 5 per cent (that is, a higher level of precision than is required for stratum-level reporting of results).

Table 4 shows the required response rate by stratum for a large institution. This institution has a large number of students but a comparatively small number of study areas. As a result, the overall required response rate is low at 21.8 per cent but the stratum level target response rate varies widely from 91.4 per cent to 14.4 per cent.

This institution could easily reach an overall response rate of 21.8 per cent but could fail to meet targets for each stratum unless this was closely monitored. Given that response rates above 50 per cent are highly unlikely at an individual stratum level, even institutions appearing to have an 'easy' required response rate may still fail to meet reporting thresholds for individual study areas.

Table 4 Response rate targets for an institution with high student numbers and few study areas

Stratum	Corresponding Study Area	Sample	Target	Required response rate (%)
1	Natural & Physical Sciences	1,613	232	14.4
3	Biological Sciences	210	119	56.7
4	Medical Science & Technology	971	212	21.8
14	Agriculture & Forestry	289	140	48.4
15	Environmental Studies	1,140	219	19.2
21	Dentistry	35	32	91.4
29	Business Management	1,570	231	14.7
31	Management & Commerce - Other	32	29	90.6
34	Humanities incl. History & Geography	1,544	231	15.0
42	Art & Design	241	128	53.1
43	Music & Performing Arts	614	189	30.8
44	Communication, Media & Journalism	65	53	81.5
	Total	**8,324**	**1,815**	**21.8**

Table 5 on the next page provides an example of an institution with challenging response rate targets. This institution has a comparatively small number of enrolled students but has a broad course offering across a number of study areas. Targets range from a low of 23.8 per cent to a high of 100 per cent with an overall required response rate of 45.7 per cent. Institutions showing this pattern of response rate targets were typically in regional areas where a variety of courses are offered.

Table 5 Response rate targets for an institution with low student numbers and many study areas

Stratum	Corresponding Study Area	Sample	Target	Required response rate (%)
3	Biological Sciences	39	35	89.7
4	Medical Sciences & Technology	104	76	73.1
16	Health Services & Support	135	91	67.4
17	Public Health	13	13	100.0
18	Medicine	421	165	39.2
19	Nursing	869	207	23.8
23	Physiotherapy	134	90	67.2
25	Teacher Education	134	90	67.2
26	Teacher Education - Early Childhood	226	124	54.9
27	Teacher Education - Primary & Secondary	506	177	35.0
28	Accounting	307	145	47.2
29	Business Management	21	20	95.2
30	Sales & Marketing	102	75	73.5
31	Management & Commerce	19	18	94.7
33	Political Science	11	11	100.0
34	Humanities, History & Geography	462	171	37.0
36	Social Work	29	27	93.1
37	Psychology	66	54	81.8
38	Law	247	130	52.6
41	Sport & Recreation	17	17	100.0
44	Communication, Media & Journalism	140	93	66.4
	Total	**4,002**	**1,829**	**45.7**

2.8. Additional populations

Institutions were provided with the opportunity to include additional populations in the SES on a fee-for-service basis. In 2017, 12 institutions chose to survey additional populations, including postgraduate research, middle-year, offshore and enabling students.

Responses from students in these populations were not included in the *SES National Report* and do not appear in any results presented in this report.

3. Survey procedures

3.1. Institutional engagement

3.1.1. Invitation to participate

An email seeking consent to participate was sent to the primary contact at each institution during the early stages of preparations for the 2017 SES. Institutions confirmed participation via a webform in Vision 6.

All correspondence with institutions provided the QILT email address and phone number and invited institutional stakeholders to contact the QILT team with queries.

3.1.2. Institution Administration Guide

A detailed Institution Administration Guide was provided to participating institutions to assist in preparations for and deployment of the 2017 SES. The guide included detailed instructions for sample preparation, as well as materials and instructions to support the student engagement campaign (refer to Section 3.2).

Refer to Appendix 2 for a copy of the 2017 SES Institution Administration Guide.

3.1.3. Webinar

The QILT webinar series is used to provide the sector and interested parties with up to date information about QILT surveys.

A webinar focussing on preparations and engagement activities for the upcoming SES would typically have been in held in June / July 2017, however, due to uncertainties relating to contract arrangements (refer also Section 8.1), no such webinar took place.

An SES-focussed webinar was held, however, towards the end of the 2017 SES data collection period, providing an update on overall collection status and identifying activities for the balance of the data collection period. The webinar also showcased analysis which focused on the experience of commencing and completing students based on 2016 SES data.

3.2. Student engagement

A range of promotional materials were disseminated to participating institutions to help build SES awareness and encourage student participation.

There were two main phases of student engagement, with institutional activities by phase summarised at Table 6.

The first phase, awareness, involved an awareness building campaign focussing on pre-survey engagement, to ensure that students were aware of the survey in advance of fieldwork commencement.

The second phase, open, was a campaign initiated after fieldwork commenced and centred on encouraging students to complete the survey.

Table 6 Student engagement campaign

Phase	Activity
Awareness campaign	• Send a paper copy letter to sampled students to raise awareness and build survey bona fides. • Create a web presence for SES on institutional website under 'current surveys' or similar. • Send an email from the Vice Chancellor to students advising of the SES. • Use the institution's social media platforms to promote the survey (e.g., Facebook, Twitter). • Send an email from the Vice Chancellor or Faculty Head to teaching staff advising of the SES, include the in-class PowerPoint slide. • Place posters (paper or electronic billboard) around the campus for the duration of the fieldwork period. • Upload online posters to your institution's intranet for the duration of the fieldwork period. • Advertise the SES in student newsletters (or similar). • Post an announcement on the institutional learning management system, advising of the SES. • Ensure whitelisting strategies are in place.
Open campaign	• Use the institution's social media platforms to promote the survey (e.g., Facebook, Twitter). • Post an announcement on the student learning management system (e.g., Blackboard), with personalised links to complete the survey • Send an email from the Vice Chancellor or Faculty Head to teaching staff advising of the SES, include the in-class PowerPoint slide. • Ask lecturers to mention the SES at the end of lectures and include the provided slide at the end of the lecture promoting the SES, reminding students of the incentives.

The most commonly used institutional activities were an email from the Vice Chancellor or faculty heads, social media posts, institutional web presence, on-campus posters, notifications on internal learning management systems and internal staff emails.

3.3. Contact protocol

The contact protocol for the 2017 SES incorporated:

- an initial invitation to sampled students by email
- a series of up to eight reminder emails (with 'standard' and 'partial completes' variants)
- a Short Message Service (SMS) reminder to selected non-respondents, with a direct link to the survey
- in field telephone reminder calls for selected non-respondents
- post field telephone reminder calls on a fee-for-service basis.

Response maximisation was supported by the QILT helpdesk, which offered a freecall 1800 number and a dedicated electronic mailbox, and the use of a weekly rolling incentive program.

3.3.1. Email invitation and reminders

The email invitation and email reminders contained information about the SES, prize draws details, SES helpdesk contact information, and a personalised link that took students directly into their survey, bypassing the need to login.

The emails were SES-branded, html-enabled and also included manual login details. Students were able to unsubscribe by clicking a link in the footer of the email. Those who had already completed their survey, opted out of the survey or were disqualified from participating, were excluded from each successive round of email reminder activity.

One email invitation and eight email reminders were sent to undergraduates over the course of main online survey period, with a reminder email sent every three to four days, as summarised at Table 7.

Table 7 also shows the open rate ('Opened %'), comprising students who opened the email and clicked on the survey link, students who opened the email and opted out, and students who opened the email and took no further action, as well as students clicking the survey link as a proportion of those opening the email. As could be expected, both the open rate and the 'clicked link' rate fell away across the last rounds of email reminder activity.

Table 7 Email send date and outcome summary (August collection)

Email event (under-graduates)	Date	Sent n	Bounced %	Opened %	*Opened, clicked link %*	*Opened, opted out %*	*Opened, no action %*	Un-opened %	Clicked link as % opened
Invitation	3 to 6-Aug	594,745	0.2	42.6	*7.0*	*0.1*	*35.6*	57.2	16.3
Reminder 1	9-Aug	554,857	0.1	39.1	*4.3*	*0.1*	*34.8*	60.8	11.0
Reminder 2	12-Aug	522,894	0.2	39.0	*4.7*	*0.1*	*34.1*	60.8	12.1
Reminder 3	16-Aug	499,268	0.8	49.0	*5.8*	*0.3*	*43.0*	50.2	11.8
Reminder 4	19-Aug	472,806	0.1	45.7	*4.9*	*0.4*	*40.4*	54.2	10.8
Reminder 5	23-Aug	451,600	0.1	47.2	*9.5*	*0.4*	*37.3*	52.7	20.0
Reminder 6	26-Aug	293,072	0.1	39.6	*4.6*	*0.4*	*34.7*	60.4	11.6
Reminder 7	30-Aug	283,319	0.3	38.9	*3.8*	*0.3*	*34.8*	60.8	9.7
Reminder 8	2-Sep	298,077	0.1	36.2	*3.1*	*0.3*	*32.8*	63.7	8.5

Email reminders were sent less frequently for postgraduate coursework students, with a total of four email reminders sent (on 12, 20, 24 and 28 August).

The email invitation and reminder schedule for the September collection (not shown in Table 7) lagged the August collection by approximately five weeks.

The email send activity was designed to keep baseline survey completions (those completed in between reminders) as high as possible to maintain momentum throughout the data collection period and maximise participation.

All emails featured personalised text, a warm and friendly tone, and were as short and relevant as possible. Whilst all emails mentioned the prize draw, how long it would take to complete the survey, and confidentiality provisions, email content had different emphasis through the reminder program. For example, Reminder 3 acknowledged how busy sample members must be, Reminder 5 emphasised that the sample member was part of a select group, Reminder 6 incorporated humour, Reminder 7 emphasised that time was running out to provide feedback, and Reminder 8 messaging centred on a 'last chance' to provide feedback. For examples of email communications, refer to Appendix 6.

3.3.2. SMS reminders

SMS follow up was primarily sent to students in poorer performing study areas as a means of driving students to the online survey. It was timed to be close to an email reminder send (email reminder 5 in 2017) due to the limited information that can be conveyed within an SMS 160 character limit.

The SMS content directed the student to check their inbox for their login details and included a link to the SES website for easy access to the survey login page. Students were able to 'opt out' or unsubscribe via SMS reply.

Students who were sent an SMS were excluded from in field reminder calls for 48 hours.

3.3.3. Telephone non-response follow up activity

In field reminders

In field telephone reminder calls, targeting students in lower performing study areas and institutions, were undertaken from 16 to 31 August, as part of a 'push to web' response maximisation strategy. Calls were placed to students who had not completed or opted out of the online survey. Upon contact, updated email address details were collected by the interviewer, with a survey invitation emailed to the student the following day. If the student did not respond to the email invitation within a week, a reminder email was sent.

Where no contact was established as part of the in field telephone reminder phase, the student was included in the standard email reminder workflow, as described in Section 3.3.1.

For the 2017 SES, 'courtesy calls' were also conducted for selected students in the lowest performing study areas and institutions. The courtesy call phase was essentially conceived as an 'early intervention', which sought to commence the telephone non-response follow up process earlier in the online fieldwork period than for the 'standard' in field reminders. Courtesy calls were placed to a selection of non-respondents to the invitation and first reminder email, from 11 to 15 August. The courtesy call process was otherwise identical to the standard in field reminder call workflow.

Post field reminders

At the conclusion of the main online survey fieldwork period, institutions could choose to undertake post field reminder calls as a fee-for-service activity, with a view to 'topping up' the number of completed online surveys for internal reporting purposes.

The post field reminder call process was identical to in field reminder call process, with post field reminder calls conducted between 5 and 19 September.

Online surveys completed as a result of post field reminders were included in the *National Report*.

Full CATI

Full CATI refers to the completion of the SES by telephone, rather than online, as a fee-for-service activity for institutions seeking to boost the number of completed surveys for internal reporting purposes.

Given that the mode of completion (telephone interviewer-administered) is inconsistent with the main survey (online self-completion), surveys completed using a Full CATI approach are not included in the *National Report*, but are included in the files provided to the institution for internal reporting purposes.

The Full CATI survey script was based on the standard online survey, adapted for delivery by telephone with additional introductory scripts and interviewer notes.

Table 8 on the next page summarises telephone non-response follow up activity across the courtesy call, in field reminder, post field reminder and full CATI phases.

Table 8 Summary of telephone non-response follow up activity

	Phase			
	Courtesy call	In field reminder	Post field reminder	Full CATI
Phase parameters				
Fee for service activity	No	No	Yes	Yes
Start date	11-Aug-17	16-Aug-17	05-Sep-17	05-Sep-17
Finish date	15-Aug-17	31-Aug-17	19-Sep-17	19-Sep-17
Participating institutions	(all)	(all)	8	1
Call procedures				
Number of call attempts to establish contact	1 to 2	1 to 2	1 to 2	1 to 6
Use of alternative contact number (if available)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Call outcomes				
Sample initiated	24,535	213,060	74,720	733
Unusable sample	792	12,182	3,403	36
No contact	16,509	142,382	50,852	467
Collected email address	6,957	57,082	19,872	N/A
Other contacts	277	1,414	593	230
Survey completion outcomes				
Number of SES completed online	1,117	13,050	3,433	N/A
Number of SES completed by telephone	N/A	N/A	N/A	173
Completed surveys included in *National Report*	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Interviewer team briefing and quality control

All interviewers selected to work on the SES attended a comprehensive briefing session, delivered by the Social Research Centre project management team. Briefings were held on August 11 for the courtesy call / in field reminder phase and September 5 for the post field reminder / full CATI phase.

The briefing covered the following aspects:

- survey context and background
- survey procedures (sample management protocols, response rate maximisation procedures)
- privacy and confidentiality issues
- targeted refusal aversion techniques
- strategies to maintain co-operation
- comprehensive practice interviewing and role play.

The quality monitoring techniques applied to the telephone phases of the SES included:

- listening-in validations, conducted in accordance with ISO 20252 procedures
- field team de-briefing after the first shift, and thereafter, whenever there was important information to impart to the field team in relation to consistency of survey administration, data quality, or project performance
- maintenance of an ‘interviewer handout’ document addressing any respondent liaison or data quality issues, and
- monitoring (listening in) by the Social Research Centre project manager and supervisory staff.

3.3.4. Social media

The SES 2017 social media campaign was broad based, targeting higher education students in Australia who are currently studying, and aimed to build on the SES brand within the QILT survey suite.

The social media campaign ran from 7 August to 5 September and included paid and unpaid advertising streams. The paid advertising stream focused on click to website ads on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, and Facebook video view ads. The unpaid campaign consisted of the QILT Facebook page which hosted weekly prize winner announcements and posts reminding graduates to complete the survey.

The QILT Twitter account (@qilt_src) was maintained with tweets about the launch of the survey, and prize draw periods (see Appendix 7 for examples of social media content).

All social media materials were linked to the www.ses.edu.au landing page where students could login to the survey using their details from the email invitation or reminder emails.

Students unable to locate their login details could 'authenticate' (refer to the next section for more details).

3.4. Data collection

3.4.1. Online survey

The SES was fielded solely in online (web) mode. The online survey could be accessed by either clicking on the link in the email invitation or reminders, through the short link in the SMS, or via the SES landing page on the QILT website.

Additionally, students could access the online survey by clicking the *'I don't have SES login details'* link on the SES landing page, and following an 'authentication' process similar to retrieving a forgotten password. Authentication involved providing student ID, first name, and date of birth. If authentication details matched the sample frame details the student was asked to provide an email address, and an invitation to the survey was automatically sent to the student via the nominated email address. Authentication was first implemented in the 2015 SES to support survey access from social media and other institutional promotional activity.

Clicking the link in the email invitation, email reminder or SMS would go directly to the beginning of the survey. Accessing the landing page would take sample members to a login page to enter the username and password provided in invitation and reminder emails.

Online survey presentation was informed by Australian Bureau of Statistics standards, accessibility guidelines and other relevant resources, with standard features including:

- optimisation for small screen devices
- 'Next' and 'Previous' buttons
- input controls and internal logic checks
- use of a progress bar
- tailored error messages, as appropriate
- recording panels for free text responses commensurate with the level of detail required in the response
- 'saving' with progression to the next screen

- the capacity to save and return to finish off at another time, resuming at the last question completed.

Refer to appendices 8c and 8d for screenshots of the standard (desktop) and small screen optimised versions of the online survey respectively.

Look and feel

The survey look and feel was customised to be consistent QILT branding guidelines, including the use of the SES logo and the colour scheme. This ensured consistency with communications such as images included in email invitations and reminders, advertisements placed on Facebook and the QILT website.

Navigation buttons

Placement of the 'Previous' and 'Next' buttons and the colouring of the 'Next' button was informed by the research literature (Couper, Baker, and Mechling 2011; Romano Bergstrom, Lakhe, and Erdman 2016; Wroblewski 2009).

Optimisation for small screen devices

Sample members attempting to complete the online survey using a small screen device were identified by the data collection software, which used a JavaScript function that returned details from the sample member's browser, including browser name and version, device type, operating system and version. Mobile optimisation was triggered when the screen width is less than 768 pixels.

Several elements of the way the online survey presented were changed for users of small screen devices. Grid items were reconfigured to ensure that they were usable on a small screen device. The small screen optimised view ensured that response options on the right-hand side of the grid did not fall off-screen, potentially leading to response error (see Couper 2008:195-96). The items in the grid were instead presented one item at a time, with the response options listed vertically, and the sample member required to scroll down to view the next item in the grid, together with the response frame.

In addition to the treatment of grid items, the size and orientation of the navigation ('Previous' and 'Next') and 'Pause' buttons changed for small screen devices. The desktop layout placed the 'Previous' button on the bottom left corner, the 'Next' button on the bottom right corner and the 'Pause' button on the top right corner. The small screen layout stacked the buttons vertically at the bottom of the screen, with the 'Previous' button in the highest position, the 'Next' button in the middle and the 'Pause' button in the lowest position. The size of the navigation and 'Pause' buttons also increased in the mobile view.

Items not optimised for small screen devices

A number of items in the student support domain (*settle, effenrol, feel prep, induct*, plus *offsup* and *enlang*) were not fully optimised and continued to be presented on small screen devices in the legacy grid format.

The long list of reasons for seriously considering leaving was not optimised (shortened), and was presented in double column format with the sample member needing to scroll down to see all response options for this item.

Progress bar

The online survey includes a progress bar indicating how far the respondent has progressed. This appears as the orange coloured horizontal bar at the top of the screen in the screenshots at Appendices 8c and 8d.

Error messages

The following message was presented to sample members completing online who indicated that they are no longer enrolled at the named institution: *"Unfortunately you do not qualify to complete this survey. If you have any questions, please contact the Social Research Centre SES helpdesk on 1800 055 818 or via email at ses@srcentre.com.au."*

Saving responses

Responses to the survey were automatically saved each time the respondent clicked the Next button. The 'Pause' button also performs the function of allowing the respondent to save their answers on the screen.

These features enable respondents to complete the survey over multiple sessions, without the need to start over. Reminder emails to sample members who had not completed the survey noted that the survey could be re-started from the last question answered.

Testing

Following programming of the survey script, dummy data was generated to produce a mock data set and enable testing of all question bases and survey sequencing.

Institutions with additional institution specific items were sent a test link specific to the additional items as part of the final testing and client sign off process.

The SES was soft-launched with a sub-sample of the NUHEI population, and surveys completed on day of the soft launch were checked for correct base sizes to ensure sequencing was functioning as intended. No issues were identified, and the survey proceeded to full launch.

3.4.2. Quality assurance and applicable standards

The Social Research Centre is accredited under the ISO 20252 scheme (certification number MSR 20015, first issued by SAI Global, on 11 December 2007). All aspects of the SES were undertaken in accordance with the Australian Market and Social Research Society (AMSRS) code of practice, ISO 20252 standards, the Australian Privacy Principles and the Privacy (Market and Social Research) Code. All senior QILT staff are full members of the Australian Market and Social Research Society and the Social Research Centre is also a member of the Association of Market and Social Research Organisations (AMSRO). All sensitive or personally identifiable information such as sample and data were transferred using the QILT Secure File Exchange.

3.4.3. Progress reporting

Weekly update emails were sent to institutions outlining what percentage of the target had been achieved, and how their institution compared to the average per cent of target overall and their cohort average (University or NUHEI / undergraduate and postgraduate average).

The weekly update emails also contained suggested activities for the point in time in the data collection period to help increase response rates. For institutions with very low response rates, the QILT team contacted the institution directly to discuss response maximisation strategies.

3.4.4. Live online reporting module

Institutions were able to monitor their progress throughout the SES data collection period by accessing a real time online reporting module. Each institution was provided with a login which allowed survey managers to track response rates and instantly view their summary data, including:

- number of completed surveys
- number of partially completed surveys (i.e., 'in progress' or abandoned)
- number of opt out and out of scope students.

The standard reporting module also allowed survey managers to track responses across variables of interest, such as:

- stage of studies (commencing / completing)
- study area (45)
- gender (male / female)
- faculty and campus
- domestic / international students.

Institutions could also download the above data from the reporting module for their in-scope populations.

The reporting module enabled monitoring of progress towards the overall institutional target, and the early identification of poor-performing study areas. Survey managers were provided with aspirational targets at the study area level for their institution and were encouraged to monitor survey completion at this level, as opposed to simply monitoring response at the overall institution level.

Given the particularly high response rates required in a number of the smaller study areas in some institutions, survey managers were encouraged to increase engagement and survey promotion activity among students in smaller and/or potentially lower-performing study areas.

For study areas with particularly challenging targets, it was suggested that survey managers liaise with the relevant Heads of School or Faculty and request their support to help promote the SES, either through emailing students directly or promoting the survey in lectures and / or tutorials. The QILT team sent reminder emails tailored to study area or course where relevant.

3.4.5. Department progress reporting

The department was provided with weekly updates covering email reminder and other response maximisation activities, the progress of individual institutions, response by field of study, and progress with the survey overall.

The department was also provided with access to a bespoke 'live' online reporting module which provided an overview of participation rates for each institution and the national average for universities and NUHEIs, and for undergraduates and postgraduates.

Results were provided in real time and included progress against target at the study area within institution level, a comparison of the current with the final 2016 response rate and a count of opt outs and out of scopes for each institution. An example of the national reporting module is shown in Appendix 9.

3.5. Respondent support

The Social Research Centre established an SES 1800 helpdesk to provide students with a method to establish contact with the SES team other than email. The helpdesk number was also available to international students (with an international dialling code), and remained operational for the duration of the fieldwork period. The helpdesk was staffed during standard business hours, and all out of hours callers were routed to a voicemail service, with calls returned within 24 hours.

The SES helpdesk team were briefed on the SES background, procedures and questionnaire to enable them to answer a wide range of queries. To support the helpdesk, a database was made available to enable the team to reference caller information and survey links, as well as providing a method for logging all queries to the helpdesk.

As can be seen at Table 9, there were 1,748 helpdesk transactions in response to the email invitation and reminders in the main online fieldwork period. A further 1,817 helpdesk transactions were attributable to telephone response maximisation activities, with a majority (1,635) relating to the courtesy call phase.

Most helpdesk enquiries that were attributable to email invitation and reminder email activity during the main online fieldwork period related to support accessing the online survey (492), opt outs (327), sample members confirming they had already completed the survey (255) and general requests for survey information (224).

Table 9 Summary of helpdesk traffic by source and project phase

		Query source		Project phase		
	Total	Email	1800	Online	In field reminder	Courtesy call
Total	**3,565**	**1,605**	**1,960**	**1,748**	**182**	**1,635**
Completed courtesy / reminder call	1,237	9	1,228	30	114	1,093
Support accessing online survey	494	437	57	492	0	2
Call back request	452	1	451	9	42	401
Opt out	411	330	56	327	7	52
Already completed	271	246	25	255	4	12
General survey information request	235	189	46	224	3	8
Out of scope	227	177	50	163	9	55
Change of details	53	38	15	51	0	2
Legitimacy / privacy concern	21	15	6	20	0	1
Complaint (too many emails, etc.)	12	11	1	12	0	0
All other	177	152	25	165	3	9

During the courtesy call phase, the majority (1,093) of helpdesk transactions related to the completion of the courtesy call over the phone in response to the sample member's call.

Overall, there was a very small number of sample member complaints (12) about e.g. the number of email reminders received, and a small number of enquiries from sample members with legitimacy or privacy concerns (21).

Some 227 sample members were identified as out of scope as a result of their contact with the helpdesk.

All opt outs and out of scope sample members were excluded from subsequent reminder activity, in accordance with standard sample washing rules. Where sample members updated their contact details, the updated information was used for subsequent reminders.

Members of the QILT team were responsible for monitoring the SES inbox and responded as appropriate to queries and complaints. The helpdesk 1800 number and email were provided in all written communications to students.

3.6. Incentives

The rolling prize draw was designed to maximise early response by offering more chances to win the earlier the survey was completed (e.g. if the survey was completed by the end of the first prize draw then the student would be entered into all four draws).

There were four prize draws in total for the August round with three $1,000 prepaid Visa gift cards, five $500 prepaid Visa gift cards and ten $250 prepaid Visa gift cards (total $8,000) to be won each week. The total prize pool was valued at $32,000.

The September round used the same rolling prize draw, however there was one $250 prepaid Visa gift card to be won each week with a total prize pool of $1,000.

4. Questionnaire

4.1. Development

The instrument used to collect data for the SES, the Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ), focuses on aspects of the higher education experience that are measurable, linked to learning and development outcomes, and potentially able to be influenced by institutions.

The construct model underpinning the SES, as a conceptualisation of the student experience, is based on five conceptual domains including Teaching Quality, Learner Engagement, Student Support, Learning Resources, and Skills Development. These focus areas are operationalised by means of summated rating scales, underpinned by 46 individual questionnaire items.

The domain items are supplemented by two open-response items that allow students to provide textual feedback on the best aspects of their higher education experience and those most in need of improvement.

The SES also contains two additional sets of items, demographic and contextual, to facilitate data analysis and reporting.

Refer to Appendix 8a for an item summary by domain.

4.2. Structure

The 2017 SEQ featured seven modules:

- Module A – introduction and screening
- Module 2 – inclusion and learner engagement
- Module 3 – teaching and educational development
- Module 4 – support
- Module 1 – demographics
- Module 5 – institution specific items
- Module 6 – course experience (CEQ).

The CEQ facilitates international benchmarking and was presented to a sample of students of sufficient size to yield national level estimates that are precise to within +/- 2.2 percentage points of the true population value at a 95 per cent confidence level. The CEQ comprises the Good Teaching Scale, Generic Skills Scale, Clear Goals and Standards Scale, and the Overall Satisfaction item.

Refer to Appendix 8a for a CEQ item summary, and to the 2017 SES Data Dictionary for more detailed information about the modular structure of the questionnaire.

4.3. Changes for 2017

Apart from updating the reference period from 2016 to 2017, updating the response frame for time-specific items (such as *Yrenrol* and *Yrcomp*), and minor modifications to the introduction and screening module with a view to improving flow and data quality, there were no changes to the core SEQ for 2017.

4.4. Institution specific items

As has been the case since 2013, institutions were offered the option of including non-standard, institution-specific items as part of the 2017 SES.

In total, 26 institutions chose to include institution-specific items, up from 25 in the 2016 SES.

Frequent inclusions were the Workplace Relevance Scale (WRS), included by 13 institutions, and a Net Promoter Score item, included by four institutions.

Institution-specific items were only presented to students after they had completed the SEQ, resulting in a clear demarcation between the core and institution specific survey modules.

5. Data processing

5.1. Definition of the analytic unit

The analytic unit for the 2017 SES is the course, meaning that students in double degrees respond *separately* in relation to each degree, and as a result may appear more than once in the final data set.

The SEQ is defined as valid and complete if:

- the student has completed units in the course/program
- there is a minimum of one valid SEQ scale score
- in the case of double degrees for which the student has at least one valid SEQ scale score for each course/program, the courses/programs are in different study areas.

Where double degree students have completed units in both degree components and they are in the same study area, the first record is selected for analysis.

5.2. Data cleaning and preparation

5.2.1. Student level

Sample variables were first merged from the original population file for checking and to fill any sample data missing from the online collection platform as a result of students prematurely exiting the survey.

Records with newly entered course information were edited, and final course level, field of education, and study area information was derived from a master course list based on available course data for each institution. Where new course codes were added to the master course list, accompanying information was sourced from the survey manager for the relevant institution. The coding process is described in further detail in Section 5.3.

The in-scope status of the student, that is whether they were enrolled in a degree eligible for the SES, was then re-derived based on revised course level data. This process set out to ensure that students who had switched from an eligible undergraduate course to an ineligible course, such as a different undergraduate course where they had not yet completed units in the course, were excluded from the dataset.

All items in the body of the questionnaire were re-filtered to their respective bases to ensure there were no errant responses, and the appropriate missing data conventions (refer to the SES data dictionary) were applied.

After cleaning, normalised SEQ variables, SEQ scale variables, and consolidated demographic and analysis variables were derived as described in the SES data dictionary. In the case of double degrees, SEQ scale variables were derived separately for each course in the student level file.

5.2.2. Course level

After data was finalised, the student level responses were split to course level:

- where a student was enrolled in a single degree, the student level record became the course level record
- where a student was enrolled in a double degree and had completed units in only one course, the student level record became the course level record
- where a student was enrolled in a double degree (including two concurrent unrelated degrees) and had completed units in both courses, two course level records were created:
    - the student level record minus course specific items completed for the second degree
    - the student level record with course specific items completed for the first degree replaced with responses to course specific items completed for the second degree.

The variable 'ANALYSIS' was then created in the course record to flag those eligible for analysis, flagging records as either:

- a student complete – the first course in a double degree or the second course in a double degree where a complete SEQ exists only for the second course
- the second course in a double degree where the student has completed for both components of the double degree
- the second course in a double degree where the student has completed for both components of the double degree and both components of the double degree have the same study area
- incomplete – no valid SEQ scale scores for this course
- out of scope – the student is not currently enrolled or not in the first or last year of an undergraduate course.

The SES data dictionary lists the new or modified variables for the 2017 SES, including a number of socio-economic status and geographic / remoteness indicators.

5.3. Course coding

Revised course names entered by students in the survey were manually looked up against a master course list for the relevant institution. Where a course name matched multiple course codes the student was assigned to the course with the highest enrolment where no conflicts between the different courses existed.

Where an appropriate course code for the course name or double degree recorded by the student could not be found, queries were sent to the survey manager from the relevant institution. Course codes not appearing on the original master list were accompanied by field of education and course level information to facilitate the survey manager's process. Where the survey manager advised that a double degree as entered by a student did not exist, they were treated as two unrelated concurrent degrees, as described in Table 10. Of the responses requiring course coding, several broad categories of anomalous response requiring further editing were identified. The categories and resolutions are also described in Table 10.

Table 10 Resolution of coding anomalies

Response	Resolution
The student reported they were undertaking a double degree, but entered the same single course for both components of the degree.	The student is flagged as being enrolled in a single degree. Where responses are recorded for two course components, only responses for the first component are kept.
The student entered a course not offered by the institution.	The student is flagged as "Not Currently Attending" (*currenrol*=2) in the sample file, as they cannot be studying the given course at the relevant institution.
The student recorded two degrees that are offered as single degrees but not offered as a double degree by the institution.	Each course recorded by the student is treated as a separate single degree. Where the student indicated they had completed subjects in both degrees the student appears twice in the final course level analytic file (as they would for a double degree) but with two single degree records.
The student recorded the full title of a double degree in a field reserved for a single course.	Since it is not possible to determine which course component of the double degree the student is referring to in these cases, the student's response to the SES is considered invalid.
The student recorded an invalid course title.	Since it is not possible to determine the course the student is enrolled in, the student's response to the SES is considered invalid.

Overall, there were 16,523 instances of university students correcting their course details. Of these, 10,856 or just under two thirds (65.7 per cent) entered identical course details to those in the sample and were edited to "No change in qualifications" (*QUALCHGE=1*).

There were 2,035 instances of NUHEI students correcting their course details. Of these, 1,564, or just over three quarters (76.9 per cent) entered identical course details to those in the sample and were edited to "No change in qualifications" (*QUALCHGE=1*).

The final count of students changing course by institution, excluding those with no change in qualifications, is provided at Appendix 10. The number of students recording a course change, expressed as a proportion of students completing the SES at the course level, was highest at The Australian National University (7.3 per cent), Flinders University (6.7 per cent) and the University of Canberra (6.1 per cent).

5.4. Weighting

As discussed in more detail at Section 8.3, there has historically been an under-representation of males and younger students in the achieved SES sample.

Post stratification weighting based on *E306* (Higher Education Provider Code), *Stage* (Commencing, Completing, Middle years), *Area* (21 study areas) and *E315* (Gender) was initially trialled in the 2014 UES, and was found to not to significantly affect the results at a national level. This has continued to be the case for all subsequent iterations of the SES, including 2017.

Whilst the post stratification weight variable '*Weight*' continues to be included in the SES data file, SES data has historically been reported without applying the weight, with a view to maintaining consistency with previous iterations and minimising complexity for *National Report* readers.

To further investigate the issue of corrective weighting and inform possible future approaches to weighting, the Social Research Centre will assess the impact on key estimates of applying weights which incorporate all the elements included in the response propensity model, which informs responsive design activity / the targeting of students in lower performing study areas and institutions during data collection (refer to Sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3).

In addition to the elements included in the current *Weight* variable, the response propensity model uses *E310* (Course of study type code), *E316* (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander code), *E329* (Mode of attendance code), *E330* (Type of attendance code), E348 (Language spoken at home code), age category based on E913 (Age code), Area45 (Study area – 45 categories), Heptype (Higher education provider type), E386 (Disability), remoteness area code and SEIFA decile.

Issues arising from the review of corrective weighting will be documented as part of the *QILT White Paper* series.

6. Deliverables

The Social Research Centre provided institutions and the department the following deliverables:

- finalised questionnaire
- weekly progress reports during data collection
- data files:
    - institution data files in CSV and SPSS format as a standard, and in SAS format for institutions specifically requesting this format
    - department national data file in SAS format
- data dictionary and data map
- files in Tableau packaged workbook format at the national (department), institution and Universities Australia level
- files of verbatim responses to open-ended questions in MS Excel, at the national (department) and institution level
- *National Report* in PDF and MS Word format, available from the QILT website
- National Report Website Tables and National Report Additional Tables, available from the QILT website
- the SES 2017 infographic and press release, and
- methodological report.

7. Final response rate and reportable strata

7.1. Final response rate

7.1.1. Overall response rate

While the focus for the SES is response rate at the individual stratum level to support reporting on the QILT website, the overall response rate remains a relevant measure of survey administration effectiveness.

For the purpose of QILT projects, response rate is calculated on the basis of usable completed surveys as a proportion of final sample, once opt outs, disqualified and out of scope records have been removed.

The overall response for the 2017 SES was 36.2 per cent, down from 45.6 per cent in 2016, and similar to the 37.7 per cent achieved in 2015.

Table 11 Response summary

	2017	2017 as % initial population	2016	2016 as % initial population	2015	2015 as % initial population
Initial population	594,989	100.0	401,939	100.0	391,405	100.0
Disqualified	10,407	1.7	5,168	1.3	3,003	0.8
Out of scope	5,759	1.0	1,258	0.3	177	0.0
Opt out	9,847	1.7	4,461	1.1	2,962	0.8
Final sample	568,976	95.6	391,052	97.3	385,263	98.4
Responses	206,121		178,459		145,382	
Overall response rate	**36.2**		**45.6**		**37.7**	

For the 2017 SES, a number of factors are thought to have combined to reduce the effectiveness of response maximisation strategies. Due to unavoidable issues relating to IT security, the launch of the 2017 SES was delayed by almost one week. The lack of certainty related to this delay affected the ability of many institutions to deploy effective response maximisation strategies as they had in 2016.

In addition to the uncertainty of the SES launch, a number of institutions used the opportunity to deploy other surveys in the usual SES data collection window, leading to some populations being over surveyed.

Furthermore, the '*Change the Course: National Report on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment at Australian Universities'* report was released in early August 2017, which may have overshadowed the SES in the minds of university management, staff and students.

The addition of postgraduate coursework students had been communicated to institutions, however, due to the uncertainty surrounding the deployment of the SES, many institutions were unable to implement response maximisation strategies targeting this group. This, coupled with traditionally lower survey engagement from this group as evidenced in optional additional populations in previous iterations of the SES, may also have contributed, in part, to the decrease in response rates.

Finally, issues with whitelisting and greylisting of email invitations and reminders to institutional email addresses also contributed to a substantial degree to a decrease in responses for institutions which had not provided alternate email addresses or SMS contact details for students.

Overall, the institutional verification procedure worked well, with only a small proportion of the initial population disqualified from the survey (1.7 per cent) or reporting as out of scope (1.0 per cent). The proportion of students electing to opt out of the survey was less than two per cent, suggesting that neither the nature of the topic nor the response maximisation process prompted excessive requests to withdraw from the survey.

7.1.2. Response by provider and student type

Table 12 summarises response rate by provider and student type. Overall, there was relatively minor variation in response rate by provider and student type, with response rates ranging from 40.1 per cent (NUHEI undergraduates – commencing) to 33.1 per cent (University postgraduate coursework – later year, and NUHEI postgraduate coursework – commencing).

Undergraduate students (37.1 per cent) had a marginally stronger response rate than postgraduate coursework students (34.1 per cent), albeit following more intensive email response maximisation activity (refer to Section 3.3.1).

Commencing students (37.0 per cent) had a marginally stronger response rate than later year students (35.2 per cent).

Overall, university (36.2 per cent) and NUHEI (36.9 per cent) response rates were similar.

Table 12 Response summary by provider and student type

	Initial pop'n n	Dis-qualified %	Out of scope %	Opt out %	Final sample n	Responses n	Response rate %
Total project	594,989	1.7	1.0	1.7	568,976	206,121	36.2
University	546,239	1.7	1.0	1.6	522,831	189,082	36.2
UG - commencing	228,664	0.5	0.7	1.7	221,834	83,724	37.7
UG - later year	154,016	2.4	0.7	2.2	145,784	52,520	36.0
PGCW - commencing	86,689	0.8	1.4	1.0	83,873	29,243	34.9
PGCW - later year	76,870	4.5	1.8	0.9	71,340	23,595	33.1
NUHEI	48,750	2.7	0.7	1.9	46,145	17,039	36.9
UG - commencing	10,803	1.1	0.6	2.1	10,387	4,167	40.1
UG - later year	21,955	2.4	0.7	1.9	20,868	7,802	37.4
PGCW - commencing	6,267	4.5	0.8	2.1	5,802	1,918	33.1
PGCW - later year	9,725	3.9	0.9	1.7	9,088	3,152	34.7
Total UG	415,438	1.4	0.7	1.9	398,873	148,126	37.1
Total PGCW	179,551	2.7	1.5	1.1	170,103	57,995	34.1
Total commencing	332,423	0.7	0.9	1.6	321,896	119,052	37.0
Total later year	262,566	3.1	1.1	1.8	247,080	87,069	35.2

The proportion of sample categorised as ‘disqualified’ was higher, generally, for postgraduate coursework (2.7 per cent) and later year students (3.1 per cent), relative to undergraduate and commencing students. Opt out rates tended to be marginally higher for undergraduates (1.9 per cent) relative to postgraduate coursework students (1.1 per cent).

7.1.3. Response by institution

Response rate by institution is considered a relevant measure of institutional engagement in the SES and of survey administration effectiveness overall.

Response rate by university ranged from 51.2 per cent (University of Divinity) and 47.3 per cent (Australian Catholic University) to 23.6 per cent (University of Technology Sydney) and. 23.8 per cent (University of Sydney).

Response rate by NUHEI ranged from 80.5 per cent (Campion College) to 15.6 per cent (International College of Management, Sydney), suggesting significant variation at the individual institution level in the application of the student engagement activities outlined in the Institution Administration Guide.

A number of universities, including Curtin University (3.1 per cent) and Macquarie University (3.0 per cent) had almost twice the national average opt out rate (1.7 per cent). The opt out rate at three NUHEIs with a small student population (Academy of Information Technology, Perth Bible College, Harvest Bible College), was over 5.0 per cent (9.8, 6.0 and 5.1 per cent respectively).

Refer to Appendix 11 for a response summary by institution.

7.2. Achievement of response rate targets

A total of 21 universities achieved the response rate target that was established as a result of the process described in Section 2.7.4.

A number of universities achieved a response rate in excess of 20 percentage points higher than their target, including The University of Melbourne (26.8 percentage points higher than target), Australian Catholic University (24.2 percentage points) and Monash University (20.0 percentage points).

Others achieved a response rate significantly below their target, including Bond University (30.0 percentage points below target), Southern Cross University (21.8 percentage points) and University of Wollongong (16.7 percentage points).

For full details of university performance against response rate targets, refer to Appendix 5.

7.3. Strata meeting the desired level of precision

Table 13 on the next page show the number and proportion of strata meeting the desired level of precision (+/- 7.5 percentage points at the 90 per cent level of confidence), by conceptual domain (refer to Section 4.1), at the 21 study area level, for the 2016 and 2017 SES, for university and NUHEI undergraduates.

Whilst the proportion of strata meeting the desired level of precision remained above 80 per cent for the ‘Teaching quality’, ‘ Learning resources’ and ‘Skills development’ scales for university undergraduates in 2017, there was, on the whole, a decline in the proportion of strata meeting the desired level of precision, attributable to the decrease in response rate for the SES in 2017.

The proportion of strata meeting the desired level of precision dropped by between 6.5 and 10.8 percentage points for university undergraduates, and by between 4.6 and 10.5 percentage points for NUHEI undergraduates.

For NUHEIs, the proportion of strata meeting the desired level of precision is generally lower than for universities, due to the relatively small number of students in many NUHEI cells, which in turn means that a high response rate is necessary to achieve the desired level of precision (refer back to Section 2.7.4).

Table 13 Strata meeting desired level of precision, undergraduates, 21 study areas

	2016		2017		Change	
Scale	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
University						
Total strata	**606**		**608**		**2**	
Learner engagement	513	84.7	449	73.8	-64	-10.8
Teaching quality	552	91.1	507	83.4	-45	-7.7
Learning resources	540	89.1	502	82.6	-38	-6.5
Student support	498	82.2	435	71.5	-63	-10.6
Skills development	549	90.6	511	84.0	-38	-6.5
NUHEI						
Total strata	**129**		**132**		**3**	
Learner engagement	68	52.7	59	44.7	-9	-8.0
Teaching quality	88	68.2	82	62.1	-6	-6.1
Learning resources	73	56.6	61	46.2	-12	-10.4
Student support	81	62.8	69	52.3	-12	-10.5
Skills development	87	67.4	83	62.9	-4	-4.6

Given that NUHEI cell sizes are not expected to change significantly for future iterations, it is likely that the proportion of strata meeting the desired level of precision for NUHEI undergraduates will continue to be lower than for universities undergraduates.

Table 14 shows the number and proportion of strata meeting the desired level of precision (+/- 7.5 percentage points at the 90 per cent level of confidence), by conceptual domain, at the 21 study area level, for postgraduate coursework students.

As can be seen, the proportion of strata meeting the desired level of precision for postgraduate coursework students was generally lower than for undergraduates, and ranged from 39.4 per cent (university, Student support scale) to 66.7 per cent (NUHEI, Teacher quality scale). As for NUHEI undergraduates, this is likely to continue to be a feature of future iterations of the SES, given the smaller number of students present in postgraduate coursework strata.

Table 14 Strata meeting desired level of precision, postgraduate coursework, 21 study areas

	University		NUHEI		Total	
Scale	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
Total strata	**536**		**48**		**584**	
Learner engagement	240	44.8	21	43.8	261	44.7
Teaching quality	297	55.4	32	66.7	329	56.3
Learning resources	275	51.3	25	52.1	300	51.4
Student support	211	39.4	26	54.2	237	40.6
Skills development	300	56.0	27	56.3	327	56.0

It is noted that the drop in the proportion of strata meeting the desired level of precision for the 2017 SES does not impact heavily on the number of reportable strata on the QILT website, given that the website combines the last two iterations of the SES to maximise the proportion of reportable strata.

It remains important, however, to continue to strive to maximise the proportion of reportable strata with a view to realising the aspirational goal of reporting on the QILT website at the 45 study area level, with an increased level of precision (+/- 5% at the 90 per cent level of confidence). An overview of progress towards this aspiration goal is provided at Appendix 12.

8. Response analysis

8.1. Rate of response

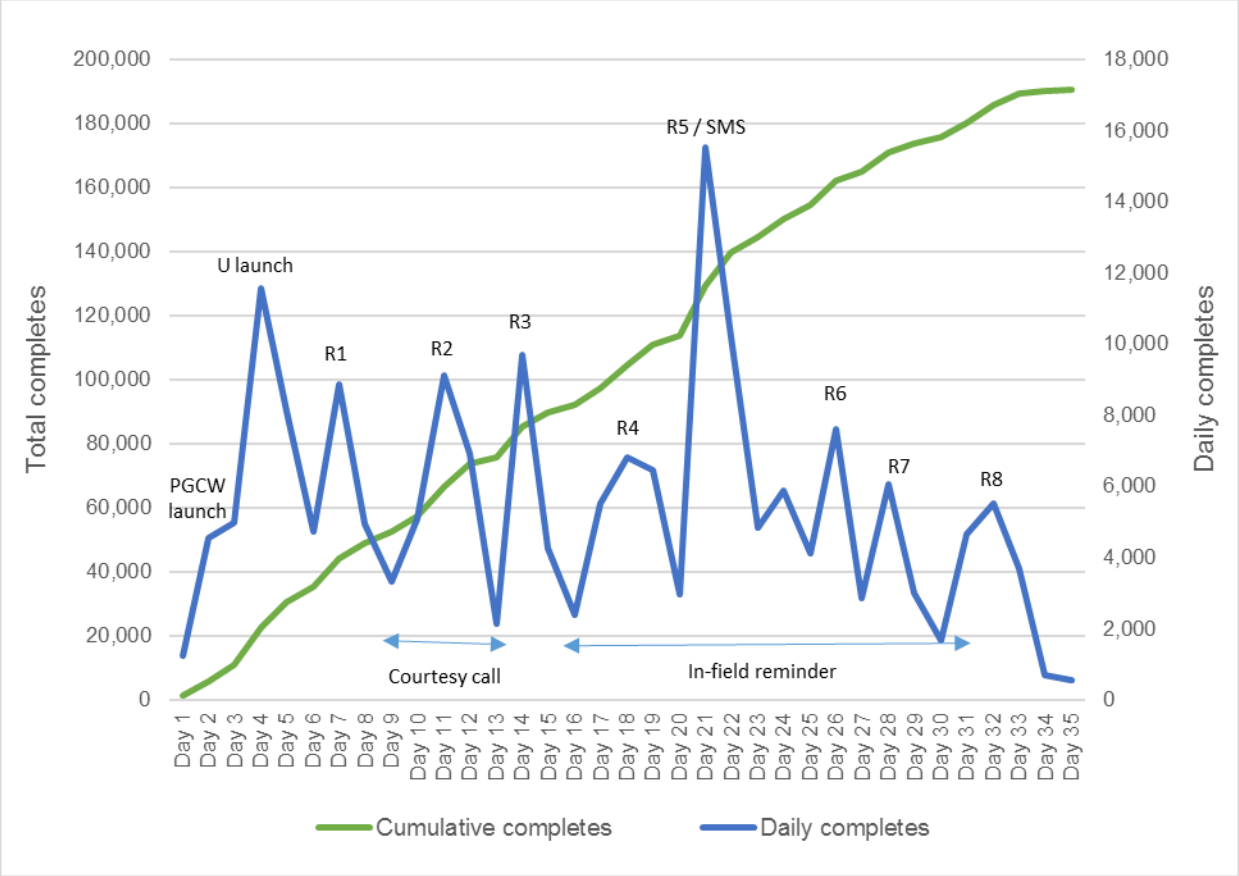
Rate of response refers to how quickly responses are received, and is reviewed to understand how specific response maximisation events (email invitation, email reminders, SMS reminders, prize draw, in-field telephone reminders) impacted the daily number of surveys completed.

The following information is based on completed online surveys as reported during data collection via the live online reporting module (refer to Section 3.4.4), rather than completed surveys as reported in the *National Report.*

Figure 1 below plots both cumulative completes and daily completes for the August data collection period for all students.

As a consequence of the staggered distribution of the initial email invitation over the first four days of the data collection period, the number of completed online surveys did not spike as prominently at the outset as could otherwise be expected.

Figure 1 Rate of response (August data collection)



The number of responses attributed to reminder emails 1 to 3 was similar, peaking at approximately 9,000 completed surveys on the day that each successive reminder email was distributed.

Figure 1 suggests that email reminder 5 was the single most effective response maximisation activity. This may be attributable to the concurrent use of SMS, email messaging which emphasised that the sample member was part of a select group, and possibly, the resolution of whitelisting issues by this stage of the data collection period.

Email reminders 6, 7 and 8 each contributed a significant number of incremental completed online surveys.

The 'troughs' between the peaks of online completion activity were generally the deepest when there was no concurrent telephone response maximisation activity. This pattern of response is broadly similar to previous surveys.

Historically, the 'cumulative completes' line would be steeper at the outset and tend to more visibly level out towards the end of the data collection period. The overall shape of the cumulative completes line for the 2017 SES suggests that institutions may not have had the opportunity to fully deploy the awareness campaign (refer to Table 6), which impacted on the rate of response, particularly in the first half of the online survey period.

8.2. Sources of responses

Table 15 summarises the contribution to the final response rate of the various methods of accessing the online survey.

Whilst all methods of accessing the online survey make some contribution, however small, to the final response rate, an overwhelming majority of respondents completed via the direct link in email communications. At the total achieved sample level, the survey link in email communications contributed 31.3 percentage points to the final overall response rate of 36.2 per cent.

In field reminder calls were the next most significant contributor (2.3 percentage points) to the final overall response rate. As a highly targeted activity, there is some variation by subgroup in the contribution of in field reminder calls to the final overall response rate (3.4 percentage points for postgraduate coursework students, compared with 1.4 percentage points for NUHEIs).

Table 15 Contribution to final response rate by online survey access method

Access method	Total	University	NUHEI	Under-graduate	Post-graduate	Com-mencing	Later year
Final response rate	**36.2**	**36.2**	**36.9**	**37.1**	**34.1**	**37.0**	**35.2**
Authentication	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1
Type in	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.8	0.7
Survey link (email)	31.3	31.1	34.2	32.5	28.6	32.0	30.4
Survey link (LMS)	0.8	0.8	0.3	0.8	0.8	0.9	0.7
Survey link (SMS)	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.1
Courtesy call email	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.2	0.2
In field telephone reminder	2.3	2.4	1.4	1.8	3.4	2.1	2.5
Post field telephone reminder	0.6	0.7	0.0	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6

It should be noted that only completed surveys directly attributable to the courtesy call, in field reminder, post field reminder and SMS are recorded as such in Table 15. It is possible that, for example, reminder call activity may prompt a sample member to click on the survey link in an email they had previously received. In this context, the analysis presented at Table 15 should be considered indicative.

8.3. Non-response

To investigate the extent to which those who responded to the SES are representative of the initial population, respondent characteristics are presented alongside population parameters in Tables 16 and 17. Many of the characteristics of respondents to the 2017 SES very closely match those of the initial population, especially with respect to stage of studies, Indigenous status, home language, disability status, study mode, first in family to attend a higher education institution and socio-economic status.

Table 16 Population and response characteristics by subgroup – undergraduates

	Group/subgroup[1]	Initial population n	Initial population %	Responses n	Responses %
Total		**415,438**		**148,126**	
Stage of Studies	Commencing	239,467	57.6	87,907	59.3
	Later year[2]	175,971	42.4	60,219	40.7
Gender	Male	178,373	43.0	53,154	35.9
	Female	236,840	57.0	94,871	64.1
Age	under 25	328,380	79.1	113,234	76.4
	25 to 29	38,611	9.3	12,906	8.7
	30 to 39	28,777	6.9	12,021	8.1
	40 and over	19,629	4.7	9,959	6.7
Indigenous	Indigenous	5,562	1.3	1,973	1.3
	Non-Indigenous	409,876	98.7	146,153	98.7
Home language	Home language – English	354,259	85.3	126,989	85.7
	Home language – Other	61,179	14.7	21,137	14.3
Disability	Disability reported	21,223	5.1	8,844	6.0
	No disability reported	394,210	94.9	139,280	94.0
Study mode	Internal Study mode	380,515	91.6	135,527	91.5
	External/multi-modal Study mode	34,923	8.4	12,599	8.5
Residence status	Domestic student	346,148	83.3	125,663	84.8
	International student	69,225	16.7	22,453	15.2
First in family status[3]	First in family	92,329	45.6	34,140	45.2
	Not first in family	110,314	54.4	41,353	54.8
Socio-economic Status	High	110,200	32.2	39,340	31.7
	Medium	174,623	51.1	63,796	51.4
	Low	56,892	16.6	20,979	16.9
Remoteness	Metro	268,572	78.7	94,886	76.5
	Regional/Remote	72,618	21.3	29,068	23.5

[1] Some subgroups many not add to 100 per cent due to missing data.

[2] Later Year includes Middle Year students where for NUHEIs where census was conducted

[3] First in family status includes commencing students only.

As has been the case in previous surveys in the series, the largest potential source of non-response bias is in relation to gender and age. Male students are substantially under-represented in the achieved sample, by 7.1 percentage points for undergraduates, and by 3.7 percentage points for postgraduate coursework students. Gender representativeness is slowly improving over time,

however, with the gap between the initial population and achieved sample proportion for males at the total sample level decreasing from 9.4 percentage points in 2014 to 6.1 percentage points in 2017.

Younger students are also somewhat less likely to respond with those aged under 25 under-represented by around 2.6 and 4.1 percentage points for undergraduates and postgraduate coursework students respectively. Postgraduate coursework students aged 40 and over are over-represented by 3.8 percentage points. For both undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students, domestic students are somewhat over-represented by 1.5 and 2.8 percentage points respectively. Postgraduate coursework students whose home language is not English are also under-represented by around 2.4 percentage points.

Table 17 Population and response characteristics by subgroup – postgraduate coursework

	Group/subgroup[1]	Initial population n	Initial population %	Responses n	Responses %
Total		**179,551**		**57,995**	
Stage of Studies	Commencing	92,956	51.8	31,145	53.7
	Later year[2]	86,595	48.2	26,850	46.3
Gender	Male	80,593	44.9	23,908	41.2
	Female	98,910	55.1	34,069	58.8
Age	under 25	74,670	41.6	21,752	37.5
	25 to 29	48,634	27.1	14,669	25.3
	30 to 39	32,972	18.4	11,850	20.4
	40 and over	23,223	12.9	9,708	16.7
Indigenous	Indigenous	1,104	0.6	343	0.6
	Non-Indigenous	178,447	99.4	57,652	99.4
Home language	Home language – English	119,674	66.7	40,065	69.1
	Home language – Other	59,877	33.3	17,930	30.9
Disability	Disability reported	5,136	2.9	1,954	3.4
	No disability reported	174,414	97.1	56,041	96.6
Study mode	Internal Study mode	142,317	79.3	45,723	78.8
	External/multi-modal Study mode	37,234	20.7	12,272	21.2
Residence status	Domestic student	96,596	53.8	32,827	56.6
	International student	82,898	46.2	25,167	43.4
First in family status[3]	First in family	28,911	40.7	10,265	41.9
	Not first in family	42,196	59.3	14,237	58.1
Socio-economic Status	High	38,557	41.6	13,099	41.6
	Medium	42,836	46.3	14,628	46.5
	Low	11,189	12.1	3,752	11.9
Remoteness	Metro	74,872	81.1	25,090	79.9
	Regional/Remote	17,503	18.9	6,319	20.1

[1] Some subgroups many not add to 100 per cent due to missing data.

[2] Later Year includes Middle Year students where for NUHEIs where census was conducted

[3] First in family status includes commencing students only.

As can be seen at Tables 18 and 19, the achieved sample also closely matched the initial population in terms of study area.

As for previous surveys in the series, the largest difference between the undergraduate and postgraduate coursework achieved sample and initial population was observed in relation to the Business and management study area (4.5 percentage points and 3.5 percentage points respectively). The Business and management study area also has by far the highest student population for both undergraduates and postgraduate coursework (21.7 and 32.5 per cent respectively).

For both undergraduates and postgraduate coursework, Agriculture and environmental studies and Rehabilitation students were marginally over-represented in the achieved sample. For postgraduate coursework, students in the Pharmacy, Dentistry and Law and paralegal studies study areas were slightly under-represented in the achieved sample. It is noted that these groups constitute a very small proportion of the respective populations.

Table 18 Population and response characteristics by study area – undergraduates

Study area	Initial population n	Initial population %	Responses n	Responses %
Total	**472,149**		**160,369**	
Science and mathematics	48,309	10.2	16,685	10.4
Computing and Information Systems	18,067	3.8	5,982	3.7
Engineering	28,466	6.0	9,669	6.0
Architecture and built environment	11,367	2.4	3,445	2.1
Agriculture and environmental studies	5,255	1.1	2,200	1.4
Health services and support	38,053	8.1	13,462	8.4
Medicine	4,211	0.9	1,349	0.8
Nursing	34,948	7.4	13,088	8.2
Pharmacy	3,018	0.6	1,127	0.7
Dentistry	1,379	0.3	624	0.4
Veterinary science	2,040	0.4	818	0.5
Rehabilitation	6,068	1.3	2,555	1.6
Teacher education	32,315	6.8	11,983	7.5
Business and management	102,649	21.7	27,611	17.2
Humanities, culture and social sciences	54,457	11.5	20,089	12.5
Social work	8,311	1.8	3,321	2.1
Psychology	16,586	3.5	6,494	4.0
Law and paralegal studies	16,689	3.5	5,685	3.5
Creative arts	23,165	4.9	8,497	5.3
Communications	15,173	3.2	5,201	3.2
Tourism, Hospitality, Personal Services, Sport and recreation	1,623	0.3	484	0.3

Table 19 Population and response characteristics by study area – postgraduate coursework

Study area	Initial population n	Initial population %	Responses n	Responses %
Total	**181,437**		**58,200**	
Science and mathematics	4,377	2.4	1,562	2.7
Computing and Information Systems	13,946	7.7	4,286	7.4
Engineering	13,084	7.2	3,999	6.9
Architecture and built environment	5,175	2.9	1,583	2.7
Agriculture and environmental studies	1,775	1.0	775	1.3
Health services and support	10,440	5.8	3,470	6.0
Medicine	5,529	3.0	1,744	3.0
Nursing	6,792	3.7	2,044	3.5
Pharmacy	1,072	0.6	250	0.4
Dentistry	707	0.4	173	0.3
Veterinary science	530	0.3	237	0.4
Rehabilitation	1,661	0.9	540	0.9
Teacher education	23,025	12.7	8,195	14.1
Business and management	59,014	32.5	16,875	29.0
Humanities, culture and social sciences	10,444	5.8	4,155	7.1
Social work	5,747	3.2	2,431	4.2
Psychology	4,047	2.2	1,780	3.1
Law and paralegal studies	8,559	4.7	2,236	3.8
Creative arts	2,258	1.2	758	1.3
Communications	2,686	1.5	931	1.6
Tourism, Hospitality, Personal Services, Sport and recreation	569	0.3	176	0.3

8.4. Item level non-response

Item-level non-response refers to the proportion of respondents skipping an SEQ item without providing a response.

Historically, item non-response has been low, despite the non-mandatory nature of almost all items in the survey. Item non-response for SES scale items averaged 2.9 per cent and 2.4 per cent in 2017 for university undergraduates and postgraduates respectively, compared with 2.2 per cent and 3.3 per cent for university undergraduates in 2016 and 2015 respectively.

As can be seen as Tables 20 and 21, both the level of item non-response, and the items with the highest non-response, were similar to previous iterations of the SES for both university and NUHEI students. This would appear to indicate that these questions may be difficult to answer, either due to design of the question, or the nature of the information requested.

Table 20 Item level non-response for single course responses: university

SES domain item		2017 U (%)	2017 PG (%)	2016 (%)	2015 (%)
Factual items					
grade	Average overall grade	6.3	5.2	4.6	6.6
online	Proportion of study online	6.3	5.3	4.5	6.5
yrcomplete	Number of years completed	5.7	5.0	4.4	6.4
Attitudinal items					
considchg	Seriously considered leaving	6.1	5.5	4.7	6.8
astdliv	Living arrangements affected study	6.1	5.6	4.7	6.8
astdfin	Financial circumstances affected study	6.1	5.6	4.7	6.8
astdwor	Paid work affected study	5.9	5.3	4.6	6.7
offsup	Offered relevant support	4.5	4.0	4.6	5.5

Table 21 Item level non-response for single course responses: NUHEI

SES domain item		2017 U (%)	2017 PG (%)	2016 (%)	2015 (%)
Factual items					
grade	Average overall grade	6.2	6.4	5.1	7.4
online	Proportion of study online	6.3	6.5	5.1	7.2
Attitudinal items					
considchg	Seriously considered leaving	6.7	7.0	5.5	7.5
astdliv	Living arrangements affected study	6.5	6.9	5.4	7.5
astdfin	Financial circumstances affected study	6.5	6.9	5.5	7.5
astdwor	Paid work affected study	6.3	6.5	5.4	7.3

As could be expected, item level non-response increased with progression through the survey. This is especially true for students who responded to the SES in relation to a second course, where non-response for SES scale items averaged 4.6 and 4.8 per cent for university undergraduates and postgraduates respectively, compared with 2.9 and 2.4 per cent for the first course.

For further details of item non-response, refer to Appendix 13.

9. Summary of issues for future surveys

Perhaps the single most important issue for the next implementation of the SES is to seek to address the factors which are thought to have contributed to the decrease in response rate for the 2017 survey. This is expected to include:

- an emphasis on strong, timely sector communications in the lead up to the 2018 collection
- certainty around the project schedule
- the reinstatement of the SES webinar focussing on preparations for the collection
- early attention to whitelisting issues
- a review of the postgraduate coursework communication strategy and contact protocol.

Whilst the SES is considered methodologically stable, there is scope to refine a number of aspects of project execution, based on issues arising from the 2017 implementation, including:

- continuing to build our understanding of the drivers of response, with respect to:
    - further refinements to the content of invitation and reminder emails to identify the most effective messaging at different stages of the data collection period, for different audiences
    - optimising the use of SMS reminders
    - assessing the impact of highly targeted social media activity
- enhancing the response propensity model to better identify priority groups for response maximisation activities, mitigate errors of representation, and maximise the number of reportable strata
- building on the 'courtesy call' concept to undertake early, telephone-based intervention for sub-groups least likely to respond online
- facilitating and encouraging the use of institutional learning management systems for the distribution of online survey links, given the generally positive association between use of LMS and response rate
- reviewing the role and timing of the launch of 'authentication', given its relatively small contribution to the final response rate, the lateness of submission of sample by some institutions and the logistics of finalising sample for survey launch.

Consideration may also be given to:

- fully optimising the online survey for completion on a small screen device
- reviewing the way that course changes are captured in the questionnaire with a view to minimising post fieldwork checks by institutions and enhancing the coding workflow
- changing the way that 'completes' are reported in the live online reporting module to better align with final number of completes, as reported post processing, and possibly
- aligning the way response rates are reported with industry standards.

Appendix 1 SES summary outcomes over time

Appendix 2 SES 2017 Administration Guide

Appendix 3 Field of education / study area concordance

Appendix 4 Sample size precision formulae

Appendix 5 Target and actual response rate by institution

Appendix 6 Example email content

Appendix 7 Example social media content

Appendix 8a 2017 SEQ item summary

Appendix 8b 2017 SEQ core survey

Appendix 8c 2017 SEQ screenshots (desktop)

Appendix 8d 2017 SEQ screenshots (small screen device)

Appendix 9 National reporting module

Appendix 10 Course change by institution

Appendix 11 Response by institution

Appendix 12 Reportable strata

Appendix 13 Item non-response