

University of New England

Student Intention and Progression Survey

Stage 1, 1998

Centre for Higher Education Management and Policy
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Executive Summary and Recommendations

This report presents an analysis of the responses of 723 internal undergraduate students who replied to a questionnaire administered in early December 1998. The questionnaire sought information on students' study intentions for 1999. A particular concern of the survey was to identify those students who were discontinuing their studies at UNE in 1999 and the principal reasons for this decision. Of the 723 students who responded to the questionnaire, 93 indicated that they would not be returning to UNE in 1999.

It is well known that a number of considerations influence student retention and attrition rates and that no one factor or consideration dominates. This is true of the University of New England as well where the present survey of 1998 students' study intention for 1999 demonstrates that employment and financial considerations, academic preparedness, course and teaching/learning environment, accommodation and travel, and family responsibilities and personal circumstances are some of the many factors that bear upon the University's ability to retain its students. Indeed, of the factors just listed, only three – employment and finance, accommodation/distance/travel problems, and course and teaching/learning environment (in that order of importance) – rated mention by a significant proportion of students responding to the questionnaire. And even with respect to these three factors, no one factor was identified as being most important by even 50% of the respondents.

Despite the complex and multi-dimensional nature of student retention, the University is committed to creating an educational and organisational environment that maximises its ability to retain its students up to the time of successful course completion. And in this respect, the University's performance appears exemplary at the national level. A 1998 DETYA national analysis of university performance reports that 'the retention rate at the University of New England is three per cent *higher* than might be expected, given its student mix (p. 39).¹ This finding is based on the characteristics of the overall student body which consists of about three-quarters external students.

While it does not appear that UNE's overall performance with respect to student retention is grounds for concern, the University's regional location may present particular problems for internal 'on-campus' students, which are not experienced by their metropolitan colleagues. Such problems include: cost of travel, difficulties in obtaining suitable accommodation, separation from family and friends, and relative lack of full-time and casual employment opportunities.

As stated above, a multiplicity of factors and circumstances influence students' decision to withdraw from study, many of which are far beyond the University's control or power to influence. For example, accident, health problems, a death in the family, and other such circumstances are always going to impact on some students and it is unreasonable for any university to expect a one-hundred per cent retention rate. What is important from an institutional perspective is to attempt to identify areas in which remedial action might help further improve the retention rate. The responses to the questionnaire do point towards a limited number of areas where University action might be considered, particularly with respect to employment and finance;

¹ *The Characteristics and Performance of Higher Education Institutions*, Canberra, AGPS, 1998.

accommodation/distance/travel problems; and course and teaching/learning environment.

In first considering the course and teaching/learning environment, of those students who indicated that they intended to withdraw from UNE study in 1999, between one-quarter and one-third indicated that teaching/learning related factors (such as lack of interest in the course, dissatisfaction with the teaching of the course; lack of course relevance to future career plans) were of importance in influencing their decision. Also, though a minority, about one-fifth of the withdrawing respondents seem to have found inflexible administrative arrangements and uncaring/uninterested administrative staff factors that played an important part in their decision. Rigid departmental rules about timetables, course structure and attendance were mentioned in some of the comments as well. Even though the teaching/learning environment does not appear to be a problem for the majority of respondents, the University must be committed to the continual improvement of its teaching quality and possibly here more attention could be paid to course relevance to future career plans and course related administrative procedures.

Recommendation 1: That it be considered how to better incorporate principles concerning course relevance to future career plans with the policies and structures intended to support UNE's teaching quality.

Recommendation 2: That Faculties and Schools consider their current course related administrative practices and procedures with the intent to maximise student flexibility and openness.

Although 'academic preparedness' did not emerge as particularly important with respect to the students' decision to withdraw from study at UNE, respondents identified inadequate counselling prior to entry and unsatisfactory study skills as of some importance. Such factors may contribute to decisions to withdraw, although they are not sufficient to prompt withdrawal in itself. Nonetheless, there may be a need for more prominently advertised and up to date study skills workshops and more adequate information provided during Orientation Week.

Recommendation 3: The University continue its efforts in providing and extensively advertising study skills workshops and other related activities.

Recommendation 4: The University explore how to better prepare students for living in Armidale through providing more pertinent information to school councillors and during Orientation Week.

Another important 'academic' related aspect of the findings is that a substantially larger proportion of discontinuing students relative to continuing students indicated that UNE was not their first choice; 52% and 75% respectively. This finding should also be viewed in the light that well over one-half (about 59%) of withdrawing students intend in 1999 to continue study at another university. Thus, it appears that UNE is effectively a 'feeder' institution for other universities with respect to a substantial number of withdrawing students. It also can be surmised that a proportion of students enrol at UNE with the intention at the beginning of transferring to another university before graduation.

In that UNE may be a 'stepping-stone' for some students to higher educational opportunities elsewhere is not necessarily detrimental to the University's interests or reputation and is certainly consistent with government policy regarding student mobility. However, the ramifications of this situation deserve much fuller

investigation. Further consideration of the problem might explore the formalisation of the ‘feeder’ arrangement with specific other universities and the financial implications of such action. At the very least, the University may wish to consider how to more closely monitor the course satisfaction of students for whom UNE was not the first choice of enrolment.

Recommendation 5: The University consider how to more closely monitor the course satisfaction of students for whom UNE was not the first choice of enrolment.

Of the variety of factors and circumstances students could have chosen as influential to their decision to withdraw from study at UNE, accommodation/distance/travel were rated second in importance. With respect to accommodation per se, a number of respondents in their general comments praised the UNE Residential College system and suggested that it should be better publicised. Nonetheless, close to one-third of the discontinuing student respondents indicated that ‘too many distractions from study in college accommodation’ was an important reason for withdrawing from study at UNE.

Recommendation 6: Heads of College review the management of extra curricular college activities and the maintenance of an appropriate study environment.

Other important factors apparently influencing students to withdraw from UNE studies are the inability to travel or phone home as often as they would have liked and travel expenses. Many internal students travel substantial distances in order to study in Armidale, and those resident in college must vacate their rooms during vacation periods, adding further to travel and/or accommodation expenses. The University has in the past explored the possibility of additional travel concessions for its students, without success. Nonetheless, it may be appropriate to consider further initiatives in this area.

Recommendation 7: Consideration be given to how best assist students who must vacate college accommodation during vacation periods.

Recommendation 8: Relevant transport agencies and government authorities be approached with respect to further travel concessions for UNE students travelling between Armidale and their home residence.

The most important set of factors and circumstances associated with student retention appear to be employment and finance related. These problems are particularly acute for a regional university for a number of reasons. The high cost of travel and relocation, as already discussed, and the lack of a large number of part-time and casual employment opportunities, to mention but two examples.

For all students responding to this survey (continuing and discontinuing alike) it appears that the majority remain dependent on traditional sources of financial support: Youth Allowance and parental support. Given the extra financial burden incurred through study at a regional university, rules governing access to the Youth Allowance might be amended to take into account the location where students intended to study. Also, tax concessions for parents supporting students at regional universities might be an appropriate policy option.

Recommendation 9: Relevant government authorities be approached with respect to revising the rules on access to the Youth Allowance to take into account the regional location of the university.

Recommendation 10: Relevant government authorities be approached with respect to providing parents supporting students at a regional university with a tax concession.

There has been a good deal of anecdotal evidence that lack of sufficient part-time and casual employment opportunities in Armidale has influenced students' decision to withdraw from study at UNE. The evidence presented in this report suggests that improving opportunities for both part-time and casual employment would impact on between one-quarter and one-third of students. Though such action would by no means solve all of the problems associated with improving student retention, it would appear that more local employment opportunities might go a long way towards improving the material circumstances of a substantial minority of students. Over forty per cent of the students who indicated that they would discontinue study in 1999 gave the 'constant worry about having enough money to get by from week to week' as an important reason for their withdrawing from study at UNE.

Recommendation 11: That the University work with local employers and employer associations, such as the Armidale Chamber of Commerce, with a view to improving the part-time and casual employment opportunities available to students.

Student withdrawal from university study is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon. Hopefully, this report provides a better understanding of this phenomenon with respect to UNE on-campus students. Further investigations of student retention will be conducted later in 1999 by the Centre for Higher Education Management and Policy. The next stage of the study will attempt to explore in much more detail the factors and circumstances influencing students' decision to withdraw through interviews with students not proceeding with their studies at UNE in 1999.

University of New England

Student Intention and Progression Survey - 1998

January 1999

Introduction

This report is part of an ongoing study investigating the incidence of student withdrawal at the University of New England. A preliminary analysis of the internal undergraduate population which failed to continue from 1997 to 1998 is presented in Appendix A. That analysis was based upon student records held by the University.

The present study is based on a survey of internal undergraduate students enrolled at UNE in 1998. The survey is directed at ascertaining students' intentions for further study at UNE in 1999 and attempts to identify the reasons why a small proportion (about 12%) of students eligible to continue study do not do so. This study provides important information in its own right. But it also provides valuable information for a more concentrated study of withdrawing students to be conducted in February or March 1999 once students' intentions are actually known.

It should be pointed out from the beginning that 'dropout' at UNE is not considered to be a pressing or peculiar problem. In fact, a recent study by DETYA (*The Characteristic and Performance of Higher Education Institutions*, Canberra, AGPS, 1998) demonstrates that overall UNE's student retention rate is considerably above what would be expected according to the institutions student profile. Nonetheless, the University is committed to increasing its number of on campus undergraduate enrolments and is aware of some difficulties, particularly financial ones, associated with living in Armidale due to its geographical location. The study of the reasons why students withdraw from UNE attempts to provide information to help classify problems experienced by students which lend themselves to ameliorative action by the University.

The present study is based on a survey of all undergraduate students enrolled in 1998 eligible to continue study at UNE in 1999. Depending on whether students intended to continue with their studies in 1999 or planned to discontinue study at UNE in 1999, they were asked different questions in addition to a set of background questions presented to all students. A copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix B. The questionnaire was mailed to students' home addresses in the first week of December 1998. Students were asked to complete and return the questionnaire by 31 December 1998.

The remainder of this report presents an analysis of the survey results. The report first describes in detail the student survey population and then discusses the characteristics of the students who returned the questionnaire. The analysis of results is presented in three parts. Part I discusses the responses to questions asked of all students, continuing and discontinuing; while Part II concentrates solely on the responses of discontinuing students. Part III presents additional information and comments supplied by respondents.

The Student Survey Population

The questionnaire was sent in the first week of December to internal undergraduate students (full-time and part-time) enrolled in UNE courses in 1998. The survey target population was identified by the UNE Student Database Unit, which supplied the database and mailing labels. The database contained the names and home addresses of all undergraduate students enrolled in 1998 who had not indicated that they intended to graduate in 1999 (ie who had not completed course requirements by the end of 1998). Also, students with a home address in an overseas country were subsequently removed from the database on the assumption that the circumstances influencing their decisions to continue study at UNE in 1999 were likely to be substantially different from those of their Australian counterparts. Thus, the initial student population to be surveyed consisted of 2460 individuals.

It should be noted that the database was compiled about 3 weeks before students would have officially received their second semester and/or full-year examination results. This may have affected the actual number of students eligible to graduate in 1999, possibly artificially inflating the size of the population surveyed.

In fact, one student returned the questionnaire stating that they would not be returning to study at UNE in 1999 because they intended to graduate in 1999. Another student returned the questionnaire blank and another student indicated that they were enrolled in a postgraduate course during 1998. These questionnaire returns were treated as 'inactive', as were the 22 questionnaire returns marked 'return to sender', thus reducing the total student population surveyed to 2435.

Of the total number of students surveyed, while formally enrolled in 1998, 191 students stayed at UNE in 1998 for only a short time and did not receive an official result in that year. Of this group of students, 37 (19%) appeared to have started their course of study in 1995 or earlier (ie they had a student ID issued in 1995 or earlier), 20 (10%) started in 1996, 84 (44%) started in 1997 and 50 (26%) were new to the University in 1998. Though all of these students were mailed a questionnaire, it should be noted that those with a 1998 student number would have limited and perhaps no experience of the University (some of these students would have deferred their studies to 1999; some would have changed their mind and enrolled at another university at the last minute; etc.). But only 10 students (see below) with no 1998 results who indicated that they had first enrolled in 1998 returned the questionnaire.

The remainder of the students surveyed (2244) were all internal (full-time and part-time) undergraduates engaged in study during 1998 and who had not indicated that they would complete course requirements by the end of 1998 (excluding students from overseas). Two hundred ninety-six (13%) of these students began their course in 1995 (or at least had a 1995 or earlier student ID) or earlier, 367 (16%) students appear to have begun study in 1996, 671 (30%) began in 1997 and 910 (41%) were new to the University in 1998. The following table summarises the characteristics of the student population surveyed.

Table 1: Student Survey Population

Year began study	Students enrolled in 1998 but who had no 1998 results*		All Other Undergraduate students enrolled in 1998*		All Undergraduate Students Surveyed*	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1995 or earlier	37	19%	296	13%	333	14%
1996	20	10%	367	16%	387	16%
1997	84	44%	671	30%	755	31%
1998	50	26%	910	41%	960	39%
Total	191	99%	2244	100%	2435	100%

*Excluding overseas students and those who completed course requirements for graduation

Returns

There was only one mail out, which produced 723 useable returns, or a response rate of 30 per cent. The response rate is not ideal but it should be noted that the survey was based on what was determined to be the total relevant student population rather than a sample. Thus the survey results are considered indicative of particular problems and issues students face in continuing their studies at UNE. The results are also considered to provide a basis to guide further inquiries in this area.

Of the 723 questionnaires returned, only 34 were returned by students who enrolled in a UNE course at the beginning of 1998, but did not pursue their studies during that year. The poor return rate for this group is not surprising given the gap in time between when these students left the University and when the questionnaire was mailed. It is interesting to note nonetheless that 6 students in this group indicated that they would return to study at UNE in 1999. Table 2 summarises the survey returns by category and year of enrolment.

Table 2: All Student Survey Returns

Year began study	Students enrolled in 1998 but who had no 1998 results*		All Other Undergraduate students enrolled in 1998*		Total Returns*	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Missing	0		3		3	
1995 or earlier	3	9%	59	9%	62	9%
1996	3	9%	90	13%	93	13%
1997	18	53%	209	30%	227	31%
1998	10	29%	328	48%	338	47%
Total	34	100%	689	100%	723	100%

*Excluding overseas students and those who completed course requirements for graduation

The following analysis of results distinguishes between students who indicated that they will return to study at UNE in 1999 and those who indicated that they would not do so. The emphasis, of course, is on non-continuing students, but it is worthwhile to compare the responses of continuing and non-continuing students to items in Parts I and II of the questionnaire before dealing solely with the responses of non-continuing students to items in Part III of the questionnaire (see Appendix B).

Of those students who returned questionnaires, 624 students or about 87 per cent indicated that they would continue study at UNE in 1999 and 93 students (13%) declared the opposite. While the number of non-continuing students is small, prior analysis of student transition rates from 1997 to 1998 (see Appendix A) indicated that

the number of internal undergraduate students who withdrew from their studies was only about 300. Though the total number of students (internal undergraduate) who will actually withdraw from study in 1999 cannot be known at this stage, it would appear that the number who responded to this questionnaire is of sufficient size to allow for at least informed speculation as to the motives and reasons for withdrawal of all students who adopt this course of action.

Part I: Analysis of Results - All Respondents

Age

The students returning the questionnaire are considerably younger than the total internal student body. In 1998, 38% of all internal students were less than 21 years of age, while the corresponding figure for the survey is 64%. This is not surprising since the population surveyed excluded both students who were to graduate and postgraduate students. However, with respect to those surveyed, non-continuing students appear to be slightly older than continuing students, though the differences are negligible (see Table 3).

Table 3: Age

Age	Continuing Students		Non-Continuing students		All Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Missing	3		0		3	
Under 21	407	65%	57	61%	464	64%
21-24	139	22%	21	23%	161	22%
25 or over	81	13%	15	16%	95	13%
Total	630	100%	93	100%	723	100%

Gender

In 1998, 56% of all UNE internal undergraduate students were female. The proportion of female students returning the questionnaire was 67%, indicating a rather strong female bias amongst respondents. Why this should be the case is not entirely clear, though possibly female students are somewhat more diligent than their male colleagues when it comes to tasks such as completing and returning questionnaires. But what is more interesting with respect to gender is that it appears that a higher proportion of male than female students have chosen to withdraw from their studies in 1999. As can be seen from Table 4, while only 33% of all respondents are male, 41% of those respondents indicating withdrawal from UNE in 1999 are male.

The reason for the male bias with respect to non-continuing students is not clear. In recent years there has been some evidence to suggest that male students perform less well than female students at high school and thus possibly they come to university less well prepared than female students. Or possibly female students are better able to find the necessary means of financial support than are male students, such as from parents and/or casual employment. Or could it be that males are more likely to return the survey if they have a complaint and are withdrawing? Moreover, while the gender differences reported here are interesting, the low number of non-continuing students makes any analysis of statistical significance of the differences suspect. Obviously, this is an area deserving much more investigation.

Table 4: Gender

Gender	Continuing Students		Non-Continuing students		All Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Missing	3		0		3	
Male	197	31%	38	41%	235	33%
Female	430	69%	55	59%	485	67%
Total	630	100%	93	100%	723	100%

Location of Home Residence

Students were asked to provide their home residence postcode. As can be seen from Table 5, a far larger proportion of continuing students (22%) than non-continuing students (12%) appear to have their home residence in Armidale.

The significance of this finding will be made clearer below when factors affecting withdrawal are discussed in more detail, particularly factors associated with travel expenses and term accommodation. Whether continuing or discontinuing, the geographical location of UNE forces the majority of internal students (about 80% overall) to relocate with all of the financial and emotional cost that entails.

Table 5: Location of Home Residence

Postcode	Continuing Students		Non-Continuing students		All Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Missing	10		0		10	
Armidale postcode	136	22%	11	12%	147	21%
Non-Armidale postcode	484	78%	82	88%	566	79%
Total	630	100%	93	100%	723	100%

Marital Status

Marital status (see Table 6) does not appear to be an important variable affecting students' decision to continue with their studies at UNE in that the overwhelming majority of all respondents, continuing or otherwise, are single. This is consistent with the age profile of respondents as discussed above.

Table 6: Marital Status

Marital Status	Continuing Students		Non-Continuing students		All Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Missing	2		2		4	
Married/defacto	56	9%	6	7%	62	9%
Single	570	91%	84	92%	654	91%
Total	630	100%	93	100%	723	100%

Type of School/College at Year 12

The proportion of respondents who attended a non-government high school is about the same as the national average (see Table 7). What is interesting, however, is that a higher proportion of non-continuing students compared to continuing students attended a non-government high school, 37% and 32% respectively. But the difference is only 5% and probably has little if any statistical significance.

Table 7: Type of School/college at Year 12

School/college at Year 12	Continuing Students		Non-Continuing students		All Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Missing	2		0		2	
Government	398	63%	55	59%	453	63%
Non-government	198	32%	34	37%	232	32%
Other	32	5%	4	4%	36	5%
Total	630	100%	93	100%	723	100%

Faculty of Enrolment

The distribution of respondents across faculties is nearly the same as that for the whole of 1998 UNE enrolments. In 1998, 31% of all undergraduates were enrolled in the Faculty of Arts, 20% in the Faculty of Economics, Business and Law (FEBL), 25% in the Faculty of Education, Health and Professional Studies (FEHPS), and 24% in the Faculty of the Sciences. The respective faculty distribution for students who responded to the questionnaire was: 30%; 18%; 24%; and 22%. The majority of the 6% of respondents enrolled in combined degrees (34 out of 42) were enrolled in an Economics/Arts combination (see Table 8).

But in terms of faculty distribution of the enrolments of those who indicated that they would not be continuing study at UNE in 1999, it can be seen from Table 8 that non-continuing students in the Faculties of Arts and to a slightly lesser extent in the Faculty of Sciences are over represented. In terms of retaining students relative to the overall proportional share of faculty enrolment of respondents, FEBL appears to out perform the other faculties.

Table 8: Faculty of Enrolment

Faculty	Continuing Students		Non-Continuing students		All Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Missing	1		1		2	
Arts	182	29%	36	39%	218	30%
FEBL	118	19%	10	11%	128	18%
FEHPS	155	25%	18	20%	173	24%
Sciences	134	21%	26	28%	160	22%
Combined degree	40	6%	2	2%	42	6%
Total	630	100%	93	100%	723	100%

Prior Educational Qualifications

As might be expected, for the majority of respondents, high school was the highest previous educational qualification prior to their entry to UNE. There seems to be little difference between continuing and non-continuing students in this respect (see Table 9).

Table 9: Prior Educational Qualifications

Highest Previous Qualification	Continuing Students		Non-Continuing students		All Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Missing	2		0		2	
Completed High School	534	85%	76	82%	610	85%
TAFE qualification	63	10%	10	11%	73	10%
Bachelors Degree	7	1%	0	0%	7	1%
Postgraduate Degree	1	-	0	0%	1	-
Other	23	4%	7	8%	30	4%
Total	630	100%	93	100%	723	100%

Time Between Leaving School and Enrolling at UNE

According to the results in Table 10, it appears that non-continuing students spent more time between leaving school and enrolling at UNE than continuing students. This result is consistent with the fact that non-continuing students appear to be, on average, slightly older than continuing students (see Table 3). But the differences are not extreme in either case, and for both continuing and non-continuing students, the norm appears to be to proceed to university straight from school. Nonetheless, this is another area which may deserve further investigation.

Table 10: Time Between Leaving School and Enrolling at UNE

Number of Years	Continuing Students		Non-Continuing students		All Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Missing	2		0		2	
0	432	69%	57	61%	489	68%
1	81	13%	9	10%	90	13%
2-4 years	38	6%	14	15%	52	7%
5 years & over	77	12%	13	14%	90	13%
Total	630	100%	93	100%	723	100%

Study Mode

While it appears that the large majority of all respondents were studying full-time, a larger proportion of discontinuing students were in the part-time mode compared to continuing students. However, the numbers are small and must be interpreted with caution. Also, the relatively large number of missing cases for this item needs to be taken into account. This is probably due in part to not listing deferred as an option on the questionnaire, and that the question was not suited for respondents who discontinued study early in 1998.

Table 11: Study Mode

Study Mode	Continuing Students		Non-Continuing students		All Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Missing	38		14		52	
Full-time	560	95%	69	88%	629	93%
Part-time	32	5%	10	13%	42	6%
Total	630	100%	93	100%	723	100%

Course of Study

Table 12 list in descending order of occurrence the courses in which non-continuing students were enrolled along with enrolments in these courses by continuing students. As can be seen, nearly one-half (47%) of non-continuing students were enrolled in two degrees: the Bachelor of Arts (32%) and the Bachelor of Education (15%). Moreover, these two course are 'over subscribed' to by non-continuing students relative to the proportion of total enrolments in these degrees.

The remainder of the non-continuing students are spread across a number of degrees, and no one degree accounts for more than 9% of these enrolments.

A word of caution needs to be said about the Bachelor of Engineering Degree. The University discontinued this degree for all but final year students from 1999 onwards. While this was not known at the time the questionnaire was mailed, the closure of the degree was announced before the due date for return of the questionnaire. The 7

students enrolled in the BENG who indicated that they would not continue study at UNE in 1999 may or may not have known their course had been cancelled at the time they completed the questionnaire. Certainly according to comments, some of these students were well aware that the course had been terminated (see Part III below).

Table 12: Course of Study

Course	Continuing Students		Non-Continuing students		All Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Missing	5		1		6	
BA	102	16%	29	32%	131	18%
BE	58	9%	14	15%	72	10%
BSC	52	8%	8	9%	60	8%
BENG	1	-	7	8%	8	1%
BN	49	8%	6	7%	55	8%
BCOMM	47	8%	5	6%	52	7%
BALAW	42	7%	4	4%	46	6%
BTCH	43	7%	3	3%	46	6%
BFA	16	3%	2	2%	18	3%
BRUR	24	4%	2	2%	26	4%
BURP	27	4%	2	2%	29	4%
BAS	7	1%	1	1%	8	1%
BCOLAW	7	1%	1	1%	8	1%
BCOMP	9	1%	1	1%	10	1%
BEC	1	-	1	1%	2	-
BECLAW	4	1%	1	1%	5	1%
BET	0	-	1	1%	1	-
BLANG	9	1%	1	1%	10	1%
BPSYCH	15	2%	1	1%	16	2%
BNATBE	2	-	1	1%	3	-
BNATENG	2	-	1	1%	3	-
Other	108	17%	0	0	108	15%
Total	630	100%	93	100%	723	100%

Year Commenced Study

It appears from Table 13 that first year students are less likely to continue with their studies than second and subsequent year students. In relation to all students, non-continuing students first enrolled in 1998 are over represented by about 5%. It is generally the trend that the majority of students who withdraw from their courses do so after the first year of study.

Table 13: Year Commenced Study

Year	Continuing Students		Non-Continuing students		All Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Missing	3		0		3	
1998	290	46%	48	52%	338	47%
1997	198	32%	29	31%	227	32%
1996	81	13%	12	13%	93	13%
1995 or earlier	58	9%	4	4%	62	9%
Total	630	100%	93	100%	723	100%

Institution and Course of First Choice

Students were asked whether or not UNE was their institution of first choice for enrolment (see Table 14). It is interesting to note that while overall, about three-quarters of respondents said yes to this question, for those students indicating withdrawal in 1999, only about one-half said UNE was their first choice. As will be

observed below (see Table 18) the majority of students who withdraw do so in order to attend another university.

It is on this item that there is one of the largest differences between continuing and non-continuing students. This finding may have various policy implications (and deserves further investigation). It is possible that some students may be using UNE as a stepping stone to another 'more desirable' institution, which is not necessarily adverse to the University's interests. Yet the University perhaps could be doing more to encourage students for whom UNE was not their first choice to nonetheless complete their studies in Armidale.

Table 14: Institution of First Choice

Was UNE First Choice	Continuing Students		Non-Continuing students		All Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Missing	8		1		9	
Yes	466	75%	48	52%	514	72%
No	156	25%	44	48%	200	28%
Total	630	100%	93	100%	723	100%

Also, it appears that it is the institution rather than the course of first choice that discriminates between non-continuing and continuing students. As can be seen in Table 15, there is little difference between continuing and non-continuing students as to whether their course of enrolment at UNE was their first choice.

Table 15: Course of First Choice

Course of First Choice	Continuing Students		Non-Continuing students		All Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Missing	4		1		5	
Yes	486	78%	69	75%	555	77%
No	140	22%	23	25%	163	23%
Total	630	100%	93	100%	723	100%

Academic Performance

Students were asked to indicate the number of units they attempted and the number of units they passed in 1998. Some respondents indicated number of credit points rather than number of units, and a large number of respondents (21%) said they were unsure because they had yet to receive second semester results, and about 11% did not answer the question. A rough indicator of academic performance was constructed by dividing useable responses into those who passed 50% or more of the units/credit points attempted and those who passed less than 50% of the units/credit points attempted.

It appears that on average the academic performance of discontinuing students is substantially poorer than that for continuing students (Table 16). The analysis of 1997/98 withdrawals (Appendix A), also indicated that about around one-third of discontinuing students failed more than 50% of their units attempted. But because of the problems mentioned above and the very low numbers of non-continuing students, the results reported in Table 16 must be interpreted with extreme caution.

Table 16: Academic Performance

Number of units/ credit points passed	Continuing Students		Non-Continuing students		All Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Unsure or missing cases	179		49		228	
50%	438	97%	30	68%	468	95%
< 50%	13	3%	14	32%	27	5%
Total	630	100%	93	100%	723	100%

Importance of Sources of Financial Support

All students surveyed were asked to rate various sources of financial support on a 5 point scale ranging from ‘Not Important or Not Applicable (1)’ to ‘Very Important (5)’. The results are summarised in Table 17. For ease of presentation of results, the 5 point scale has been collapsed into three responses: ‘Not Important or Not Applicable (1 & 2)’, the median response (3), and ‘Important/Very Important (4 & 5)’. The full range of results is presented in Appendix C. The high number of missing cases is due to a number of respondents apparently only responding to items of relevance to their individual circumstances, and there would probably be little danger in regarding the missing cases as representing a ‘Not Important/Not Applicable’ response. But since doing so would have little affect on the interpretation of results – it would only further accentuate the non importance of certain items – no adjustment was made.

The results in Table 17 are fairly predictable, with the most important items of financial support being support from parents, youth allowance and personal savings, in that order. Full-time employment and support from spouse’s/partner’s income has little or no relevance for the vast majority of respondents. This second finding is consistent with the age and marital student profile discussed earlier. Part-time and casual employment appear to be important or very important sources of financial support for around one-third of respondents, with casual employment more prominent than part-time employment.

There appear to be no gross differences between continuing and non-continuing students as to the importance of the various sources of financial support. It is interesting to note, however, that relative to continuing students, for non-continuing students, part-time employment is somewhat more important than casual employment. This may mean that students who have chosen to withdraw are more dependent than continuing students on a regular source of income that part-time over casual employment may provide. This speculation is given some support by the observation that it appears that non-continuing students have less access to the youth allowance and personal savings and are slightly more dependent on parental support than are continuing students. But any such conclusions must be tempered by the fact that numbers for non-continuing students are quite small.

From a policy point of view, it would seem that improving opportunities for both part-time and casual employment would impact on between one-quarter and one-third of students. But the vast majority of students remain dependent on traditional sources of financial support: youth allowance and parental support. Possibly, policy here too could be reviewed, particularly with respect to rural university students’ access to the youth allowance and tax concessions for parents supporting students at regional universities.

Table17: Importance of Sources of Financial Support

Source of Support and Importance	Continuing Students		Non-Continuing Students		All Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Part-time Employment						
Missing	90		14		104	
Not Important or Not Applicable	398	74%	51	65%	449	73%
Median Response	20	4%	7	9%	27	4%
Important/Very Important	122	23%	21	27%	143	23%

Table17: Importance of Sources of Financial Support (continued)

Full-time Employment						
Missing	110		19		129	
Not Important or Not Applicable	505	97%	68	92%	573	97%
Median Response	4	1%	2	3%	6	1%
Important/Very Important	11	2%	4	6%	15	3%
Casual Employment						
Missing	76		18		94	
Not Important or Not Applicable	341	61%	50	67%	391	62%
Median Response	49	9%	9	12%	58	9%
Important/Very Important	164	30%	16	21%	180	29%
Youth Allowance (Austudy/Abstudy)						
Missing	42		12		54	
Not Important or Not Applicable	246	42%	42	52%	288	43%
Median Response	13	2%	2	3%	15	2%
Important/Very Important	329	56%	37	46%	366	55%
Spouse's/partner's Income						
Missing	110		22		132	
Not Important or Not Applicable	482	93%	69	97%	551	93%
Median Response	3	1%	0	0%	3	1%
Important/Very Important	35	7%	2	3%	37	6%
Support From Parent(s)						
Missing	61		12		73	
Not Important or Not Applicable	145	26%	16	20%	161	25%
Median Response	69	12%	4	5%	73	11%
Important/Very Important	355	62%	61	75%	416	64%
Personal Savings						
Missing	77		16		93	
Not Important or Not Applicable	197	36%	31	40%	228	36%
Median Response	98	18%	12	16%	110	18%
Important/Very Important	258	47%	34	44%	292	46%

1999 Intentions – All Students

As stated above, 93 respondents indicated that they already had discontinued study at UNE or intended not to continue at UNE in 1999. Of the remaining 630 respondents, 92 per cent indicated that they intended to continue study at UNE in the course in which they were presently enrolled and about 8 per cent indicated that they intended to continue study but in a different course. Also, 70 respondents or about 11 per cent of the continuing students indicated that they intended to continue study at UNE, but as external students. Continuing students were asked no more questions. Part III of the questionnaire was only completed by students discontinuing their studies. However, all students were invited to provide additional comments if they so wished and the responses of those who did so are discussed in Part III of the report.

Part II: Reasons for Withdrawal

The 93 respondents who indicated that they would not continue study at UNE in 1999 were asked about their alternative plans for the year (see Table 18). Fifty-nine per cent of the respondents indicated that they planned to continue study at another university, 10% intended to find full-time employment, 11% said they intended to return to UNE after taking a break from study, and 19% listed a variety of alternative activities, including part-time employment and TAFE courses.

It is encouraging to see that close to three-quarters of the withdrawing students are not lost to higher education, with 59% continuing studies at another university and 11% intending to return to UNE at some future date. But on the other hand, it should be of concern to UNE that the majority of the students who withdraw from UNE do so in order to attend another university.

Table18: Non-continuing Students' Plans for 1999

Non-Continuing Students' Plans for 1999	Non-Continuing Students	
	No.	%
Missing	5	
Continue study at another university	52	59%
Find a full-time job	9	10%
Take a break from study, intending to return to UNE at a later date	10	11%
Other	17	19%
Total	93	100%

The remainder of the survey was devoted to questions that attempted to identify the underlying factors influencing students intention to withdraw from study at UNE. The questions were grouped into six categories: employment and finance; academic preparedness; course and teaching/learning environment; accommodation/distance/travel problems; family relationships and responsibilities; and health, accident, stress or other personal factors (see Appendix B). Within each category, students were asked to indicate on a five point scale the importance or applicability of a number of factors that may have influenced their decision to withdraw from UNE. Again, for ease of presentation of results, the 5 point scale has been collapsed into three responses: Not important or not applicable (1 & 2), the median response (3), and important/very important (4 & 5). The responses are recorded according to proportions rather than frequency. The full range of results is presented in Appendix D.

Results are reported below according to the six categories.

Employment and Finance

Of the 13 employment and finance factors listed, a substantial proportion of respondents (one-quarter or more) identified only 3 factors as important or very important: constant worry about having enough money to get by from week to week (43% of respondents); lack of part-time/casual employment opportunities in Armidale (about 29% of respondents); and deemed ineligible for the Youth Allowance (29% of respondents). Depending on how the median response is assessed, it also seems that underestimating the expenses involved in living away from home may also be a factor of some importance for about one-quarter of the respondents (see Table 19).

Regarding the some total of responses in Table 19, it is probably safe to conclude that financial and employment factors influenced between 30% and 40% of the respondents' decision to discontinue study at UNE. Also, however, it may be concluded that finance and employment decisions were not important and/or applicable for around 60% of the respondents indicating their withdrawal from UNE studies.

From a policy perspective, there are possibly three areas in which action might be considered: improvement of part-time/casual employment opportunities; consideration of how to better assist students deemed ineligible for the Youth

Allowance (possibly, as mentioned above, through tax concessions for parental support or modification of the Youth Allowance criteria for country students); and better counselling and provision of information with respect to the expenses associated with living and studying in Armidale.

Table 19: Employment and Finance Factors Influencing Students' Decisions to Withdraw from UNE

Factor	Not Important or Not Applicable %	Median Response %	Important/Very Important %
Lack of full-time employment opportunities in Armidale (n = 86)	77.9	8.1	13.9
Lack of part-time/casual employment opportunities in Armidale (n = 86)	60.5	10.5	29.1
Necessity to leave course to look for a job elsewhere (n = 84)	87.0	4.8	8.4
Lack of vacation work (n = 84)	83.4	8.3	8.4
Loss of job (n = 83)	96.4	3.6	0.0
Spouse/partner lost their job (n = 83)	96.4	1.2	2.4
Employer not supportive of your study (n = 81)	96.3	2.5	1.2
Constant worry about having enough money to get by from week to week (n = 86)	48.9	8.1	43.0
Major unexpected expense (n = 86)	76.7	9.3	14.0
Deemed ineligible for the Youth Allowance (n = 85)	65.9	4.7	29.4
Youth allowance inadequate (n = 83)	78.3	2.4	19.2
Loss of Youth Allowance (n = 84)	89.3	1.2	9.5
Underestimated the expense involved in living away from home (n = 85)	71.8	14.1	14.2

Academic Preparedness

With respect to factors concerned with students' academic preparedness, only two appear to deserve any mention: inadequate counselling prior to entry; and unsatisfactory study skills (see Table 20). These are, however, factors that could lend themselves to remedial action.

Table 20: Academic Preparedness Factors Influencing Students' Decisions to Withdraw from UNE

Factor	Not Important or Not Applicable %	Median Response %	Important/Very Important %
Lack of prerequisite knowledge relevant to the chosen course (n = 84)	85.7	8.3	6.0
Inadequate counselling prior to entry (n = 84)	77.3	4.8	17.9
Inability to keep up with the other students in the course (n = 82)	81.7	14.6	3.6
Insufficient maths background (n = 84)	85.7	6.0	8.4
Lack of orientation/bridging courses(s) (n = 82)	87.8	8.5	3.6
Unsatisfactory study skills (n = 84)	71.4	11.9	16.6

Course and Teaching/Learning Environment

There appears to be little dissatisfaction amongst withdrawing students about the University's classroom/laboratory conditions; or the adequacy of library, computing and student support facilities. However, a number of other factors concerning the

course of study and/or the teaching/learning environment appear to be having some serious influence on students' decision to withdraw from study. Between about one-quarter and one-third of respondents indicated some concern about: lack of course relevance to future career plans; dissatisfaction with the teaching of the course; lack of interest in the course; inflexible administrative arrangements (such as time tabling, course structure, course requirements); uncaring or uninterested administrative staff; and heavy course workload (see Table 21). Depending on how the median response is interpreted, 'failure to satisfactorily complete course requirements' seems to have influenced the decision of about one-quarter of the discontinuing students. On the other hand, a substantial majority of respondents did not find any of these factors important and/or applicable to their decision to withdraw from UNE. Nonetheless, where a tangible minority of students express concern about the quality of the teaching/learning environment, ameliorative action is probably appropriate. The University needs to remain committed to constant improvement in the quality of its courses and the teaching/learning environment.

Table 21: Course and Teaching/Learning Environment Influencing Students' Decisions to Withdraw from UNE

Factor	Not Important or Not Applicable %	Median Response %	Important/Very Important %
Lack of interest in the course (n = 83)	72.3	6.0	21.6
Heavy course workload (n = 83)	67.5	12.0	20.4
Dissatisfaction with the teaching of the course (n = 84)	64.3	11.9	23.8
Lack of course relevance to future career plans (n = 82)	65.9	9.8	24.4
Failure to satisfactory complete course requirements (n = 81)	75.3	8.6	16.0
Unsatisfactory classroom/laboratory conditions (n = 82)	85.4	4.9	9.8
Inadequate library facilities (n = 82)	87.8	4.9	7.3
Inadequate computing facilities (n = 83)	84.3	6.0	9.6
Inflexible administrative arrangements (n = 84)	75.0	6.0	19.1
Uncaring or uninterested administrative staff (n = 83)	75.9	4.8	19.3
Uncaring or uninterested teaching staff (n = 83)	81.9	2.4	15.6
Inadequate student support services (n = 82)	85.4	7.3	7.3

Accommodation/Distance/Travel Factors

Of the factors associated with accommodation, distance and travel, only three seemed to be of much concern to withdrawing students: distractions from study in college accommodation; and problems brought about by travel expenses and inability to travel or phone home as often as desired (see Table 22).

In terms of policy, the colleges might review their management of extra curricular activities and the maintenance of an appropriate study environment. Thirty per cent of the respondents indicated that too many distractions from study in college accommodation was an important or very important reason for their withdrawal. Also, nearly the same proportion indicated problems associated with distance between their term address in Armidale and their home location, identifying in particular the cost of travel from home to Armidale as an important reason for withdrawing. It might be worthwhile for the University to explore the possibility of obtaining more advantageous travel concessions for its students.

Table 22: Accommodation/Distance/Travel Factors Influencing Students' Decisions to Withdraw from UNE

Factor	Not Important or Not Applicable %	Median Response %	Important/Very Important %
Lack of freedom and independence in living at home (n = 84)	91.7	6.0	2.4
Inadequate study facilities (n = 84)	86.9	6.0	7.2
Tension/conflict with or among people with whom you shared accommodation (n = 84)	76.1	9.5	14.3
Loneliness in college accommodation (n = 83)	78.3	7.2	14.4
Too many distractions from study in college accommodation (n = 84)	60.7	8.3	30.9
Inability to travel or phone home as often as you would have liked (n = 84)	66.7	6.0	27.4
Difficulty in adjusting to a different lifestyle from the one at home (n = 84)	85.7	7.1	7.1
Travel expenses (n = 85)	61.2	9.4	29.4

Family Relationships and Responsibilities

Except for a small minority of respondents, factors associated with family relationships and responsibilities had virtually no influence on the decision to discontinue study at UNE (see Table 23). This is probably related to the fact that the majority of the students not continuing study are under the age of 21 and single (see above).

Table 23: Family Relationships and Responsibilities Influencing Students' Decisions to Withdraw from UNE

Factor	Not Important or Not Applicable %	Median Response %	Important/Very Important %
Lack of interest in and encouragement for your studies from parents (n = 84)	91.7	3.6	4.8
Lack of interest in and encouragement for your studies from spouse/partner (n = 83)	96.4	1.2	2.4
Difficulty with juggling family commitments (eg child care, household duties) and study (n = 83)	86.7	4.8	8.4
Pregnancy (n = 82)	98.7	0.0	1.2
Problems in arranging child care to enable attendance at University (n = 82)	97.5	1.2	1.2
Studies disrupted by family break up/divorce (n = 81)	96.3	0.0	3.7

Health, Accident, Stress or Other Personal Factors

Again, except for a small minority of respondents who experienced some personal crisis during the course of their study, health, accident, stress or other personal factors appear to have little influence on the decision to withdraw. The only factors that seem to deserve a mention in this respect are stress brought about by the dual demands of work and study, and tired of studying (see Table 24).

Table 24: Health, Accident, Stress or Other Personal Factors Influencing Students' Decisions to Withdraw from UNE

Factor	Not Important or Not Applicable %	Median Response %	Important/Very Important %
Care of a sick relative/friend (n = 82)	93.9	0.0	6.1
Severe illness or accident (n = 83)	86.7	4.8	8.4
Insufficient facilities for disabled persons (n = 82)	97.5	1.2	1.2
Tired of studying (n = 84)	77.3	10.7	11.9
Dislike of being a student (n = 83)	81.9	13.3	4.8
Stress brought about by the dual demands of work and study (n = 84)	73.8	10.7	15.4

Most Important Factors or Group of Factors Influencing the Decision to Withdraw

Finally, students were asked to choose the two most important factors from a list of potential factors that may have influenced their decision to withdraw from UNE. The results are presented in Table 25.

The three most frequently identified reasons for withdrawing from study from UNE are employment and finance; accommodation/ distance/travel problems; and course and teaching/learning environment – in that order of preference. But no one factor was identified by even 50% of the respondents. It is important to note that no single dominating factor explains withdrawal from UNE

Table 25: Most Important Factors or Group of Factors Influencing Decision to Withdraw

Factor	Number of Respondents Selecting Particular Factor (two choices only per respondent; maximum possible per factor is 93)
Employment and finance	37
Accommodation/distance/travel problems	33
Course and teaching/learning environment	31
Health, accident, stress or other personal factors	18
Academic preparedness	14
Family relationships and responsibilities	14

Part III: Summary of Comments From Respondents

Comments From Withdrawing Students

There were a number of explanations provided by students not intending continuing their studies at UNE. These included: (1) factors relating to the academic component of the degree enrolled in and the level of support received from teaching and administrative staff; (2) reasons *unassociated* with the university itself or the degree enrolled in (such as ill-health and lifestyle preferences) and (3) enrolment in a course at another university. Financial hardship and limited employment opportunities in Armidale were major explanations for withdrawing. A number of students commented that they were transferring to another university and hence withdrawing from UNE. Some students commented on their distaste for Armidale itself as a place to live. Other explanations involved the distance of UNE from home of residence; and discontinuation of an advertised course. With respect to the latter factor, the principal complaint was about the discontinuation of engineering at UNE. The criticism regarding this decision was vociferous and the disappointment at not being able to continue the degree at UNE substantial.

Comments from Continuing Students

A number of continuing students took the opportunity to provide further comments regarding difficulties in continuing with their studies at UNE. Many commented on financial hardships in undertaking their studies. These include the costs of accommodation; the need to leave colleges during the vacation periods and the costs of travel to their home residences. For those who are ineligible for Austudy or similar financial support the financial difficulties for parents are considered substantial. Fewer opportunities for part-time/casual employment than exists in the major cities exacerbates these financial difficulties.

Another major criticism regarded the course structure and the teaching and responsiveness of some staff to dealing with student difficulties. The quality of the infrastructure, in particular the computer support in the ITS building and the provision of relevant and up to date literature in the library, also received negative comments (although this was identified as an important factor on the survey form itself by only a few respondents). The 'prestige' of the University compared with the 'elite' universities such as the University of Sydney or the University of New South Wales also were identified as concerns by some students.

Despite critical comments and concerns, there were also a number of positive comments about UNE. These ranged from those regarding the quality of college life to the appreciation of the level of support by academic staff for their students and the quality of the courses. Several students believed that the college residences were not promoted as well as they could be to prospective students. Also the success of UNE students in gaining employment in areas related to their degrees was considered not to have been advertised sufficiently.

APPENDIX A

Summary Report on Internal Undergraduate Students Enrolled in 1997 who did not continue with study in 1998

Summary Report on Internal Undergraduate Students Enrolled in 1997 who did not continue with study in 1998

(The following excludes overseas students, honours students, and non-award students, but includes part-time students. Duplicate entries where a student has transferred from one degree program to another have also been deleted – ie only one entry for a course duplicate has been included).

There were 296 internal, undergraduate (Bachelor Pass) students enrolled in 1997 who did not continue study at UNE or complete a course in 1998. The full-time/part-time breakdown is as follows:

Full-time	233	79%
Part-time	63	21%
Total	296	100%

The students were distributed by Faculty as follows:

Arts	150	51%
Economics	40	14%
Education	50	17%
Science	56	19%

In 1997 there were 3073 internal undergraduate students enrolled at UNE, of whom 320 or about 10% were part-time. These students were distributed across the four faculties as follows: Arts – 1023 or 33%; Economics – 642 or 21%; Education – 647 or 21%; Science – 761 or 25%. It appears that of those students who did not continue from 1997 to 1998, part-time students are over represented as are those enrolled in the Faculty of Arts.

Of the 296 non-continuing students, 124 (42%) had a student ID earlier than 1997 and 172 (58%) were new to the University in 1997. However, it should be noted that of the students with a pre-1997 ID, 21 of them are recorded as being enrolled in 1997 units only. This is probably due in part to students deferring enrolment or older students having a previous ID but enrolling in a new course in 1997. Possibly, these students should be counted as 1st year students in 1997, reducing the number of 1997 2nd and subsequent year students from 124 to 103 (35%).

A further breakdown as to length of study based on student ID is as follows

enrolled pre 95	35	12%
1995 to 1996	89	30%
enrolled 1997	172	58%
Total	296	100%

There was insufficient information in the records examined to conduct an analysis of TER scores. There was data on the admission basis for 267 of the students and this is summarised below.

Admission Basis	Number of Students	%
EXM by institution	4	1%
Final year secondary ed at sch	87	29%
Final year secondary ed at TAFE	4	1%
Complete higher ed course	5	1%
Incomplete higher ed course	35	12%
Mature age	21	7%
Other basis	9	3%
OLA	1	-
Professional qualification	1	-
Special entry	93	31%
TAFE course	7	2%
Not known	29	10%
Total	296	

The average GPA of all students who did not continue from 1997 to 1998 is 0.98, and the average number of units passed is 58%. 47 students (16%) failed all units and had a gpa of 0. 68 students (23%) passed one or more units but less than 50% of the units attempted. 113 students (38%) had a gpa of less than 1.00; 98 students (33%) had a gpa greater than or equal to 1.00 and less than or equal to 2.0; and 38 students (13%) had a gpa greater than 2.0. The academic performance of all non-continuing students is summarised below.

All Non-continuing students academic performance

GPA	No of Students	%	% units passed	No. of Students	%
0	47	16%	0	47	16%
> 0 < 1.0	113	38%	> 0 < 50%	68	23%
1.0 2.0	98	33%	50%	181	61%
> 2.0	38	13%			
Total	296	100%		296	100%

The 124 non-continuing students who were other than first year, had an average gpa of 0.97, and on average passed 54% of the units attempted. A more detailed breakdown of their performance is provided below.

Students with Pre-1997 IDs academic performance

GPA	No of Students	%	% units passed	No. of Students	%
0	12	10%	0	12	10%
> 0 < 1	60	48%	> 0 < 50%	43	35%
1.0 2.0	34	27%	50%	69	55%
2.0	18	15%			
	124	100%		124	100%

The 172 non-continuing 1997 first year students had an average gpa of 0.99, and on average passed 61% of the units attempted. A more detailed breakdown of their performance is provided below.

Students with 1997 IDs

GPA	No of Students	%	% units passed	No. of Students	%
0	35	20%	0	35	20%
> 0 < 1.0	53	31%	> 0 < 50%	25	15%
1.0 < 2.0	64	37%	50%	112	65%
> 2.0	20	12%			
	172	100%		172	100%

Of the non-continuing students, there does not appear to be any substantial difference in the academic performance between first year and other students, though first year students do seem to perform as a group slightly better. Nonetheless, it would seem safe to speculate that approximately half of the students examined here have chosen not to continue for academic reasons, having failed 50% or more of the units attempted and achieved a gpa of less than 1.00.

However, an important and possibly surprising feature of the 1997 data is that about half (144) of the 1997 students who did not come back to UNE in 1998, nonetheless completed procedures for 1998 re-enrolment. In other words, this group of students completed re-enrolment in 1997, indicating their intention of continuing with their studies in 1998, but failed to do so. The other group just disappeared and did not complete re-enrolment procedures in 1997. What is also interesting is that the first group (those who re-enrolled, but did not come back), appear on average to have much better academic records than those in the second group (the ones who do not re-enrol). The average GPA is 1.28 for the first group, and 0.70 for the second; on average, the first group successfully completed 71% of the units attempted; while the corresponding figure for the second group was 45%. A further breakdown of the two groups (those who did and did not complete re-enrolment prior to the commencement of the 1998 academic year) is provided below.

Non-continuing students who nonetheless completed re-enrolment in 1997

GPA	No of Students	%	% units passed	No. of Students	%
0	10	7%	0	10	7%
> 0 < 1.0	49	34%	> 0 < 50%	23	16%
1.0 2.0	57	40%	50%	111	77%
> 2.0	28	19%			
Total	144	100%		144	100%

Non-continuing students who did not complete re-enrolment in 1997

GPA	No of Students	%	% units passed	No. of Students	%
0	37	24%	0	37	24%
> 0 < 1.0	64	42%	> 0 < 50%	45	30%
1.0 2.0	41	27%	50%	70	46%
> 2.0	10	7%			
Total	152	100%		152	100%

Finally, the majority (86%) of the non-continuing students gave a NSW post code as their home address. 60 students also listed Armidale as their home address. The remainder of the students' home addresses are spread throughout NSW and Australia, as indicated below. In terms of a postcode analysis, the home-address rural/urban location and Low SES indicator of that location is compared with that of the 1998 intake.

- Low SES: 31.2% of 1998 intake; of the 1997 non-continuing students, 25.9% are low SES.
- Rural: 71.7% in 1998 versus 61% of the 1997 non-continuing students
- Isolated: 3.3% (1998) or 4.2% (1997) versus 4.1% of the 1997 non-continuing students

APPENDICES B - D

(download as separate pdf files)
see the web page

Appendix B	Questionnaire
Appendix C	Importance of Sources of Financial Support
Appendix D	Factors Influencing Students' Decisions to Withdraw from UNE