

# LA TROBE UNIVERSITY STUDENT EQUITY 2006 SUMMARY

## Background

In its commitment to student equity, La Trobe University makes an important contribution to the well-being of the general community and ensures that people from all sectors of the community are able to receive the personal, social and financial benefits of a tertiary education. This commitment affords the opportunity for people from all backgrounds to contribute to society according to their fullest potential, offering their skills, achievements and diverse perspectives within the University and the wider community.

In addition, studying in an environment which represents the broader Victorian community exposes students to a more accurate view of the world, encourages the development and appreciation of diversity, and equips students to deal with their futures in an increasingly diverse world. Equity in tertiary education is thus not only a benefit to students in the defined equity groups, but to the University as a whole.

The Department of Education, Science and Training states that: *higher education providers receiving support from the Australian Government are responsible under the Higher Education Support Act 2003 for ensuring equity of access. Supporting equity is an integral part of their general operations.*<sup>1</sup>

Included in this summary is an analysis of the University's performance in the area of student equity of the past five years, and a comparison with the most recent state and national averages for the sector.

## DEST Designated Student Equity Groups

DEST monitors equity measures for the following groups identified as being historically disadvantaged in relation to higher education:

- Students from low socio-economic status background (Low SES)
- Students from non English speaking background (NESB)
- Students with a disability or long term medical condition
- Students from rural and isolated areas
- Gender (non-traditional areas of study)
- Indigenous Australian students

Definitions for these groups are described in Appendix 1.

The measures used to monitor student equity performance are: access, participation, retention and success. Definitions of these measures are described in Appendix 2.

## Student Equity Achievements at La Trobe

Statistical analysis of student equity group data provides a positive picture overall for La Trobe University's performance over the period 2002 – 2006, relative to other universities in the sector. Particularly notable are the recruitment, retention and success levels for students from low SES backgrounds and students from rural areas. Recruitment and success levels for students with a disability are also notable.

---

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher\\_education/programmes\\_funding/programme\\_categories/special\\_needs\\_disadvantage/default.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/programmes_funding/programme_categories/special_needs_disadvantage/default.htm).

Factors contributing to these positive trends include: a wide range of scholarships; a wide range of student outreach programs; a recycled computer scheme; a strong level of support for students with a disability; academic support via the Language and Academic Skills units; the Equity Staff Development program; and strategies within the University's Learning and Teaching Plan that address the diversity of the La Trobe student population.

The analysis for the following two equity groups indicate that there is a need for additional attention to improve the overall access and success of these students.

### **Students from Non-English Speaking Background (NESB)**

Although there has been a steady increase in the retention of students from a non-English speaking background, the University is below the enrolments levels for the sector. Access for this group of students has increased since 2002 but the University remains below the average for both the state and national sectors. Research is currently being undertaken to ascertain reasons why this group is under represented and the strategies required to improve participation, retention and success rates.

It must also be noted that the DEST definition of non-English speaking background only includes those students who have been in Australia for less than ten years, and speak a language other than English at home. La Trobe University does have a culturally diverse student cohort which is not reflected under the DEST definition for NESB students.

### **Students from Isolated Areas**

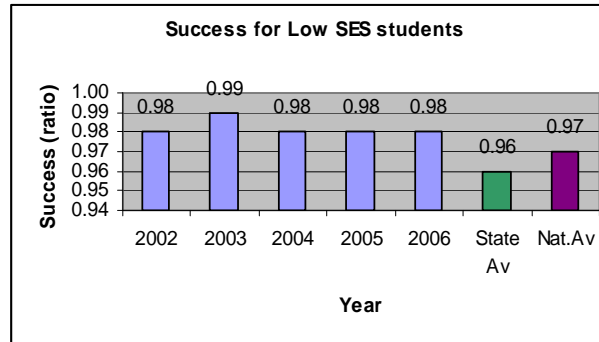
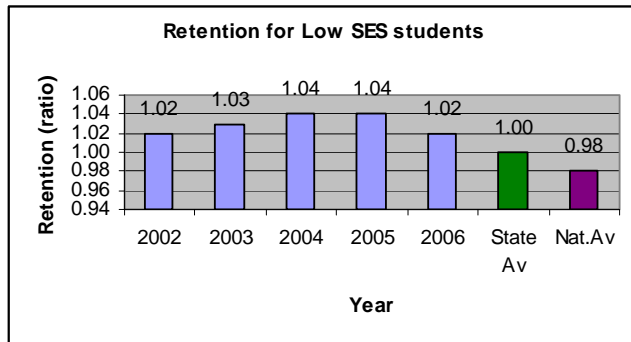
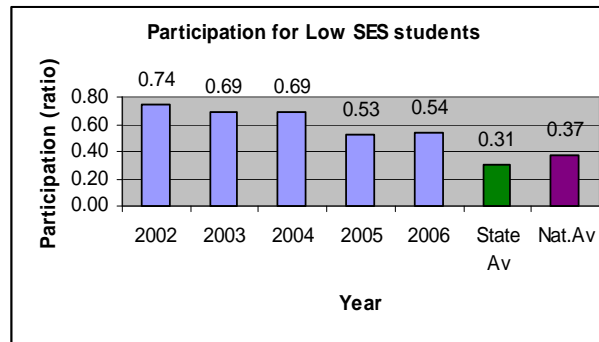
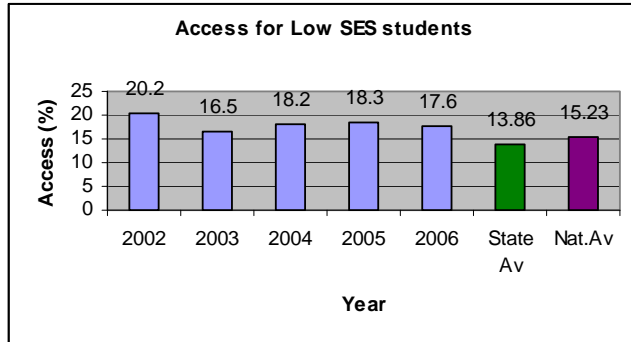
The data shows that access, participation, and success rates of this group are above the Victorian Universities average. Success rates for this group have been above both the state and national average for every year of the five year period. However, retention rates remain below the state average, and access and participation levels remain below the national average.

There are a number of factors which may contribute to the lower enrolment levels. The current drought which has affected Victoria for several years is no doubt a major factor. Further, research undertaken by Mission Australia indicates that completion rates at secondary school for both female and male students are considerably lower in isolated areas than metropolitan students. This is particularly so for male students.<sup>2</sup> A research project investigating how to improve access to University for state secondary school equity groups in the Bendigo region is almost finalised. This report will provide the Equity and Access Unit with information about what needs to be addressed to improve not only the access of isolated students but also rural students.

---

<sup>2</sup> Mission Australia (2006). Rural and Regional Australia: Change, Challenge and Capacity.

## Students from Low Socio Economic Status (SES) Background



Although there has been a steady decline in commencing and continuing students from this group over the 5 year period, La Trobe continues to attract a higher percentage of these students than the State and National average. The participation ratio indicates that La Trobe has a higher ratio of low SES: high SES students than the state and national average.

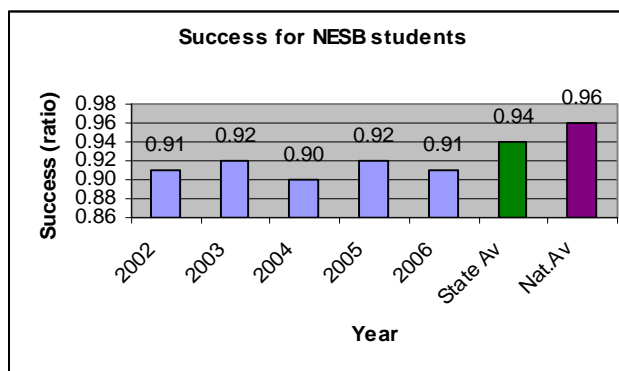
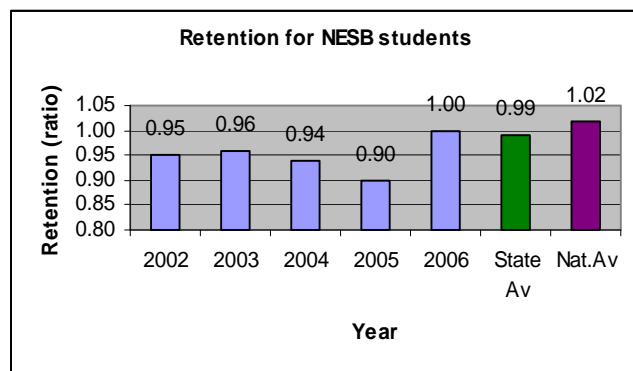
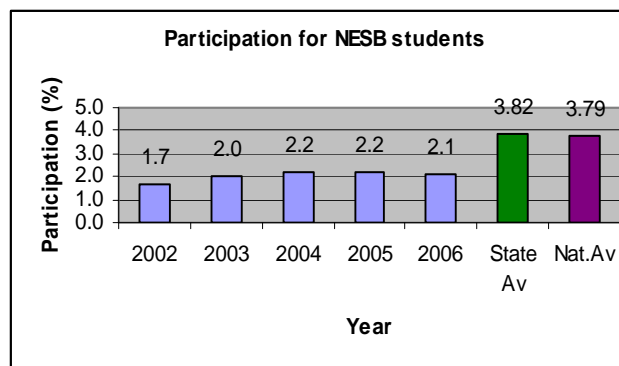
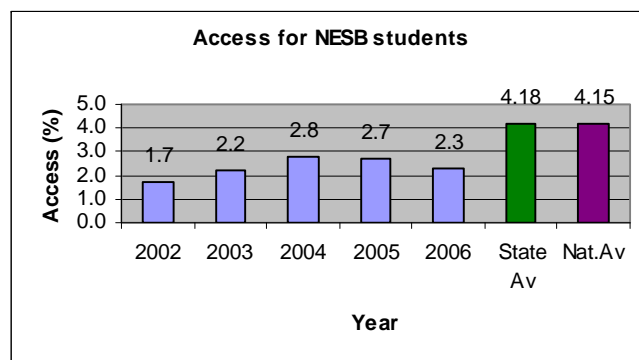
Of the 3,889 students in 2006 designated at low SES, 56% attend Bundoora Campus and 34% attend regional campuses.

The retention and success measures indicate that low SES students at La Trobe are slightly more likely to persevere and succeed in their studies when compared with state and national averages across the university sector.

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	State Av 05*	Nat. Av 05*
<b>Access %</b>	20.2%	16.5%	18.2%	18.3%	17.6%	<b>13.86</b>	<b>15.23</b>
<b>Participation %</b>	20.0%	18.5%	18.1%	17.2%	17.4%	<b>13.52</b>	<b>14.57</b>
<b>Participation r</b>	0.74	0.69	0.69	0.53	0.54	<b>0.31</b>	<b>0.37</b>
<b>Retention r</b>	1.02	1.03	1.04	1.04	1.02	<b>1.00</b>	<b>0.98</b>
<b>Success r</b>	0.98	0.99	0.98	0.98	0.98	<b>0.96</b>	<b>0.97</b>

\*2006 state and national averages for the University sector are not available until late 2007

## Students from Non English Speaking Background (NESB)



	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	State Av 05*	Nat. Av 05*
<b>Access %</b>	1.7%	2.2%	2.8%	2.7%	2.3%	<b>4.18</b>	<b>4.15</b>
<b>Participation %</b>	1.7%	2.0%	2.2%	2.2%	2.1%	<b>3.82</b>	<b>3.79</b>
<b>Retention r</b>	0.95	0.96	0.94	0.90	1.00	<b>0.99</b>	<b>1.02</b>
<b>Success r</b>	0.91	0.92	0.90	0.92	0.91	<b>0.94</b>	<b>0.96</b>

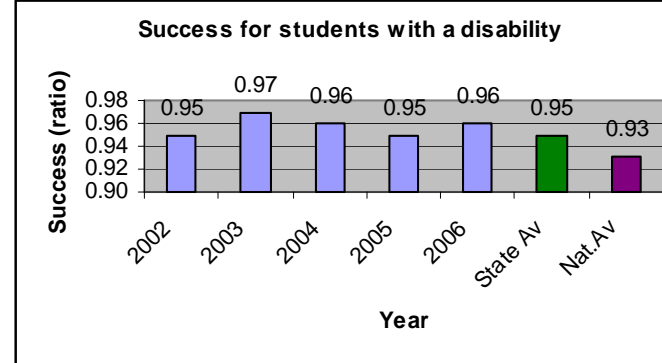
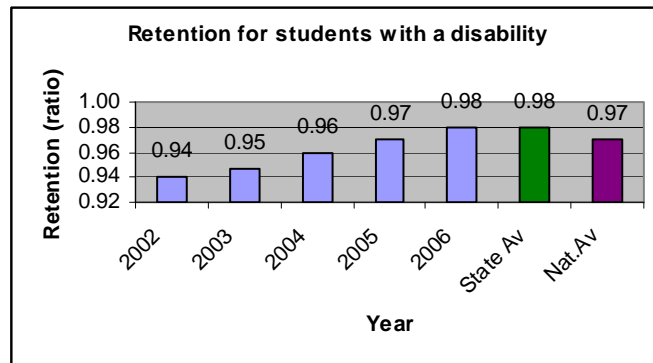
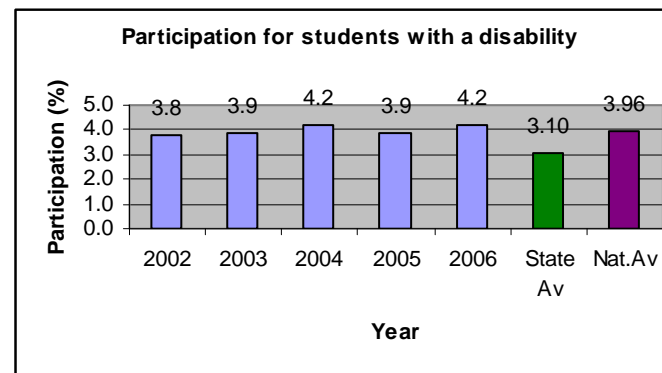
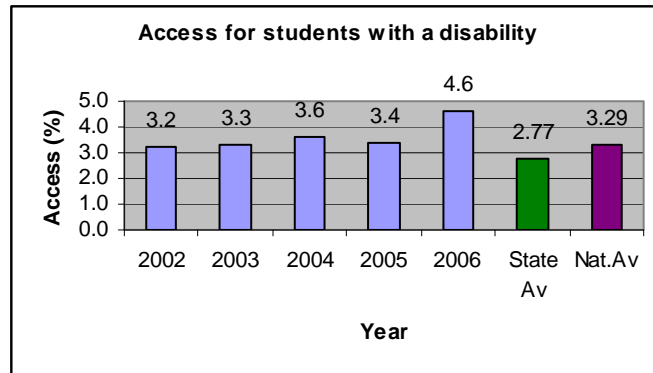
\*2006 state and national averages for the University sector are not available until late 2007

The percentage of commencing and continuing students from this group has increased slightly over the 5 year period, however La Trobe still attracts a lower percentage of these students than the state and national average. In 2006 a project commenced to explore what barriers may exist to University entry for this group of students, with a view to developing outreach programs to encourage more NESB students to commence studies at La Trobe.

There has been a pleasing increase in retention levels for this group, indicating that in 2006 NESB students at La Trobe were slightly more likely to persevere with their studies than their counterparts across Victorian universities, and just as likely as non-NESB students to remain in their programs.

Success measures indicate that NESB students at La Trobe are slightly less likely to succeed in their studies when compared with state and national averages across the university sector. The current project will also consider how the University can provide additional study support initiatives for this group of students.

## Students with a Disability or Long Term Medical Condition



The percentage of commencing and continuing students from this group has increased slightly over the 5 year period, and La Trobe attracts a higher percentage of these students than the state and national average.

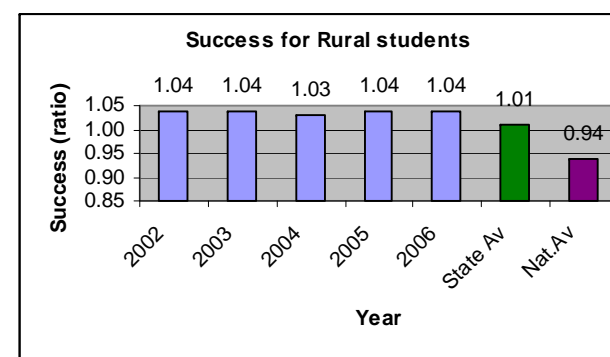
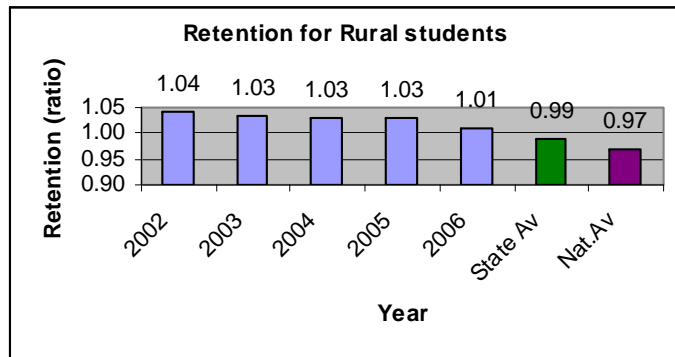
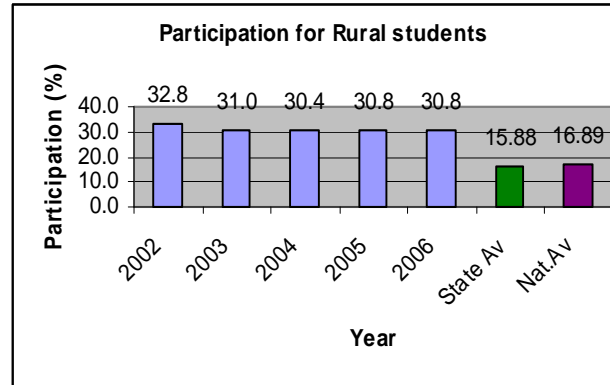
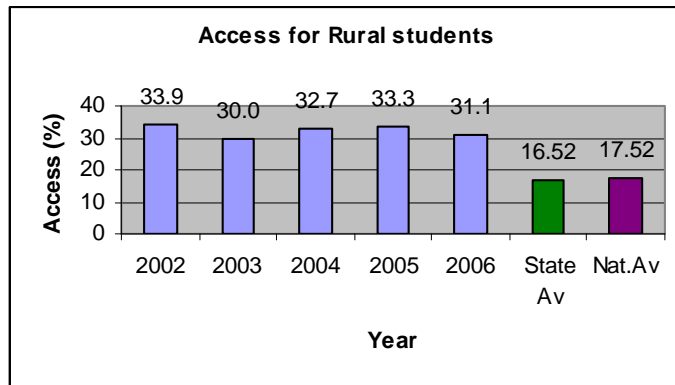
The retention rate indicates that this group of students are remaining in their studies at a similar level to their state and national counterparts, and are slightly less likely to remain in their studies than students who do not have a disability.

The success measures indicate that these students at La Trobe are succeeding at a similar level to their counterparts in other Victorian universities, and they are slightly more likely to succeed when compared with national averages across the university sector.

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	State Av 05*	Nat. Av 05*
<b>Access %</b>	3.2%	3.3%	3.6%	3.4%	4.6%	<b>2.77</b>	<b>3.29</b>
<b>Participation %</b>	3.8%	3.9%	4.2%	3.9%	4.2%	<b>3.10</b>	<b>3.96</b>
<b>Retention r</b>	0.94	0.95	0.96	0.97	0.98	<b>0.98</b>	<b>0.97</b>
<b>Success r</b>	0.95	0.97	0.96	0.95	0.96	<b>0.95</b>	<b>0.93</b>

\*2006 state and national averages for the University sector are not available until late 2007

## Students from Rural Areas



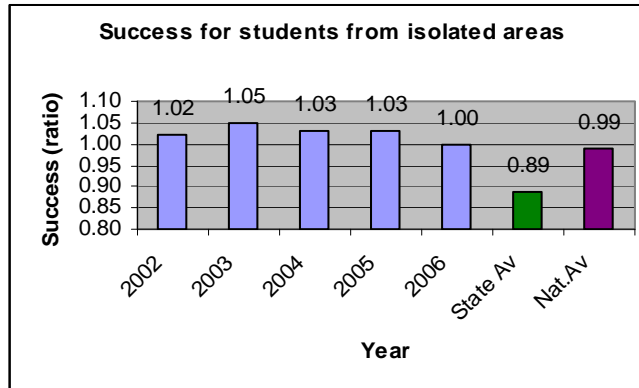
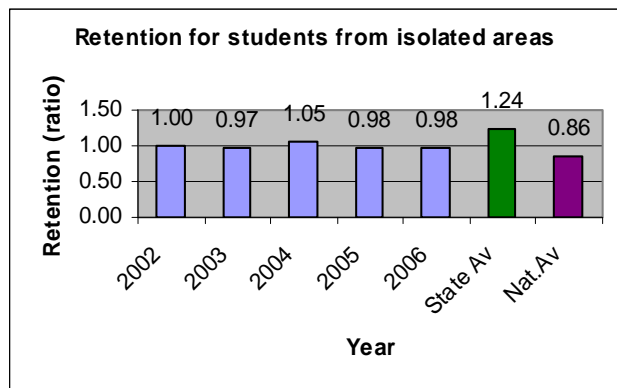
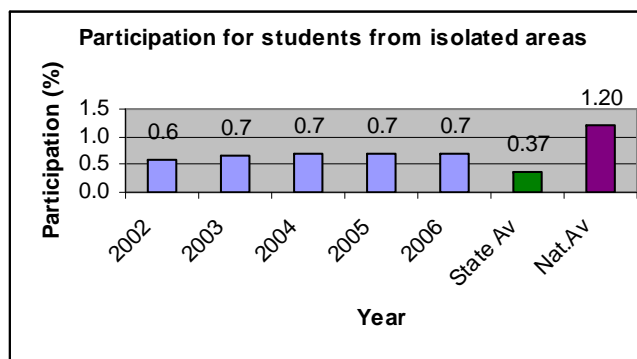
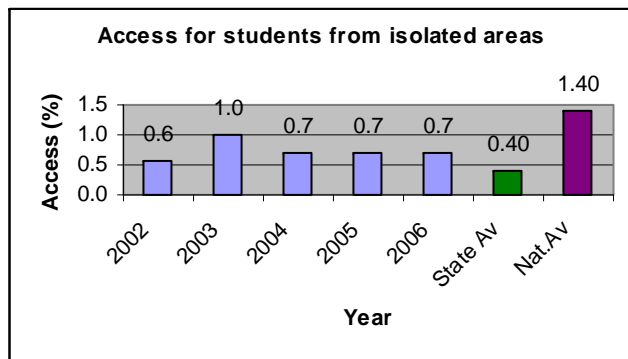
Although there has been a slight decline in commencing and continuing students from this group over the 5 year period, La Trobe is still attracting a very high percentage of these students compared to the state and national average. This indicates that the rural communities in which La Trobe has campuses are well served by the University location.

The retention and success measures are very pleasing and indicate that rural students at La Trobe are consistently more likely to persevere and succeed in their studies when compared with state and national averages across the university sector, and when compared with non-rural students.

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	State Av 05*	Nat. Av 05*
<b>Access %</b>	33.9%	30.0%	32.7%	33.3%	31.1%	16.52	17.52
<b>Participation %</b>	32.8%	31.0%	30.4%	30.8%	30.8%	15.88	16.89
<b>Retention r</b>	1.04	1.03	1.03	1.03	1.01	0.99	0.97
<b>Success r</b>	1.04	1.04	1.03	1.04	1.04	1.01	0.94

\*2006 state and national averages for the University sector are not available until late 2007

## Students from Isolated Areas



	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	State Av 05*	Nat. Av 05*
<b>Access %</b>	0.6%	1.0%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	<b>0.40</b>	<b>1.40</b>
<b>Participation %</b>	0.6%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	<b>0.37</b>	<b>1.20</b>
<b>Retention r</b>	1.00	0.97	1.05	0.98	0.98	<b>1.24</b>	<b>0.86</b>
<b>Success r</b>	1.02	1.05	1.03	1.03	1.00	<b>0.89</b>	<b>0.99</b>

\*2006 state and national averages for the University sector are not available until late 2007

There has been a slight increase in commencing and continuing students from this group over the 5 year period, and La Trobe is attracting a higher percentage of these students compared to the average in other Victorian universities. The much higher national average figure is indicative of the fact that Victoria has less 'isolated areas' than other Australian states.

The retention measure for this group has declined, and is less than the state average but higher than the national average. This indicates that this group are less likely to persevere in their studies than their counterparts at other Victorian universities, but more likely to persevere when compared with students from isolated areas at the national level.

However, those students from isolated areas who do remain in their studies have a very pleasing success rate, higher than both the state and national average.

## **Educational disadvantage associated with gender**

For many years DEST required institutions to monitor the enrolment and progress of women in non-traditional areas of study. However more recently DEST has changed to the broader category of 'educational disadvantage associated with gender', and DEST has asked institutions to determine their own focus in this regard according to their student profiles. Under this category, La Trobe University has monitored women's participation in the following areas:

- engineering;
- architecture;
- information technology;
- higher degrees by coursework and by research.

State and national averages are not readily available for these groups.

## Appendix 1

### Definitions of Equity Groups

DEST monitors equity measures for the following groups identified as being historically disadvantaged in relation to higher education:

#### **People from low socio-economic status backgrounds (low SES)**

Higher education students from low socio-economic status backgrounds (low SES) are defined as those whose permanent home-address postcodes are within the lowest 25% of postcodes in Australia, measured according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Index of Education and Occupation.

#### **People from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB)**

Non-English speaking backgrounds students are defined as those domestic students who arrived in Australia within the previous ten years, and speak a language other than English at home.

#### **People with disabilities**

Higher Education students with disabilities are defined as those who answered 'yes' on student enrolment forms to the question 'Do you have a disability, impairment or long term medical condition which may affect your studies?' It is important to note that there may in fact be more students with a disability at La Trobe University than are indicated by this measure. There are students who do not wish to identify because of the negative stigma associated with disability.

#### **People from rural areas**

Higher education students from rural backgrounds are defined according to the 1992 classification of postcodes by the Commonwealth Department of Primary Industries and Energy. Rural students are those whose permanent home address is not in an urban area, defined as a city of greater than 100,000 people. (For the purposes of definition Darwin and Townsville are also classified as urban.)

#### **People from isolated areas**

Isolation is also measured by the 1992 classification of postcodes by the Commonwealth Department of Primary Industries and Energy. It is defined according to an index of remoteness which takes into account population density and distance from the nearest provincial city (population 25,000 or more).

#### **Non-traditional gender areas**

DEST requires universities to monitor and report on fields of education where there appears to be a gender inequality or imbalance. In previous years women in the non-traditional fields of architecture and engineering, and women in higher degrees, have been monitored at La Trobe. As can be seen in the charts included in this year's profile, participation of women in architecture has improved significantly and is no longer of concern as an equity issue at La Trobe. However, all areas of study will continue to be monitored by the Equity and Access Unit and any issues of concern will be reported in future.

#### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.**

Those who answered 'yes' to the question 'Are you an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander' on enrolment forms. Note that at La Trobe University this area is monitored separately by the Director of Indigenous Education, and is thus not included in this profile.

### Definition of Equity Indicators

#### Rate

'Rates' are the proportion of students in the relevant cohort who belong to the named equity group, expressed as a percentage.

#### Ratio

Ratios in this report are rates divided by a reference value. This measure makes a comparison between the equity group and the wider student population. A ratio of 1.00 indicates an equitable performance, while ratios of less than 1.00 indicate less than equitable performance.

#### Access

Access is a measure of whether students from particular equity groups are able to gain entry into university study. The **access rates** reported here show the percentage of the students **commencing** study at La Trobe University who belong to the named equity group.

#### Participation

Participation is a measure of whether students from particular equity groups are studying at university. The **participation rate** is the percentage of the students **enrolled** at La Trobe University who belong to the named equity group. (It differs from the access rate in that it takes into account all students, not only those in the first year of their course.)

Note that in line with DEST practice, participation for low SES students is expressed not as a percentage but as a **ratio** between students from low SES backgrounds and students from high SES backgrounds. The target for this ratio is 1.00, i.e. ideally low SES and high SES students would participate equally in La Trobe University study.

#### Retention

Retention is a measure of whether students who commence study at La Trobe University continue their course of study. An **apparent retention rate** is calculated by comparing the number of students re-enrolling in a given year with the number of students who were enrolled in the previous year (not counting those who completed their course). It is only an apparent rate in that it does not include students who deferred their course of study or transferred to another university. A retention rate of 1.0 would mean that all the students who were enrolled the previous year, and had not completed their course, re-enrolled to continue their study.

The **retention indicators** shown in the charts herein are **ratios** between the retention rate of the students in that equity group, and the retention rate of all La Trobe students. The target is a retention indicator of 1.0 which implies that students in the equity group are continuing their studies at the same rate as other students.

#### Success

Success is a measure of whether students are passing in their course of study. A **success rate** is the proportion of units a student passed compared to the number of units undertaken. The **success indicators** shown in the charts below are **ratios** between the success rates of students in the named equity group, and all other La Trobe students. The target success indicator is 1.0, which would show that students in the equity group are passing at the same rate as other students.