HALF OF UNIVERSITY 'DROP-OUTS' IN OFFICIAL FIGURES ACTUALLY RETURN TO STUDY

Almost half of all the university students in Australia who are counted as ‘drop-outs’ in official retention figures actually return to study within eight years, a new report has found.

The new analysis, commissioned by the Department of Education, confirms that most of them return within three years. This includes one in five who take just a single year away from university.

The report was written by Andrew Harvey, Giovanna Szalkowicz and Michael Luckman from La Trobe University’s Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity Research.

It found that 47 percent of domestic undergraduates who had been counted as ‘drop-outs’ by the official retention figures had returned to university within eight years.

Universities Australia’s Chief Executive Belinda Robinson said the report was further evidence of Australia’s strong performance on university student completion – the third highest in the OECD.

“Australia has dramatically expanded access to university over the past decade and maintained consistent completion rates. This is a significant achievement,” she said.

“The reality for many students who leave university is that they need time out to deal with work and family responsibilities before returning to complete.”

Many of those who interrupt their study are part-time, mature age and distance education students.

For those who don’t complete, there is still an employment benefit in having some university education rather than none – a study across 15 EU countries found this year.

The figures also highlight the crucial role of programs to support students to stay enrolled, including the flagship Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP).

“HEPPP was cut again in the last Budget – but universities will make the strongest of cases for it to be retained given its crucial role in helping more students from low SES backgrounds to finish a degree,” Ms Robinson said.