Universities are rising to the demands of growing numbers of equity students, with new research confirming they are satisfied with their academic experience and feel adequately supported when there.

The study of 193,500 responses to the Student Experience Survey and other data found first-in-family students were likelier than other students to be satisfied with their university experience. Satisfaction levels were most pronounced among indigenous students asked to consider the level of support they received.

Students from non-English speaking backgrounds were the likeliest to be dissatisfied with their overall educational experience, regardless of which year of study they were in.

The report, by Ian Li and David Carroll for the National Centre for the Study of Equity in Higher Education, also found that despite slightly elevated levels of satisfaction to other students, equity students were still at an increased risk of dropping out of university before graduating.

“Indigenous students in their commencing year were six percentage points more likely to be at risk (of dropping out) than non-indigenous students,” the report says. That risk ameliorates only mildly in following years, with indigenous students still five percentage points likelier to drop out.

“We know that completion rates among disadvantaged students are still some way the average. We want to know the reasons for that (especially) given the very positive news is that they appear to be very well supported at university,” Assistant Professor Li, from the University of Western Australia, told the HES.

The paper also backs up research by La Trobe’s Andrew Harvey and colleagues that found the three dominant reasons for leaving university early were health, financial and social.