Strengthening Mature Age Students’ Access into Undergraduate Nurse Education

FINAL REPORT
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Preface

During 2005, the Nurse Policy Branch of the Department of Human Services Victoria, convened key stakeholders from across the nursing profession to consider the ‘key influences on nursing, its strengths and current capability’ (Department of Human Services Nurse Policy Branch, 2005). Importantly, this initiative was viewed as providing an opportunity to develop strategies and a vision for the preparation of a workforce that would meet future health care needs.

The phase one report titled *Prepare Nurses for the Future* was released in December 2005. This report indicated that stakeholders had developed a shared vision for the future preparation of the nursing workforce and four key recommendations were proposed to assist with enacting the vision. The stated recommendations were:

- Prepare undergraduate nurses to contribute to the reform of health care delivery and a sustainable Victorian health care service
- Increase use of simulation and more appropriate and timely clinical placements to increase clinical competence and undergraduate positions
- Make it easier for people to enter, progress and re-enter the profession
- Use a standardised assessment to confirm nurses’ readiness for registration. (Department of Human Services Nurse Policy Branch, 2005).
To progress the recommendations into action, four working groups were established. The aim of each group was to examine the feasibility of each recommendation and to plan and pilot studies to test implementation options.

Working group three under the ‘Prepare Nurses’ initiative identified four primary areas of enquiry under the recommendation ‘Make it easier for people to enter, progress and re-enter the profession’. One area identified by the working group as needing further investigation was ‘How can clarity and consistency of pathways be provided to/from VET or Higher Education’ with a particular focus on identifying strategies to attract those outside the school leaver pool.

We are pleased to provide our report that explores issues surrounding mature age access to pre-registration nurse education courses.

This research study has been conducted in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans and ethics approval was granted from La Trobe University.
Acknowledgements

The *Prepare Nurses for the Future* initiative is an exciting one and the vision of the initiative was well evident within working group three. This group of stakeholders represented all sectors and the collegiality and good will that was evident within this group was inspirational. Importantly, every member of the group respected the views and opinions of others and the group dynamics demonstrated clearly what can be achieved by a group focused on ensuring the best possible outcomes for the future of nursing. Thank you to every member of the group. Your invaluable guidance, support and assistance contributed significantly to this study.

We acknowledge the funding that made this project a reality, however, perhaps more importantly; we wish to acknowledge the commitment of the staff of Nurse Policy Branch for their constant interest and support.

To the education providers and mature age students who participated in this study, our thanks, and we hope that we have reflected your views.
Executive summary

Australia’s health care system is facing current and future acute workforce shortages as the health workforce ages, more people opt to work part-time and the recruitment pool for those commencing employment diminishes. For nursing, attracting an appropriately qualified workforce, in sufficient numbers to meet the demands of a changing health care system, is a complex task with no easy solution.

To cope with the challenges facing nursing, now and in the future, the Prepare Nurses for the Future initiative was developed to provide a vision for the future of the nursing profession. Working group three from this initiative focused on looking at strategies to make it easier for people to enter, progress and re-enter the nursing profession. In planning the future nursing workforce nurse education was viewed as a vital consideration.

Key reports have indicated that mature age students may be an important group in future workforce planning as numbers of the school leaver group diminishes and individuals more frequently change career directions.

Currently, little is known about what attracts mature age students to nursing. There is little information about their background and trajectory; their methods of entry into the profession, factors that make access to nurse education easy and factors that make access to nurse education more difficult.

Utilising a mixed method approach this study aimed to:
• establish current statistics on the prevalence of mature age students in undergraduate nursing courses.

• identify current university requirements for mature age entry into pre-registration nursing education.

• identify areas for standardisation of credit processes for mature age and professional entry students with qualifications outside of the discipline of nursing.

• provide knowledge that will assist in the development of supportive information for individuals seeking access to nursing as a career choice.

Questionnaires were sent to 22 Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers and 7 university providers. Completed questionnaires were returned from ten VET providers and 4 universities. 220 student questionnaires were distributed through education providers with 120 returned. Data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

Whilst definitions of mature age students varied, questionnaire results indicated that approximately 50% of current students studying nursing are from the non school leaver pool. Education providers indicated that they are a highly motivated group with strong communication skills. Attributes such as time management, work ethic and life experiences were identified. The range of skills and experience that this group brings to the education and clinical setting was viewed as extremely valuable for the profession.
Employment prospects, professional and personal satisfaction and the fulfilment of a long term ambition were identified as reasons why mature age students were studying nursing. Overwhelmingly students reported satisfaction with their career choice despite the significant hurdles that they face in pursuing studies in nursing. The results of this study confirmed international research that has indicated that family and financial responsibilities are often overwhelming for mature age students.

The results of the questionnaires were discussed in a focus group with key education representatives. The questionnaires and focus group data indicate ways in which access to pre-registration nurse education can be strengthened for mature age students. Information tailored to the specific needs of the mature age student is needed. Family information sessions may be useful in ensuring that mature age students have good support and realistic expectations about the demands of further study. The Internet is the most common source of information and there is capacity to improve information that is available. At a practical level, this study highlighted the need to ensure that complete and timely information is available to mature age students to ensure that they are better able to manage the issue of balancing academic, family and financial responsibility. Because of the competing demands faced by mature age students’ consideration must be given to course structure and support. Whilst distance education or online courses would seem to be a panacea for the busy mature age student, this study clearly demonstrated the need for strong face to face support to ease the transition to study. The financial burden of being a student was identified as one of the most important factors that impacts upon the ability of mature age students to successfully complete their course. This study and others provide a strong rationale for financial support for the mature age student.
The strongest recommendation from this study is for clearer and transparent application processes, entrance requirements and policies related to recognition of prior learning. This study demonstrated the dramatic differences between education providers that currently exist. Increasingly, attention must be given to articulation pathways between the VET and university sectors that reflect the changing nature of industry demand and student need.

It is clear that mature age students have the capacity to bring a wealth of experience, skills and knowledge to the nursing profession. The challenge for the profession is to identify ways in which access to nurse education can be strengthened for this diverse and unique group.
1. Introduction

Traditionally, nursing has recruited its student base through the primary groups, these being school leavers through the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC), enrolled nurses (Division two registered nurses in Victoria) converting to level one of the register, and the mature age student moving into a new career. Since the transfer of nurse education to the tertiary sector, the school leaver group have comprised the majority of enrolments into nursing courses; however, current workforce trends indicate that the school leaver pool in coming years will reduce. There are indications to suggest that ‘mature age’ applications to pre-registration nursing courses will significantly increase in the future. Partially, this can be attributed to workforce projections that indicate those entering the workforce now, and in the future, will more frequently change career direction than previous generations.

The student who does not commence at university or in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector immediately following secondary education belongs to a demographically diverse group and their pathways to study are many and varied (Archer, Cantwell, & Bourke, 1999; Byrne, 2005; Connell, 2003; Kantanis, 2002; Settersten & Lovegreen, 1998). Collectively, this group attracts the title ‘non traditional’ or ‘mature age’ students, however, the group may range from young adults returning to study, after having delayed their tertiary education, to adults that return to education in ‘old age’ (Settersten & Lovegreen, 1998).
The reasons why mature aged students may return to study are varied but one of the major reasons is the desire to expand their education as a means of enhancing career/employment prospects.

Society is rapidly changing and there is a trend toward people needing to upgrade qualifications. Professor Rolland from Swinburne University, Melbourne, has stated that many workers are under the false impression that their formal qualifications last a lifetime.

The older you are the more likely it is that your formal qualifications are out of date. As a society we still adhere to the traditional model of acquiring our formal skills at the start of our working life, even though they remain current for progressively shorter periods of time in a fast-paced business environment (Toomey, 2006).

A recent study indicates that almost two in three employees who are in the ‘baby boomer’ cohort are dissatisfied with their present jobs. However, many in this age group feel that they are too old or lack the skills to find better work (Chesterton, 2006). Returning to study in the university or VET sector as a mature age student may be viewed as an option to ensure qualifications that increase employment prospects and overall work satisfaction.

Numerous studies have identified other reasons why mature age students may return to study. These reasons include an unrealized wish to attain a post secondary VET or university qualification, a desire to prove themselves to their families, including their own children, interest in furthering their own personal development and because they believe returning to study will enhance their ability to be a role model (Davies & Williams, 2001; Dowswell, Bradshaw, & Hewison, 2000; Dowswell, Hewison, & Millar, 1998; Egerton, 2001; Kantanis, 2002; Reay, Ball, & David, 2002; The Courier Mail, 2006b). Some mature age students simply want to feel ‘intelligent’ and expand
their knowledge, while others just enjoy attaining knowledge (Paasse, 1998; Reay et al., 2002). To a lesser extent, some are women who have a feministic empowerment agenda and undertake further study to strengthen their positions (Maher, 2001).

Within the VET and university sector, mature age students are most commonly defined as over twenty-one years of age on admission (Egerton, 2001). Students in this group enter post secondary study from a variety of different pathways. Some may have an acceptable high school or TAFE qualification, some have completed courses at TAFE institutions or have other professional qualifications, some have already completed a university degree, some have successfully completed the Special Tertiary Admissions Test (STAT), some are members of disadvantaged groups who qualify for special entry, and some successfully complete what is referred to as an enabling program, usually conducted by the organization where the student wishes to study (Archer et al., 1999).

2.0 The untapped potential of the mature age cohort

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has stated that Australia’s labour force is undergoing an extensive change with the size and age of the work force very different to anything that has been experienced in the past. With a larger portion of the population reaching retirement age and fewer younger people entering the work force to replace them, a workforce shortage is looming in all sectors (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004; Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2003; Biddle, Burgess, Mitchell, & O'Brien, 2002; Byrne, 2005).
In 2003, the Australian Bureau of Statistics identified 41,600 people aged 45-64 that were classified as ‘discouraged jobseekers’. About half of the discouraged job seekers in this age group (51%), reported they were discouraged because they felt that they were considered too old by employers. 22% felt there were no jobs in their locality or in their line of work. 18% felt they lacked the necessary schooling, training, skills or experience (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004).

A recent poll found that 94% of Australians feel that their skills are not sufficiently valued (The Courier Mail, 2006a). In a survey of 8,345 employers undertaken by recruitment and HR consultants, Hudson, it was estimated that only 40.7% of employers were accessing the valuable talent pool represented by mature age workers (Southam, 2006). There are suggestions in the literature that mature age workers are often treated poorly by both employment agencies and prospective employers and that many in this age group report experiencing disrespect and humiliation when seeking employment (Encel & Studenki, 2004).

Mature age workers should be an attractive alternative to employers with notable qualities such as accrued knowledge and skills, adaptability, loyalty and reliability integral to this group of prospective employees (Byrne, 2005; Meiklejohn, 2006; The Advertiser, 2006; Toomey, 2006). This group is likely to have higher job satisfaction and therefore remain in their position longer than younger workers (Ingersoll, Olsan, Drew-Cates, DeVinney, & Davies, 2002).

Nevertheless, there is a wealth of evidence that shows a very great reluctance by employers to take on these workers (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2003; Department of Health and Ageing, 2006; Egerton, 2001; Encel & Studenki,
48% of people aged 45 or more in an Australian sample reported experiencing age related discrimination when seeking employment. Similar rates have been reported in the United Kingdom (Egerton, 2001; The Courier Mail, 2006b). Interestingly the rates of discrimination were higher for those without university qualifications (The Courier Mail, 2006b). This is despite legislation that prohibits this discrimination (HREOC, 2004), and recent heavy campaigning and numerous government incentives encouraging employees to take these potential workers into consideration (K. Andrews, 2006; Australian Government, 2006; Bowie Wilson, 2006; Encel & Studenki, 2004; Toomey, 2006). The fact that, in general, employers indicate they have trouble filling vacancies, there would appear to be enormous capacity within the mature age group (Bowie Wilson, 2006; Encel & Studenki, 2004).

Reasons found for the reluctance of employers to take on mature age workers tend to stem from archaic and stereotypical reasoning. They include the notion that older workers are more difficult to train, are too tired to work effectively, have an inability to remain current in their knowledge, lack technical skill, lack experience with technology, and suffer from higher rates of illness and injury (Encel & Studenki, 2004; Meiklejohn, 2006; Williams, 2006). There is a misconception that older workers will not stay long in a job due to impending retirement. However, a recent study suggested that older workers are four times more likely to remain in a job compared with Generation X and Y (The Advertiser, 2006; VECCI, 2003).

Statistics indicate that over the last twenty years those people aged between 45-64 that continue to work has increased by almost 15% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004).
Age discrimination legislation, numerous government incentives to stay at work and the lifting of the compulsory retirement age are all reasons for the increased figures (HREOC, 2004; Southam, 2006; VECCI, 2003).

Reflecting the current and future workforce structure there is an increasing trend for individuals that have often spent many years in the workforce to return to study. The increase in mature age students entering post secondary education is evident not only in Australia but appears to be an international trend.

In recent years in the United Kingdom (UK), there has been a marked increase in the number of mature age students entering post secondary education. Studies have indicated that 30% of all students commencing post secondary education in the UK are now over the age of twenty one (Ansari, 2002; Bolam & Dodgson, 2003; Cuthbertson, Lauder, Steele, Cleary, & Bradshaw, 2004; Egerton, 2001; Fleming & McKee, 2005; Lauder & Cuthbertson, 1998). American studies report the trend toward increasing numbers of mature age students commencing study, as one that has been more rapid over the last few decades (Hendryx, Fieselmann, Bock, Wakefield, Helms, & Bentler, 1998).

From an Australian perspective studies note an increase in mature age students entering post secondary institutions; a phenomenon that is only likely to increase considering that approximately 70% of Australians who will form the workforce in ten years time are already working (Archer et al., 1999; Byrne, 2005; Cantwell, 2004).
2.1 The advantages of being a mature age student

While literature in the past has intimated that mature students are at a disadvantage when studying, an equal number of studies contradict these findings (Ansari, 2002; Byrne, 2005; Cantwell, 2004; Cantwell & Grayson, 2002; Darlaston-Jones, Cohen, Drew, Haunold, Pike, & Young, 2001; Fleming & McKee, 2005). Education and training are seen to contribute to one’s personal and economic wellbeing (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002; Byrne, 2005), and studies have indicated that a return to study by mature age people is linked to better health in general (Borysenko, 2006).

2.1.1 Motivation to succeed

The fact that older students show a higher level of satisfaction with their course and studies (Ansari, 2002; Ingersoll et al., 2002) suggests that motivation is intrinsic in mature students and positively influences their attitude when it comes to the demands of post secondary study (Adamson, Covic, & Lincoln, 2004; Cantwell, 2004). Mature age students are thought to have a greater desire to achieve, possibly due to the feeling that they have more to lose if they are not successful (Ansari, 2002; Kevern & Webb, 2004).

Despite the many and varied reasons why mature age students enter study, as a group, they appear to have a strong commitment to study, intention to persevere and desire for personal fulfillment (Archer et al., 1999; Cantwell, 2004). This is supported by Archer et al. (1999) who questioned the motivation of students who were completing an enabling program for entry to tertiary level study. In the mature age group, their motivation was related to a desire to understand what they were studying as opposed
to the younger students, whose motivation was to pass their subjects with minimum effort and thought (Archer et al., 1999; Cantwell, 2004).

2.1.2 Prior life experience

Research has indicated that life experience aids a student in many ways. Many mature age students bring with them the skills and experience gained throughout their years of working (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004; Fleming & McKee, 2005). For mature students some of the benefits of their past experiences include the probability that they are more likely to be assertive and request assistance from lecturers, thus improving their study outcomes (Fleming & McKee, 2005; Ofori, 2000).

Research has indicated that mature age students may also have acquired useful time-management and multi-tasking skills beneficial to their studies (Kevern & Webb, 2004). Improved verbal aptitude, also a byproduct of prior knowledge and life experience, is a skill that significantly aides students in their oral and written assessments (Archer et al., 1999; Carnall, 1995; Ustun, 2006). This increased skill in communication often allows mature age students to interact with their educators with greater ease (Kantanis, 2002).

Studies have indicated that mature age students tend to demonstrate more confidence in problem solving, action planning and are more readily self critical. It has been strongly argued that mature age students are more willing to appraise their strengths and weaknesses than their school leaver counterparts (Archer et al., 1999). One disadvantage of being a mature age student is that they are more likely to be negatively affected by the impact of poor feedback on assessments. This can
potentially impact on the student’s self esteem and may in turn impact upon their future study success (Young, 2000).

### 2.1.3 Student satisfaction and focus on study

Student age has been shown to have a significant impact on predicted performance in the post secondary environment. Research has clearly demonstrated that mature aged students perform at a higher level and show higher satisfaction with their course when compared to their younger counterparts (Ansari, 2002; Lumb & Vail, 2004).

Kantanis (2002) contends that mature age students have a higher likelihood of part time study and are more likely to focus on learning rather than what they perceive as the immature and often irresponsible pursuits of fellow school leaver students (Kantanis, 2002; Stark, Manning-Walsh, & Vliem, 2005; Thorpe & Loo, 2003).

Mature age participants in a study by Reay et al. (2002) indicated that the idea of the traditional ‘student lifestyle’ with its combination of independence and dependence, and leisure and academic work, was ‘unthinkable’. The students in this study reported that their lives have a very different focus, that is, a balancing act between academic, economic and domestic responsibilities (Reay et al., 2002).

### 2.2 The stressful nature of returning to study

Commencing post secondary study is often a stressful experience, however, for mature age students the pressures of returning to study are compounded by a multitude of factors, usually foreign to the ‘traditional’ student who has entered the
VET or university sector directly as a school leaver (Anonymous, 2002; Darlaston-Jones et al., 2001; Davies & Williams, 2001; Kantanis, 2002).

While it would be reasonable to assume that mature age students make a conscious, thoughtful decision to return to study, it appears that these students, in particular, are unprepared for the time and financial commitments that undertaking further study will require of them (Dowswell et al., 1998; Gerrard & Roberts, 2006; Kantanis, 2002; Kevern & Webb, 2004; Meyer, Hoover, & Maposa, 2006). While the personal investment for mature age students is high, Kantanis (2000 p.5) identifies a number of issues that require a great deal of consideration by mature aged students. These issues include:

- Lack of programs during orientation suitably tailored for mature age students,
- Immediate necessity for computer literacy,
- Attendance on a part time basis,
- Lack of confidence in communicative competence regarding academic writing and oral presentations,
- Ambiguous interaction with staff,
- Ambivalent interaction and integration with school-leaver students in lectures, tutorials, and practical laboratory sessions,
- Heightened awareness of limited time - wanting every minute of university to ‘count’,
- Fear of humiliation by school-leaver students – especially regarding ostracism due to age, potential difficulty understanding content and nature of assessment tasks,
- Partner and/or family response to student’s desire to return to study,
- Need to convince partner and/or family that study is work,
- Friend’s response to students desire to return to study,
- Employer and work colleague response to student’s desire to return to study, and
- Increased financial pressures having relinquished full-time paid employment.

For nursing students in particular, there are aspects of returning to study over and above those listed that should also be taken into consideration. These include shift work, being away from home on clinical placements, and the emotional burden of clinical nursing practice (Lauder & Cuthbertson, 1998).

2.2.1 The pressure of family responsibilities

Researchers have indicated that non-academic life difficulties contribute enormously to stress experienced in the mature age student group (B. Andrews & Wilding, 2004; Davies & Williams, 2001; Kevern & Webb, 2004). While acknowledging the diversity of the mature age group, these students, due to their life stage, are more likely to have dependant children and other social commitments. Multiple roles including those as employees, voluntary workers, parents and carers are common (Davies & Williams, 2001; Dowswell et al., 1998; Kevern & Webb, 2004).

Obviously, considerable stress is placed upon family commitments and relationships when a mature age person enters study, with the risks of study not only impacting on the student, but their family situation. There is a wealth of literature that considers the impact of return to study on family relationships and family function (B. Andrews &
Simultaneously establishing a career and raising young children is difficult (Benzies, Tough, Tofflemire, Frick, Faber, & Newburn-Cook, 2006; Kevern & Webb, 2004) and this appears to be the case for the majority of mature age students entering post secondary institutions. One study reported just over half of mature age entry students at one university are studying while managing the complexities of raising children (Davies & Williams, 2001). Focus groups have discussed that family responsibilities can, and do impact on academic success. Relationships with life partners, parenting, and the demands of elderly parents are intermixed with the demands of studying at university and further exacerbated by the need to work part time (Bolam & Dodgson, 2003; Davies & Williams, 2001).

For women, returning to study and balancing family responsibilities can be overwhelming. However, younger women with children have argued passionately against societal perceptions that early childbearing had robbed them of their opportunities for education (Benzies et al., 2006; Lee, Renner, Saunders, Stamford, Bickford, Johnston, Hsiao, & Phillips, 1998; Wu & MacNeil, 2003). In Australia, there is a significant cohort of women between the ages of 30-44 who seek retraining and/or updating of skills in order to move back into the workforce (Byrne, 2005; Cuthbertson et al., 2004; Egerton, 2001; Kevern & Webb, 2004; The Courier Mail, 2006b).
Both male and female mature age students with a dependant family have expressed strong feelings of guilt about not spending adequate time with their family and/or devoting enough time to their relationship (Anonymous, 2002; Bolam & Dodgson, 2003; Cuthbertson et al., 2004; Davies & Williams, 2001). Time not spent with children was described by participants in one focus group as a ‘high and immediate cost’ of their studies (Davies & Williams, 2001). In one UK study, participants reported the negative impact that returning to study had on their children and suggested that issues that occurred were related to the lack of available time that could be spent parenting. Studies have reported that children of parents who have returned to study often react to the stress of their parent, expressing their own stress with misbehavior (Gerrard & Roberts, 2006; Kantanis, 2002). It has been argued that this problem is compounded when the children are very young (Lin, 2005).

Studies have demonstrated that one of the major reasons that mature age students cite when discontinuing studies are problems related to domestic/working circumstances and childcare/family commitments (Bolam & Dodgson, 2003). Medical students’ training has been described in terms of ‘long hours of work that empty marriages and strain the soul’ (Carnall, 1995). While very little is known about Australian mature aged nursing students, one study identified the enormous pressure that mature age students face when completing clinical placements, both from a family and financial perspective (Cuthbertson et al., 2004). The myriad of issues that mature age students face related to family commitments often lead to an erosion in the student’s self confidence, which in turn negatively affects success in study (Archer et al., 1999; Bolam & Dodgson, 2003; Hayes, Feather, Hall, Sedgwick, Wannan, Wessier-Smith, Green, & McCrorie, 2004; Ofori, 2000).
Researchers in the UK, suggest an increasing incidence of ‘seriously disturbed’ students who require counseling. In these studies, increasing financial difficulty and multiple demands on student time were found to be affecting the mental health and academic performance of students. 9% of participants in these studies were reported as being clinically depressed and 20% experienced anxiety at a ‘clinically significant level’ (B. Andrews & Wilding, 2004; Hayes et al., 2004). A second study, found nearly 40% of medical students, that discontinued their studies, left due to poor psychological health that was course related (Hayes et al., 2004). A US study supports these findings, with increased rates of anxiety and depression reported amongst the students enrolled in the first year of nursing courses (Hughes, Romick, Sandor, Phillips, Glaister, Levy, & Rock, 2003). Understandably, stressors resulting in depression have been shown to negatively impact on the academic results of students (B. Andrews & Wilding, 2004).

On a more positive note, while academic stress can cause serious health problems such as depression and anxiety disorders, researchers have indicated that mature age students may have more resources to draw on in times of stress. Stark and colleagues (2005), evaluated the self caring behaviors of nursing students, in the context of their studies, and found that mature aged students participated in more health promoting behaviors and had better health responsibility than the school leaver group. The mature age student group, usually with a family, were more likely to pay more attention to their nutritional needs than the young, single, ‘traditional’ student (Stark et al., 2005).
Studies have indicated that mature aged students are more likely, than their school leaver counterparts, to drop-out of higher education at an early stage, with 16% of mature age students as opposed to 8% of younger students leaving tertiary study in the first semester of year one (Bolam & Dodgson, 2003). Six factors were highlighted by mature age students as reasons for discontinuing study. These were, poor quality of the student experience, inability to cope with the demands of the program, unhappiness with the social environment, wrong choice of programs, matters relating to financial need and dissatisfaction with aspects of institutional provision (Bolam & Dodgson, 2003). In other studies with nursing students, researchers state that a large number of mature aged students report that they often/very often felt like leaving their course (Cuthbertson et al., 2004). A study by Fleming and McKee (2005) identified that 85% of their sample of mature age students, had, at some stage, considered discontinuing their nursing studies.

2.2.2 Feeling like outsiders

The tertiary study environment is geared towards a younger, single population, which can often leave mature age students feeling ostracized (Davies & Williams, 2001; Kantanis, 2002). One of the strongest indicators for the success of a student returning to study is the support network surrounding that student. The student who has reliable support of family, friends and peers is less likely to withdraw from study (Darlaston-Jones et al., 2001; Fleming & McKee, 2005).

The generational difference between mature age students and students labeled Generation X and the newly emerging Generation Y can cause major difficulties for mature age students who perceive themselves as outsiders. Factors evident within Generation X and Y such as differing learning styles, the nature of their family
structure and the fact that they frequently challenge authority and the ‘status quo’ (Walker, 2000) can have a major unsettling impact on mature age students.

Thorpe and Loo (2003) assert that the social values of an individual change as one ages. ‘Perhaps greater life experiences encourage, if not require, older participants to prioritize individual and family obligations’ (Thorpe & Loo, 2003 p.88). There is a risk, however, that mature age students adopt a pseudo parental role, often admonishing the behavior of the younger students, thus finding themselves alienated by their attitudes and behavior (Kantanis, 2002)

Mature aged students who return to study often face significant stress related to the increasing use of technologies within the post secondary learning environment. In some education institutions all administrative procedures are undertaken on-line and this can be a major source of stress for the mature age student (Kantanis, 2002) There is a strong emphasis within the post secondary sector on information technology skills and it has been argued that mature age students must quickly become ‘IT savvy’. The pressure of managing course material, with less than ideal information technology skills is enormous, and can have a major impact on educational progress through courses (Dearnley, Dunn, & Watson, 2006; Kantanis, 2002; Meiklejohn, 2006; Robertson-Steele, 1998).

The pressure, that many mature age students face in managing technology, is supported by the findings of the national ‘Re Generation’ survey of 860 Australian workers. In this study, researchers found more than half of those aged between 45 and 64 years of age regarded themselves as out of date with technology (Chesterton,
2006). Despite results in one study finding that large percentages (88%) of mature age students have a computer at home, there are still those who have had little or no experience with computers. The skill level of mature age students is often well below that of their children (Dearnley et al., 2006; Meiklejohn, 2006).

Increasingly, in post secondary education there is an expectation that students have access to the Internet. For mature age students, family responsibilities are such that there is a strong incentive to complete as much study at home as possible. However, confidence with the Internet and the type of Internet access can impact on student success. Home connections that are not broadband can mean that study requirements, such as literature searches can become tedious. For the younger student, access to on-campus facilities may be more convenient, but due to the myriad of domestic responsibilities of the mature age student accessing facilities outside study hours may be difficult (Dearnley et al., 2006).

Gatenby (2006) argues, that the presumption that mature age students will have a broader knowledge base than their younger counterparts is often not substantiated. Adult learning theory assumes that the mature student will also be mature in their approaches to learning, however, this is not always the case (Hayes et al., 2004). Often because of this presumption there is the tendency for educators to rely on the contributions of mature age students in the classroom. It is suggested that overall, mature age students are more likely to have completed the prescribed reading. In some cases the organised, motivated nature of mature aged student causes friction in the learning environment (Kantanis, 2002).
There is often an assumption that mature aged students are willing to become mentors for the younger students and to become heavily involved in all aspects of study life. However, there is a risk that mature age students can be expected to contribute far more than their outside responsibilities allow (Settersten & Lovegreen, 1998). Researchers have indicated that pre-registration, mature age, nursing students report that there are greater expectations placed on them in relation to performance, and higher reliance placed on them due to their age (Kevern & Webb, 2004).

2.2.3 Fear of not being intelligent enough

Very often students entering post secondary study for the first time or returning after an absence, fear that they will not succeed and worry that they lack the intelligence to complete their course (Archer et al., 1999; Borysenko, 2006; Cantwell, 2004; Davies & Williams, 2001; Gatenby, 2006). Researchers have suggested that as the majority of mature age students will not have successfully completed high school, and prior academic experiences may be distant, fear of embarrassment and failure for these students is particularly acute (Archer et al., 1999; Borysenko, 2006; Cantwell & Grayson, 2002; Fleming & McKee, 2005; Paasse, 1998).

In a study utilizing focus group methodology, mature age students related that they felt unprepared for assignments, examinations and other forms of assessment. The students admitted that they lacked the basic study skills necessary when first starting post secondary study (Bolam & Dodgson, 2003). Supported by a similar US study, 35.6% of mature age students felt they were unprepared for the intensity of the course that they had enrolled in and were overwhelmed by the number and complexity of assessments (Meyer et al., 2006). Borysenko (2006) argues that these types of fears can sabotage learning potential, particularly in the beginning stages of study.
2.2.4 Financial risks

While mature aged students recognize that the money expended for tertiary education is an investment in their future, the debt incurred by their study is often a deterrent, and can become a major element in the decision to pursue post secondary study (Davies & Williams, 2001; Marks, 2001). For mature age students, related expenses such as child care and travel can be considerable (Dowswell et al., 2000; Dowswell et al., 1998; Fleming & McKee, 2005; Gerrard & Roberts, 2006; Kenny & Duckett, 2005; Reay et al., 2002).

The financial costs associated with post secondary education means that most students have to maintain employment while they are studying. In the UK, a survey indicated that over 80% of full-time students had worked over the summer break and 60% had worked during the academic year. Hours of work ranged between 12 ½ hours per week to full time (40 hours per week) (Neill, Mulholland, Ross, & Leckey, 2004). An Australian study found that three quarters of second year nursing students were working while they were studying, with half of these students working 16 hours or more per week during the academic year (Salamonson & Andrew, 2006). Consistently, hours of part-time employment has been found to be detrimental to academic performance (Salamonson & Andrew, 2006). Although these studies are not mature age specific, the profound financial difficulties that mature age students face has been reported in a number of studies (Gerrard & Roberts, 2006; Reay et al., 2002).

The enormity of financial difficulties for the mature age student have been reported as having a major contribution to students emotional wellbeing, with poverty leaving students particularly vulnerable to depression (B. Andrews & Wilding, 2004;
Cuthbertson et al., 2004; Gerrard & Roberts, 2006). Focus group members’ attitudes to debt as described by Davis and Williams (2001) ranged from sheer panic to resigned acceptance. In this study, participants suggested that inadequate recognition was given to the financial circumstances of mature age students, which include dependants and mortgages (Davies & Williams, 2001).

Linked closely to family responsibility, mature age students are most likely to discontinue their university education due to financial stress. Financial struggle is particularly acute for sole parents, commonly women (Bolam & Dodgson, 2003; Byrne, 2005; Davies & Williams, 2001; Gerrard & Roberts, 2006). Over 20% of students in a study undertaken by Andrews and Wilding (2004) reported a major financial crisis and/or going without food or essential travel due to lack of money (B. Andrews & Wilding, 2004). Mature age students with children are seen to be more financially vulnerable with more complex financial problems (Bolam & Dodgson, 2003; Gerrard & Roberts, 2006).

2.2.5 Stress during study

Various aspects of stress management correlated with tertiary study have been examined in the literature. Ranging from stress related to assessments (Bolam & Dodgson, 2003), through to stress related to the home life and financial stressors of the student (Davies & Williams, 2001), one constant throughout the literature is that stress experienced by students with sound support networks is significantly less than those without (Norton, Thomas, Morgan, Tilley, & Dickens, 1998; Paasse, 1998; Pritchard & McIntosh, 2003; Reay et al., 2002; Settersten & Lovegreen, 1998).
Norton (1998) described the supportiveness of a partner as the single, most important mitigating factor in how a mature age student copes with study (Norton et al., 1998). Norton (1998) and Setterson (1998) both found that levels of support differed between that of female and male students. Men who were studying usually had supportive partners, who viewed their study as an avenue for their partner to further themselves in their career. On the other hand, females who were studying had less support from their male partners with regard to their study. The emphasis on the importance of the study for a woman was underscored by an expectation that she would maintain her domestic stereotypical role. Study for the woman, as perceived by her partner, was not necessarily viewed as a career move but more of a hobby. Studies have indicated that support for female student’s declines as the course progresses and sometimes the pressure on the female student is so great, that withdrawing from study becomes the easiest option.

Female students, in particular, often experience taunting by friends and relatives who cannot understand their desire to study (Norton et al., 1998; Settersten & Lovegreen, 1998). However, there have been studies that have contradicted these findings. Mature age participants in a study by Steele and colleagues, reported excellent support given to them by their partners, parents, friends and children. These people provided emotional support and encouragement throughout the students’ study and the participants indicated they would not have been academically successful without the level of support given (Robertson-Steele, 1998).

2.2.6 Organizational skills

Organizational skills are of paramount importance to successful post secondary study, particularly in health sciences (Adamson et al., 2004). It is interesting to note that one
The conclusions of a study that considered time management and organizational skills of first year undergraduate health science students suggested that first year students are incapable of predicting the importance of skills for future study and employment. The study suggested that students do not have well-developed self-directed learning skills (Adamson et al., 2004).

Although there is a positive association between time spent studying and the resultant academic grade, when time management ability has been taken into consideration it has been shown that those students more adept at managing their daily routine are more successful in their studies (Adamson et al., 2004). Prioritization and organizational skills are seen as coping strategies, particularly with those mature age students that have families. It has been found that this group are adept at organizing their schedule to ensure that assessments are completed on time (Robertson-Steele, 1998). This suggests that mature aged students may be better prepared to study; however, this does not necessarily mean that study will be any easier for this group.

Mature aged enrolled nurses converting to level one of the register, through a degree level program, stated that their study had to be carried out in their ‘quiet times’ at work [on the rare occasion it was quiet], during meal breaks at work, otherwise it was in their own time often late at night after children were in bed (Dowswell et al., 1998). This is particularly problematic considering that there is a recognized lack of university services after hours (Kantanis, 2002).

Researchers have explored why mature age students could not commence studies in the post secondary sector. There was strong evidence that incomplete, insufficient and
late information from education providers was a major problem (Davies & Williams, 2001; Fleming & McKee, 2005). In particular, early access to timetable information, needed to assist mature age students with organizing childcare and employment, has been identified as an important consideration for education providers to attract and retain mature age students (Bolam & Dodgson, 2003).

2.2.7 Employability post study

Bolam and Dodgson (2003 p.189) stress that

Institutions need to ensure that students leave university with the right employability skill to be able to compete in the labour market, or with the skills necessary to help them progress to further learning.

While students generally believe that post secondary qualifications will assist them in achieving a better job, amongst the student population there is also an element of fear regarding the uncertainty of securing a job with their new qualifications (Davies & Williams, 2001). Mature age students may endure poor support and lack of encouragement from their work colleagues while studying, and then can face difficulties when they re-establish themselves in the work place (Kantanis, 2002). Increased qualifications can affect work roles. A relevant example from a nursing perspective is when the level of responsibility increases following study, as is the case with nurses converting their qualifications from enrolled nurse (division two) to registered nurse (division one). Studies have indicated this change can cause workplace friction with work colleagues, which causes anxiety for the new graduate (Dowswell et al., 1998; Fagerberg & Kihlgren, 2001).

2.2.8 The need for greater knowledge on mature age students

Given the significant increase in the mature age population pursuing study in the post secondary environment and the myriad of issues that impact upon their success, there
is a need for further study that explores this unique and diverse group. Given current and future nursing workforce projections, mature age students are, and will continue to be an important group for the future nursing profession. To be responsive to current and future workforce projections, there is a need to fully understand how the nursing profession can better strengthen access to pre registration nursing education for the mature age student. From a nursing perspective, surprisingly little is known about mature age students, particularly considering studies have indicated that this cohort makes up approximately 50% of the total student population in post secondary educational institutions. There is little knowledge about what attracts mature age students to nursing, nor is there information regarding their background and trajectory, their methods of entry into the profession, factors that make access to nurse education easy and factors that make access to nurse education more difficult.
3.0 The study

3.1 Aims of the study

The aims of this study were:

1. To establish current statistics on the prevalence of mature age students in undergraduate nursing courses.
2. To identify current university requirements for mature age entry into pre registration nursing education.
3. To identify areas for standardisation of credit processes for mature age and professional entry students with qualifications outside of the discipline of nursing.
4. To provide knowledge that will assist in the development of supportive information for individuals seeking access to nursing as a career choice.

3.2 Study design

Using a mixed-method, descriptive approach and purposive sampling the study was designed around two major activities.

3.2.1 Questionnaire component

29 packages were distributed to VET (22 providers) and University (7 providers) providers within Victoria. The details of each venue were obtained from publicly available sources and research packages were sent to the Head of School/Department/Section of each provider. The package included a letter of invitation, a venue questionnaire (appendix 1), and student invitation letter and questionnaire (appendix 2).
Organisational questionnaire

The representative from each organisation was invited to complete the anonymous questionnaire, returning it in the provided pre-paid self-addressed envelope. The organisation questionnaire included questions on:

a) The definition of mature age student.

b) How information is disseminated to prospective mature age students.

c) Entrance requirements for mature age entry including alternative entry pathways such as enabling or bridging programs.

d) Formal support programs including preparation for study.

e) Programs offered eg. Graduate entry program.

f) Articulation between VET and University.

g) Statistics on school leaver/mature age course enrolment comparison.

h) Criteria for assessment and selection of mature age applicants.

i) Criteria for ‘credit’, advanced standing or ‘recognition of prior learning’ in both the VET and University sector.

Mature aged student questionnaire

The letter of invitation distributed to the educational organisations requested that each provider distribute a questionnaire to mature age students within their facility. VET providers were asked to distribute 5 student packages (n=110), while universities were asked to distribute 20 student packages (n=140). The student packages included a letter of invitation, student questionnaire (appendix 2) and a pre-paid self-addressed envelope.
Mature age student recipients were asked to carefully read the letter of invitation and complete the anonymous questionnaire, returning it in the provided pre-paid self-addressed envelope.

The mature age student questionnaire sought responses to the following:

a) Previous education and training.

b) Previous employment/career.

c) Rationale for choosing nursing as a career.

d) Pathway to enter nursing.

e) Barriers or support prior to enrolment/during enrolment.

f) ‘credit’ or ‘advanced standing’ received for both the VET and university sector.

g) Future career directions.

3.2.2 Questionnaire data analysis

All questionnaire data were entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences and analysed to produce descriptive statistics.

3.3 Focus group to consider results

Representatives were sought from VET and Universities providers (1 x private VET, 5 x metro VET, 5 x rural VET and 7 x Universities, n=18), requesting that they participate in a focus group session. A package containing a letter of invitation was sent along with a consent and withdrawal of consent form. Each recipient was asked to carefully read the letter, signing the consent form if they wished to participate and return in the pre-paid self-addressed envelope.
The focus group schedule was developed following the analysis of the questionnaires. These sessions were designed to encourage participants to consider the results from the questionnaires and discuss issues surrounding how to optimally strengthen mature age access into nurse education.

3.3.1 Focus group data analysis

The focus groups were audio taped and transcribed. Transcripts were returned to participants for confirmation that they were a true and accurate representation of group discussion. Using NVivo, qualitative data management software, responses were coded, themes refined and analysed data presented as a descriptive account.
4. Questionnaire results

4.1 Education provider questionnaire results

Responses were received from ten VET providers and four universities. The VET providers all offered Certificate IV in Health (Nursing), while the universities offered an undergraduate nursing degree.

4.1.1 Defining mature age entry

Amongst the responses there was a great deal of variation in how mature age was defined. Definitions were generally based upon the student’s age and/or the amount of time since they left school. Among VET providers; where a lower age limit was specified, this ranged from 16 years to 25 years. Where the amount of time since leaving school was specified, this ranged from 1 year to 3 years (though in one case the organization specified re-entry to study after ‘a substantial break’). Among the universities that provided a definition, one required mature age applicants to be over 21 years of age, another over the age of 23 years, while a third stipulated that mature age entry was for those who had been out of school for 2 years (the remaining university did not provide a definition).

4.1.2 Dissemination of information to mature age students

Respondents were asked which of a variety of media their organization used to disseminate information to students. Table 1 below, indicates that the most commonly utilized forms of dissemination were the internet (92.9%) and open days (85.7%).
Three venues indicated that they hold a specific mature age information session, and the estimated number of attendees per session ranged from 80-100. None of the venues produced specific course information for mature age students.

4.1.3 Number of mature age students

Venues were asked to indicate whether they had a specified quota of places for mature age students. Only two venues had such a quota, both of which were universities, and both allocated 20% of first year places to mature age students.

Regarding first year enrolments in 2006, the average number of mature age students at each venue was 69 (range 20-250, SD=64).

4.1.4 Application process for mature age students

All four of the universities, but only one of the ten VET providers, accepted mature age student applications via VTAC. In contrast, all of the VET providers, but only one of the universities, accepted direct entry applications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Dissemination</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET/Uni open days</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local newspaper</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers expo</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET/Uni publications</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers advisors</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job networks</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily newspaper</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Other response specified was “Industry facilities/networks”
Nine VET providers listed the entry requirements for mature age students into their Certificate IV course. While the specifics varied across locations, almost all required applicants to pass some form of academic hurdle (variously described as VETASSESS, literacy and numeracy testing, ACER testing, National Level 3 Maths and National Level 4 English). Four VET providers indicated there was also an interview process, and three listed other prerequisites for entry (including completion of a short course in medical terminology, and Level 2 First Aid). Some providers specifically noted that the entry requirements for mature age students were the same as those that applied to all other students.

University requirements for mature age entry also varied between institutions and generally involved more than one element. Two mentioned the Special Tertiary Admissions Test (STAT), two mentioned further study since finishing school, and one mentioned work experience (both paid and voluntary). One response simply referred to ‘special selection principles’ without describing what these were.

Providers were asked whether they had specific criteria by which they assessed mature age applications, and if so, what these were. Only one VET provider indicated such criteria existed, and described them as follows; “The interview process is for all successful applicants and questions are structured to capture life experience.” Three of the four universities indicated such criteria existed. These criteria included a mix of previous study results, work/life experiences, and references.

Two of the VET providers and one of the universities indicated that they had a formal bridging or preparation program as an alternative entry pathway into their course. All
three providers charged for this program, though only one provided information on the cost ($700). Only the university provided further details of the program, describing it as “Diploma of Foundation Studies - 6 units from the nursing program and 2 units from Arts”.

Thirteen of the venues detailed the advice they give to unsuccessful applicants. The advice given generally involved some combination of suggesting that the person; reapply the following year, undertake some other less demanding course of health-related study, further prepare for return to study (e.g. complete short course in literacy and numeracy before re-sitting entrance test), and/or gain further relevant work experience.

4.1.5 Course admission

Altogether eight of the 14 venues surveyed indicated that they offer a formal preparation for study program prior to the commencement of semester (6/10 of the VET providers, and 2/4 of the universities). Four of the VET providers charged for this, as did the two universities who provided such a program. The average cost of such programs was $290.83 (range $50-700).

The components of programs offered included health-related subjects (e.g. medical terminology, First Aid, basic sciences) and/or return to study subjects (e.g. assignment preparation, note taking, using the internet).

Only one of the venues surveyed (a university) indicated they had a compulsory bridging program for mature age students as an entry requirement for the course,
although students could gain an exemption from this on the basis of previous study in anatomy and physiology. The course cost $250.

Fifty-seven percent of the venues surveyed indicated that they offered formal study support or mentoring to their mature age students during their course (6/10 VET providers and 2/4 universities). This generally involved the availability of a Learning/Study Skills service within the institution. Three venues indicated extra support may also be made available via lecturers/teachers/tutors.

4.1.6 Current student cohort

Respondents reported that about half of all students in first, second and third years were mature age, although this varied considerably across venues (Table 2).

Table 2 Percentage of mature age students in each year level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year level</th>
<th>Mature age students in each year level</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st year</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>20-94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>20-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd year</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>40-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th year</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>20-20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over three quarters (76.9%, missing = 1) of the venues surveyed said they provided credit, exemption, advanced standing or recognition of prior learning (RPL) to mature age students enrolled in their course. This included six of the VET providers and all of the universities. Of the ten venues that provided further information about what would qualify a student for RPL, all indicated that previous study was considered, and six said previous work experience was taken into account.

Respondents were asked to indicate the maximum amount of RPL allowable, and the criteria to be used for assessment. Where specified, the proportion ranged from 20% to 100% (or in one case 3/16 units). The criteria used to assess RPL were in most
cases based on either NBV or institutional guidelines, and predominantly related to the successful completion of prior studies.

Nine venues provided information on the proportion of mature age students who received the maximum amount of RPL allowable. The average proportion of mature age students receiving RPL was 9.4% (range 0-60%, standard deviation=19.2). Eleven venues indicated that students could appeal a decision to deny them RPL (seven VET providers, and all of the universities), and all of these were able to identify the person to whom the appeal could be made. Generally the identified person/position was a higher academic authority, such as the Program Coordinator, Director of Teaching and Learning, Academic Board, Head of Program or Head of School. However, two venues indicated that appeals were handled via Student Support Services. Some respondents commented that the appeals process which applied to mature age students was no different to that open to all other students.

4.1.7 Withdrawal from study prior to completion

Thirteen venues indicated the three most common reasons why they believed mature age students withdraw from study prior to completion. The most commonly given reasons were financial constraints (76.9%) and time constraints (69.2%) (Table 3).
Table 3    Reasons for withdrawal from study by mature age students prior to completion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Withdrawal</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Percent of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Financial constraints</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>76.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constraints</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>69.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty of completion</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support from family</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to progress</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realities of nursing not meeting expectations</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not known</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of clinical placements</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>300.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Other responses specified were "Illness" and "Pregnancy"

Venues estimated the proportion of mature age students who withdraw from their course prior to completion. Across all year levels it appears that only a small proportion of mature age students withdraw (Table 4).

Table 4    Proportion of mature age students withdrawing from course prior to completion by year level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year level</th>
<th>Mature age students withdrawing from course</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean percentage (%)</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>1-20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>0-20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd year</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.8 Course completion

Venues estimated the proportion of all students graduating in 2003, 2004, and 2005 who were mature age (Table 5). In every year it was estimated that just over two-thirds of all graduating students were mature age, although there was substantial variation between venues regarding this. Among the VET providers, it was estimated that about four fifths of all graduating students were mature age, compared to about half of those enrolled in universities.
Table 5  Proportion of all students graduating who were mature age by year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mature age students graduating</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>67.7</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>20-99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>69.4</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>30-100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>20-99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.9 Ease of entry into nursing course

In response to the question “Do you believe that entry into a nursing course is easy for a mature age student?”, six respondents (42.9%) indicated “yes”, five (35.7%) said “no”, and the remaining three (21.4%) endorsed both “yes” and “no”. There appeared to be no difference according to venue type as to whether entry was regarded as easy or difficult for mature age students.

Nine respondents listed factors which they believed made entry into nursing easy for mature age students. Mature age students were seen to have a range of life and work experiences which stood them in good stead when being interviewed for entry. There was also recognition that most mature age applicants were highly motivated and goal oriented which made them desirable students. Some respondents also commented that the academic entry requirements were not especially high. A small number of respondents commented on features of their course which made it attractive to mature age students (e.g. no HECS fees, flexible delivery).

Ten respondents commented on factors which made entry into nursing difficult for mature age students. The main difficulties identified were; other competing commitments (e.g. family, financial, work), lack of confidence/fear of returning to study, lack of family support, timing of clinical placements or shift work, academic
skill deficits (e.g. literacy, numeracy, computers), and lack of places (i.e. in course and on clinical placements).

4.2.10 Strengthening mature age access into nursing education

Venues were asked what measures could be taken to strengthen mature age access into undergraduate nurse education. The eight respondents who provided some comment on this generally made suggestions intended to address some of the difficulties identified above. For example, it was suggested that various forms of financial support such as bursaries, scholarships, and traineeships should be made available, specifically to mature age students. Greater flexibility in course delivery (e.g. part time, offering clinical placements during school hours or on weekends, child-minding facilities) was seen as a way of responding to the family commitments of many students. Several respondents suggested increasing the number of places available to mature age students. Academic support such as a targeted short-course prior to entry, increasing awareness of support services, monitoring progress, and offering encouragement were also seen as potentially useful strategies.

4.2 Mature age student questionnaires

120 completed surveys were returned from students studying in both the VET and university sector.

Most respondents (60.5%) indicated they were currently enrolled through a TAFE/VET provider, while the rest were enrolled at a university. The most common course was Certificate IV (Nursing) (65.8%), followed by a three year Bachelor of Nursing (30.8%). Three people were currently doing a two-year bachelor degree, and one person was doing a four year bachelor degree.
Of those undertaking a Certificate IV in nursing, 92.3% were attending TAFE/VET, and the remaining students were attending a university provider. Across both locations of Certificate IV course provision, 65.8% were in their first year of study, and the rest in their second.

Of the 41 respondents enrolled in a Bachelor of Nursing degree (whether of two, three or four years duration), 29.3% were in 1st year, 53.7% in 2nd year, and 17.1% in 3rd year.

4.2.1 Demographic data

The majority (88.3%) of the 120 survey respondents were female. Most were aged between 25 and 49 years of age, though ages ranged from less than 20 years to 55-59 years (Table 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two thirds (66.9%) of the questionnaire respondents indicated they had one or more dependents (Table 7).
The average number of dependent children (among the 76 respondents who had them) was 2.3 (range 1-5), and their children’s ages ranged from 5 weeks to 32 years old.

Table 8 indicates the number of dependent children that each respondent had.

### Table 8 Number of dependent children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of dependent children</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>38.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.2.2 Highest level of education

Respondents provided information on the highest level of education attained prior to enrolment in their current nursing course (Table 9). Just over a fifth had less than Year 12 education, a fifth had Year 12 only, almost two fifths had a TAFE qualification, and the remainder had a trade or university qualification.

### Table 9 Highest level of education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year/Qualification</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE course</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>38.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade qualification</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University certificate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University diploma</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University post graduate diploma</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.3 Employment

The vast majority of survey respondents (99.2%, n=119) indicated they have been in paid employment since secondary school. Of the 116 who provided further information on how long they have been in paid employment since secondary school, the average number of years in the workforce was 14.6 years (range 1-40, standard deviation. 9.07).

Respondents were asked to nominate their main occupation since leaving school. This was an open-ended question, and so the 119 responses have been coded into a limited number of categories of like occupations. Where the person mentioned more than one main occupation, only the first mentioned was used in determining the category. As indicated in Table 10, the most common occupations were in the health sector (18.5%), administrative and other similar duties (17.6%), and retail (17.6%).

Table 10 Main occupation since leaving secondary school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Occupation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin/clerical/reception/secretarial</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail/customer service/sales</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business/finance</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/childcare</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed forces/police</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home duties</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory worker/machinist/spray painter</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair and beauty services</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic arts/design</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterinary nursing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given that the current research is focused on nursing, the previous occupations of the 22 respondents in the ‘health’ category were examined. Six had mainly worked as
enrolled nurses (division two), five as personal care attendants or nurse assistants, and two as disability support workers. Other health occupations included; division one registered nurse, patient transport officer, residential care worker, dental nurse, massage therapist, and medical laboratory scientist.

The majority (75.8%) of the 120 survey respondents indicated they were in paid employment immediately prior to the commencement of their current nursing course. The occupations engaged in were very similar to those identified above, although it appears that a greater proportion (51.6%) were involved in a health-related occupation, suggesting a shift into such occupations prior to the commencement of their nursing course (Table 11). 13.2% worked in the retail sector immediately prior to enrolment.

**Table 11 Main occupation immediately prior to enrolment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main occupation immediately prior to enrolment</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>51.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail/customer service/sales</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin/clerical/reception/secretarial</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/childcare</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business/finance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory worker/machinist/spray painter</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic arts/design</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among those engaged in health-related occupations immediately prior to enrolment, over half had been working as a personal care attendant, and a quarter as division two nurses.

Of the 91 respondents in paid employment immediately prior to the commencement of their course, most were working the equivalent of three or more days per week, i.e. 17 or more hours per week (Table 12).
Table 12  Number of hours worked per week immediately prior to enrolment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of hours worked per week</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;8hrs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-16hrs</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-32hrs</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>36.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33-40hrs</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;40hrs</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were 29 respondents not in paid employment immediately prior to enrolling in their current nursing course. Respondents were invited to tick as many options as applied from a list of other non-paid activities and occupations (Table 13). Two thirds of those not in the paid workforce, prior to commencing study, were engaged in home duties, while a further 20% were studying.

Table 13  Unpaid activity engaged in immediately prior to enrolment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unpaid activity prior to enrolment</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home duties</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carer</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking for paid work</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travelling overseas</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travelling in Australia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This group of 29 respondents were asked to indicate how many years it had been since they were in paid employment. The average length of time was 5.9 years (range 5 months-23 years, standard deviation 5.6 years)

Twenty respondents (16.9%, n=118) indicated that they had been studying immediately prior to enrollment in their current nursing course. Those studying were asked what they had studied, and the open-ended responses were coded into a limited
number of categories (Table 14). Respondents had typically studied at Certificate III or IV level, and 65% had studied a health-related course.

### Table 14 Course studied prior to enrolment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course studied prior to enrolment</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Certificate III (Aged Care)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate IV Health Sciences (Nursing)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other health-related course</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate III (Personal Care Attendant)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General educational skills course</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 4.2.4 Reasons for choosing to study nursing

Respondents were asked to “Please indicate your reasons for choosing to study a nursing course”. Most people gave at least one reason why they had opted to study nursing and some gave several. The question was framed as an open-ended prompt, in response to which three main themes emerged: (1) employment opportunities, (2) making a difference, and (3) long-standing ambition.

Many respondents commented upon the perceived employment opportunities associated with nursing. These included flexibility of hours, better pay, more scope for career progression and the possibility of traveling. For example:

*Flexibility of employment options. Diverse range of areas to work. Career which would be flexible with my home commitments. Enjoy caring for and working in human service field - have done for 20 years.*

*To get a decent job with endless possibilities. To be self sufficient financially.*
To gain more career choices. To earn more money. To enhance on skills.

To have a career with flexible working hours. To provide something for the community.

To make myself more employable.

In terms of ‘making a difference’, many people referred to wanting to do something more emotionally rewarding for a career, wanting to help other people, enjoying working with people, or feeling that the nursing profession was special. For example:

Because of my desire to learn to care for people. I have thought about it over the years but never felt that I was in a position to do it - now it was a matter of now or never!

Wanting to get back into the workforce and choosing a change of direction - interest in caring for people

Many respondents made reference to their long-standing ambition or desire to pursue a career in nursing, which they had not had the opportunity to pursue at an earlier time due to a multitude of factors (e.g. other commitments, not gaining entry, lack of maturity or confidence, pursuing some other career). For example:

Have always wanted to be a nurse. Decided to start with Div 2 to see if I could handle study load before trying to get in to Div 1.

Have had an interest in undertaking nursing for quite a long time but decided to wait for children to all be attending school.

I have wanted to do this for a long time but there were many obstacles along the way - including confidence in myself at being able to do nursing. My family are older now and I want to work in a field where I
can achieve job satisfaction just by helping someone, even if it’s only a smile.

Wanted to do over 20 years, but circumstances did not allow. Now time for self.

4.2.5 Information about careers in nursing obtained prior to enrolling

Respondents were asked to indicate how informative they found several sources of information about nursing careers to be prior to enrolling. Responses were scored on a 3 point scale (1=not informative, 2=informative, 3=very informative), so the higher the mean, the better the source of information was judged to be. As can be seen from Table 15, respondents indicated that other people (including registered nurses, friends, current nursing students and family) were rated among the most useful sources of information about careers in nursing. These were also among the most frequently used sources of information. The Internet was viewed as either informative or very informative. University or VET information and open days, career expos, and health service open days were generally regarded as informative, while other forms of media such as newspaper and television were seen as the least useful sources of information, and were also among the least commonly accessed.
Table 15  Sources of information accessed and their usefulness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of information</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>1 (Not informative)</th>
<th>2 (Informative)</th>
<th>3 (Very informative)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registered nurse</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current nursing student</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET/Uni open days</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VET/Uni publications</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>2.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers expo</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health service open day</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local newspaper</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily newspaper</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A small number of people mentioned accessing other sources of information about careers in nursing. These included ringing a TAFE or university directly, reading a newspaper article about apprenticeships, researching careers in the library, contacting a local Member of Parliament, ringing the Nurses Board of Victoria, and consulting the VTAC guide.

Fifty-seven respondents provided information on the specific websites they accessed regarding nursing careers. Many respondents accessed multiple websites. The most common were university websites, with 84% of those respondents who accessed websites logging on to a specific university.
Table 16  Websites accessed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Websites Accessed</th>
<th>Number accessing (n=57)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>UNIVERSITY SITES</strong></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>84.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Catholic University</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballarat University</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Sturt University</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deakin University</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edith Cowan University</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Trobe University</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monash University</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMIT</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of South Australia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria University</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University sites – general</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TAFE SITES</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>38.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box Hill</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRIT</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gippsland</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gordon</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goulburn Ovens</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holmesglen</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riverine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wodonga</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE sites - general</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PROFESSIONAL ORGANISATIONS</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>38.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia Nursing Federation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurses Board of Victoria</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurses Board of Australia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal College of Nursing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OTHER EDUCATION RESOURCES</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance Education SA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private training provider sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC government education website</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VTAC</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OTHER</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t remember</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment sites</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government health websites (Vic and NSW)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information sites</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The single most commonly used keyword when internet searching was ‘Nursing’, entered by most people who accessed the Internet for information prior to enrolment. Other variants of this keyword included Bachelor of Nursing, Division two nursing, nursing in Melbourne/Victoria/Australia, nursing careers, nursing jobs, and enrolled
nurse. Other keywords used by respondents could be grouped into three broad categories, general education, specific institutions, and areas of specialty. Words that related to education generally included: tertiary, studies, university, TAFE, courses, education, degrees, traineeships, scholarships, bachelor, off campus, external studies, part time, undergraduate. A number of people used the names and locations of specific universities and TAFE colleges as search terms (e.g. Albury, Wodonga, Bendigo, Monash, Ballarat University, Gordon TAFE, RMIT, La Trobe). Key words that reflected particular areas of nursing or health specialty included: midwifery, neonatal, paediatrics, remote health, overseas nursing, Certificate IV in Health, medical, health sciences.

4.2.6 Contact with TAFE/VET/University prior to enrolling

Respondents were asked whether they had contacted the TAFE/VET provider or university before applying for their current nursing course. The majority (82.4%, n=119) indicated that they had done so. Of these 98 respondents, 81.6% said they had been given verbal information, 72.4% written information, and 25.5% were directed to a website, which suggests information was available in more than one format from most providers. Participants were also asked to rate the helpfulness of the information provided. Most people (63.9%) rated it as ‘very helpful’, 32% as ‘helpful’, and 4.1% as ‘unhelpful’ (the mean helpfulness rating was 2.6/3.0).

Respondents were asked what they found to be helpful about the information they received from the university or TAFE prior to enrolling. Elements of the information commonly identified as useful included course content and structure (e.g. subjects, placements, duration, hours), application procedures (e.g. entry exam, VTAC), prerequisites, details of information or open days, costs, and general information on
the nursing profession. However, when participants were asked what other information was required; the same themes emerged from the data as above. This suggests that either there were differences between institutions in the thoroughness of the information provided, or that there were individual differences in perceptions of usefulness (i.e. where one person considered the information received to be adequate, another perceived it as lacking). Information on course costs was one area particularly frequently mentioned as lacking, suggesting that educational institutions may need to take care to provide as much detail about this as possible to future students.

4.2.7 Delay in pursuing nursing studies

Prior to their current enrolment; most respondents (70.8%) had delayed pursuing entry into nurse education. The 85 people who indicated delaying their entry into nurse education were asked to select the reasons for this delay from a list of possible factors (Table 17). Family commitments and financial constraints were the most commonly reported factors. Fear about returning to study/lack of confidence was also identified as a barrier by many.
Table 17  Reasons for delaying pursuing nursing education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for delay</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family commitments</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial restraints</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of returning to study</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of confidence</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constraints</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity to education facility</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure of the course</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimidated by younger students</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in being accepted into the course</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer/colleagues unsupportive</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had not got around to it</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family unsupportive</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The thirteen respondents who indicated that the ‘structure of the course’ had been a factor in delaying their entry into a nursing course were asked to comment on this more specifically. The most common difficulties expressed were to do with course load and timetabling. Several people would have preferred to study part-time, generally because they had small children, although two people also mentioned needing to continue with paid employment while studying. Such people found it difficult to participate when either the course was only offered full-time, or when clinical placements needed to be conducted in full-time blocks. A number of people also commented on inconvenient timetabling, with classes spread out over the entire week, rather than being concentrated in two or three days, again interfering with family and paid-work commitments.

4.2.8 Relocation in order to study

Sixteen percent of respondents indicated they needed to relocate in order to undertake nursing studies. These 19 people were asked to choose one or more items from a list
of possible reasons for relocation (Table 18). The most common reason for needing to move was the distance between home and their place of study. The two people who gave ‘other’ reasons for relocation indicated financial constraints had required them to move so they could afford to study.

Table 18 Reasons for relocation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for relocation</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Percent of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travelling distance</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>61.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted to move away from home</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uni/VET/TAFE provider of choice</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only Uni/VET/TAFE place offered</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>138.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.9 Application for current course

The majority of respondents had applied for their current course via direct entry (58.1%), while the rest applied through the state tertiary admissions system (37.6% via VTAC, and 4.3% via another state tertiary admission process). Respondents were asked to indicate the straightforwardness of the process (1=complicated, 2=relatively straightforward, 3=straightforward). The results are presented separately for each method of entry in Table 19. Those who applied via direct entry in general rated the process as ‘straightforward’, while most who applied via VTAC or other similar system rated the process as only ‘relatively straightforward’.
Table 19  Straightforwardness of application process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application process</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>1 (Complicated)</th>
<th>2 (Relatively straightforward)</th>
<th>3 (Straightforward)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct entry</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VTAC or other state tertiary admission process</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For both forms of entry, those few respondents who found the process to be ‘complicated’ mentioned issues such as confusing information from different institutions, difficult to follow websites (especially VTAC), and complex paperwork to fill in.

Respondents who applied for their current nursing course via direct entry were asked whether they had successfully completed an enabling or bridging program that guaranteed them a place. Only 15.6% of direct entry students had completed such a course. The courses described varied widely from an entry exam (e.g. VETASSESS nursing test) and interview process, through to short courses in medical terminology, and up to one semester of preparatory university study (e.g. academic writing, computer skills, mathematics).

4.2.10 Course enrolment

The majority of respondents (86.3%) indicated that they had been well informed of the course requirements. An apparently greater proportion of Certificate IV (Nursing) students (93.6%) regarded themselves as well informed compared to the Bachelor of Nursing students (71.8%). Of the 16 people who felt they were not well-informed of the course requirements, the main shortcomings identified were a lack of information...
about the course contents and requirements, timetabling, and prerequisites needed to study particular subjects.

Just over a fifth (21.4%) of respondents said they received some credit, exemption, or Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for their current course (41.5% of Bachelor of Nursing students, compared to 10.5% of Certificate IV students). Of the 25 students overall who received RPL, 79.2% indicated this was on the basis of previous study, 20.8% on the basis of previous work experience, 12.5% for completing a bridging course, and 8.3% for some ‘other’ reasons. Only 14 people who received RPL specified what percentage of credit they had been granted. The average amount was 14.4% (range 2.4-33.0, standard deviation 8.4), although given the small number of cases upon which this figure was based it should be regarded with caution.

The 25 respondents who received RPL were asked whether they thought the amount received was adequate. Nearly two thirds (63.6%) of this sub-group believed their RPL to be adequate, while the remainder considered it inadequate. Five people felt they had received inadequate recognition of their prior work experience and ten people felt they had received inadequate recognition of their prior learning experience (there was some overlap between the two). The perceived inadequacy of RPL was generally in relation to having to take subjects in which the person already had significant knowledge and experience.

4.2.11 Returning to study

Respondents were asked to estimate how long it took them (in minutes) to travel to their educational institution, and how far away it was (in kms). The average length of travel time was 31.3 minutes (range 2-150 minutes, standard deviation 24.6), and the
The average distance was 32.1 km (range 0.2-250 kms, standard deviation 37.5). The length of time and distance traveled were also coded into categories, and frequencies generated (Table 20 and Table 21).

**Table 20  Time spent travelling to educational institution in minutes**  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time spent travelling (minutes)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;=10</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-30</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-60</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;60</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 21  Distance travelled to educational institution in kilometres**  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance travelled (KM)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;=2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-50</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51+</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most respondents (64.7%) indicated they were currently in paid employment. The average number of hours worked per week is shown in Table 22. A third of respondents worked the equivalent of 1-2 days per week, and another third 2-3 days per week. Very few worked full time.

**Table 22  Average number of hours worked per week**  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average number of hours worked per week</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt;8 hrs</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-16 hrs</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-32 hrs</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33-40 hrs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;40 hrs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most (68.8%) of those respondents who were working while studying were employed in health related jobs such as division two nursing, and personal care attendant positions (Table 23).
### Table 23 Occupation while studying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation while studying</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail/customer service/sales</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admin/ clerical/reception/secretarial</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/childcare</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business/finance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed forces/police</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic arts/design</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>77</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 4.2.12 Experience of being a mature age student

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they thought being a mature age student was an advantage. Of the 116 who provided an answer, 81.9% said ‘yes’, 10.3% said ‘no’, and the remaining 7.8% endorsed both ‘yes’ and ‘no’. Respondents were then asked ‘Why/why not?’ Of those who said being a mature age student was an advantage, the main reason given could be summarized as ‘having more maturity, life experience, knowledge and/or confidence’. For example:

*Because you have many life experiences e.g. parenting, working in different occupations, perhaps having travelled (experiencing different cultures) developing empathy because of that experience.*

*Experiences in life and with work.*

*I feel I'm more mature and have a bit more life experience. If I was to study nursing straight from year 12 I think I would have found it a bit more daunting and confronting.*

The second main reason given by respondents who thought being a mature age student was an advantage could be summarized as ‘being more motivated/focused/committed/able to manage time’. For example:

*Are more self directed in learning and are more committed to complete course. Have a specific goal and WANT to attend and learn.*
I am doing the course because I want to, not because I think I might like to.

Other reasons for thinking being mature age was an advantage were each mentioned by only a few respondents. These included lessening childcare responsibilities, greater financial security, and eligibility for alternative modes of entry into the course.

Twelve people thought being a mature age student was not an advantage. The reasons given for not considering mature age to be an advantage included; other commitments (e.g. family, work, financial), changes in the study skills required (e.g. IT, referencing), younger students being more familiar with some subjects (e.g. psychology, biology, chemistry), and poor memory.

The nine students who responded both ‘yes’ and ‘no’ generally gave reasons consistent with those identified above on the advantages and disadvantages of returning to mature age study.

Respondents were provided with a series of statements regarding their return to study with which they were asked to indicate their level of agreement (1 = ‘strongly disagree’, 2 = ‘disagree’, 3 = ‘neither agree/disagree’, 4 = ‘agree’, 4 = ‘strongly agree’). The mean scores of respondents regarding these statements were calculated and are presented in Table 24.
### Table 24  Level of agreement with statements regarding mature age study

(1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATEMENTS</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel that organisation is the key factor in studying successfully</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>(2-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more enthusiastic about learning now than when I was younger</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>(1-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying is providing me with a career opportunity I didn't expect to have</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>(1-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a strong support network surrounding me</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>(1-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel accepted by younger students</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>(2-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel my self image has improved</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>(2-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying now is easier because of life experiences</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>(1-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know more that I thought I did</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>(2-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying has changed my thinking</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>(1-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The experience of studying at tertiary level is what I expected</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>(2-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My study has caused me financial hardship</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>(1-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My home life suffers because I am studying</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>(1-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have to un-learn things</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>(1-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel expectation to know everything already</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>(1-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study seems more difficult now than I remember it</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>(1-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have thought or said in the last 6 months &quot;I'm too old for this&quot;</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>(1-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that my inexperience with computers negatively impacted on my studying experience</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>(1-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel my self image has suffered</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>(1-4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I have been away from study too long now to be successful</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>(1-5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.2.13 Future career plans**

Respondents were asked to describe their future career plans. Of the 113 who did so, most were keen to commence working at the conclusion of their studies, although there were a substantial number who wanted to go on to further study, either immediately or after spending some time in the workforce. Among division two students who wanted to study further, most wanted to either receive their medication endorsement or to go on to study for a Bachelor of Nursing. Of the Bachelor of Nursing students, those who wanted to study further were generally hoping to work for a short period of time before embarking on a specialist course of study, such as midwifery, paediatrics, or critical care (more information on intention to study is
provided below). Some people mentioned the particular environment they would like to work in after completing their studies such as in community nursing, aged care, rural health, or overseas.

The majority (68.6%) of respondents indicated their intention to pursue further nursing studies. Another 30.5% were undecided, while only 0.8% had no plans to study in the future. Eighty respondents provided information on specifically what they intended to study in the future (Table 25).

**Table 25 Area of intended future study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of intended future study</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Percent of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medication administration (Div 2)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post graduate certificate</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>38.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency nursing</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community nursing</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternity</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University undergraduate degree</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensive care</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation nursing</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal and child health</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peri-operative nursing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>13.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Masters degree</td>
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<td>2.3</td>
<td>7.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coronary care</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>327.5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**4.2.14 Ease of entry into mature age study**

Over half (51.3%) of the respondents believed that it was easy to enter into a course as a mature age student, 44.2% did not think it was easy, and 4.4% were undecided.

Of the 58 people who considered mature entry easy, 52 provided reasons why they believed this to be so. The main factors mentioned were life experience, maturity,
relevant job experience (in some cases), and achievable entry requirements (e.g. entry exam and interview).

Of the 50 people who did not consider mature entry to be easy, 48 provided reasons for this belief. Among the main issues mentioned were other competing commitments (e.g. family, financial, work), age, competition for places from both school leavers and international students, insufficient places, and the entry process (especially entry exams, which some found to be daunting).

4.2.15 Happiness with choice of nursing career

The vast majority (97.5%) of respondents indicated they were happy to have chosen nursing as a career. Altogether 107 out of the 115 respondents who were happy with their choice identified the reasons why. The themes concerning happiness with career choice were identical to those that emerged for reasons for wanting to study nursing in the first place. That is, respondents were happy because they found nursing to offer them flexible employment opportunities, they felt that they were making a difference by helping people, and for many, they were fulfilling a long-held desire to pursue a nursing career. It therefore appears that the expectations and hopes of many mature age students in choosing a nursing career were actually being realized.

Two out of the three people who were not happy with their choice of career indicated why this was the case. One felt there were very limited career opportunities available without further study, and the other mentioned the attitudes of staff towards student nurses as being problematic.
5. Focus group analysis and findings

The results of the questionnaires were used to stimulate discussion around the concept of strengthening mature age access to nurse education. Discussion centred around three main areas. The first being the advantages of mature age students, the second the difficulties mature age students face in returning to study and finally those issues education providers should take into consideration when planning for mature aged students.

5.1 Advantages of mature age students

It was generally felt that mature age students make a considered decision to return to study. All participants agreed that this was an attribute common to most mature age students and the fact that they have “really given a great deal of thought to what they’re wanting to do” means they are more likely to complete the course they begin. Some comparisons between mature age students and school leaver students occurred:

*The motivation of mature age students is quite different to school leaver students.*

*When you are straight out of school you tend to be a little bit selfish and whatever it is you do is sort of dispensable and it doesn’t really matter if you don’t finish it ‘I’ll just do something else’. But when you decided to take something on like this, as an adult, where you have responsibilities and you’ve got, you know for me I had family responsibilities and everything. You don’t go into these things lightly*  

*So I was motivated, I was focussed I worked incredibly hard, loved it with a passion, every single minute of it, it nearly killed me*

Along with sound reasons for entering study, mature age student attributes were also considered important to their success in study. It was suggested that most often these attributes served mature age students well in the clinical setting:
In the clinical environment they’re a lot more mature... a lot of them can actually prioritise their time.

It was argued that the work ethic of mature age students differs from ‘traditional’ students:

Mature age students will actually spend a little more time with their clients than the younger nurses who are into the tasks more so. You kind of actually have more of a rapport with the older nurse than the younger ones. Because they seem to take more time with them and are more concerned.

They actually complete the course and I’m not saying the young one’s don’t but they go in with that in mind in particular and I just find and so when they’ve got to have their police checks and the placement they don’t seem to be staid whereas I find I’m not necessarily stereotyping the younger, well they tend to miss a day here and there and they haven’t got their police check on time, they can’t do placement....

The life experience of mature age students was seen as advantageous, both in and out of the classroom setting.

They’ll cotton on faster if they’ve had a wealth of life experience.

It adds a real richness to the class too having them all with different life experiences coming together... I do think I think they add a richness to the nursing profession itself.

They have to have huge communication skills and diplomacy skills.

5.2 Difficulties for mature age students

The group believed that mature age students have some major hurdles to traverse before they can enjoy success in their studies. Participants agreed that access to courses was difficult for mature age students and that complicated navigation of web sites made entry much more complicated. The expectation that mature age students are technological ‘savvy’ was identified as a major issue that presented a challenge for mature age students entering courses.
Building confidence was viewed as central to supporting the mature age student’s return to study:

*I get a lot of mature age student where I come from say “I’m getting a bit old for this”.... They’re a bit hesitant... and then they’ll say to us “oh I’ve forgotten how to do it I don’t know how to do it any more”.*

The group considered that students who did not complete their secondary schooling face uncertainty about returning to study. Many of them fear failure because of their earlier education experiences. As they progress through the course, however, mature age students were described as discovering, quite to their amazement that they are very capable of achieving well in their studies.

*They’re not really sure about how their study will go ... they’re all a bit nervous about that ...I think there’s also a perception with mature age students if that they didn’t do what was then HSC, or whatever it was when they were at school, you know they didn’t get to that level they perhaps left at form 9 or whatever it was called ... they’re not as clever as the school leavers who got their HSC’s or their VCE’s.... in fact they’ll actually start and realise half these kids can’t put a sentence together to save their life, they can’t write and essay to save their life, that their 200 word little paper that they had to write when they were last at school in form 2 actually and all the reading they’ve done and all the work that they’ve done actually meant that they can actually put an essay together and get really good marks and that’s an incredible shock....*

Participants also explained that as mature age students come to the realisation that they can achieve, they then start to think more about their future and gain confidence to plan their career:

*Once they start to realise that they can do this and achieve and start getting reasonable results they then start to think oh I can make a career out of this...*
Participants believed that attrition for mature age students is a common problem, however, compared to school leaver students was considered lower. The reasons for attrition were stated as being related either to family issues or finance.

*From my point of view I tend to see that they’re attrition rates down…[attrition] seems to be [due to] a range of family issues but financial ones just seem to be a part of all of that…*

The financial impact on mature age students was unanimously agreed to be ‘huge’. While students were often determined “…you’re not about to waste however many thousands of dollars that you’re putting into this to get this qualification”, the lack of finance coupled with family commitments often left mature age students with no choice but to leave the course.

*Well it’s bigger from the perspective that most of them have got kids …I know a number of mature age people who leave because of financial reasons. They can’t actually keep going…*

The debate between continued learning vs. parental responsibility attracted a great deal of discussion. It was argued that the structure and function of tertiary institutions often impacts upon parental responsibility. The example of timetabling was given:

*I have to lecture students from 4 till 6 and the attendance at that series was dreadful … I spoke to them in tutorials about lecture attendance and a lot of the mature age students said well I’ve got to take Johnny to soccer….*

Participants agreed that mothers, in particular, often grapple with the guilt of working and studying:

*It’s a mother thing…You know mothers are supposed to be there, putting prep in you know be at home, its at the base of all our minds about what we do, what we’re supposed to do….You know it doesn’t mater how progressive we are and how contemporary we are there’s still that undercurrent in mother’s minds of in relation to children I’m still a mother but you can hardly do both without one suffering… It’s an age*
old problem with us women and we're never going to get it exactly right.... Yeah, you're gonna feel guilty no matter what you do.

The focus group members discussed the need for supporting the studying parent and also the importance of family support. There was discussion about a program that offered family information sessions to support parents returning to study:

But I think somewhere along the line we need to help them develop some self protecting skills, a lot of them are actually, getting around this sort of guilt and you get it if you go off to work, you get it if you stay at home....And to have an information session for the family would have been great ...It might also help them realise what they’re getting into as well.

I think that more focussing on the family, once they start enrolling it’s a family thing...

Mature aged students were identified as being a group that require preparation for study. Participants generally described these students as initially needing a lot of help:

We spend an enormous amount of time with the students in teaching them about how to study..... Do you notice that can you pick the students that have actually done return to study?....Yep, I can.....They’re probably not so overwhelmed ... Well they manage better from the start of the course because they’ve got that grounding ...

5.3 Education provider considerations

The group participants identified a number of issues that would all need to be taken into consideration by education providers when planning for the education of mature age students.

The life experience of mature age students is seen as a major advantage for this cohort of students, however, there is little recognition of prior learning or value given to the life experience of these students:
I have had friends that have gone and started in retail and they have to do a certificate throughout the throughout their journey and now they're in management and they have certificates for all of that work ....maybe we need to be more acknowledged really acknowledged that these life skills people have which they don’t necessarily have a piece of paper for...

The group considered the difficulty in quantifying these experiences in the context of a nursing course:

I’m thinking that it’s needed to be quantified and when you’re talking life experience how do you quantify aspects of life?

Focus group members suggested that the structure of many courses and the course accreditation requirements of the Nurses Board provide inflexibility in recognising prior experience:

Do you find that if you are looking at recognition for prior learning or credits or whatever you want to sort of call it that you do look for formal qualifications? Rather than any assessment for what else they’ve done?....Well I think we’ve been primed to as academics you know we’ve got no room to move. Have we?

There was the view, however, that prior experience whilst valuable needed to be contextualised into a nursing perspective:

Whether it’s a lot of it amounts to contextual though isn’t it? I mean communication skills in Maccas is only so much you need to cope in the nursing context of an unwell person....

The specifics of course delivery highlighted some areas that should be taken into consideration for mature age students. Discussion occurred around preference for flexible delivery modes considering the familial and employment demands on mature age students’ time:

I think flexibility in delivery is important to mature age students. So hopefully you’ve got a variety of options.
Focus group members, however, cautioned that while distance delivery modes may be apparently useful to mature age students, these students also tend to prefer validation of their work through some face to face contact.

*I think face to face is really important particularly in the first year of study.....And that’s like building confidence too.... You tend to rely on feedback heavily, you rely on feedback a lot in that first year...*

Mature age students were perceived to appreciate security as they became more familiar with the tertiary environment:

*I think if you come back for a second day of class you’re doing well really.....Just being in an educational building I think is confidence building you know just to know you know where is the toilet and where is the caff you know and they’ve actually done one day a week for six months or something they actually think I know this place and I know ....They’re a lot more adventurous going into second year*

Collaboration between universities and the VET sector were viewed as vitally important. Increasingly, participants believed that mature age students are seeking pathways in both directions between the VET and university sector One participant described how they have the local university representative come in and talk to their students outlining the paths their education may take. This participant stated that this was very well received by students, and increasingly students are going on to university study after completing a VET course.

**5.4 Ideal solutions?**

When faced with the question of how to strengthen access for mature age students’ participants discussed some ideal solutions. The merits of a paid employment model similar to the post-graduate midwifery model being used in one health service were discussed:
I’m wondering because we should be looking at a similar situation to the paid model with midwifery for example. I teach post-grad midwives and our students have the option of taking a paid model where they get paid, full timers get paid I think 3 days a week and they work supernumery one day a week so if you know is that something that could be offered to final year nursing students for example. So that at least they’ve got ok that first year they’re not get paid but the second year they’re going to ....

Financial solutions based upon governmental support and relaxed income means testing was also suggested as a solution.

I mean it may be that someone who is going back to study full time that the income is recognised as separate to their partner ... that they’re giving up so no longer is it combined income, it’s his income that really matters, it’s her income only that’s accounted for so you know cutting back on that so maybe you thinking big picture

Focus group members grappled with the idea of recognising prior qualifications and life skills for mature aged students, and found that while they agreed some form of recognition should occur, no-one had any solutions as how this might be done.

Participants related the difficulties they perceived in first determining just what students could have ‘credit’ for and secondly convincing the rest of academia that this should be done.

I think of us giving actually RPL4 working methods and I can just see someone throwing their arms up in the air saying what’s the point? But I’m not saying it’s wrong or right ...You’re right [mature age students] have to have huge communication skills and diplomacy skills, they take a lot so you know I think there’s nothing wrong with that but I have a feeling someone actually might think I’m.....That you are quite nutty...

Participants suggested that balancing the needs of mature age students and ensuring a sense of equity with the school leaver group was a constant challenge:

I guess I mean the question is “should we treat the school leaver pool and the non school leaver pool in exactly the same way”? That was probably the question....Well I don’t think, I think each should be treated the same but recognised they have different needs.... But how do we do that in a structured way?
6. Discussion

Current and future health workforce shortages have the capacity to cripple the health care system. Increasing demands and expectations of consumers for quality health care, increasing client acuity, rapid technological development, rising costs, the ageing population and the current and future increase in chronic disease require a highly experienced workforce (Duckett, 2005). However, like many other countries, Australia has an ageing workforce and more employees are seeking part time employment, primarily as a means of establishing a ‘life-work balance’ (Australian Health Workforce Advisory Committee, 2004; Duckett, 2005; Productivity Commission, 2005).

Major studies have indicated dire future workforce predictions (Access Economics, 2001; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004; Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2003; Australian Government, 2006; Productivity Commission, 2005). Reports have indicated that the future health workforce will be recruited from a significantly diminished pool. Projections suggest that the current workforce entrants of approximately 170,000 each year will fall to 12,500 by 2020 (Access Economics, 2001).

For nursing, these reports present a gloomy future. In Victoria, workforce projections indicate shortages of 7,200 fulltime positions by 2011-2012. Of these, it is predicted that 1,969 full time vacancies will exist for division two (enrolled) nurses (Department of Human Services Victoria, 2004).
Clearly the complexity of workforce issues requires a myriad of strategies. However, this study and others indicate that a major focus of future workforce planning should be on the non-school leaver population. Given the report by Access Economics (2001), indicating a significant decline in people entering employment, it would appear that nursing must consider recruitment from the current, broad existing workforce.

Studies have identified the potential benefits in targeting mature age students to further their qualifications and increase their employment options (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2003; Byrne, 2005; Commonwealth of Australia, 2006; Salamonson & Andrew, 2006). There is a growing sentiment that suggests there is a large untapped pool of under qualified, but academically able people in the population, a pool of underutilized ability (Egerton, 2001).

The results of this study clearly indicate that there is significant interest from mature age students in pursuing a career in nursing. The results outlined in chapter four indicate that approximately 50% of students studying nursing in both the VET and university sector are non-school leavers. Importantly, the education providers surveyed in this study indicate that just over two thirds of all graduating students from nursing courses are mature age.

This study has indicated that mature age students are viewed as highly motivated individuals with well established communication skills. Education providers suggested that mature age student qualities such as time management, work ethic and life experiences are significant attributes that translate well to both the education and
clinical setting. The range of skills and experience that mature age students bring to study and employment have been well documented in other studies (Fleming & McKee, 2005; Kevern & Webb, 2004; Ofori, 2000).

The students who were surveyed in this study highlighted the reasons why they were pursuing a career in nursing. Employment prospects and professional and personal satisfaction were identified as important. For many of these students, a career in nursing was fulfilling a long standing ambition. This study clearly demonstrates that this cohort of students is strongly committed to a future career in nursing with almost all students surveyed indicating that they were extremely happy with their decision to pursue a nursing career. Furthermore, the majority of student respondents indicated that they intended to pursue further nursing studies.

The overwhelming message that was conveyed in this study is that mature age students are highly motivated individuals who take their decision to return to study seriously. The success rates of mature age students that were identified in this study are not surprising and have been reported in numerous other studies (Ansari, 2002; Kantanis, 2002; Lumb & Vail, 2004).

While mature age student are reported as making a valuable contribution to the nursing profession, both as students and as health professionals on graduation (Kevern & Webb, 2004) this study, similar to others that have been reported internationally, indicates that mature age students achieve their success often through very difficult circumstances. Reay’s (2002) description of the tensions that occur in the balancing of academic, domestic and economic responsibilities clearly indicates the need to give significant thought to strengthening support for mature age students.
6.1 Supporting return to study – the need for information

In this study, an important component of supporting mature age students return to study was the provision of appropriate and timely information. There is ample evidence to show that mature age students’ decision to return to study is a considered one (Dowswell et al., 1998; Gerrard & Roberts, 2006; Kantanis, 2002; Kevern & Webb, 2004; Meyer et al., 2006); therefore the heightened requirement for information by these students is not unexpected.

Survey respondents clearly indicated that the Internet was an important source of information. The most common websites accessed were university and TAFE sites and this study confirms the need to ensure that information on the Internet is accurate and reliable. Given that access to sites, other than those provided by education institutions, appeared quite low, there would seem to be some value in ensuring that TAFE and university sites included more broad information about the value of nursing as a career. In writing this discussion, university and TAFE websites were visited and understandably it appeared that the strongest focus was on providing course information. Few education provider websites included links to valuable nursing resource sites. Interestingly, newspaper and television advertising were seen as the least useful sources of information for prospective mature age students.

This study identified a need to provide specific information tailored to the needs of mature age students. Our study would suggest that this is an area that could be strengthened by both university and VET providers. Studies have indicated that information for mature age students should be specific and targeted at their situation (Bolam & Dodgson, 2003; Kantanis, 2000; Pritchard & McIntosh, 2003). In this
study, none of the education providers produced specific mature age information and our results would suggest that this is an area where there is potential to develop information that is more relevant to this cohort. Specifically, students in this study expressed the need for information regarding financial implications and employability post study.

Only three of the venues surveyed indicated that they hold a specific mature age information session yet there would appear to be value in conducting sessions that cover the myriad of issues faced by mature age students. Consideration should be given to conducting family information sessions as considerable success in this approach has been identified in the literature (Kantanis, 2000). It is argued that taking a family approach to information provision assists prospective students by ensuring that their families have a clear understanding of the commitment required for successful study at post secondary level (Kantanis, 2000). This is supported by research that indicates that stress experienced by mature age students [that can manifest as serious depressive illness] is significantly reduced for students with sound family support (Pritchard & McIntosh, 2003; Reay et al., 2002; Robertson-Steele, 1998; Settersten & Lovegreen, 1998).

Mature age students in this study were a diverse group, with two thirds having at least one child. In this study, education providers and students were in agreement that family responsibilities is one of the major issues that impacts upon the ability of mature age students to successfully enter and progress through the post secondary sector. Not surprisingly, mature age students in this study identified the need to have clear information about course requirements and identified the late provision of
timetabling information as having a major impact upon their stress levels. There is strong evidence in the literature that incomplete, insufficient and late information is a major problem with the process of entering post secondary education and often deters potential mature age students from commencing study (Davies & Williams, 2001; Fleming & McKee, 2005). Clearly improvements in this area should be a priority for all educational institutions.

6.2 Entry, course structure and support

In this study, it was evident that there were significant differences in application processes, entrance requirement and policies around issues such as recognition of prior learning. The strongest recommendation from this study is for more transparent and clear processes. When nursing students in Victoria are required to meet the same competencies for registration, it is difficult to understand why there is so much difference in application processes, entrance requirements and university policies. While we aimed to identify areas for standardization of credit processes for mature age students, what is clear is that this aim is impossible to meet until some consistency is achieved between educational institutions.

In the surveys and the focus groups conducted in this study issues surrounding recognition of prior learning (RPL) were identified. However, while RPL or like terms are used to describe credit given to students, this study indicated the challenges inherent in this system. For the mature age student, the wealth of life experience and skills gained through employment are difficult to measure (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004; Fleming & McKee, 2005). In this study, the mature age students reported that being a mature age student was an advantage, with the added maturity, life experience, knowledge and confidence gained through life experience including
employment. The vast majority of survey respondents (99.2%, n=119) indicated they have been in paid employment since secondary school and the average number of years in the workforce was 14.6 years. All participants in this study indicated that recognition of prior learning should value the wealth of experience that is not always gained through formal study. Students reported feeling frustrated when having to repeat content that they felt confident with. Challenge assessments are used in some post secondary settings and there may be value in considering ways in which greater recognition of prior experience can be afforded to mature age students.

Researchers have identified that the quality of the mature age student experience is an important predictor of continuance with the course (Bolam & Dodgson, 2003). Given that Fleming and McKee (2005) have reported that 85% of mature age students consider discontinuing their studies at some time, support offered is vitally important. This study, consistent with the work of Bolam and Dogson (2003) and Borysenko (2006) indicates that students need support in gaining strong basic study skills, including skills in managing information technology (Chesterton, 2006). Given that mature age students often feel embarrassed and intimidated by the younger cohort (Fleming & McKee, 2005), there would appear to be value in structuring specific study skills sessions for mature age students.

Studies have indicated that there is a lack of orientation programs for commencing mature age students in both the VET and university sectors (Kantanis, 2002). Research literature and the results of this study would indicate that students who complete pre-study programs make a much smoother transition into the post secondary sector. While eight of the fourteen venues surveyed in this study indicated
that they offered a formal preparation for study program, the cost ranged from $50-$700. Given the responsibilities that have been identified as being characteristic for mature age students one could question whether these return to study programs are designed to reflect the practical needs of mature age students. While some educational institutions may have developed resources, consideration should be given to developing a return to study program for mature age students that could be completed off campus in DVD or web based format. There would be value in a number of educational organizations working on a common program.

This study indicates that students want flexibility when returning to study. Part-time and flexible modes of delivery were identified as ways to strengthen mature age access to nurse education. When life and employment commitments are taken into consideration, it appears that distance education modes may be ideal. However, while distance education appears to be a mode of delivery becoming more popular for education institutions, it is not always the preferred method of learning by students (Walker, 2000). Students report that this mode of delivery is more likely to evoke feelings of isolation due to the lack of interaction with other students and teachers (Hyde & Murray, 2005).

Both students and education providers in this study identified that students need face to face contact, particularly in the first year of study. The value of having contact with fellow students and educators appears to be more highly valued than the autonomy that distance education models afford the student (Hyde & Murray, 2005; Kearns, Shoaf, & Summey, 2004). Blended modes of delivery, that incorporate both face to face and some of the more innovative off campus options, such as web based delivery,
would appear to support the challenges faced by mature age students. However, in designing more flexible models of educational delivery attention must be given to ensuring that mature age students have the skills to access the information and support services are available after hours (Kantanis, 2002).

Research literature suggests that the post secondary education environment is very much geared towards a younger, single population, which can often leave mature age students feeling ostracized (Davies & Williams, 2001; Kantanis, 2002). Considering that descriptions regarding entering study for a mature age student include intimidating, daunting and overwhelming (Gatenby, 2006; Hayes et al., 2004; Kantanis, 2002); there is a need for educational institutions to provide ongoing support for these students as they become comfortable with the social and learning environment.

### 6.3 The financial burden of being a mature age student

This study identified financial considerations as one of the major factors impacting upon the ability of a mature age student to study nursing. While there is little doubt that student poverty is a major issue impacting on all students (Australian Institute For Primary Care, 2004; Heath Professions Council of Australia, 2004), the responsibilities of mature age students are often more significant.

In this study, the majority of survey respondents indicated they were in paid employment immediately prior to the commencement of their current nursing course. Most were working the equivalent of three or more days per week. Leaving paid employment obviously has a significant impact upon the financial security of a group,
largely known to have significant family responsibility (Bolam & Dodgson, 2003; Byrne, 2005; Davies & Williams, 2001; Gerrard & Roberts, 2006).

Financial difficulties have been reported to be one of the most common stressors faced by mature age students (B. Andrews & Wilding, 2004; Cuthbertson et al., 2004; Gerrard & Roberts, 2006); and these students feel that inadequate recognition is given to the financial circumstances that they face (Davies & Williams, 2001). Mature age students are most likely to discontinue their university education because of significant financial stress (Bolam & Dodgson, 2003; Byrne, 2005; Davies & Williams, 2001; Gerrard & Roberts, 2006). The debt incurred by mature age students who return to study is often a deterrent, becoming a major element in the decision to enter further study programs (Davies & Williams, 2001; Marks, 2001).

While strategies such as reducing the HECS contributions for mature age students or considering the ‘rules’ surrounding access to means tested government payments would require significant government lobbying, there are some other strategies that may ease the financial burden that currently impact on the majority of mature age students.

Given the apparent value in attracting mature age students into the nursing profession we believe that consideration should be given to expanding the availability of targeted ‘mature age’ scholarships. While equity with the school leaver population is important, we believe that there is reasonable justification, given the well documented responsibilities of the mature age cohort (Dowswell et al., 2000; Dowswell et al., 1998; Fleming & McKee, 2005; Gerrard & Roberts, 2006; Kenny & Duckett, 2005;
Reay et al., 2002), to explore ways in which maximum financial assistance can be provided.

In this study, 64.7% of students were combining study with paid employment. Almost 80% of those students who were working were employed more than eight hours per week. Interestingly most reported employment in health related jobs. It would appear that there is a strong rationale to target mature age students for the more innovative nursing student paid employment models that are currently occurring or being developed. Current models in Victoria are based on ‘student fellowship’ arrangements, where students are employed within the health setting in an explicit student capacity whilst completing their pre-registration studies (Kenny, Nankervis, Kidd, Connell, Kevin, & Callaghan, 2007). Internationally, the value of paid employment models in terms of ‘work readiness’ have been identified, but importantly, from a financial perspective, they have been shown to have a marked impact on preventing student poverty (L Gamroth, Budgen, & Lougheed, 2004; L Gamroth & Lougheed, 2002). Paid employment models that enable students to complete their course requirement hours would be particularly attractive to mature age students, as an Australian study of mature age nursing students indicated that financing placements away from home was their biggest concern regarding their study (Cuthbertson et al., 2004).

6.4 Supporting career advancement – the need for transparent and flexible pathways

In this study, 68.6% of mature age students indicated that they intended to pursue further nursing studies. 30.5% were undecided. Given these figures, an important
component of strengthening mature age access to nurse education is clear and transparent pathways to and from the VET and university sector.

There is a national trend toward developing a more systematic approach to articulation between universities and the VET sector. The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) has provided endorsement for the Good Practice Principles for Credit Transfer and Articulation (Department of Education Science and Training, 2003).

The preamble for the document Good Practice Principles for Credit Transfer and Articulation indicates that students should be provided with transparent and clear educational pathways that provide the opportunity for students to gain recognition for their work and educational background and where appropriate receive credit for prior learning. It is proposed that ‘effective credit transfer and articulation is a key component in making lifelong learning a reality’.

The principles outlined in the Good Practice Principles for Credit Transfer and Articulation provide a benchmark for measuring effective articulation agreements between the VET and Higher Education sector. These principles include:

1. The focus of credit transfer and articulation arrangements from VET to Higher Education is to establish the equivalence of learning outcomes, and to assist these equivalence decisions to be reached, regardless of the similarity or differences of the education processes involved (including processes of delivery, teaching methodology and assessment); whether the provider is a Registered Training Organisation or an accredited Higher Education provider;
or of entry levels to previous qualifications (for example, eg Diploma from year 12 entry versus Diploma from Cert IV).

2. All individual institutions and providers should include formal vertical and lateral pathways for credit and articulation, both in the design of new courses and programs of study and when upgrading existing courses and programs of study, and that these pathways should be widely publicised to existing students and potential applicants.

3. Decisions to grant applications of credit or articulation between the VET and the higher education sector should have general applicability for all eligible students, but may not guarantee automatic admission to specific courses or programs of study where demand exceeds the numbers of student places available.

4. Rules, Regulations and any Register of Precedents which inform, influence or govern decisions taken in respect to the granting of credit or advanced standing should be transparent and publicly available to intending students prior to submissions of enrolment and include applications for credit in an easily accessed format. This should include transparent information related to fees where they are charged.

5. Arrangements for articulation and credit transfer, when applied, should not unfairly advantage or disadvantage either the students entering courses and programs of study with credit transfer or articulation or those students who enter directly.

6. Arrangements for credit transfer and articulation should take account of existing and continuing arrangements and procedures which support improved
credit and articulation agreements from VET to Higher Education at industry-wide, State-wide, regional or institutional levels.

7. Institutions should employ agreed measures to evaluate the effectiveness of their credit transfer and articulation arrangements in improving over time the mobility of students from VET to Higher Education.

8. Individual institutions and providers are expected to demonstrate through their regular internal and external quality audits that their policies and practices for all types of credit transfer and articulation support these agreed principles.

The results of this study and a review of educational institution websites would appear to indicate that many institutions do not have in place clear articulation agreements.

7 Concluding comments

Contemporary society is characterised by enormous change and nowhere is this more evident than in the employment sector. In the health sector, future workforce demands are concerning, however; there is also evidence to suggest that the quality of the future workforce will be significantly strengthened by the skills, knowledge and attributes that graduates from health courses bring to their workplace. While educational institutions play a major role in preparing graduates to meet the needs of industry, it is clear that industry needs are changing. There is a strong emphasis on graduates who are ‘work ready’ and have confidence, outstanding communication skills, highly developed critical thinking skills and excellent time management and prioritisation abilities.

Workforce directions indicate that the non-school leaver population will be the major source of the future workforce. For nursing, this creates challenges but also provides
the opportunity to develop a highly skilled workforce that will ensure the delivery of high quality care. The significant life experience of the non-school leaver population can be capitalised on to build a profession that significantly contributes to the well being of all Australians.

Clearly, post secondary education institutions must respond to the changing demographics of their student cohorts. Both the university and VET sector have provided courses and structured their programs along very traditional lines. For education to remain relevant to industry, and importantly to the customers who access services, there is an urgent need to recognise that the world is changing. The next decade will see rapid change, with roles developing that are unheard of today. Educational institutions will play a major role in preparing people with the skills and knowledge needed for this changing world.

Central to the future will be rethinking the way in which education is delivered and designing programs that meet the complex needs of students who balance study with the myriad of demands that characterise our busy lives. Mature age students will be a significant force and a vitally important pool for the future nursing workforce. The focus of policy makers and key stakeholders at all levels should be on strengthening mature age access to education and supporting students to gain the knowledge, skills and qualifications that will provide the future workforce.
References


Cuthbertson, P., Lauder, W., Steele, R., Cleary, S., & Bradshaw, J. (2004). A comparative study of the course-related family and financial problems of


Appendix 1: VET/University questionnaire

Project title: Strengthening Mature Age Students Access into Undergraduate Nurse Education

La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee Approval no: HEC NO 06-151

Thank you for your time in completing this questionnaire. The information that you provide will guide planning that aims to assist mature age students to enter the nursing profession. In order to maximise the data collected for this project we encourage you to complete all questions, however, if there are any questions that you would prefer not to answer please note NA (not answered) at the appropriate question and leave blank. The questionnaire should take no more than 20 minutes to complete.

1. This is an anonymous questionnaire. We do not require any identifying details, however, we ask you to please tick whether you are:
   
   A VET provider ☐
   A University provider ☐

2. Is this response for:

   Certificate IV in Health (Nursing) ☐
   Undergraduate Nursing Degree ☐

STUDENT RECRUITMENT

3. How does your organisation define mature age entry?

   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
4. **How is information disseminated to mature age students?**
   (please tick all that apply)
   - Internet
   - Local Newspaper
   - Daily Newspaper
   - Television
   - VET/University publications
   - Careers expo
   - VET/University open days
   - Internet
   - Job Networks
   - Careers Advisors
   - Other (please describe)

5. **Do you have a specific mature age information session?**
   YES   NO   (please circle)

   If YES please go to question 6.
   If you have circled NO please go to question 7.

6. **How many people attended the information session?**
   Approximately __________

7. **Do you produce specific course information for mature age students?**
   YES   NO   (please circle)

8. **Do you have a quota number or percentage of mature age students that are selected?**
   YES   NO   (please circle)
9. If you have a mature age quota what is the percentage of the total students selected for entry to first year of the program?

____________%  

10. How many mature aged students enrolled in the first year of the course in 2005?

____________  

11. How do mature age students apply for a place in your course? (please circle)

VTAC  Other state tertiary admission  Direct entry  

eg UMAC  

12. Please list the entry requirements for mature age entry into your course/s

________________________________________________________  

________________________________________________________  

13. Do you have specific criteria for assessing mature age applications?

YES   NO   (please circle)  

14. If you have specific criteria for assessing mature age applications please list

________________________________________________________  

________________________________________________________  

________________________________________________________  

15. Do you have a formal bridging or preparation program as an ALTERNATIVE ENTRY pathway?

YES   NO   (please circle)  

16. Is there a cost for the bridging/preparation program?

YES   NO   (please circle)
17. What is this cost?

$_________________

18. If you have a formal bridging or preparation program as an ALTERNATIVE ENTRY pathway for your course/s please provide details of this program.

_____________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________

19. If prospective students do not receive a place in your course what advice do you give them?

_____________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________

ADMISSION INTO A COURSE

20. Do you offer any formal preparation for study programs PRIOR to the commencement of semester/term?

YES  NO  (please circle)

21. Is there a financial cost associated with the formal preparation for study program?

YES  NO  (please circle)

22. What is the total cost of this program?

$___________
23. Please provide details of these programs

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

24. Do you have a COMPULSORY bridging program for mature age students as an ENTRANCE REQUIREMENT FOR YOUR COURSE?  
YES   NO   (please circle)

25. Are any mature age students given exemption from this course?  
YES   NO   (please circle)

If YES please go to question 26.  
If you have circled NO please go to question 27.

26. If some mature age students are exempted from this bridging program please specify the criteria for exemption

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

27. Is there a cost for the bridging program?  
YES   NO   (please circle)

28. What is this cost?  
$ __________

29. If you have a formal bridging program as a COMPULSORY ENTRANCE REQUIREMENT for your course/s please provide details of this program.

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________
30. Do you offer any formal study support/mentoring for mature aged students during the course?

   YES  NO  (please circle)

31. Please provide details of this program/s

_______________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________

YOUR STUDENT COHORT

32. Please provide an estimate of the percentage of mature age students currently enrolled in your course/s

   1st year  _______ %
   2nd year  _______ %
   3rd year  _______ %
   4th year  _______ %

33. Do you provide any credit, exemption, advanced standing or recognition of prior learning (RPL) to mature age student enrolled in your course/s?

   YES  NO  (please circle)

34. What is the basis of this credit/exemption/RPL? (please tick all that apply)

   Previous work experience  ☐
   Completion of bridging course  ☐
   Previous study  ☐
   Other (please specify)  ☐
35. Please provide details of the maximum credit/exemption/RPL that would be given to a mature age student and the criteria that would be used for assessment.

36. What percentage of mature age students receive the maximum amount of credit/exemption/RPL allowed?

_____%

37. If a student has their application for credit transfer/exemption/RPL denied are there any grounds for appeal?

YES          NO          (please circle)

38. If Yes, who would the student appeal to?

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________
39. **What are the 3 most common reasons identified by mature age students withdrawing prior to completion?**

(Rank “1” for most common reason and “3” for the third most common reason)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time constraints/Existing commitments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial constraints</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment opportunities after graduation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty of completion (perceived)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support from family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support from employer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support from VET Provider/University</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of clinical placements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative clinical placement issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course not meeting expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realities of nursing not meeting expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to progress</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not known</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please state)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_______________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________
40. Please estimate the % of mature age students who withdraw from their course prior to completion.

1st year ________%  
2nd year ________%  
3rd year ________%  
4th year ________%  

41. Please estimate the % of mature age students (as part of the total number of graduating students) who completed their course in:

2003 ________%  
2004 ________%  
2005 ________%  

42. Do you believe that entry into a nursing course is easy for a mature age student?

   YES  NO  (please circle)  

43. List the factors that make entry into nursing easy

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

44. List the factors that make entry into nursing difficult

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
45. Have you any comments or suggestions about strengthening mature age access into undergraduate nursing education?

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________

WE THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR TIME
Appendix 2: Mature age student questionnaire

Project title:  Strengthening Mature Age Students Access into Undergraduate Nurse Education

La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee Approval no: HEC NO 06-151

This is an anonymous questionnaire please do not include any identifying material

The questionnaire is designed for students who have NOT entered a nursing course straight from year 12. The term ‘mature age’ is used to describe all students that have NOT entered nursing directly from year 12 irrespective of actual age.

Thank you for your time in completing this questionnaire. The information that you provide will guide planning that aims to assist mature age students to enter the nursing profession. The questionnaire should take no more than 30 minutes to complete.

1. **What is your age?** (please tick)

   - < 20 [ ]
   - 20-24 [ ]
   - 25-29 [ ]
   - 30-34 [ ]
   - 35-39 [ ]
   - 40-44 [ ]
   - 45-49 [ ]
   - 50-54 [ ]
   - 55-59 [ ]
   - 60-64 [ ]
   - >64 [ ]
2. What gender are you? (please tick)
   Male □ Female □

3. How many dependents do you have?

   ______________________________________________________

4. If you have dependent children, what age are they?

   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________

5. What is the level of education that you completed prior to enrolling in your current nursing course? (please tick all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Level</th>
<th>Completed</th>
<th>Pass</th>
<th>Fail</th>
<th>Year completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade qualification</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University certificate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University diploma</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Post graduate diploma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Research Degree (Masters PhD)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Since completing secondary school have you been in paid employment? (please circle)
   Yes    No
7. How many years have you been in paid employment since leaving secondary school?

__________________________________________________________________________

8. What has been your main occupation?

__________________________________________________________________________

PRIOR TO ENROLLING IN A NURSING COURSE

9. Immediately prior to commencing your current nursing course were you in paid employment? (please circle)

Yes   No

If YES please answer questions 10 and 11. If you have circled NO please go to question 12.

10. What was your MAIN occupation immediately prior to commencing your current nursing course?

__________________________________________________________________________

11. If you were in paid employment, how many hours a week did you work?

<8 hrs   □   9-16 hrs   □

17-32 hrs □   33-40 hrs   □

>40 hrs   □
12. If you were not in paid employment, please tick the response that best describes what you were doing immediately prior to commencing your current nursing course. (please tick as many boxes as apply)

- Unemployed
- Looking for paid work
- Volunteer
- Home duties
- Carer
- Studying
- Travelling in Australia
- Travelling overseas
- Other (Please specify) 

13. If you were not in paid employment prior to commencing your current nursing course, how many years is it since you were in paid employment?

14. Immediately prior to commencing your current nursing course were you studying? (please circle)

- Yes
- No

If YES please answer questions 15.
If you have circled NO please go to question 16.

15. Please specify what you were studying immediately prior to commencing your current nursing course. (please include the name of the subject/course)
16. Please indicate your reasons for choosing to study a nursing course.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

17. Prior to enrolling in your current nursing course where did you obtain information about careers in nursing? How informative was this information? (please tick the appropriate column for each)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please tick all that apply</th>
<th>Very informative</th>
<th>Informative</th>
<th>Not informative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Newspaper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daily Newspaper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Television</td>
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<tr>
<td>VET/University publications</td>
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<tr>
<td>Careers expo</td>
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<tr>
<td>VET/University open days</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health service open day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Registered Nurse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Current nursing student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Family</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
18. If you accessed information from other sources please specify.

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

19. If you received information from the Internet please list which sites you accessed. If you accessed more than one website for information please number in order of site most commonly accessed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Websites visited</th>
<th>Number in order of most commonly accessed</th>
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</table>

20. When you used the internet, what key words did you use to search?

<p>| | |</p>
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</tbody>
</table>

21. Did you contact the TAFE/Vet provider or University for information prior to applying for a position in your current nursing course? (please circle)

Yes

No

If YES please answer questions 22.
If you have circled NO please go to question 26.
22. **What information were you given?** (please tick)

   - Verbal
   - Written
   - Directed to a website

23. **How helpful was this information?** (please tick)

   - Very helpful
   - Helpful
   - Not helpful

24. **What was helpful about the information that you received?**

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

25. **What other information did you need?**

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

   **APPLYING FOR A COURSE**

26. **Had you delayed pursuing nursing education?** (please circle)

   Yes          No

   If YES please answer questions 27.
   If you have circled NO please go to question 29.
27. If yes, what factors resulted in you delay the commencement of this course? (please tick all that apply)

- Financial restraints
- Time constraints
- Family commitments
- Difficulty in being accepted into the course
- Fear of returning to study
- Intimidated by younger students
- Lack of confidence
- Structure of the course
- Employer/colleagues unsupportive
- Family unsupportive
- Proximity to education facility
- Had not got around to it

28. If you ticked “Structure of the course” at question 27 please indicate what specific factors about the course structure resulted in your delayed commencement of the course.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

29. Were there any factors that resulted in you delaying the commencement of the course that are not listed above? (please list)

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
30. Did you have to relocate to enable you to study? (please circle)

Yes ➡️ No

If YES please answer questions 31.
If you have circled NO please go to question 32.

31. If you had to relocate what was relocation necessary?

- University/VET/TAFE provider of choice
- Only university/VET/TAFE place offered
- Travelling distance
- Wanted to move away from home
- Other (please explain)

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

32. Who did you apply for entry to your current course? (please circle)

VTAC ➡️ Other state tertiary admission ➡️ Direct entry

eg UMAC

33. If you applied through VTAC or other state territory admission, was this process (please circle)

Straightforward ➡️ Relatively straightforward ➡️ Complicated

34. If you found this process complicated please explain why?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
35. If you applied through direct entry was this process (please circle)

Straightforward      Relatively straightforward      Complicated

36. If you found the process complicated please explain why.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

37. If you applied through direct entry had you successfully completed an enabling or bridging program that guaranteed you entry? (please circle)

Yes      No

If YES please answer questions 38.
If you have circled NO please go to question 39.

38. If you completed a bridging/enabling program please describe this program in terms of length of program and content studied.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

YOUR COURSE ENROLMENT

39. I am currently enrolled in a course offered by (please tick)

University           ☐

TAFE/VET provider    ☐
40. **I am currently studying** (please tick)

- Certificate IV in Nursing
- Two year Bachelor degree
- Three year Bachelor degree
- Four year Bachelor degree
- Double degree

41. **What year of study are you in?** (please tick)

- 1st
- 2nd
- 3rd
- 4th

42. **Were you well informed about the requirements of the course to be undertaken?** (please circle)

- Yes
- No

Please explain your response

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

43. **Did you receive credit/exemption/recognition of prior learning (RPL) for your current course?** (please circle)

- Yes
- No

If YES please answer questions 44.
If you have circled NO please go to question 51.
44. What was the basis of this credit/exemption/RPL (please tick all that apply)

- Previous work experience ☐
- Completion of bridging course ☐
- Previous study ☐
- Other (please specify) ☐

__________________________
__________________________

45. If you were given credit/exemption/RPL for your current course what percentage of credit did you receive off the total course?

______________ %

46. Do you believe that the credit you received was please circle

- Adequate
- Inadequate

47. Do you think this credit/exemption/RPL appropriately acknowledged your prior WORK experience? (please circle)

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

48. If the answer to question 47 was No please explain

__________________________
__________________________
__________________________

49. Do you think this credit/exemption/RPL appropriately acknowledged your prior LEARNING experience? (please circle)

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable
50. If the answer to question 49 was No please explain

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

RETURING TO STUDY

51. What distance do you travel to get to the University/TAFE/Training provider?

_______________ km

52. How long does it take you to travel to the University/TAFE/Training provider?

_______________ minuets

53. Are you currently in paid employment? (please circle)

    Yes                 No

54. If you are working please indicate your occupation?

_________________________________________________________________

55. How many hours do you normally work each week?

< 8 hrs □                9-16 hrs □

17-32 hrs □                33-40 hrs □

> 40 hrs □

56. Do you think being a mature age student is an advantage? (please circle)

    Yes                 No
57. Why/Why not?

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

58. List the most DIFFICULT aspects of being a mature age student.

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

59. List the most POSITIVE aspects of being a mature age student.

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________
60. **Please complete the following table** (For each statement tick the box to indicate if you strongly agree, agree, neither agree/disagree, disagree or strongly disagree with the statement)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree/disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being a mature age student do you feel you are expected to know everything already</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel accepted by the younger students</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying now is easier because of my life experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I know more than I thought I did</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have had to un-learn things</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Studying has changed my thinking</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I have been away from study too long now to be successful</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study seems more difficult now than I remember it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more enthusiastic about learning now than when I was younger</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My home life suffers because I am studying</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying is providing me with a career opportunity I didn’t expect to have</td>
<td></td>
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<td>I feel that organisation is the key factor in studying successfully</td>
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<td>I have thought or said in the last 6 months “I’m too old for this”</td>
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<td>I feel my self image has improved because of this experience</td>
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I feel my self image has suffered because of this experience

I feel that my inexperience with computers negatively impacted on my studying experience.

I have a strong support network surrounding me during my study

The experience of studying at tertiary level is what I expected.

My study has caused me financial hardship

---

**YOUR FUTURE CAREER PLANS**

61. Please describe your future career plans.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

62. Do you intend to pursue further study in nursing? (please circle)

Yes  No  Undecided
63. If you answered Yes to question 62 please tick all that apply.

- University undergraduate degree
- Post Graduate Certificate
- Masters Degree
- Emergency Nursing
- Intensive Care
- Coronary Care
- Maternal and Child Health
- Maternity
- Mental Health
- Community Nursing
- Rehabilitation Nursing
- Peri-operative Nursing
- Medication Administration (Division 2)
- Other (please indicate)

64. Do you believe that entry into a nursing course is easy for a mature age student? (please circle)

Yes
No
65. If you circled Yes please list the factors that make entry into nursing easy.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

66. If you circled No please indicate the factors that make entry into nursing difficult.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

67. Overall are you happy with your nursing career choice? (please circle)

Yes                           No

68. If you are happy with your nursing career choice please indicate the reasons why.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

69. If you are unhappy with your career choice please indicate the reasons why.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
70. Have you any other comments about strengthening mature age access into undergraduate nursing education?

WE THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR TIME