

The Fall and Rise of Postgraduate Commonwealth Supported Places

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Executive Summary

Domestic postgraduate students are saving money by enrolling in subsidised and price-capped Commonwealth supported places instead of full-fee places. For the first time since the late 1990s, most public university domestic postgraduate coursework places are Commonwealth supported. For universities, however, Commonwealth supported places typically deliver less revenue per student. Through interviews with university leaders and empirical analysis of enrolment trends, this paper examines why universities made these changes to postgraduate education.

A key reason is that the Job-ready Graduates policy made it easier to move Commonwealth supported places between undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Reduced demand for undergraduate courses in 2022 and 2023 created capacity for more postgraduate Commonwealth supported students. University leaders preferred putting postgraduate Commonwealth supported places in courses with high social benefit but without high financial rewards. Enrolment data supported these statements, especially in teaching, nursing and social work. But the Commonwealth supported share of places has not increased in some allied health fields, possibly because Job-ready Graduates reduced funding rates. By contrast, price competition between universities has led to more Commonwealth supported and fewer full-fee places in postgraduate IT courses.

Introduction

In 2024 more than 240,000 Australians studied for a postgraduate coursework degree, three times the number of thirty years ago. Many factors contributed to enrolment increases, including labour market demand for specialised knowledge and skills and, in some fields, regulators or professional associations requiring postgraduate degrees to enter occupations they control. In other cases, universities began offering postgraduate initial professional entry courses, competing with bachelor degrees in the same field. Law and medicine are prominent examples.

Successive governments recognised growing demand for postgraduate courses but sought to limit public expenditure. Typically, governments restricted tuition subsidies to postgraduate courses or fields of education they chose, leaving other courses and fields to the market.

In 2021, however, course restrictions were relaxed. For domestic students universities can now offer either Commonwealth supported places, with a public subsidy and price-capped student contribution amount, or full-fee places, with no tuition subsidy and market-set fees. Income contingent loans finance both funding types, but full-fee places can cost students tens of thousands of dollars extra.

For postgraduate students a Commonwealth supported place is best if available. For universities the fee-paying option looks better in revenue per student. Yet the Commonwealth supported places share of postgraduate coursework places has trended up since the late 2000s. Most public university domestic postgraduate coursework places are Commonwealth supported for the first time since the late 1990s. Drawing on detailed enrolment data and interview research with university leaders, this paper explores the policy, university mission and market reasons for this trend.

A brief history of domestic postgraduate coursework funding

The late 1980s were a turning point for postgraduate coursework, part of a sector-wide transition from a free to a user-pays system. In 1989 most postgraduate coursework students transitioned to the new HECS (Higher Education Contribution Scheme) system. HECS students remained subsidised by the government but also paid a flat student charge supported by an income contingent loan.

From the late 1980s universities could also enrol full-fee domestic postgraduate students, without a loan, in professional upgrading courses. Restrictions on full-fee places were relaxed in subsequent years. By 1994 universities ran a parallel HECS and full-fee postgraduate coursework system, except in education and nursing, which remained HECS only (Anderson et al., 1998, pp. 111–112). Although low in the early years, full-fee enrolments grew steadily (Figure 1).

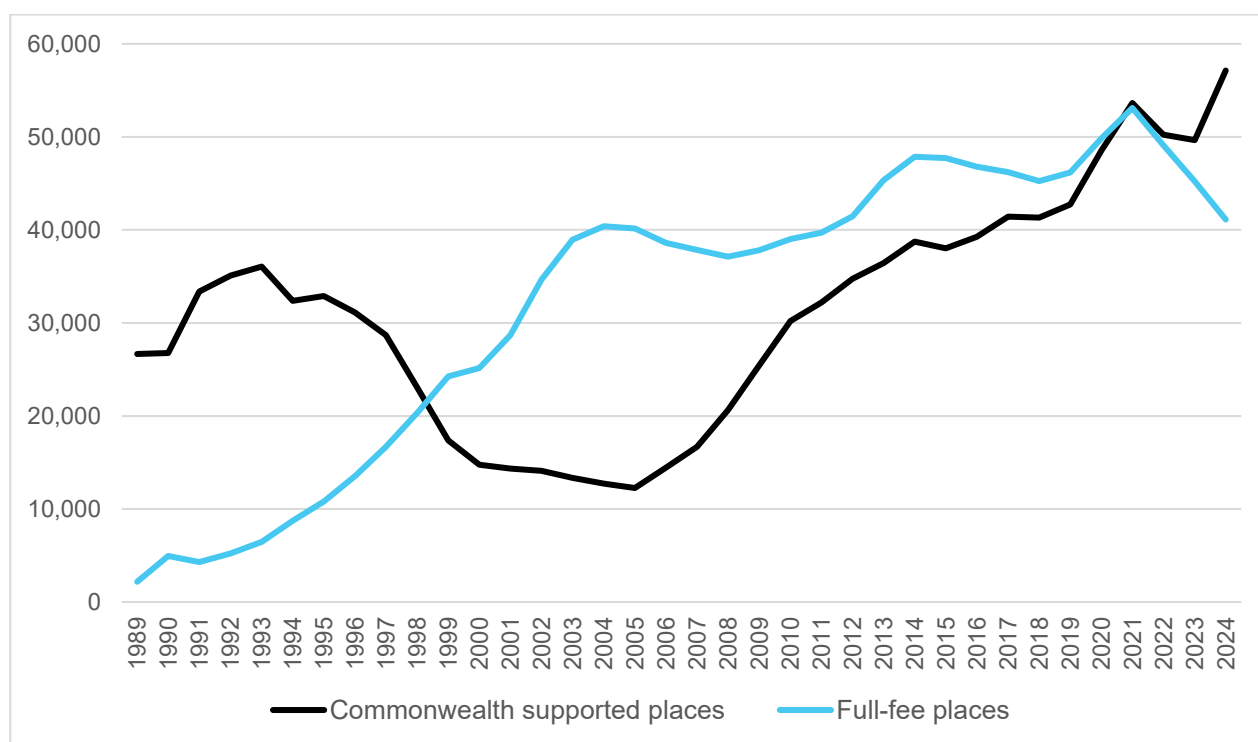
In the 1996 Budget the government reduced HECS places, the then name for Commonwealth supported places (CSPs). To protect undergraduate opportunities, phased-in cuts focused on postgraduate coursework places (Vanstone, 1996b, pp. 7, 52–55). The availability of fee-paying places was a reason to focus cuts on postgraduate HECS places (Vanstone, 1996a). The number of postgraduate HECS places fell significantly (Figure 1). The remaining places were concentrated in education and health-related courses. Despite continued growth in full-fee places, total domestic postgraduate coursework places fell until a recovery from 2002.

In 2002 the government introduced the Postgraduate Education Loan Scheme (PELS), extending income contingent loans to full-fee postgraduate coursework students. PELS was rebranded as FEE-HELP in 2005. Loans made full-fee places more feasible for students, who could now avoid paying upfront, as previously required.

After 2005, in a more favourable budget situation, the government relaxed its stance on postgraduate CSPs, as HECS places were now called. In the then funding system, both undergraduate and postgraduate places were allocated under funding agreements signed by each university. CSP numbers grew again, while the full-fee market softened (Figure 1).

In 2012 bachelor degrees exited the funding agreement system and became demand driven except in medical degrees. Universities were paid for whatever number of bachelor degree places they delivered. Sub-bachelor degrees such as diplomas, and postgraduate coursework degrees, became 'designated' courses, with student places allocated in funding agreements to each university. The allocation was to both the course level and a 'funding cluster', groups of disciplines with the same Commonwealth contribution, the public subsidy element of the total funding rate. The maximum value of designated places limited how much public subsidy universities could receive for postgraduate CSPs. But universities could 'over-enrol' students as CSPs without limit, receiving student contributions only.

Figure 1: Public university Commonwealth-supported and full-fee postgraduate coursework places, 1989-2024



Sources: Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, *Students 1999: Selected higher education statistics*; also *Students 2000*. Department of Education, *uCube 2001-2019*; Department of Education, *Student load pivot table 2020-2024*.

Notes: A place is equivalent to the subject load taken by a full-time student, EFTSL (equivalent full-time student load). For the 1989-1998 data total domestic postgraduate coursework figures are available but not the exact full-year totals for each funding category. For 1989 to 1996 a time series of full-fee paying domestic students is used to calculate percentages, as undergraduate full-fee domestic students were not permitted at this time. For 1997 and 1998 the estimates are derived from the percentages by HECS liability status for the first half of the year. Actual numbers may vary slightly from those shown. Full-fee medical and full-fee employer reserved places are included in this time series but removed from subsequent data tables. 'Public university' refers to universities on 'Table A' of the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*. The University of Notre Dame was added to Table A in 2021, but its enrolments are included in prior years to aid comparability. 1990s figures include small numbers of students outside the public university system.

By the 2010s this hybrid CSP/full-fee system of financing postgraduate places was the source of significant complaint. Which universities had postgraduate CSPs and in what courses was the result of deals between the Commonwealth and universities over many years. Universities had highly varying total numbers of

postgraduate CSPs, from dozens to thousands. Universities were disadvantaged when a same-city competitor could offer postgraduate CSPs while they could only offer full-fee places. Within a postgraduate course, full-fee students paid much more than their CSP classmates (Kemp & Norton, 2014, pp. 80–82).

Another issue was inefficient allocation of student places. A government consultation paper showed that in the 2014-2017 period universities collectively ‘over-enrolled’ their sub-bachelor CSP programs and ‘under-enrolled’ their postgraduate CSP programs, delivering fewer student places than they had been allocated (DET, 2018, pp. 5–6). Despite this, funding agreements from the period prohibited the transfer of student places between sub-bachelor and postgraduate courses.¹ In a more flexible system universities could have moved student places from low to high demand courses regardless of qualification level, increasing capacity and maximising revenue. But the then funding system had no efficient mechanism for moving designated places to where they could be used.

In late 2017 the government terminated the demand driven system for bachelor degrees. From 2018 universities had four CSP sub-allocations – a fixed maximum dollar amount for bachelor degrees and three sets of designated places, for medical, sub-bachelor and postgraduate courses.

Job-ready Graduates

The Job-ready Graduates policy, announced in 2020 and implemented from 2021, is known for changes to the student contributions charged to Commonwealth supported students. These increased significantly in some fields, especially for arts degrees, but were reduced for other fields, especially teaching and nursing.

Job-ready Graduates also sought to end simultaneous under- and over-enrolment. The three qualification-level CSP categories – sub-bachelor, bachelor and postgraduate coursework – were merged into a single flexible fund (DESE, 2020, pp. 16, 23–24). Free preparatory programs known as enabling courses were included in the flexible fund, although money to compensate universities for forgone student contribution revenue was capped.² Only medicine remained designated.

Under the new system universities receive a more flexible ‘maximum basic grant amount’ (MBGA), within which they can move places between qualification levels and funding clusters. The MBGA is the maximum Commonwealth contribution revenue each university can receive for students in the included categories. As a result, specified numbers of postgraduate CSPs no longer appear in university funding agreements. But universities have new, possibly difficult, decisions to make. In moving CSPs to the postgraduate level, universities face potential trade-offs with both full-fee postgraduate places and alternative uses of CSPs for undergraduate courses (see also Xu & Norton, 2026). This paper explores how universities manage their new flexibility and the dilemmas it can create. As medical places lack this flexibility they are excluded from subsequent analysis.

Four other policy changes intersect with this reform to the grant system.

First, a small demand driven system was restored from 2021. It initially operated for Indigenous students from regional areas taking bachelor degrees. In 2024 it was extended to all Indigenous students enrolled in

¹ Standard clause 11 in the 2017 funding agreements and standard clauses 17 and 18 in the 2018 agreements.

Discussions with officials active in managing funding agreements at the time indicate that these rules affected university use of CSPs but in practice funding for designated places was calculated collectively. Historical funding agreements: <https://www.education.gov.au/historical-cgs-funding-agreements>

² From 2025 enabling places were converted to FEE-FREE Uni Ready places with a fixed Commonwealth contribution that effectively replaced the previous student contribution partial compensation. This makes it easier for universities to expand enrolments in these courses within their overall funding allocation.

bachelor degrees. Universities do not face the trade-offs explored in this paper for these places, which like medicine are excluded from subsequent analysis. In the 2021-2023 period this omits about 4,000 places per year, and in 2024 nearly 10,500 places.

Second, the government made a partial return to allocating places, undermining the flexibility ending non-medical designation was intended to promote. The largest allocation, of up to 23,750 places, was for 'short course' places in 2021, with a rollover into 2022 for unused places, affecting sub-bachelor and graduate certificate CSPs. This policy was a short-term COVID-19 measure. A longer-term but smaller pool of places, of 12,000 commencing places in 2021, were allocated for bachelor degrees (DofE, 2022b). In 2022 the government announced 20,000 places in specific courses for equity students and in 2023 4,000 places to support the AUKUS-related Nuclear-Powered Submarine Student Pathway program (Clare & O'Connor, 2022; Marles & Clare, 2023). These places were financed within the MBGA for sub-bachelor, bachelor and postgraduate coursework places. Places delivered under these ad hoc programs are included in subsequent analysis.

Third, Job-ready Graduates altered Commonwealth contribution rates. These vary significantly by discipline, but Job-ready Graduates reduced them on average (partly offset for universities by higher student contributions). This meant that the same MBGA could support more student places than previously. Across all qualification levels universities remained free to 'over-enrol', to take places on a student contribution basis only.

Fourth, a COVID-19-related policy that coincided with the first four years of Job-ready Graduates, the Higher Education Continuity Guarantee (HECG), ensured that universities received their MBGA amount for flexible and designated places, whether or not they delivered places valued at the MBGA amounts. This turned out to be a significant policy. At its peak in 2022, 33 of 38 universities received HECG funding. In 2024, under a revised HECG and with a recovery in enrolments, 23 universities received HECG funding; this total includes two MBGA-near-miss payments of under \$10,000 (DofE, 2026a).

Job-ready Graduates – aggregate CSP changes between qualification levels

This section examines whether universities used their new freedom to move CSPs between qualification levels. It uses 2019 as the base year for comparison. 2020 was the old system's last official year, but its enrolment patterns were complicated by policy responses to COVID-19 disruptions and the relaxation of rules.³

As the HECG payments imply, the post-2021 Job-ready Graduates years were difficult for universities. As seen in Table 1, within-scope CSP places fell in 2022 and 2023. Despite a positive trend in 2024, CSP places remained below 2019 or 2021 levels. The additional undergraduate places allocated to specific courses between 2022 and 2024 left no trace in total undergraduate CSPs.

³ This included 'short course' places announced during the year. In changes announced in November 2019, in 2020 universities could also move non-medical designated places between sub-bachelor and postgraduate, and rules on replacing postgraduate full-fee with CSP places were relaxed (DofE, 2022a; English, 2019).

Table 1: Flexible Commonwealth supported places by qualification level delivered, 2019, 2021-2024, totals and percentages, public universities

QUALIFICATION LEVEL	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
ENABLING	12,402	10,395	8,177	7,667	8,683
SUB-BACHELOR	12,081	16,379	15,123	15,274	17,772
ENABLING + SUB-BACHELOR	24,482	26,774	23,300	22,941	26,455
BACHELOR	552,359	559,988	523,668	510,610	521,264
PG COURSEWORK	36,225	46,904	43,404	42,830	50,234
TOTAL	613,066	633,666	590,372	576,381	597,953
MBGA \$BILLION	\$6.7	\$7.0	\$6.7	\$6.8	\$7.2

QUALIFICATION LEVEL	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
ENABLING	2.0%	1.64%	1.38%	1.33%	1.45%
SUB-BACHELOR	2.0%	2.58%	2.56%	2.65%	2.97%
ENABLING + SUB-BACHELOR	4.0%	4.23%	3.95%	3.98%	4.42%
BACHELOR	90.1%	88.37%	88.70%	88.59%	87.17%
PG COURSEWORK	5.9%	7.40%	7.35%	7.43%	8.40%
TOTAL	100.0%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Sources: Department of Education, *Universities Australia (UA) members dataset*. Department of Education, *Funding determinations for Higher Education Courses*.

Notes: The UA members dataset is detailed higher education data supplied by the Department of Education to Universities Australia covering its member universities. This paper uses that data excluding Bond University, which has no CSPs. It primarily uses full-time equivalent student load data. It omits designated medical load and bachelor degree Indigenous demand driven student load. For 2021-2023 only Indigenous students from regional areas were included in this scheme. Regionality is not included in the available student load data. It was estimated using the share of Indigenous bachelor-degree students from regional areas.

Postgraduate CSPs increased sharply between 2019 and 2021, by 29%. The 'short course' graduate certificate had an effect, with places more than doubling (Table 2). But more was going on than the short course policy, as masters degree CSPs increased by a larger absolute amount. A comparison with 2019 highlights the impact of the Job-ready Graduates changes. In 2019 the funding agreements allocated 36,909 non-medical postgraduate CSPs.⁴ With 36,225 such places delivered (Table 1) there was sector-level under-enrolment of postgraduate CSPs. In every year between 2021 and 2024 non-medical postgraduate CSPs significantly exceeded the 2019 allocation. In 2024 universities delivered 50,234 non-medical postgraduate CSPs, 36% above the 2019 allocation. Status quo policies on postgraduate CSPs could only have achieved this result with significant over-enrolment. Over-enrolment at this scale on student contribution rates only is unlikely to have been financially viable, especially where universities replaced full-fee with CSP places.

In the aggregate, the postgraduate CSP share of all flexible CSPs during the first three years of Job-ready Graduates was consistently around 7.4%, compared to the 2019 figure of 5.9%. In 2024, during a general recovery in CSP enrolments across all qualification levels, the postgraduate share increased again, to 8.4%.

Although postgraduate CSPs maintained their increased enrolment share in 2022 and 2023, total postgraduate CSPs declined. The 2021 spike and the subsequent decline in postgraduate CSPs are consistent with higher education demand's counter-cyclical relationship with the labour market. In 2021 the labour market was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, including ongoing lockdowns in some states. Some

⁴ Based on transcription of the 2019 funding agreements, including Notre Dame. The Department of Education does not release summaries of funding agreement content.

people unable to work normally enrolled in university courses instead. In 2022 and 2023 a strong labour market made further study less attractive, especially for older people (Norton, 2025a).

Table 2: Postgraduate Commonwealth supported places by qualification level, 2019, 2021- 2024

QUALIFICATION LEVEL	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
GRADUATE DIPLOMA	2,599	2,779	2,913	3,315	4,707
GRADUATE CERTIFICATE	1,629	5,640	4,914	5,229	6,874
MASTERS (NON-MEDICAL)	31,942	38,435	35,530	34,241	38,610

Source: Department of Education, *UA members dataset*.

Note: Low enrolment course categories postgraduate cross-institution, preliminary postgraduate and doctorate by coursework omitted.

Dividing CSPs into commencing and continuing students helps identify underlying dynamics. Universities have most control over commencements, since once students enrol in CSPs they can continue until they complete their course, unless excluded for academic or disciplinary reasons. Table 3 shows that postgraduate CSP commencements started increasing again in 2023, but total postgraduate CSPs were held down by fewer continuing students, following the smaller intake of new students in 2022. The 2024 increase in total CSPs was partly due to more continuing postgraduate CSPs. But the major driver was a 29% increase in commencing postgraduate CSPs. Without a major decline in commencing postgraduate CSPs in 2025, this locks in increasing CSP totals for 2025.

Undergraduate demand increased in 2025 compared to 2024 (Norton, 2026b), creating potential tensions between allocating places to undergraduate or postgraduate courses. This is discussed in the final section of this paper.

Table 3: Commencing and continuing postgraduate Commonwealth supported places, by qualification level, 2021- 2024

Commencing	2021	2022	2023	2024	Change 2023-2024
Graduate diploma	1,729	1,849	2,121	3,211	51.4%
Graduate certificate	4,840	3,394	3,796	5,214	37.4%
Masters (non-medical)	17,703	14,471	14,803	18,354	24.0%
<i>Commencing total</i>	<i>24,272</i>	<i>19,715</i>	<i>20,720</i>	<i>26,779</i>	<i>29.2%</i>
Continuing					
Graduate diploma	1,050	1,063	1,194	1,496	25.3%
Graduate certificate	800	1,520	1,433	1,660	15.9%
Masters (non-medical)	20,733	21,059	19,439	20,256	4.2%
<i>Continuing total</i>	<i>22,583</i>	<i>23,642</i>	<i>22,065</i>	<i>23,412</i>	<i>6.1%</i>

Source: Department of Education, *UA members dataset*.

Note: Low enrolment course categories postgraduate cross-institution, preliminary postgraduate and doctorate by coursework omitted.

University decision-making on postgraduate CSPs

Interview research by the authors in 2024 and 2025 explored the thinking of university leaders and planners about CSPs. In all we interviewed 15 people across 5 universities about their CSP decision making. At the time of our interviews only one of the five was under-enrolled, but another three had at least one year of HECG payment between 2021 and 2023.

Despite the HECG temporarily paying for undelivered student places no interviewee wanted their university to be under-enrolled. The MBGA, while technically a funding limit, was seen normatively as a minimum while over-enrolment was regarded as normal, if suitable student demand was there.

The vice-chancellor of the still under-enrolled university felt pressure from government and from other universities, mentioning:

.. pressure from government at the moment, given that we have been given a bit of protection [from HECG funding]. So, in their view, we're being paid to teach students that we're not teaching, and other people are not being paid to teach students that they are teaching...

Under the expectation that MBGA would be used, two of our five institutions moved CSPs to the postgraduate level in part to use more of their MBGA while undergraduate demand was weak. The vice-chancellor of university with a recent history of under-enrolment noted that:

One of our strategies for dealing with being under cap has been to move more CSPs to postgraduate degrees, where we see that there's demand, and there might be more demand if we had CSPs available.

Interviewees gave varying reasons for pursuing over-enrolments. A deputy vice-chancellor at an equity-focused over-enrolled university told us that:

...if there's demand, and we believe the students can meet our admission requirements, and that we're setting them up for success, not just taking them in, ... we feel that it's incumbent on us to try and take in as many students as we can.

The vice-chancellor of another over-enrolled university took a less open-door approach, but nevertheless targeted CSP enrolments with a value about 5% above the university's MBGA. The university felt that this was enough to be 'confidently over' their MBGA without risking excessive cross-subsidy of partially-funded students.

Interviews also highlighted the complexities of the apparent trade-off between full-fee and CSP places in postgraduate programs. Price sensitivity differs between disciplines. Two interviewees remarked that for some courses offering CSPs could attract enough students to make a postgraduate course viable. Full-fee places typically bring in more revenue per student, but not more revenue in total if enrolments are low.

Several universities saw the option to move CSPs to postgraduate courses as helping them achieve mission-related goals. This was especially the case in educating professionals in fields with limited financial rewards. Teaching, nursing and social work degrees were given as examples. A dean told us that:

[f]or example, in the Master of Education that is the ITE [initial teacher education] pathway to become a registered teacher, we're able to put CGS there. And it's absolutely essential – we won't get people from the sorts of cohorts that come here [at our university]... if it's all fee for service.

A vice-chancellor also said:

We've tended to historically go for areas of social good, so nursing, education, social work, health as being the areas where the CSP quota that we have would be put into that piece, given we are now operating in a system which allows us to move not only between funding bands, but between undergraduate and postgraduate.

Another factor in postgraduate coursework CSP decision making was institutional competition, a longstanding issue in the hybrid CSP/full-fee postgraduate coursework funding system. While universities were no longer prevented from offering postgraduate CSPs to match their competitors, a policy criticism of the 2010s, doing so came at the cost of fewer full-fee places. A vice-chancellor noted:

There are examples at [our university] where we have made a decision that others have decided to move from fee paying to CSP supported, which has meant that we've had to move alongside that.

A load planning officer at the same university told us that rival universities offer postgraduate CSPs in courses where this halved revenue compared to full-fee places. This made market strategies and planning 'very difficult'.

University-level changes in postgraduate CSP share

The changes in postgraduate CSP totals and enrolment shares shown in Table 1 reflected widespread university-level change. Between 2019 and 2024, 31 of 38 universities increased their postgraduate CSP share (Table 4). All but two of the 31 also increased their absolute number of postgraduate CSPs. Of the seven universities with a decreased share of CSPs at the postgraduate level, three increased their absolute number of postgraduate CSPs; the decline in share was due to greater growth in undergraduate CSPs.

Table 4: Change in non-medical postgraduate CSP share of flexible CSPs, 2019, 2021-2024, by university under-enrolment status

University	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024	Change 2019 to 2024 – % point	Extra PG CSP 2019 to 2024
University of Tasmania	7.4%	11.7%	19.4%	20.8%	23.5%	16.1%	2,019
Federation University Australia	6.1%	11.0%	13.4%	14.5%	15.5%	9.5%	514
La Trobe University	3.6%	7.8%	8.9%	11.0%	12.2%	8.5%	1,554
The University of Newcastle	2.3%	4.6%	5.3%	5.1%	9.8%	7.5%	1,344
Charles Sturt University	8.5%	12.7%	13.0%	14.8%	15.6%	7.1%	1,093
University of Southern Queensland	5.5%	9.5%	10.5%	10.6%	11.2%	5.8%	442
Charles Darwin University	7.2%	8.9%	8.5%	11.5%	12.3%	5.0%	192
Southern Cross University	4.7%	5.8%	6.5%	7.5%	9.2%	4.5%	293
University of Wollongong	5.0%	6.6%	7.0%	8.1%	9.4%	4.4%	558
Deakin University	3.8%	6.4%	4.3%	4.5%	7.6%	3.8%	913
CQUniversity	2.3%	6.3%	5.9%	5.5%	5.7%	3.4%	261
Victoria University	5.5%	6.2%	6.5%	6.1%	8.8%	3.3%	411
James Cook University	5.6%	9.0%	9.6%	9.2%	8.9%	3.3%	89
Curtin University	3.1%	5.3%	5.4%	4.8%	6.3%	3.2%	791
Griffith University	5.6%	6.7%	6.2%	7.1%	8.8%	3.2%	444
Queensland University of Technology	4.9%	7.0%	5.9%	6.7%	8.1%	3.2%	844
The University of Queensland	3.2%	4.9%	4.9%	5.3%	6.0%	2.8%	666
Western Sydney University	5.1%	5.0%	5.5%	5.7%	7.8%	2.7%	417
Australian Catholic University	4.9%	6.1%	6.0%	5.6%	6.9%	2.1%	419
Flinders University	9.7%	10.5%	10.2%	10.4%	11.4%	1.7%	73
University of New South Wales	6.7%	7.5%	7.6%	8.0%	8.2%	1.5%	410
University of Notre Dame Australia	4.0%	3.8%	3.6%	4.2%	5.4%	1.4%	160
University of the Sunshine Coast	2.6%	3.4%	2.5%	2.8%	3.9%	1.3%	150

Edith Cowan University	5.6%	6.5%	6.2%	5.4%	6.6%	1.0%	23
The University of New England	17.6%	15.6%	13.9%	15.5%	18.4%	0.8%	-410
RMIT University	3.7%	4.8%	4.6%	4.5%	4.4%	0.7%	207
Macquarie University	2.6%	3.2%	3.1%	3.0%	3.1%	0.5%	136
Swinburne University of Technology	1.7%	2.4%	2.3%	2.1%	2.1%	0.4%	39
The University of Adelaide	5.2%	5.7%	5.3%	4.9%	5.5%	0.3%	15
Murdoch University	1.4%	1.3%	1.2%	1.3%	1.7%	0.3%	-31
University of Technology Sydney	1.6%	2.0%	1.9%	1.5%	1.7%	0.1%	99
Australian National University	1.4%	2.5%	1.5%	1.2%	1.3%	-0.1%	-2
The University of Sydney	9.0%	9.6%	8.7%	8.6%	8.8%	-0.2%	-20
University of South Australia	6.9%	7.0%	6.9%	6.8%	6.6%	-0.3%	-164
The University of Melbourne	22.6%	24.9%	24.4%	22.5%	22.3%	-0.4%	67
Monash University	5.8%	6.1%	5.6%	5.6%	5.4%	-0.4%	65
The University of Western Australia	18.1%	21.0%	20.3%	18.4%	17.4%	-0.7%	90
University of Canberra	6.0%	7.4%	5.8%	4.2%	4.8%	-1.2%	-162
All public universities	5.9%	7.4%	7.4%	7.4%	8.4%	2.5%	14,009

Sources: Department of Education, *UA members dataset*. Department of Education, *Funding determinations for the Higher Education Continuity Guarantee and Designated higher education courses final*.

Notes: Shaded cells indicate flexible places courses under-enrolment in the year shown. Otherwise as for Table 2.

We know from interviews that some universities deliberately put CSPs in postgraduate courses to minimise under-enrolment. But across the sector the evidence is inferential. As mentioned in the interviews and discussed further in later sections, maximising MBGA use is not the only reason for a university to transfer CSPs between course levels.

Due to published Department of Education reconciliations against funding agreement MBGAs and the Higher Education Continuity Guarantee (HECG) policy we can identify under-enrolled universities between 2021 and 2024. In Table 4, the shaded results indicate flexible MBGA under-enrolment in that year.⁵ In shaded years universities faced no short-term trade-off between postgraduate CSPs and CSPs for other qualification levels. As can be seen, this was a common situation, especially in 2022 and 2023. Adding postgraduate CSPs would reduce under-enrolment and increase student contribution revenue. There was, however, a potential trade-off with postgraduate full-fee places, discussed below.

As Table 4 shows, the three universities with the largest percentage share increase in postgraduate CSPs all suffered from chronic under-enrolment, reduced but not eliminated by additional postgraduate CSPs. But the top ten universities for increased CSP enrolment share includes three universities that never under-enrolled on their MBGA for flexible CSPs, and two others that had only one year of doing so. One possible interpretation of fully using their MBGA is that the extra postgraduate CSPs delivered were sufficient to avoid under-enrolment, but this cannot be proved on the available data.⁶

⁵ The basis of this calculation was the Higher Education Continuity Guarantee payment, if made, less medical under-enrolment, if any. Several universities would not have received an HECG payment except for medical under-enrolment. As they cannot transfer medical places this under-enrolment is not relevant to the university decision-making examined in this paper. The HECG funding formula excluded money for ad hoc allocations of student places but these places cannot be excluded from the available enrolment data. Ad hoc places had a substantial postgraduate share in 2021, in subsequent years these places were mostly for undergraduate courses.

⁶ The UA data has subject field of education information that generally is enough to match to a funding cluster, with some exceptions for fields with different rates depending on course; see the discussion of psychology later in the paper.

Trends in postgraduate CSP and full-fee places

In 2022 and 2023, as seen in Table 5, total non-medical postgraduate CSP and full-fee places both declined, but full-fee places more so. The CSP share edged up by two percentage points. And then in 2024 the relativities changed significantly as CSP places increased by 17% and full-fee places declined by 9%. CSPs reached 56% of non-medical postgraduate places.⁷ In percentage terms this returns CSP-full fee relativities to roughly 1998 levels, but with CSPs now trending up rather than down. Table 6 shows a 2024 decline in commencing full-fee places, which combined with the increase in CSP commencements (Table 3) will ensure that the postgraduate CSP share will continue to grow into 2025 at least.

Table 5: Non-medical postgraduate coursework places by fee status, 2019, 2021-2024

FEE TYPE	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
COMMONWEALTH SUPPORTED	36,225	46,904	43,404	42,830	50,234
FULL-FEE	44,269	51,208	47,235	43,182	39,116
TOTAL	80,494	98,112	90,640	86,012	89,350
COMMONWEALTH SUPPORTED %	45.0%	47.8%	47.9%	49.8%	56.2%

Source: Department of Education, *UA members dataset*.

Note: Employer-reserved full-fee places omitted as these are not interchangeable with CSPs. Including them would add around 1,250 places in 2023 and 2024.

Table 6: Commencing full-fee non-medical postgraduate coursework places, 2021-2024

Commencing	2021	2022	2023	2024	Change 2023-2024
Graduate diploma	4,197	3,832	4,016	3,552	-11.5%
Graduate certificate	4,983	4,349	4,098	3,486	-14.9%
Masters (non-medical)	15,877	13,731	11,480	10,686	-6.9%
<i>Commencing total</i>	<i>25,057</i>	<i>21,912</i>	<i>19,593</i>	<i>17,724</i>	<i>-9.5%</i>
Continuing					
Graduate diploma	3,164	2,863	2,951	3,076	4.2%
Graduate certificate	2,396	2,102	1,675	1,479	-11.7%
Masters (non-medical)	21,219	20,962	19,406	17,276	-11.0%
<i>Continuing total</i>	<i>26,779</i>	<i>25,926</i>	<i>24,032</i>	<i>21,830</i>	<i>-9.2%</i>

Source: Department of Education, *UA members dataset*.

Notes: Low enrolment course categories postgraduate cross-institution, preliminary postgraduate and doctorate by coursework omitted. Employer-reserved full-fee places omitted.

Although the sector-level postgraduate coursework trend is clear, Table 7 shows very different institution-level patterns. Three universities – Wollongong, Federation and Tasmania – moved from a high share of CSP postgraduates in 2019 to near abandoning full-fee postgraduate education in 2024, with 96% or more of places provided through CSPs. Tasmania and Federation had the highest and second highest 2019 to 2024 growth of postgraduate CSPs as a share of all flexible CSPs (Table 4), with both also under-enrolled in each of 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024. These cases look like institutional strategies to use CSPs as fully as possible. Wollongong, however, was not under-enrolled.

However, the data does not have student year of commencement, which is necessary to identify grandfathered rates for pre-Job-Ready-Graduates students.

⁷ In Figure 1 the cross-over year for a CSP load majority is 2021 rather than 2024. This is due to the influence of medical CSPs, of which there were around 6,800 in each year.

At the other end of the CSP-full-fee enrolment share spectrum, five universities – Murdoch, Canberra, Swinburne, the ANU and UTS – in 2024 enrolled less than quarter of their postgraduate coursework places as CSPs. Three of this five increased their full-fee share between 2019 and 2024. Looking back to Table 4, Murdoch, Swinburne, the ANU and UTS all began and finished the 2019-2024 period with a low proportion of their total CSPs in postgraduate courses, 2.1% or less. Only Canberra and Murdoch had a persistent overall under-enrolment problem that might encourage full-fee to CSP movements. But this strategy may not always have been the best or most practical option. Canberra lost postgraduate CSPs but increased full-fee places significantly, which maximised its total domestic postgraduate revenue. Murdoch lost both full-fee and CSP postgraduate enrolments between 2019 and 2024, suggesting a general decline in demand that offering more CSPs may not have altered. The ANU also suffered from weak demand across both CSP and full-fee markets. UTS and Swinburne, by contrast, gained both full-fee and CSP postgraduate students. The choice between CSP and full-fee is only one factor affecting enrolments and university decisions.

Table 7: Postgraduate CSP share of non-medical postgraduate coursework places, 2019, 2021-2024

University	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024	Change 2019 to 2024 (% point)	In-scope places 2024
University of Wollongong	73.9%	85.5%	93.1%	97.8%	99.5%	25.6%	1,229
Federation University Australia	71.6%	87.4%	94.4%	98.5%	98.8%	27.3%	870
University of Tasmania	80.2%	85.1%	92.0%	93.8%	96.2%	16.0%	3,178
University of the Sunshine Coast	70.2%	77.6%	76.6%	84.3%	91.2%	21.0%	418
The University of New England	79.9%	72.1%	69.9%	75.9%	83.1%	3.2%	1,756
University of Southern Queensland	50.0%	64.0%	69.8%	73.1%	80.3%	30.3%	1,284
University of South Australia	78.8%	80.5%	81.4%	80.8%	80.2%	1.4%	1,372
Charles Darwin University	92.9%	86.9%	76.4%	77.9%	79.7%	-13.1%	705
The University of Western Australia	71.8%	81.9%	81.4%	78.7%	79.1%	7.2%	2,807
Queensland University of Technology	52.5%	55.0%	52.4%	65.9%	73.9%	21.4%	3,020
Flinders University	63.7%	63.1%	63.0%	66.3%	72.4%	8.7%	1,735
Charles Sturt University	40.1%	51.1%	55.1%	66.1%	72.0%	31.9%	3,053
The University of Newcastle	26.1%	41.1%	48.2%	47.7%	71.5%	45.3%	2,473
La Trobe University	42.5%	65.6%	66.2%	69.6%	71.3%	28.8%	3,173
Western Sydney University	59.9%	58.8%	61.0%	54.0%	69.1%	9.2%	2,677
Griffith University	49.1%	51.6%	50.1%	54.8%	65.2%	16.0%	2,975
The University of Queensland	33.6%	44.1%	47.6%	55.2%	65.1%	31.5%	2,151
Curtin University	36.6%	47.7%	49.4%	50.3%	61.8%	25.2%	2,404
CQUniversity	26.8%	49.9%	53.7%	55.5%	58.1%	31.3%	836
Australian Catholic University	42.8%	48.6%	48.6%	46.2%	56.9%	14.2%	2,441
Southern Cross University	28.0%	31.3%	36.2%	44.5%	56.6%	28.6%	1,105
The University of Notre Dame	32.7%	32.7%	31.8%	39.6%	55.8%	23.1%	662
James Cook University	43.4%	38.8%	41.2%	46.4%	54.9%	11.4%	957
The University of Melbourne	50.9%	53.6%	52.8%	52.5%	53.7%	2.8%	9,598
Victoria University	52.3%	49.3%	46.3%	38.3%	51.7%	-0.6%	1,968
Deakin University	27.9%	35.9%	27.3%	30.4%	49.2%	21.2%	3,962
The University of Sydney	42.4%	41.5%	39.3%	43.3%	47.7%	5.3%	4,434
University of New South Wales	47.6%	38.0%	38.0%	41.3%	44.8%	-2.8%	4,395
RMIT University	28.5%	29.2%	31.9%	37.1%	42.4%	13.9%	2,720

University	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024	Change 2019 to 2024 (% point)	In- scope places 2024
The University of Adelaide	56.4%	42.5%	35.3%	32.1%	37.6%	-18.8%	1,792
Macquarie University	30.0%	32.7%	34.1%	35.0%	36.9%	6.9%	1,861
Edith Cowan University	46.9%	37.5%	32.9%	29.9%	35.7%	-11.2%	2,224
Monash University	32.3%	29.5%	27.4%	30.0%	31.6%	-0.7%	5,464
Murdoch University	19.1%	16.0%	15.8%	17.2%	21.9%	2.8%	492
University of Canberra	54.3%	69.4%	40.9%	22.5%	21.4%	-32.9%	1,543
Swinburne University of Technology	23.4%	26.1%	24.2%	19.6%	20.2%	-3.2%	1,645
The Australian National University	7.8%	17.0%	12.8%	13.2%	15.9%	8.1%	692
University of Technology Sydney	13.9%	14.6%	13.9%	11.3%	13.2%	-0.7%	3,280
All public universities	45.0%	47.8%	47.9%	49.8%	56.2%	11.2%	89,350

Source: Department of Education, *UA members dataset*.

Note: Employer-reserved full-fee places omitted.

For many universities offering additional postgraduate CSPs reduced under-enrolment and increased student contribution revenue. But often this reduced revenue from domestic postgraduate full-fee students, as seen in Table 8. Of the 38 universities, 21 in 2024 earned less from this source than in 2019; this number rises to 27 against the peak revenue year of 2021. The commencing full-fee postgraduate numbers in Table 6 suggest another bad year in 2025 on this financial indicator. Estimated FEE-HELP borrowing for public university students, which is primarily for postgraduate study, however increased by 3.9% in 2025 on 2024 (DoFE, 2025a). The 2025 university financial reports will show whether this signals a modest full-fee recovery or just more students borrowing rather than paying upfront.

Table 8: Revenue from full-fee domestic postgraduate courses, 2019, 2021-2024 (\$millions)

University	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Change 2019 to 2024
Federation University Australia	\$5.8	\$3.3	\$1.4	\$0.8	\$0.3	\$0.3	-94.9%
University of Wollongong	\$8.8	\$9.4	\$5.0	\$2.6	\$1.6	\$0.9	-89.8%
The University of Notre Dame	\$44.6	\$47.2	\$19.5	\$21.7	\$24.7	\$24.0	-46.2%
University of Southern Queensland	\$13.1	\$14.0	\$14.2	\$12.2	\$10.8	\$7.3	-44.2%
Australian National University	\$30.6	\$29.3	\$28.6	\$27.0	\$21.4	\$17.9	-41.3%
Western Sydney University	\$24.6	\$25.3	\$26.8	\$24.4	\$23.8	\$14.8	-40.1%
Charles Sturt University	\$53.2	\$53.6	\$67.2	\$49.7	\$37.2	\$32.5	-38.8%
Southern Cross University	\$20.9	\$23.9	\$24.1	\$20.6	\$17.5	\$14.2	-32.1%
The University of Queensland	\$41.7	\$44.9	\$44.7	\$38.3	\$32.1	\$30.9	-25.8%
The University of New England	\$11.1	\$15.6	\$15.0	\$13.7	\$10.5	\$8.3	-25.8%
University of the Sunshine Coast	\$3.6	\$3.7	\$3.6	\$3.0	\$1.6	\$2.7	-25.0%

University	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Change 2019 to 2024
Queensland University of Technology	\$36.3	\$43.6	\$46.0	\$41.4	\$31.1	\$27.7	-23.7%
Murdoch University	\$11.0	\$10.8	\$11.2	\$9.1	\$8.4	\$8.5	-23.1%
The University of Western Australia	\$25.0	\$22.4	\$20.2	\$20.1	\$20.4	\$20.4	-18.2%
Curtin University of Technology	\$31.3	\$32.2	\$34.3	\$31.8	\$28.2	\$26.2	-16.4%
Griffith University	\$43.3	\$47.9	\$52.3	\$43.6	\$42.4	\$37.3	-13.9%
Central Queensland University	\$12.7	\$17.0	\$15.9	\$13.5	\$11.8	\$11.3	-11.2%
Flinders University	\$15.6	\$19.4	\$18.5	\$16.8	\$17.1	\$14.8	-4.9%
Deakin University	\$67.6	\$81.3	\$94.0	\$84.8	\$75.8	\$64.7	-4.4%
RMIT University	\$63.0	\$80.9	\$91.3	\$82.4	\$67.0	\$60.3	-4.3%
The University of Sydney	\$100.9	\$101.6	\$125.9	\$124.4	\$107.4	\$99.8	-1.1%
James Cook University	\$14.9	\$19.9	\$23.1	\$20.2	\$17.5	\$14.9	0.0%
The University of Melbourne	\$163.3	\$168.6	\$180.0	\$171.1	\$161.8	\$165.8	1.5%
University of South Australia	\$10.7	\$12.8	\$12.8	\$10.6	\$10.4	\$10.9	2.0%
Australian Catholic University	\$16.8	\$20.5	\$20.3	\$19.5	\$21.6	\$17.9	6.4%
La Trobe University	\$28.3	\$25.1	\$27.2	\$28.1	\$29.2	\$32.2	13.7%
The University of Newcastle	\$37.8	\$42.3	\$44.7	\$38.6	\$36.9	\$44.2	16.9%
Macquarie University	\$47.8	\$55.5	\$64.2	\$59.6	\$56.1	\$59.4	24.1%
Monash University	\$103.0	\$118.0	\$135.9	\$135.7	\$129.6	\$129.1	25.3%
University of Tasmania	\$4.5	\$4.9	\$4.5	\$6.9	\$6.3	\$6.7	49.1%
University of Technology, Sydney	\$62.4	\$69.5	\$74.3	\$71.3	\$88.3	\$93.5	49.9%
Swinburne University of Technology	\$29.1	\$33.0	\$35.3	\$35.4	\$43.0	\$44.0	51.2%
The University of New South Wales	\$60.0	\$78.6	\$96.5	\$99.6	\$93.9	\$93.0	55.1%
Edith Cowan University	\$17.9	\$22.6	\$31.7	\$33.0	\$35.5	\$36.0	101.9%
Victoria University	\$11.1	\$15.0	\$18.6	\$20.9	\$25.0	\$24.5	120.4%
University of Adelaide	\$13.0	\$18.2	\$28.0	\$34.5	\$37.7	\$32.6	150.9%
University of Canberra	\$11.0	\$7.3	\$7.9	\$17.1	\$28.6	\$35.0	218.8%
Charles Darwin University	\$0.7	\$1.4	\$2.0	\$4.8	\$3.8	\$3.9	440.3%
Total	\$1,296.9	\$1,440.8	\$1,566.6	\$1,488.8	\$1,416.1	\$1,368.1	5.5%

Source: Department of Education, *Financial reports of higher education providers*

Notes: These figures add a line item for upfront domestic postgraduate fees and FEE-HELP revenue. In limited circumstances domestic undergraduates at public universities can be charged full fees and borrow under FEE-HELP (Norton, 2018). However, the different FEE-HELP streams are not distinguished in the financial data. The undergraduate EFTSL involved ranged from 878 (1.9% of FEE-HELP places) in 2019 to 263 (0.7% of places) in 2024. Full-fee medical

places and employer reserved places, which are excluded from the places analysis, cannot be disaggregated in the revenue data.

Postgraduate CSP by discipline

In our interviews, as outlined above, university leaders preferred offering postgraduate CSPs in fields aligned with their mission, which typically meant places in courses leading to public service occupations with relatively low financial rewards. As one vice-chancellor said:

[w]e will prioritise within our envelope, things like nursing, education, social work, where salaries are lower and there is less slash, zero willingness from employers to help individuals cover the cost.

A senior executive from another university also noted:

[w]e have moved in some of the professional areas, particularly teaching and nursing, where we know there's demand, there's a government imperative to try and attract and retain and qualify such cohorts.

This university preference reflected historical government priorities for postgraduate CSPs. Although postgraduate CSPs spread across many disciplines from the late 2000s, the 2019 funding agreements still allocated 47% of postgraduate places to education and nursing.⁸

Education and health related postgraduate CSPs

As Table 9 shows, education (which is mostly school teaching courses) and nursing in the Job-ready Graduates era maintained a share of all postgraduate CSPs near the 47% 2019 allocation level; the delivered share was 46% in 2024. Underlying this share stability, however, nursing CSPs grew consistently while education enrolments fluctuated. The CSP share of postgraduate coursework enrolments grew in both fields, but especially nursing, which increased from two-thirds to nearly nine-tenths CSP. As Job-ready Graduates discounted student contributions for education and nursing, this shift to CSPs saved students significant amounts of money and, perhaps, made possible postgraduate study that would not otherwise have been affordable.

Table 9: Postgraduate education and nursing, EFTSL by fee type and shares, 2019, 2021-2024

DISCIPLINE	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
EDUCATION	13,298	17,093	14,855	13,305	15,133
NURSING	3,253	4,877	5,547	6,248	7,988
TOTAL EDUCATION & NURSING	<i>16,551</i>	<i>21,970</i>	<i>20,402</i>	<i>19,553</i>	<i>23,121</i>
ALL PG CSP	36,225	46,904	43,404	42,830	50,234
% EDUCATION AND NURSING OF ALL PG CSP	45.7%	46.8%	47.0%	45.7%	46.0%
EDUCATION FULL-FEE	3,669	3,773	3,460	3,092	2,693
NURSING FULL-FEE	1,632	1,780	1,647	1,591	1,123
EDUCATION CSP SHARE	78.4%	81.9%	81.1%	81.1%	84.9%
NURSING CSP SHARE	66.6%	73.3%	77.1%	79.7%	87.7%

Source: Department of Education, *UA members dataset*.

Note: Using discipline code data.

⁸ Calculated from transcribed 2019 funding agreements.

Public health, a field given a high profile during the COVID-19 pandemic, saw its postgraduate enrolments increase, with the CSP share growing from 43% in 2019 to 69% in 2024.

Table 10: Postgraduate public health, EFTSL by fee type and share, 2019, 2021-2024

FEE TYPE	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
CSP	1,303	1,992	2,008	2,152	2,559
FULL-FEE	1,726	2,002	1,898	1,506	1,154
TOTAL	3,029	3,994	3,906	3,658	3,714
% CSP	43.0%	49.9%	51.4%	58.8%	68.9%

Source: Department of Education, *UA members dataset*.

Note: Medical students excluded.

Health-related fields without increases in the CSP share

In some other health-related fields full-fee postgraduate places did not give way to CSPs in the same way as in education, nursing and public health.

Due to high rates of poor mental health, the government wants to encourage enrolments leading to practice as a clinical psychologist. But its policies on pricing psychology subjects are untidy. Subjects in courses not leading to clinical psychology practice are in the most expensive annual student contribution band, \$17,399 in 2026. Subjects in courses leading to clinical psychology practice have different student contribution rates for undergraduate (\$9,537) and postgraduate (\$4,738) courses (DofE, 2025b). Universities earn less in total, adding student and Commonwealth contributions, for a postgraduate CSP (\$20,636) than an undergraduate CSP (\$25,435) for students headed to clinical practice. This is contrary to the general finding that postgraduate courses cost more to teach than undergraduate courses (Croucher et al., 2021). Partly to offset this funding shortfall, from 2024 the Department of Health offered additional funding to universities increasing their postgraduate clinical psychology enrolments, including with at least one more CSP (DHA, 2024).

Perhaps due to the unfavourable CSP funding rate, the CSP share of postgraduate clinical psychology courses fell in the Job-ready Graduates period compared to 2019 (Table 11). The absolute number of CSPs varied in a narrow range up to 2024, when EFTSL enrolments increased, possibly helped by the new funding incentive. Growth in full-fee places ensured that total EFTSL increased each year.

Table 11: Postgraduate clinical psychology, EFTSL by fee type and share, 2019, 2021-2024

FEE TYPE	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
CSP	1,055	1,097	1,051	1,080	1,221
FULL-FEE	287	542	592	642	666
TOTAL	1,342	1,639	1,642	1,722	1,887
% CSP	78.6%	66.9%	64.0%	62.7%	64.7%

Source: Department of Education, *UA members dataset*.

Note: Using special course filter.

Another health-related field where Job-ready Graduates pricing may have had adverse effects is in rehabilitation therapies. The major discipline in this field is physiotherapy, with speech pathology and occupational therapy also having significant enrolments. On instruction from the Department of Education, the costing study that informed Job-ready Graduates funding rates put rehabilitation therapy courses with significant clinical components in the same category as public health, which is nearer the social sciences in its teaching methods.⁹ Public health places reduced the 'average' cost of teaching and scholarship in this

⁹ By putting all ASCED health-related fields other than medicine, nursing, dentistry and veterinary studies in an 'other' category (Deloitte Access Economics, 2020, pp. 77–78).

mixed disciplinary category, leading to the clinical courses receiving less total funding per student place than previously.

As Table 12 shows, rehabilitation therapy CSPs are higher in the Job-ready Graduates years than in 2019, but most growth happened in full-fee places. The share of total postgraduate EFTSL in CSPs fell as a result before a partial recovery in 2024.

Table 12: Postgraduate rehabilitation therapy, EFTSL by fee type and share, 2019, 2021-2024

FEE TYPE	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
CSP	1,426	1,694	1,620	1,480	1,695
FULL-FEE	2,221	2,612	2,829	2,987	2,841
TOTAL	3,647	4,306	4,449	4,467	4,536
CSP SHARE	39.1%	39.3%	36.4%	33.1%	37.4%

Source: Department of Education, *UA members dataset*.

Social work

In our interviews social work was mentioned as a lower-paying field in which universities preferred CSPs for postgraduate courses. Consistent with these statements, postgraduate social work was primarily offered with CSPs before Job-ready Graduates. The CSP share, however, declined slightly in the Job-ready Graduates period, as did total EFTSL enrolments (Table 13).

Table 13: Postgraduate social work, EFTSL by fee type and share, 2019, 2021-2024

FEE TYPE	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
CSP	1,955	2,441	2,163	1,833	1,819
FULL-FEE	235	415	338	260	297
TOTAL	2,190	2,856	2,501	2,093	2,117
% CSP	89.3%	85.5%	86.5%	87.6%	85.9%

Source: Department of Education, *UA members dataset*.

Note: These EFTSL are only ASCED detailed code 090501.

CSPs and market competition

Mission reasons help explain increase CSP postgraduate places, but universities are also in a competitive market. Interviewees noted that they sometimes offer CSPs for competitive reasons – because their full-fee courses are at a price disadvantage when rival universities offer CSPs in the same field.

One area where this may have happened in the Job-ready Graduates era is in postgraduate IT courses. In 2024 universities delivered 250% more postgraduate IT CSP places than in 2019. In a growing market, the CSP share of all IT postgraduate places went from a quarter in 2019 to 57% in 2024 (Table 14).

Table 14: Postgraduate information technology, EFTSL by fee type and share, 2019, 2021-2024

FEE TYPE	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
CSP	720	1,681	1,481	1,881	2,542
FULL-FEE	2,093	3,108	2,700	2,376	1,897
TOTAL	2,813	4,789	4,180	4,257	4,439
% CSP	25.6%	35.1%	35.4%	44.2%	57.3%

Source: Department of Education, *UA members dataset*.

While most universities with postgraduate IT courses increased CSPs between 2019 and 2024, Deakin University and QUT delivered the largest increases. Table 15 shows their IT enrolment patterns against that

of a potential same-state competitor that also significantly changed its CSP/full-fee profile in this period. In Victoria, La Trobe University took itself from a small presence in the domestic IT postgraduate market in 2019 to more student places than Deakin in 2024. It achieved this through offering CSP places. Deakin offered more CSPs, especially in 2024, which led to higher total enrolments than in 2023 but at the price of significantly fewer full-fee places. Deakin's total domestic full-fee revenue fell significantly between 2023 and 2024 (Table 8).

In Queensland, QUT also gained postgraduate IT market share by using CSPs in 2023 and 2024. By 2024 it retained only a handful of full-fee postgraduate IT places. The University of Queensland, like QUT located in Brisbane, more gradually increased its IT CSPs, so that its IT postgraduate student load was 80% CSP in 2024, up from a quarter in 2019. Both universities earned less from full-fee domestic postgraduates in 2024 than 2023 (Table 8).

Table 15: Within-state changes in the mix of postgraduate IT CSP and full-fee places, 2019, 2021-2024

University and fee status	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
Deakin University – full-fee	208	207	175	144	87
Deakin University - CSP	<5	154	24	48	138
Deakin University - total	208	361	199	192	226
Deakin University - CSP share	<1.5%	42.7%	12.1%	25.2%	61.3%
La Trobe University – full-fee	34.5	13	19	22	16
La Trobe University - CSP	9	72	127	216	262
La Trobe University - total	44	85	146	238	278
La Trobe University - CSP share	20.5%	84.7%	87.0%	90.8%	94.2%
QUT – full-fee	116	228	205	111	7
QUT - CSP	<5			136	406
QUT - total	116	228	205	246	413
QUT - CSP share	<1.5%	0.0%	0.0%	55.1%	98.4%
University of Queensland – full-fee	67	72	55	41	30
University of Queensland - CSP	24	54	51	92	128
University of Queensland - total	91	126	105	133	159
University of Queensland - CSP share	25.9%	42.8%	48.2%	69.1%	80.9%

Source: Department of Education, *UA members dataset*.

Note: Rounding affects some calculations.

Will growth in postgraduate Commonwealth supported places be sustained?

Once postgraduate CSP availability grows in a course market it acquires a competitive dynamic. Students expect CSPs, putting universities that do not offer them at a market disadvantage. But other pressures may push back against postgraduate CSPs.

On this paper's argument, postgraduate CSP growth was partly due to unusually weak domestic undergraduate demand in the post-COVID-19 period. At its 2023 low point, demand for undergraduate courses was below its 2011 level (DofE, 2026b). While the 2010s undergraduate boomtimes are unlikely to return, demographic growth pushed Year 12 enrolments to their highest ever level in 2025 (ABS, 2026). These demographic forces will persist until at least the early 2030s (Norton, 2024).

Commencing undergraduate enrolments in 2024, application figures for the 2025 academic year and early data on 2026 applications support a conclusion that demographic factors will increase school leaver undergraduate commencements (Norton, 2026b). Larger commencing cohorts have compounding effects on university enrolments, as in their second and subsequent years they increase continuing enrolments.

What effect increased undergraduate demand has on the undergraduate/postgraduate CSP trade-off depends on the system's CSP capacity and other constraints on university decision making. Capacity is uncertain due to Commonwealth budget constraint and significant promised policy change. Total public university MBGA amounts for 2026 represent a small real reduction on 2025 (Norton, 2026a). In June 2026, the government introduced a bill to Parliament that, if passed, would limit over-enrolments. If this legislation passes, university-level capacity to respond to CSP demand will decline.

The Parliament has already passed legislation to create an Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC). ATEC has significant power to manage universities through 'mission based compacts', including setting targets on matters of priority to the minister and ATEC (Norton, 2025b). These targets could, depending on their content, encourage or discourage provision of postgraduate CSPs.

The case for postgraduate CSPs, compared to full-fee places, is that they reduce debt accrued due to further study. But future governments, like past governments, may be more concerned about this in lower-paying occupations like nursing and teaching than in, for example, IT. There is precedent for governments quarantining CSPs for undergraduates so that more people access a first qualification – one late 1990s trigger for expanding full-fee postgraduate places.

Job-ready Graduates flexibility between undergraduate and postgraduate CSPs may be temporary. But it had successes, letting universities move resources across qualification levels to meet shifts in student demand. The simultaneous funding rate reforms, however, may have undermined flexibility by making postgraduate CSPs uneconomic in some fields. While universities will put mission considerations above maximising revenue per student, there are limits to the losses they can sustain.

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