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Numbers Don’t Tell the Whole Story: A Tertiary Diploma Pathway Course Widens Access to Higher Qualifications

Abstract:
For 22 years Avondale College of Higher Education has been operating a tertiary pathway course designed to widen access to higher education for non-traditional applicants. The course, now known as the Diploma of General Studies [DGS], has been accredited as a 2-year higher education sector diploma since 1995. Thus far, 1066 students (44% male, 56% female) have spent at least one semester in the diploma. None has opted to complete the diploma. Instead students use it as a pathway to higher awards, mostly Avondale bachelor degrees in education, nursing, arts, theology, business and occasionally science. To date, 300 former pathway students have completed an Avondale degree; a further 250 are still enrolled. Diploma students commence with Year 12 ranks (UAI, ENTER, TER, now ATAR) ranging from 30 or less to around 60; many have no rank. For those who complete degrees there is no correlation between Year 12 rank and average college grade; however, higher completion rates are achieved by those with higher ranks. My research is looking at the stories of education of 12 recent school leavers who commenced the DGS in 2012. I want to learn the story of their schooling, what the DGS course contributes to their story, what my story contributes and what all these stories contribute to the clarity of Avondale’s processes. A low ATAR score does not tell an applicant’s whole story. Lack of academic potential is not the sole explanation of a student’s failure to achieve an acceptable Year 12 rank. A semester in the diploma pathway course opens a new world of academic opportunity for many DGS students, some of whom go on to complete graduate study.

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History of Avondale Pathways

In first semester 1991, Avondale accepted its inaugural intake into a new pathway course that it called Foundation Studies [FS]. The name was possibly inspired by the University of Newcastle’s Open Foundation Course, which had been operating since 1974
However, FS was not a foundation course. From the beginning it was a tertiary pathway. The 15 students in the first intake took a mix of generic and undergraduate degree units. Almost two thirds (61%) of their units were from degree courses they hoped to qualify for, including units from education, nursing and business degrees. They sat in class alongside normal entry students. Lecturers may have been unaware that their FS students were any different from the rest. FS students taking these units were expected to complete the same assignments and sit the same exams and were graded in the same way as the normal entry students. They were given no special treatment by lecturers.

In addition to their 2, 3, or even 4 degree units, most of the 1991 FS students took 2 generic units – Foundation English and Foundation for Tertiary Studies [at the time, a full study load was 5 units]. The purpose of Foundation English was to ensure that students had adequate writing skills. Foundation for Tertiary Studies was taken by two thirds of the class; this unit provided no lectures or assignments, just 3 hours a week of one-on-one tutorial help. This provision was well intended, but most of the class did not feel the need for this level of intense help; some students skipped a lot of these tutorials. The class passed all of the generic units (average grade 61%) and most of the degree-specific units (average grade 56%). The only unit in which they did poorly was a first-year BA unit, Communication and Literature (average grade 44%). Seven of the 15 went on to complete 3- or 4-year Avondale degrees, graduating in 1994 and 1995: 3 nurses, 2 primary teachers and 2 secondary teachers.

Foundation Studies was not an accredited course. For the first two years, the course attracted students; then in 1993-1994, the numbers halved. This convinced planners at the college that Foundation Studies would have to be replaced. Plans were developed for a new, accredited course. In late 1994 accreditation was gained for a 2-year Associate Diploma of General Studies (in 1999 the name changed to Diploma of General Studies). This secured the future of pathway education at Avondale. Since 1995 the course has consistently attracted students. The first 5 years of the accredited course (1995-1999) saw 181 students complete at least one semester of the course, and the last completed 5-year period (2005-2009) saw 448 students complete at least one semester of the course.

After 15 years of growth and development and a significant number of degree graduates – 67 from the first 5 years, 80 from the second 5 years, and on track for a much larger number for the third 5 years – against the advice of the panel it set up to assess Avondale’s application, in 2009 the Department of Education and Training chose not to
renew the course’s accreditation. As a concession, a one-year extension was granted to the 2005-2009 accreditation so that the 76 students already accepted for 2010 could be taught. At the same time, Avondale prepared an appeal against the loss of accreditation. In his letter of appeal, the college president questioned how DET had concluded that the DGS did not meet the AQF criteria for a pathway course and questioned the administrative processes that had been followed. In a comment on the irony of the decision he wrote:

The decision made by your office in regard to our Diploma of General Studies puts Avondale at a great disadvantage in being able to respond to the targets indicated in the Australian Government’s response to the Bradley Review of Higher Education (2008). And, it is rather ironic that the Australian Universities Quality Agency has recently cited Avondale’s DGS as “best practice” in its field. (letter, June 16, 2010)

The appeal was successful. The report written by the review panel (September 2010) concluded:

The review panel considers the Diploma of General Studies to be consistent with the criteria for a diploma under the Australian Qualifications Framework and does not support the case that the course is a foundation studies or tertiary preparation course. (p. 6)

With accreditation restored, the DGS continued to attract students. In 2011, despite the drama of the previous year, there was a near-record enrolment, with 102 students completing at least one semester of the course.

A summary of the first 22 years of the FS/DGS pathway course shows that 1066 students have completed at least one semester of the course (44% male, 56% female). Three quarters of the intake have been recent school leavers and one quarter, mature age students. About three quarters succeed in “passing” DGS and qualifying to articulate into degree courses. Not all accept their Avondale offers. Approximately 9 out of 10 do accept; 64 per cent of these go on to complete an Avondale degree. To date, 300 have completed 3- or 4-year Avondale bachelor degrees, with several completing more than one award, including graduate awards up and including master’s level. Earlier this year a former DGS student completed a PhD at another institution. For those completing Avondale degrees, females tend to outperform males; females have a better completion rate (67% vs. 62% for males), a higher average grade (66% vs. 63% for males) and are more likely to complete their degree in
normal time (74% vs. 61% for males). Recent school leavers perform better than mature age students: more qualify (76% vs. 75%), more graduate (65% vs. 61%) and more finish in normal time (70% vs. 65%).

**Year 12 Ranking**

Recently, there has been discussion in the media about Year 12 ranking. The Group of 8 director Michael Gallagher claimed that Australia was “at risk of producing a cohort of toxic teachers” (Armitage & Browne, 2012) because some had not done well themselves in Year 12. In a discussion paper commissioned by the NSW Education Minister Adrian Piccoli (Bruniges, Lee & Alegounarias, 2012) it was noted that 20 per cent of students in teacher education courses had ATARs under 60, with some as low as 40. It appears that entrants to teacher education degrees may be required to have an ATAR of at least 70. The paper noted that the majority of teaching graduates do not initially gain full-time teaching positions and some are never employed. In an address to the National Press Club (2012, Oct 3), the vice chancellor of the Australian Catholic University, Greg Craven, responded by pointing out that many students are disadvantaged by low socio-economic backgrounds. He further noted that Year 12 ranks are not very good at predicting student success at university. What really matters is not how students finish high school, but how they finish university. To help make the point, he used this provocative analogy:

> Trying to determine who should be a teacher on the basis of adolescent school marks rather than practical and theoretical training received during their course is like selecting the Australian cricket team on school batting averages while ignoring Sheffield Shield innings. (Armitage & Browne, 2012)

The limitation of Year 12 ranking has been recognised for some time. A study by Urban, Jones, Smith, Evans, Maclachlan and Karmel (1999) showed that Year 12 rank was “a significant predictor of completing a university course”. However, they also noted that ranking was “a poor predictor within high or low TER scores”. Other studies have highlighted the unclear relationship between tertiary ranking and academic success (Magennis & Mitchell, 1998; Murphy, Papanicolaou & McDowell, 2001; Dobson & Skuja, 2005; Levy & Murray, 2005; James, Bexley & Shearer, 2009). Duke (2000) called Year 12 ranking a kind of “tyranny”. Many students are disadvantaged by the ranking process. Government school students with a rank below 80 perform as well at university as those from private and selective schools with ranks five to ten points higher (Edwards, 2008, p. 295).
There is a body of literature about the problems of disadvantage and the under representation of disadvantaged groups in higher education (Clarke, Zimmer & Main, 1999; James, 2000; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; West & Gibbs, 2004; Ferrier, 2006; Wheelahan, 2007; Grebennikov & Skaines, 2009; Phillimore & Koshy, 2010).

Year 12 ranking would be very useful if it reliably predicted success at university. Murphy, Papanicolaou and McDowell (2001) found a strong correlation between ranking and university grades for those with ranks above 80. McKenzie and Schweitzer (2001) found that previous academic performance was “the most significant predictor of university performance” (p. 21). Dobson and Skuja (2005) found that “high scores in Year 12 were a prima facie predictor of university performance” (p. 54). Roodenrys (2008) found that Year 12 rank was “the best predictor of performance” (p. 143).

But tertiary ranking does not tell the whole story. According to Levy and Murray (2005), “Tertiary entrance scores need not determine academic success” (p. 129). According to McKenzie and Schweitzer (2001), university entry scores “explain less than half of the variance in GPA” (p. 29). Magennis and Mitchell (1998) found that Year 12 rank was a poor predictor of performance in first-year students. Murphy, Papanicolaou and McDowell (2001) concluded that for students with a rank above 80, there was a correlation with university grades; for those with middling ranks (40-80), there was no correlation; and for those with ranks below 40, there was a variable correlation. Coombes (n.d.) argued that while Year 12 rank is a “probabilistic” indicator of likely success at university, it is not a guarantee. Temmerman (2008) found a poor relationship between OP (Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre, 2012) and GPA. Some with an OP of 16 outperform others with an OP of 2 [in Qld a low score is good]. James, Bexley and Shearer (2009) concluded that “ENTER [Yr 12 rank] is attributed a precision that is not deserved” (p. 1). Temmerman (2008) insists, “This highlights the importance of personal variables such as motivation and commitment to teaching, alongside academic competence” (p. 12). A study prepared by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (2010) concluded that “Some students may not demonstrate their true potential in their ATAR due to prior educational disadvantage or other factors” (p. 15). Some universities are now gathering data other than tertiary ranking to help select students for courses like medicine. For example, at the University of Newcastle (2011) applicants are interviewed to assess their aptitude and personal characteristics, including their ability to handle ambiguity.
The Avondale experience with DGS students and tertiary ranking can be seen by looking at the performance of 251 entrants with ranks ranging from 30 or less to 60, in the classes of 2005-2011. Dividing these into four groups for the students completing degrees (<30, 30-39, 40-49 and 50>) shows no correlations between rank and GPA for any group [correlations for the 3 upper groups were 0.116, 0.067 & 0.0076]. There was little variation in GPA for the four groups. The top group (ATAR 50>) averaged 68 per cent and the other three groups all averaged 66 per cent. The one clear difference between the groups is completion rate. The top group (50>) had the best completion rate (56%), followed by the middle two groups (50%), and the bottom group (34%). These findings match what is reported in the literature on Year 12 ranking, providing support for Avondale’s policy of accepting into the DGS entrants with ranks as low as 30 or less, provided they can make a case for being included. As Madigan (2006) notes, academic performance “can be predicted given the appropriate selection variables” (abstract). Special care needs to be taken when evaluating applicants with ranks below 40; however, some entrants at this level become very successful students and go on to complete graduate degrees at master’s level and above.

Case Study

This is a preliminary report on a study that is ongoing. It gives a brief overview of the case and an introduction to my 12 participants. I am interested in the experience of education, the “storied lives” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 37), of the pathway students taking Avondale College’s DGS. The choice of the DGS as a case was opportunistic: I am the convenor of the DGS course. I have been teaching several generic units in the course for the past 22 years. When I first thought about commencing a study, I planned to write an evaluation of the effectiveness of the course itself. As I proceeded down this path, I became increasingly interested in the students and their stories of education. Finally, I decided on a narrative research design. My topic is: “A narrative evaluation of the student experience of the DGS, using stories from the class of 2012.” The four questions I want to answer are these: (1) What are the students’ stories of education? (2) How do their stories unfold in the DGS? (3) What does my story contribute? (4) What do these stories add to the clarity of Avondale’s processes? Several Australian researchers have completed doctorates that examined mature age pathways and pathway students (Cullity, 2005, Stone, 2009, Willans, 2010). In view of this, I decided that my focus would be the experience of recent school leavers. Three quarters of Avondale’s DGS entrants are recent school leavers; it was not difficult to recruit participants.
My 12 research participants were selected from the DGS class of 2012. My approach to sampling was purposeful (Creswell, 2008, p. 214). It was opportunistic, in that I chose students who happened to be coming into the course when I was ready to start collecting data. The sample was homogeneous in that all the participants were recent school leavers; most were 18 or 19 years of age, with two aged 20. There were 6 males and 6 females to provide opportunity to examine gender effects. I used maximal variation sampling, by selecting students with a range of ATARs (34.4 to 50.65) and from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds (7 from homes where English is not the first or only language). I used extreme case sampling, by choosing three students with diagnosed learning difficulties (ADD and dyslexia). On this basis, I selected also the only overseas student in the class.

My main points of contact with the participants were two classes that I teach: Effective Tertiary Writing, and Principles of Tertiary Learning. Some of the written data was produced as coursework, including folio writing, a reflective journal, plus several smaller written assignments. I collected more than a dozen documents from most participants. I also conducted two rounds of interviews, one early in the semester and another near the end of the semester. In addition I kept a reflective journal, a record of observations and an email log. I began analysing the data as it was being collected. As Rapley (2011) notes, “Qualitative research is an iterative practice” (p. 285). The various rounds of data collection fed off each other. Questions asked in the interviews arose from the written data and from observations.

I am in the early stages of analysing the data. Here is a brief introduction to my participants, using the pseudonyms I have given them. The six males are Ben, Jeremy, John, Andrew, Trevor and Joshua. Ben is the only male with an ATAR (50.65) that qualified him for normal entry to the DGS [normal entry is 45]. Ben is from interstate. A victim of bullying in primary school, he had problems at home that disrupted his social development. Senior high school for him was more a journey of self-discovery than a focused academic experience. His journey to Avondale College, more than 1000 km from his home city, represented a continuation of this self-discovery journey and an attempt to escape from his past and make a fresh start. He was so determined to get away that he left behind his fiancée, who is attending university in his home city. Recently I emailed Ben to invite him to check my summary of his story:

Like me, you had an awkward relationship with your father, probably more awkward than mine… Let me hazard a guess at why you might have felt bullied in primary
school. Your awkward relationship with your dad … may not have taught you how to relate to others as well as it might. You may have found it difficult to relate to other kids, and because of this they may have found it difficult to understand you. This could have led to you being marginalised, isolated, and victimised by bigger kids.

As you grew older, you also grew bigger – a lot bigger [1.9 m tall]. This led to a turning of the tables. You were no longer a potential victim. On the contrary, if someone messed with you or with your mates, you had the capacity to make them pay.

In the period when you were adjusting to this new reality, your relational skills were playing catch-up. You were big and “scary” [Ben’s word], an intelligent loner. As such, you eventually attracted a group of somewhat like-minded individuals [misfits], which became an influential group. You were a hero and protector in the group. I imagine you were also a significant thought leader…

Perhaps part of your reason for moving to Avondale was to create some space between you and your past to give yourself room to more fully find yourself…

Ben responded to this email by writing, “I would say that is an accurate description of how I became who I am.” Ben had a very successful first semester. He passed all of his units, including one generic unit and three education degree units (av. mark of 68%), and has now commenced a science/teaching degree.

The other male participants include Jeremy (ATAR of 43), an immigrant who has both ADD and dyslexia. Jeremy is ambitious, responsible, a leader in his local church youth group. Jeremy chose to take a reduced study load of three units instead of four. DGS students need to pass four units before they are able to qualify to move to a degree course. Jeremy passed all three of his units, including one generic unit and two arts degree units (av. mark of 65%). He will remain in the DGS for another semester.

John (ATAR of 35.2) is an overseas student from Asia. His parents are both educators and his four older siblings are all university graduates, one having preceded him through this same Avondale pathway course on the way to his BN degree. John’s schooling has been rather disrupted. His family moved to work in a Pacific nation when he was small. He had to learn a new language before he could make any progress in his schooling. Because he was not making as much progress as his parents thought he should be making, they sent him away
to board in another part of the country to attend a more suitable school. From there he was sent to Australia for all of his high schooling. The arrangement was less than ideal. Along the way he has learned at least four languages. John passed all four of his units, including two generic units and two nursing units (av. mark of 63%). He has now started his nursing degree.

Andrew finished Year 12 without earning an ATAR. At school, sport was his passion – athletics, football, basketball. He aspires to play for the Knights. He wrote: “From Year 8 till Year 12 was all about sport for me. I’d just do the sport and not really bother with [school] work.” He was bored by teachers and dreamed of more effective ways to teach students like himself. When he quit school, he started working as a chef but lost his apprenticeship. At a loose end, some family members encouraged him to try Avondale. He did, quickly showing a marked degree of application to study. He wrote, “I have surprised myself with how I have changed my attitude to work … I have noticed that being in a mature environment has changed my study plan and focus … This semester has set me up for the rest of the seven semesters that I have left in my degree. I know that I will succeed … I have self-belief and motivation to do college now and it is because I have focused.” Andrew has translated his winning attitude to sport into a winning attitude to study. Andrew passed all four of his units, including two generic units and two education units (av. mark of 75%). He has now commenced a teaching degree.

Like Andrew, Trevor did not earn an ATAR in Year 12. At school Trevor was laid back, fun loving and sociable. He throve on making people happy and aspired to become an actor. He, too, loved sport and keeping active. His love of activity drew him into volunteer fire fighting. He did not take school seriously. He wrote, “Through Year 11 and 12 I still didn’t have the mindset to study.” His parents did not push him to study or take a very active interest in his education. In his gap year things did not work out well and he became depressed. When a friend suggested that he try Avondale, he took the advice. He found that he enjoyed the experience. Towards the end of the semester he wrote, “This semester I have evolved. I have become a better person and a better student. My attitude towards education changed and my results have made me proud … I am much more capable of academic work now than when I first started.” Trevor’s success may have owed something to the “sacrifice” he made “to not be involved in sports this year”. Trevor passed all four of his units, including two generic units and two education units (av. mark of 74%). He has now commenced a teaching degree.
The last of my male participants is a Pacifica student who completed primary school in Australia and high school in NZ. Joshua’s first love is rugby union. After moving to Lake Macquarie to start the DGS, he was quick to join a local team in the regional rugby competition, which his team won this year. His father is a church pastor. In high school, Joshua tried to hide from his mates that he was a pastor’s son. He found being the son of a pastor “a lot of pressure”. As if to prove that he could not possibly be the son of a minister of religion, he hung around with a bad crowd that got him involved in alcohol, drugs and violence. He had a lot of trouble at school. “My priorities were sports or drinking with my mates; education was far from being important,” he wrote. Joshua’s experience of education was not helped by his ADD or by the fact that English was not the language spoken at home. Joshua began the semester hopefully, but lost sight of study through his involvement in rugby. He failed all four of his units (av. mark of 29%) and has now withdrawn from the course, the only one of my 12 informants to drop out so far and the only male in the group to record a failing grade.

My six female participants are Eva, Kate, Gina, Amber, Mandy and Jodi. Eva (46.7) is the only one with an ATAR that gave her normal entry to the DGS. Last month I wrote in my journal: Eva is a shy, cooperative girl from a respectful ethnic minority (Creole is the main language used at home). She spent most of her young life attempting to live her mother’s dream of becoming a nurse. In senior high school this led her to take subjects she said “were not my favourites”. She wrote, “I ended up with a score [ATAR] that continuously reminds me how I could have done so much better.” She started the DGS this year, planning to move on to a nursing degree. However, by the beginning of Week 4, she was able to write in her journal, “I don’t think nursing is the career for me.” Eva is very shy. She is from a cultural tradition which is very respectful to parents. She found it difficult to resist the subtle family pressure to follow her mother’s dream. Poor subject choice continued to be a problem for Eva at college. Offered the chance to take two generic units plus two degree units, she chose two first-semester BN units as her degree electives. After deciding nursing was not what she wanted to do, Eva gave up on one of her nursing units and did not try to complete it. She did very well in her other three units (av. mark of 74%). She is still enrolled in the DGS and plans to commence a teaching degree in 2013.

One other female participant, Kate (44.9), almost achieved an entry-level ATAR. Kate has dyslexia, is from “the bush” and has no immediate family tradition of involvement with higher education. The first school she attended provided no special help for her dyslexia. She
loved dancing but found her dance teacher abusive. It would take Kate a couple of days to get over the bullying she endured from this teacher. Eventually, she moved to a private school, where she felt she received more sympathetic help. Her strength is determination. She wrote, “My parents have always said that I have a great deal of determination and if I keep aiming my determination will let me achieve anything that I aim for.” She found that tae kwon do and learning to play the violin helped her. She was encouraged by a great aunt who had been a nurse. Kate also wants to become a nurse. Kate passed all four of her units, including two generic units and two nursing units (av. mark of 65%). She is now enrolled in a nursing degree.

Gina (42.15) is a laid-back, fun-loving, loud, artistic, disorganised, undisciplined Pacifica student who hopes to get into an arts degree. At home a language other than English is used. An assessment for ADD gave an inconclusive result. Whether or not she has ADD, she is very easily distracted and finds it challenging to remain focused in lectures and to engage with study out of class. Like at least half of the boys in this study, she has a great love of sport. Her college life is filled with late nights, lots of fun and not a lot of study. In first semester, she was often missing from early morning classes. On the occasions when she would turn up, it was usually because she had not been to bed the night before. Gina’s avoidance of study was costly. She accumulated failing grades (av. mark of 43%) and was invited to “show cause” why she should not be excluded from the course. On appeal she was allowed to continue. It will soon be apparent whether she changed her approach to study in second semester.

Amber (38.3) is Eva’s older sister, the oldest of my six female participants at 20 years. She was keen to attend Avondale and encouraged her sister Eva to join her. Amber is an arty dreamer who is filled with ideas and loves to talk about things that come up in class. But when it comes to coursework, she is particularly unproductive. Another lecturer thought she was rather like a student she once knew with ADHD, the hypo-activity version. This other student showed an almost bizarre interest in a range of things, including things that were personal to the teacher, but was incapable of completing assignments. Amber reports that in school she felt driven “to appease my parents”, a comment she has made more than once. She struggles to get organised and stay that way. When she does manage to complete an academic task, it is particularly well done. I have wondered whether she is too much of a perfectionist. Despite her somewhat ineffectual approach to study, Amber managed to pass two of her four units. Her average mark (43%) was dragged down by a particularly poor mark in Effective Tertiary Writing (9%), for which she did not submit work and did not sit the final
exam. Amber continues in the DGS, and we continue to look for ways to help her to become more productive.

Mandy (34.4) is the female with the lowest ATAR. I chose her because she seemed less likely to succeed than most of the others. One of the first things she told me about herself was “I’m a bit slow”. She reported that the other students at school would have seen her as the “ditzy” one. Mandy is a shy spectator. While she realises “it’s healthier to be more involved”, she enjoys sitting back and just observing those who are more involved. This was her approach to school, to social life and to family life. Having been at the one school for most of her life, she decided to switch schools in Year 11. Knowing no one at her new school, she made no attempt to break into any of the existing social groups and was happy to continue life as a spectator. The potential disruption to her schooling was met with equal unconcern as she had not been particularly engaged by school anyway. Now that she is at college she acknowledges that she is less of a spectator, at least in relation to study. “I have more interest now. I’m more keen [sic] to start assessments and study … I’m enjoying it.” Mandy exceeded my expectations by passing all four of her units (av. mark of 63%) and is now enrolled in a nursing degree at Avondale.

Jodi was the only one of my female participants without an ATAR. She left school after Year 10, believing that she would be able to join the police without completing Year 12. Jodi is restless, hates sitting around, and is impatient to get on with life. Her interest in sport and outdoor activities led to an involvement in coaching gymnastics and working with children in schools. She had almost lose sight of completing her education, but through interacting with teachers and school children in her coaching work, she began to realise she could become a teacher. When she saw her mother and her older sister use Avondale’s DGS as a pathway into teaching degrees, she decided she should try it too. Jodi passed all four of her units (av. mark of 71%), and is now enrolled in an education degree.

The best and the worst results were recorded by my six male participants. One male achieved an average college mark at distinction level (75%), and another was just one mark off (74%). Two others had average marks at credit level (65%, 68%), with another just short of a credit (63%). The poorest average mark (29%) was also achieved by a male. The average male result was 62.3 per cent, but deleting Joshua raises this to 69 per cent. The best result for the females was Jodi (71%), the only one without an ATAR. None did as poorly as Joshua, but two averaged below 50 per cent. The average for the females was 57.2 per cent, which rises to 60 per cent without Gina. In general females outperform males in the DGS. In this study the order is reversed. It remains to be seen how many of my participants will
complete degrees. Nine of them appear to have a good chance of completing, five males and 4 females. I am fairly confident that more than half of them will be successful.

Avondale’s DGS is helping non-traditional students to achieve success in higher education, thereby making a small contribution to the federal government’s objective of having 40 per cent of young Australians completing bachelor degrees by 2025. Every one of the 300 Avondale students to complete an Avondale degree after earning alternative entry via the DGS pathway has a story to tell. Two with great stories are Ruby and Val. After her pathway course, Ruby completed her BEd (Pr) degree in 2000 (av. mark, 70%). She travelled overseas and taught in the UK. An award-winning teacher, she is now head of primary in a private school here in Melbourne and is pursuing a master’s degree with a Melbourne university. Val’s story would take too long to tell. A mature-age Pacifica student with a colourful personal history, Val did not discover he had ADD until he enrolled in the DGS in the mid-1990s. Just this year, he completed his PhD at an overseas university. Those who question the value of courses provided under AQF 5 should consider the success stories of students who take pathway courses like Avondale College’s DGS.
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