SCHOOL ENROLMENT TRENDS

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[NOTE: Tables and figures follow text]

The release in February 2007 of the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 data[1] showed an increase in overall enrolments in the schools sector of 0.6 per cent over 2005. Growth in the independent schools sector was 2.8 per cent, 1.0 per cent in the Catholic sector and 0.1 per cent in the government sector. However, there were significant regional differences in enrolment trends in the independent sector according to variations in a number of factors, including population change, economic growth, government policy and the sector's capacity to meet demand.

Demographic change

While overall there was an increase in Australian school enrolments in 2006, the projected decline in Australia's school age population (see ISB, April 2005) is already apparent in Tasmania and the ACT where total school enrolments dropped by 0.1 per cent and 0.2 per cent respectively (see Table 1). Against this decline, enrolments in the independent sector in both jurisdictions continued to increase, boosted by strong senior secondary growth (see Table 2).

The most recent demographic data issued by the Australian Bureau of Statistics show that the ACT and Tasmania can expect further downward pressure on enrolments from population change, with a decline in both the number of 5 to 9 year olds and 10 to 14 year olds in the year ended June 2006 (see Table 3).

This decline is apparent in other states and the NT, with the notable exceptions of Queensland and WA. However, there is a compensating growth in the number of 0 to 5 year olds, reflecting the jump in Australia's total fertility rate in 2005 to 1.81 babies per woman, its highest level since 1995.[2] NSW was the only state to experience a decline in the number of 0 to 4 year olds in 2006.

NSW's population growth (see Figure 1) has been adversely affected by interstate migration, with most of those moving migrating to Queensland. WA's population has also been boosted by interstate migration.[3]

Economic growth

The latest ABS National Accounts data show both Queensland and WA are experiencing strong economic growth[4]. Queensland's economy grew by 6.7 per cent in 2006 and WA's by 7.8 per cent. In contrast, NSW's economy grew by only 1.8 per cent. (See Figure 2.)

As the accompanying graph (Figure 3) shows, there is a significant correlation between economic growth and independent sector enrolment growth.

Available data suggest that economic growth and increased household wealth and income are factors influencing the growth in primary enrolments in the sector. In 2006 both WA and Queensland had above average growth in primary enrolments.

While there is greater preparedness for families used to paying hefty childcare fees to pay school fees at the primary level, an economic downturn could see many families delaying enrolment of their children in independent schools to secondary level.

Government policy

Growth in the NSW independent sector has been affected by the NSW Government's introduction of strategies specifically aimed at boosting enrolments in NSW state schools.

Dr Geoff Newcombe, executive director of the Association of Independent Schools of NSW, says the NSW Government has made a concerted effort to meet the needs of students and the community by establishing senior colleges, increasing the number of high schools offering selective academic streams and reducing class sizes at lower primary level. In many instances, its effort has been directed at schools in inner ring suburbs where long-established independent schools no longer have the room to expand to meet demand. These strategies have been backed by a strong campaign by the NSW Teachers Federation and other public school lobby groups to promote government schools.

Government policy can also significantly affect the independent sector's capacity to meet demand. For example, in the ACT the ramifications of the new Education Act are such that while the school age population is in decline it is more difficult to establish new independent schools and existing schools will find it harder to extend their year levels. However, there is still capacity to meet demand in the sector with one school in the process of extending its year offerings as approved under the previous Act and another school's second campus due to open in 2008.

The high socio-economic status of the Canberra region, which means students at any new non-government schools would be eligible for relatively lower levels of federal funding, also inhibits the establishment of new schools in the ACT.

In South Australia, while new independent schools may still gain registration and schools expand their offerings, if the subsequent enrolments have a negative effect on another school's enrolments or do not meet minimum enrolment requirements, those students moving to independent schools may not be eligible for state government funding. Association of Independent Schools of SA executive director Garry Le Duff estimates up to 155 (2006 data) students in SA non-government schools and one entire school are disadvantaged by this policy. That communities are still willing to support schools in spite of this policy shows the high level of commitment that many families have to the rights of parents to influence the education of their children.

Capacity for growth

Executive director of the Association of Independent Schools of WA, Audrey Jackson, says that the strong demand for independent schooling in WA, driven by the state's economic boom and both interstate and overseas migration, has dovetailed with greater capacity in the sector.

Since the early 2000s, new schools and new campuses of existing schools have been established and long-established schools have expanded their offerings, for example by responding to the demand for primary places by growing down or double streaming as early as Year 4.

The growth in the number of independent schools has of itself also served to increase demand in WA. With more independent schools in outer suburbs, parents unwilling to have their children travel long distances are responding to the greater accessibility of an independent education closer to home.

There is also a demand in WA for low to mid-fee schools that replicate the structure of the high fee K-12 schools. Audrey Jackson says parents want schools large enough to be able to offer a good subject range at secondary level but which perhaps have only one or two language options, not four, or cricket and football but not rowing for example. They are also looking for schools with articulated values and will be attracted to a school with a religious affiliation for this reason. Parents want their children to be recognised as individuals and, as this can be associated with the size of a school, this factor and pastoral care become important criteria in their decision making.

In the NT, a new school and the expansion of a secondary program in an established school have increased the independent sector's capacity to meet demand. Association of Independent Schools of the NT executive director, Gail Barker also notes that the introduction of a middle school in an existing secondary school had also contributed to enrolment growth, with students enrolling in Year 7 instead of Year 8. Major changes in delivery of secondary education in the government sector have also fuelled demand in the territory.

Vic Gibbons, executive director of the Association of Independent Schools of the ACT said that in the national capital a surge in enrolment growth is expected in 2008 as one school opens a new campus and another extends its offerings from Year 5 to Year 1. However in the long term there is limited capacity for growth in the sector as most schools are at their peak enrolment and establishment of new schools and year levels is more difficult under the territory's new Education Act.

In Queensland, while there was overall enrolment growth in the independent sector in 2006, Dr John Roulston, executive director of Independent Schools Queensland, said south-east Queensland and regional coastal areas in particular are growing quickly.

The mining boom has seen significant population growth either directly as a result of the mining industry or its associated service industries in areas such as Mackay, Townsville, Rockhampton and Gladstone. In the south-east of the state, the Gold and Sunshine Coasts as well as the western corridor between Brisbane and Ipswich are experiencing exceptional population growth.

Capacity to meet the associated demand for independent schooling flowing from population change and economic growth has to a large extent been met by the establishment of an additional 28 independent school sites since 2000. Further new schools are to open in 2008.

The Catholic sector has also experienced strong growth in Queensland, as in Tasmania. Tony Crehan, executive director of the Association of Independent Schools of Tasmania, said there was still uniform growth across the independent sector in Tasmania.

Garry Le Duff said growth in the SA independent sector in 2006 was not uniform. AISSA holds regular demographic workshops for member schools with officers of Planning SA and Professor Graeme Hugo of the University of Adelaide and data presented at the most recent workshop indicated that in some suburbs of Adelaide an ageing demographic was affecting primary level enrolments in some schools. However there is new growth in outer suburban and regional areas where new schools are tapping previously unmet demand. That some schools are at peak enrolment is also affecting the pattern of growth in the sector.

Research on demographic trends in Victoria, undertaken by the Association of Independent Schools of Victoria, suggests similar effects in Melbourne as those in Adelaide. Michelle Green, chief executive of AISV, said the association's research indicates that while overall the Melbourne metropolitan area is expected to experience only a small total increase in the number of school-aged children between 2006 and 2031, the population spread across the city is predicted to change markedly. The creation of new, affordable housing developments on the edges of Melbourne is expected to continue to attract young low and middle-income families over the next 25 years, as the boundaries of urban Melbourne continue to expand. By contrast, many of the established middle and outer suburbs of Melbourne whose populations of school-aged children have exploded over the past 25 years are expected to witness a decrease in the numbers of children as their population ages.

Future outlook

Looking forward, the decline in Australia's school age population will exert a downward pressure on independent sector enrolment growth. This effect will be softened to some extent by the robust national economic outlook[5] which is expected to sustain family incomes and consumer confidence at least in the short term.

NOTES

[1] The ABS Schools Australia 2007 data covering 2006 enrolments did not include one campus of a Queensland independent school. The 619 students at this campus have been included in the enrolment data in this article so that primary and secondary trends are not misrepresented. However, readers should note there will be some variation in the data published here and the figures published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

[2] ABS Births, Australia, 2006.

[3] ABS Australian Demographic Statistics, September 2006.

[4] ABS National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and Product, December 2006; State Final Demand Chain Volume Measures, seasonally adjusted.

[5] Malcolm Edey, Assistant Governor, Reserve Bank of Australia, 'The Australian Economy in 2007'; address to the Australian Industry Group, Economy 2007, 7 March 2007.

Table 1. Enrolment share by sector and state 2001-06

	Enrolment Share - % in each State/Territory									Enrolment Growth - % increase over previous year								
	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	AUST	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	AUST
2001																		
Independent	10.1	12.0	12.1	13.7	12.0	9.7	9.3	9.5	11.4	5.2%	3.2%	2.9%	1.9%	6.0%	0.3%	1.5%	4.3%	3.8%
Catholic	21.2	22.2	16.6	17.0	17.7	15.5	13.5	27.8	19.9	1.7%	0.3%	1.1%	2.0%	0.8%	0.5%	-1.8%	2.3%	1.1%
All Non-gov't	31.3	34.2	28.8	30.7	29.7	25.1	22.8	37.4	31.2	2.8%	1.3%	1.9%	2.0%	2.8%	0.4%	-0.5%	2.8%	2.1%
Government	68.7	65.8	71.2	69.3	70.3	74.9	77.2	62.6	68.8	-0.6%	0.8%	1.1%	-0.8%	-0.7%	-1.3%	-1.3%	-1.1%	0.0%
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	0.4%	1.0%	1.3%	0.1%	0.4%	-0.9%	-1.1%	0.3%	0.6%
2002																		
Independent	10.5	12.3	12.4	14.2	12.5	9.7	10.0	10.1	11.7	4.4%	3.6%	3.6%	3.4%	9.5%	-0.1%	6.2%	5.5%	4.4%
Catholic	21.3	22.2	16.6	17.5	17.8	15.6	13.1	28.4	19.9	1.0%	0.3%	1.1%	2.3%	5.6%	0.2%	-3.4%	1.8%	1.3%
All Non-gov't	31.8	34.5	29.0	31.7	30.3	25.3	23.1	38.5	31.6	2.1%	1.4%	2.2%	2.8%	7.2%	0.1%	0.5%	2.7%	2.4%
Government	68.2	65.5	71.0	68.3	69.7	74.7	76.9	61.5	68.4	-0.2%	0.2%	1.1%	-1.7%	4.0%	-0.8%	-1.2%	-1.9%	0.4%
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	0.5%	0.6%	1.4%	-0.4%	5.0%	-0.5%	-0.8%	-0.1%	1.0%
2003																		
Independent	10.9	12.7	12.7	14.6	13.0	10.2	10.5	10.7	12.2	4.6%	3.3%	4.6%	2.9%	4.4%	5.0%	5.9%	5.5%	4.1%
Catholic	21.4	22.0	16.6	17.9	18.0	15.6	12.6	28.5	19.9	0.4%	-0.4%	1.7%	2.7%	0.9%	-0.2%	-3.1%	-0.3%	0.5%
All Non-gov't	32.3	34.6	29.3	32.5	31.1	25.8	23.1	39.2	32.1	1.8%	1.0%	2.9%	2.8%	2.3%	1.8%	0.8%	1.2%	1.9%
Government	67.7	65.4	70.7	67.5	68.9	74.2	76.9	60.8	67.9	-0.5%	0.4%	1.1%	-1.2%	-1.3%	-0.6%	0.9%	-1.8%	-0.1%
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	0.2%	0.6%	1.6%	0.1%	-0.2%	0.0%	0.9%	-0.6%	0.5%
2004																		
Independent	11.3	12.9	13.0	15.1	13.5	10.4	11.0	11.3	12.5	3.2%	2.2%	3.8%	3.2%	4.0%	1.7%	5.5%	5.2%	3.2%
Catholic	21.5	21.9	16.7	18.2	18.1	15.9	12.5	28.8	20.0	0.7%	0.0%	2.3%	1.2%	1.3%	1.7%	-1.2%	0.3%	0.8%
All Non-gov't	32.8	34.8	29.8	33.3	31.6	26.2	23.5	40.1	32.5	1.5%	0.8%	2.9%	2.1%	2.5%	1.7%	1.9%	1.6%	1.7%
Government	67.2	65.2	70.2	66.7	68.4	73.8	76.5	59.9	67.5	-0.8%	0.2%	0.8%	-1.2%	-0.2%	-0.8%	-0.5%	-2.1%	-0.2%
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	0.0%	0.4%	1.5%	-0.1%	0.6%	-0.1%	0.1%	-0.6%	0.4%
2005																		
Independent	11.6	13.1	13.4	15.6	14.0	10.5	11.6	11.9	12.8	2.7%	2.2%	3.9%	3.6%	4.3%	1.3%	6.3%	4.9%	3.1%
Catholic	21.6	21.9	17.0	18.4	18.4	16.1	12.0	28.8	20.1	0.5%	0.5%	2.7%	1.6%	2.1%	1.6%	-2.9%	0.0%	1.0%
All Non-gov't	33.2	35.0	30.3	34.0	32.4	26.5	23.6	40.7	32.9	1.2%	1.1%	3.2%	2.5%	3.0%	1.5%	1.4%	1.4%	1.8%
Government	66.8	65.0	69.7	66.0	67.6	73.5	76.4	59.3	67.1	-0.5%	0.1%	0.5%	-0.7%	-0.4%	-0.1%	0.8%	-1.3%	-0.2%
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	0.1%	0.4%	1.3%	0.4%	0.7%	0.3%	0.9%	-0.2%	0.5%
2006																		
Independent	11.7	13.4	13.6	16.0	14.5	10.6	12.2	12.2	13.1	1.8%	2.5%	3.6%	2.9%	4.8%	1.5%	5.7%	2.1%	2.8%
Catholic	21.6	22.0	17.2	18.5	18.3	16.6	11.9	28.9	20.2	0.0%	1.0%	3.0%	0.6%	0.9%	3.2%	0.1%	0.1%	1.0%
All Non-gov't	33.3	35.4	30.8	34.4	32.8	27.2	24.1	41.1	33.3	0.7%	1.5%	2.9%	1.6%	2.6%	2.5%	2.9%	0.7%	1.6%
Government	66.7	64.6	69.2	65.6	67.2	72.8	75.9	58.9	66.7	-0.2%	-0.1%	0.9%	-0.5%	0.6%	-1.0%	-0.2%	-0.8%	0.1%
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	0.1%	0.5%	1.5%	0.2%	1.3%	-0.1%	0.6%	-0.2%	0.6%

Source: ABS Schools Australia series; 2006 Qld data includes a school campus of 619 students not counted by ABS.

Table 2. Independent sector FT enrolments by state and level 2006

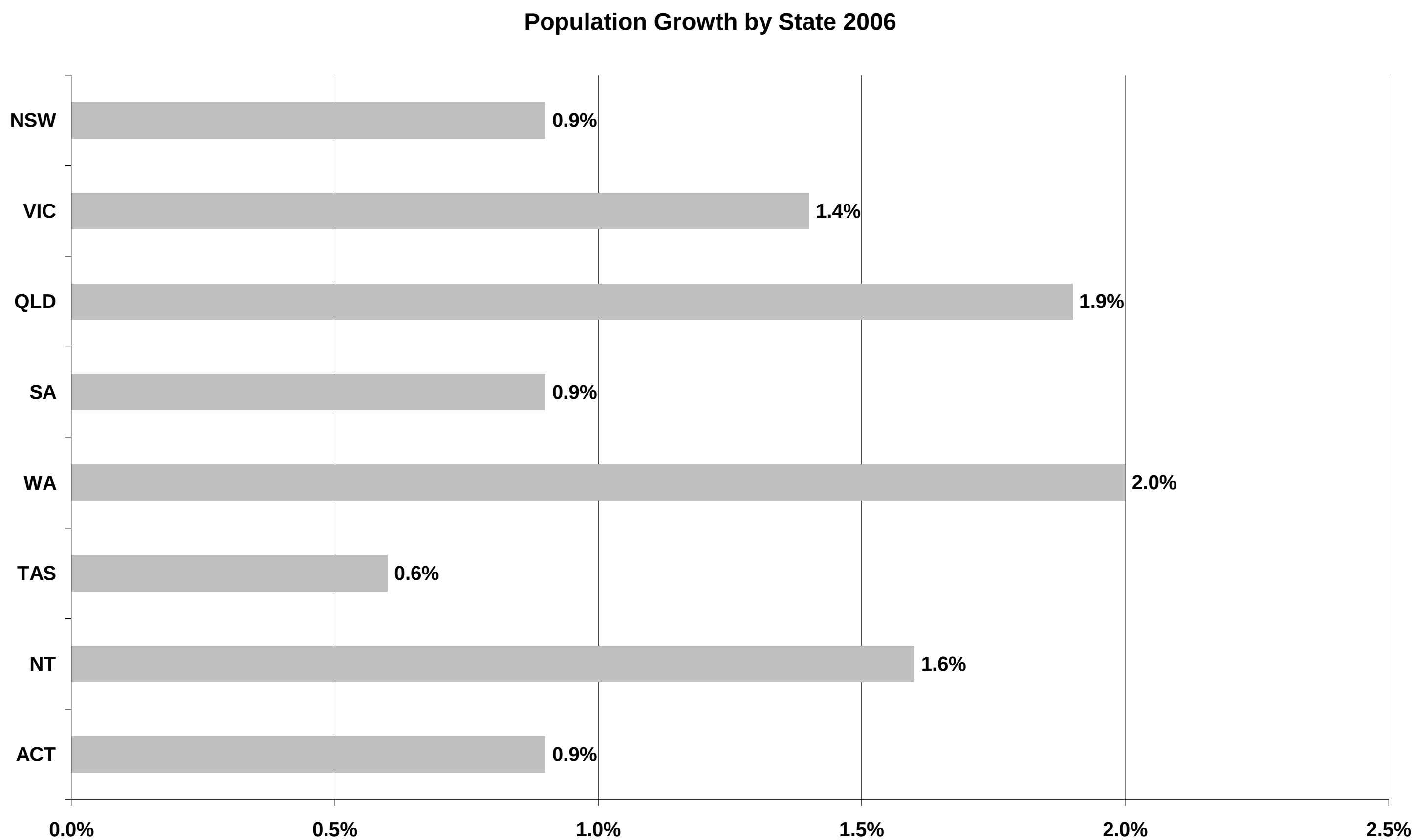
Independent Sector Full-time Enrolments by State and Level 2006									
	NSW	**VIC**	**QLD**	**SA**	**WA**	**TAS**	**NT**	**ACT**	**Australia**
2006									
Primary	60,885	42,275	41,540	22,274	22,979	3,690	2,340	3,050	199,033
Junior Secondary	48,662	46,511	30,000	10,844	17,031	3,682	1,846	3,120	161,696
Senior Secondary	20,693	22,368	17,989	6,822	9,534	1,396	403	1,084	80,289
Secondary	69,355	68,879	47,989	17,666	26,565	5,078	2,249	4,204	241,985
Total	130,240	111,154	89,529	39,940	49,544	8,768	4,589	7,254	441,018
Percentage change over 2005									
Primary	1.8	2.6	4.6	1.9	6.8	0.1	10.3	0.1	3.2
Junior Secondary	0.5	2.9	3.2	3.6	3.0	2.1	0.7	3.1	2.2
Senior Secondary	4.7	1.5	1.8	4.7	3.4	3.6	4.9	4.7	3.0
Secondary	1.8	2.4	2.7	4	3.2	2.5	1.4	3.5	2.5
Total	1.8	2.5	3.6	2.9	4.8	1.5	5.7	2.1	2.8
Source: ABS Schools Australia series; 2006 Qld data includes a school campus of 619 students not counted by ABS.									

Table 3. Estimated resident population by age group and state 2001-06

Estimated Resident Population by Age Group and State/Territory 2001-06*									
	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	AUST**
0 to 4 years									
2001	429,371	301,986	241,421	90,576	125,117	30,302	17,555	20,929	1,257,471
2002	431,333	306,526	247,496	90,639	125,291	30,671	17,647	20,611	1,270,421
2003	429,509	304,023	248,364	89,709	124,316	30,677	17,440	20,361	1,264,661
2004	425,944	306,301	250,159	88,793	124,789	30,187	17,608	20,238	1,264,281
2005	424,073	306,350	253,957	87,820	124,313	30,072	17,499	20,185	1,264,507
2006	419,143	311,755	258,643	88,725	128,008	30,341	17,746	20,583	1,275,165
5 to 9 years									
2001	443,504	322,324	259,211	98,110	132,796	33,182	17,485	21,374	1,328,290
2002	450,700	325,682	264,380	98,264	134,253	33,048	17,094	21,716	1,345,413
2003	445,635	323,272	266,215	97,049	133,352	32,394	16,900	21,233	1,336,305
2004	441,816	320,014	267,610	96,154	133,574	32,477	16,640	20,973	1,329,497
2005	438,016	317,482	268,698	94,737	133,407	31,905	16,527	20,453	1,321,465
2006	435,279	315,725	271,248	93,971	134,121	31,845	16,492	20,341	1,319,250
10 to 14 years									
2001	443,803	323,937	259,006	99,695	138,589	34,204	16,063	21,814	1,337,457
2002	455,835	328,883	267,738	100,719	139,884	34,079	16,182	22,570	1,366,161
2003	458,254	331,038	274,665	100,930	140,681	34,251	16,106	22,242	1,378,444
2004	458,629	333,257	280,137	100,885	141,273	34,438	16,312	21,976	1,387,173
2005	457,361	334,764	284,410	101,053	141,554	34,539	16,495	21,810	1,392,249
2006	454,682	333,930	286,675	101,067	142,220	34,132	16,436	21,506	1,390,910
15 to 19 years									
2001	448,117	330,373	265,639	103,119	140,871	34,476	14,945	24,257	1,362,106
2002	454,306	333,521	267,003	104,218	142,747	34,019	14,840	24,657	1,375,472
2003	452,486	333,999	269,467	104,012	143,466	34,200	14,615	24,370	1,376,787
2004	453,556	334,947	273,665	103,547	144,666	34,291	14,652	23,849	1,383,383
2005	454,452	335,465	277,675	103,078	145,108	34,076	14,771	23,604	1,388,471
2006	458,434	339,951	284,088	103,019	146,554	34,184	15,211	23,713	1,405,419

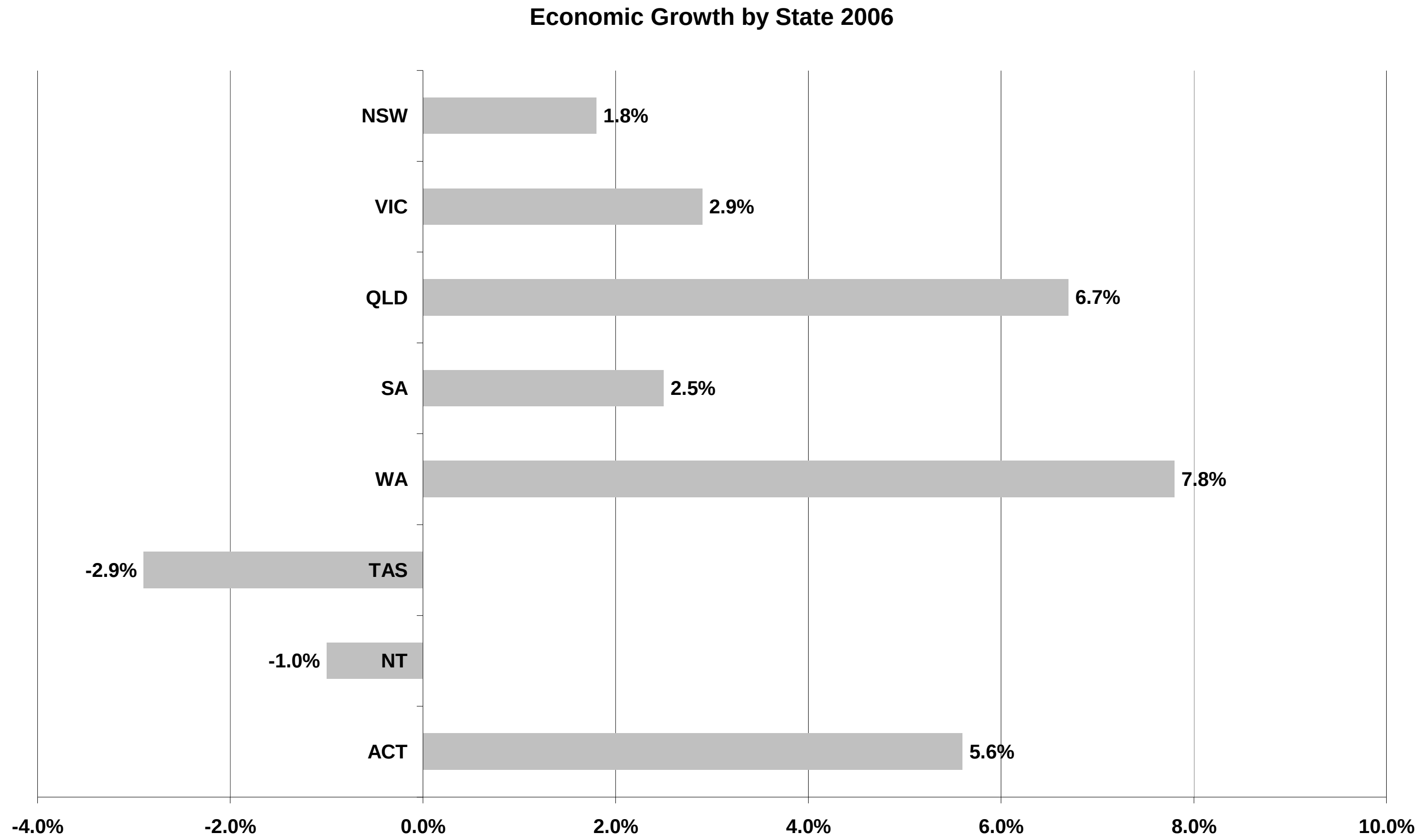
*Year is calculated July to June.
**Includes other territories
SOURCE: ABS Australian Demographic Statistics series

Figure 1. Population growth by state 2006



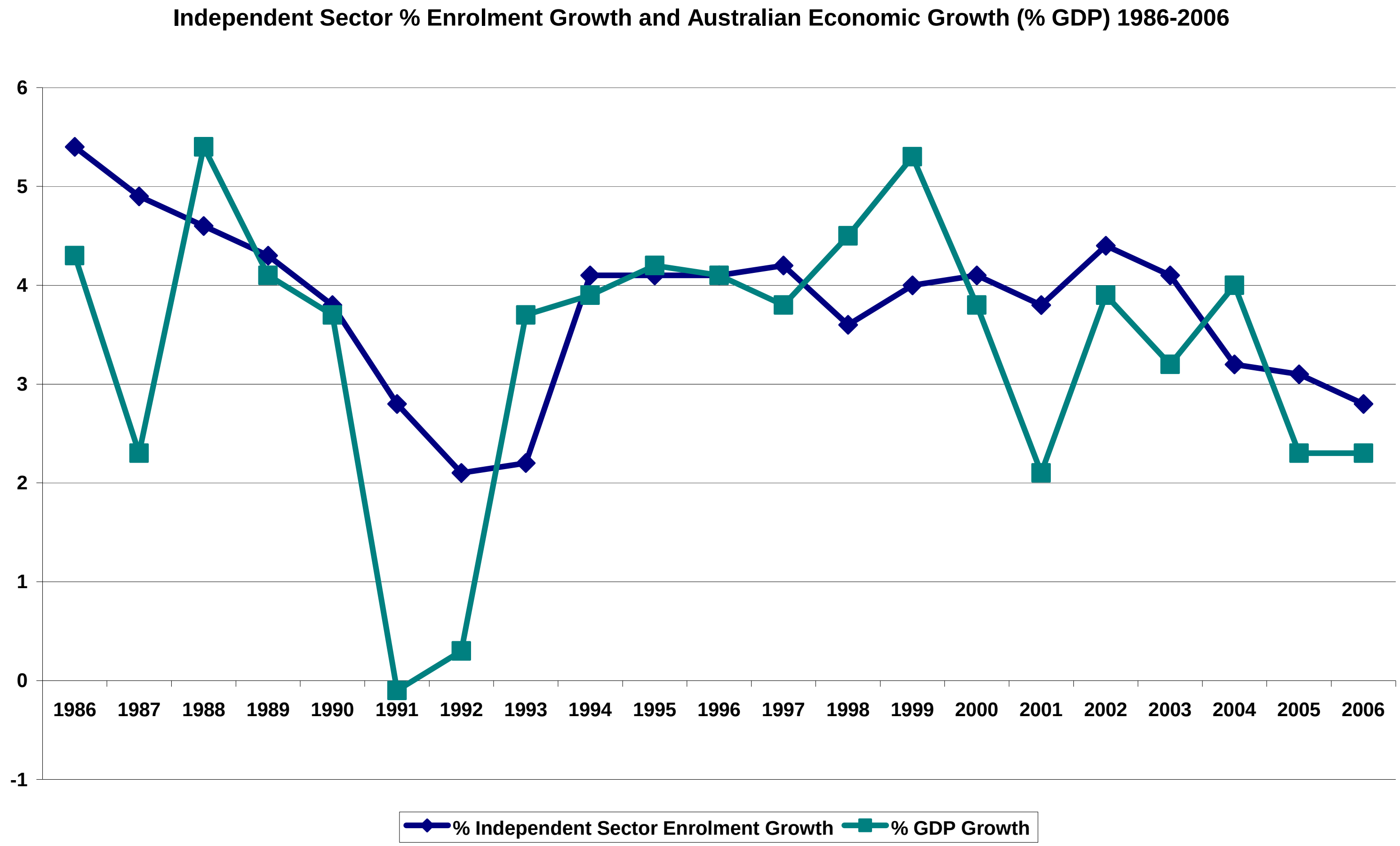
SOURCE: ABS Australian Demographic Statistics, September 2006.

Figure 2. Economic growth by state 2006



SOURCE: ABS National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and Product, December 2006; State Final Demand Chain Volume Measures, seasonally adjusted.

Figure 3: Independent sector enrolment growth (%) and Australian economic growth (%GDP) 1986-2006



SOURCES: ABS Schools Australia, FT enrolments; ABS National Accounts series, Key national aggregates, year 1 July to 30 June.

[1] The ABS Schools Australia 2007 data covering 2006 enrolments did not include one campus of a Queensland independent school. The 619 students at this campus have been included in the enrolment data in this article so that primary and secondary trends are not misrepresented. However, readers should note there will be some variation in the data published here and the figures published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

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[5] Malcolm Edey, Assistant Governor, Reserve Bank of Australia, ‘The Australian Economy in 2007’; address to the Australian Industry Group, Economy 2007, 7 March 2007.