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**Abstract**

Data from over 21,600 students who left Catalan higher education institutions during the academic years 2000?2001 and 2001?2002 have been analysed in order to describe the academic and personal profiles of university dropouts. Additionally, a telephone survey and face-to-face interviews with a pilot group of leavers were conducted to gather additional qualitative information about the reasons for their decision. The influences on non-completion can be reduced to three main factors, among which dissatisfaction with the quality of the students? experience, family and work responsibilities as well as economic difficulties, are prominent. Analysis conducted showed no significant differences between Catalan higher education institutions, with dropout percentages ranging from 28% to 33%. These rates should be understood within a context of broad access to higher education. Within the European Higher Education Area scenario, the findings have triggered institutional endeavours to improve the quality of the students? and teachers? experience. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)