

Chapter 7: Participation and attainment in education, training, and work

This chapter reports on the participation of young people aged 15 to 24 in education and/or work, as measured by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Survey of Education and Work (SEW).

Key Facts:

In Australia in 2022:

- The proportion of 15–19-year-olds who were fully engaged in education, training or work decreased to 88.3% – down from 90.3% in 2021.
- The proportion of 20–24-year-olds who were fully engaged in education, training or work increased to 76.4% – up from 73.0% in 2021. This represents a full recovery to pre-COVID levels.
- The proportion of 17–24-year-olds who had left school and were fully engaged in education, training or work increased to 75.0% – up from 73.9% in 2021. Fluctuations in this measure between 2019 and 2023 were closely related to the effect of COVID 19 on the employment of young people.

7.1 Participation in education, training, and employment

KPMs 1(g), 1(h) and 1(i) measure the full-time participation in education, training, and employment of 3 groups of young people:

- 15–19-year-olds, including school students and those who have left school and have moved into tertiary study and/or the workforce
- 20–24-year-olds, who may be undertaking VET or university study, working, or a combination of these activities
- 17–24-year-olds who have left school and who may also be undertaking further study and/or work.

Full-time participation is defined as participation in full-time education or training, or full-time work, or a combination of both part-time education or training and part-time work. The annual measures of these KPMs are based on the ABS Survey of Education and Work (SEW), which is conducted in May each year. Five-yearly measures of the KPMs, based on data drawn from the Census of Population and Housing, are reported for census years.

Key performance measure 1(g)

Proportion of 15–19-year-olds in full-time education or training, in full-time work, or both in part-time work and part-time education or training

Key performance measure 1(h)

Proportion of 20–24-year-olds in full-time education or training, in full-time work, or both in part-time work and part-time education or training

Key performance measure 1(i)

Proportion of 17–24-year-olds who have left school that are in full-time education or training, in full-time work, or both in part-time work and part-time education or training

KPMs 1(g) and 1(h) for the period 2012–2022 and for census years 2016 and 2021 are shown in Table 7.1. Figure 7.1 illustrates KPMs 1(g) and 1(h), as measured by the SEW, over the period 2012–2022.

Table 7.1

Proportions of 15–19-year-olds and 20–24-year-olds in full-time education, in full-time work, or both in part-time work and part-time education, Australia, 2012–2022 (%)

Calendar year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Full-time participation rates for 15–19-year-olds	86.5	86.3	87.2	87.4	88.4	89.0	88.6	87.0	85.4	90.3	88.3
CI±	1.0	1.2	1.1	0.3	1.3	1.0	1.2	0.9	1.2	0.9	1.4
Full-time participation rates for 15–19-year-olds (Census measure)	-	-	-	-	86.4	-	-	-	-	86.9	-
Full-time participation rates for 20-24-year-olds	76.6	73.8	74.1	73.6	76.1	75.0	74.6	75.5	71.0	73.0	76.4
CI±	1.7	1.1	1.6	1.7	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.8	2.2	1.9	2.2
Full-time participation rates for 20-24-year-olds (Census Measure)	-	-	-	-	72.2	-	-	-	-	72.3	-

Notes:

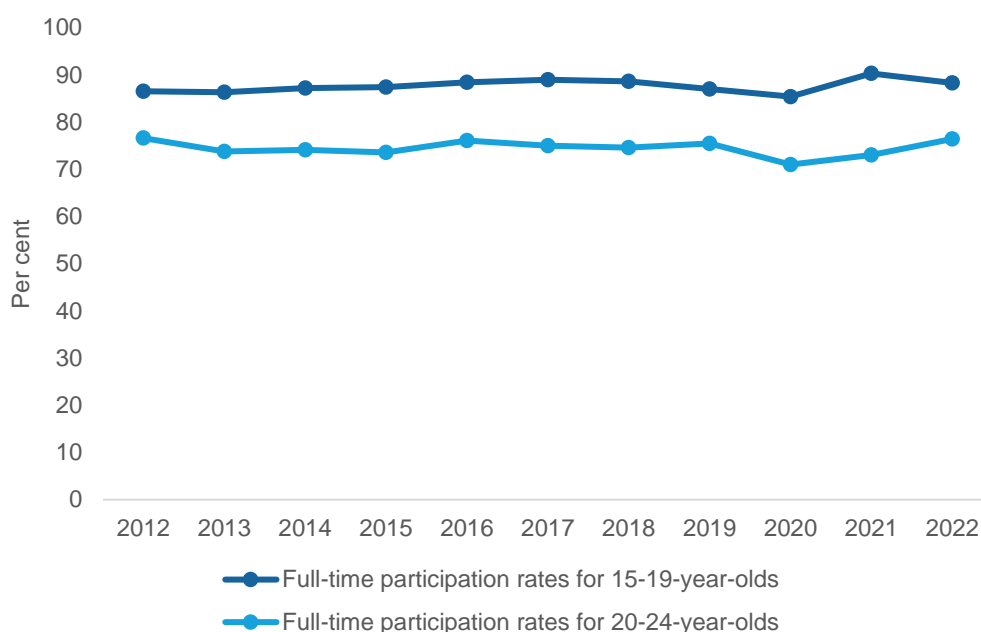
CI = confidence interval. The percentages reported for SEW data in this table include 95% confidence intervals. Confidence intervals are a way of expressing the degree of sampling and measurement error associated with survey estimates. For example, an estimate of 80 with a 95% confidence interval of ± 2 means that if the total population was surveyed rather than a sample, there is a 95% chance that the result would lie between 78 and 82.

SEW includes people in very remote areas but excludes people in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in very remote areas. This exclusion has only a minor impact on national estimates.

Sources: ABS, Education and Work, Australia, May 2022; ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2016, 2021.

Figure 7.1

Proportions of 15–19-year-olds and 20–24-year-olds in full-time education, in full-time work, or both in part-time work and part-time education, Australia, 2012–2022 (%)



Source: ABS, *Education and Work, Australia*, May 2022.

As shown in Table 7.1 and Figure 7.1, full-time participation rates for young people in their mid-to-late teens are consistently higher than for those in their early to mid-20s. This is to be expected, as the 15–19-year age group includes a high proportion of secondary school students for whom full-time participation in education, training or work is compulsory, at least until age 17.

From 2012 to 2019 there was a net increase in full-time participation for 15–19-year-olds from 86.5% to 87.0%, but a net fall in the participation rate for 20–24-year-olds from 76.6% to 75.5. This fall was partly due to the expansion of the sample population of the SEW from 2013 to include people who were permanently unable to work.

In 2020 both measures fell significantly — by 1.6 percentage points for 15–19-year-olds and by 4.5 percentage points for 20–24-year-olds — due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ While some restrictions due to COVID remained in place in May 2021, both SEW measures increased from their 2020 levels.

For 15-19-year-olds, there was a significant increase in full-time participation rates between 2020 and 2021, from 85.4% to 90.3%. This more than reversed the fall in 2020, recording the highest participation level for this age group to date and above the long-term trend for this measure.² While there was a significant decrease in full-time participation rates for 15-19-year-olds to 88.3% in 2022, this is still higher than pre-pandemic levels.

¹ The SEW is run during the first 2 weeks of May. During, and leading up to, this period in 2020, travel bans, community lockdowns and various other restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic were in place, and these are likely to have impacted the survey results.

² Reasons for this increase may include provision of free courses through TAFE as a COVID measure, upskilling following pandemic changes, domestic and international travel restrictions, fewer school leavers taking a gap year, a significantly lower unemployment rate and increased job opportunities.

Full-time participation for 20-24-year-olds increased by 2 percentage points between 2020 and 2021, and by 3.4 percentage points in 2022. The significant increase between 2021 and 2022 represents a full recovery to pre-COVID levels.

Trend data for the annual SEW measures of these KPMs for the period 2008–2022 is included in the Key Performance Measures data set in the National Report on Schooling data portal. This shows a long-term upward trend in KPM 1(g) of 0.2 percentage points per annum, and a long-term downward trend in KPM 1(h) of 0.3 percentage points per annum over this period.

As a participation measure of 17–24-year-olds, KPM 1(i) includes people from the 15–19-year-old and 20–24-year-old age groups but excludes school students from both the numerator and the denominator. This measure is informative as an indicator of the transition of young people from school to post-school education and/or work, and the performance of schooling in facilitating this.

SEW data for this KPM is reported for the period 2012–2022 in Table 7.2 and Figure 7.2. Census data for the years 2016 and 2021 is also reported in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2

Proportion of 17–24-year-olds who have left school that are in full-time education, in full-time work, or both in part-time work and part-time education, Australia, 2012–2022 (%)

Calendar year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Full-time participation rates for 17–24-year-olds who have left school	75.5	72.7	73.2	72.9	75.5	74.7	74.3	74	69.3	73.9	75.0
CI±	1.3	1.1	1.4	1.4	1.2	1.3	1.6	1.6	1.8	1.6	1.8
Full-time participation rates for 17–24-year-olds who have left school (Census measure)	-	-	-	-	71.0	-	-	-	-	73.4	-

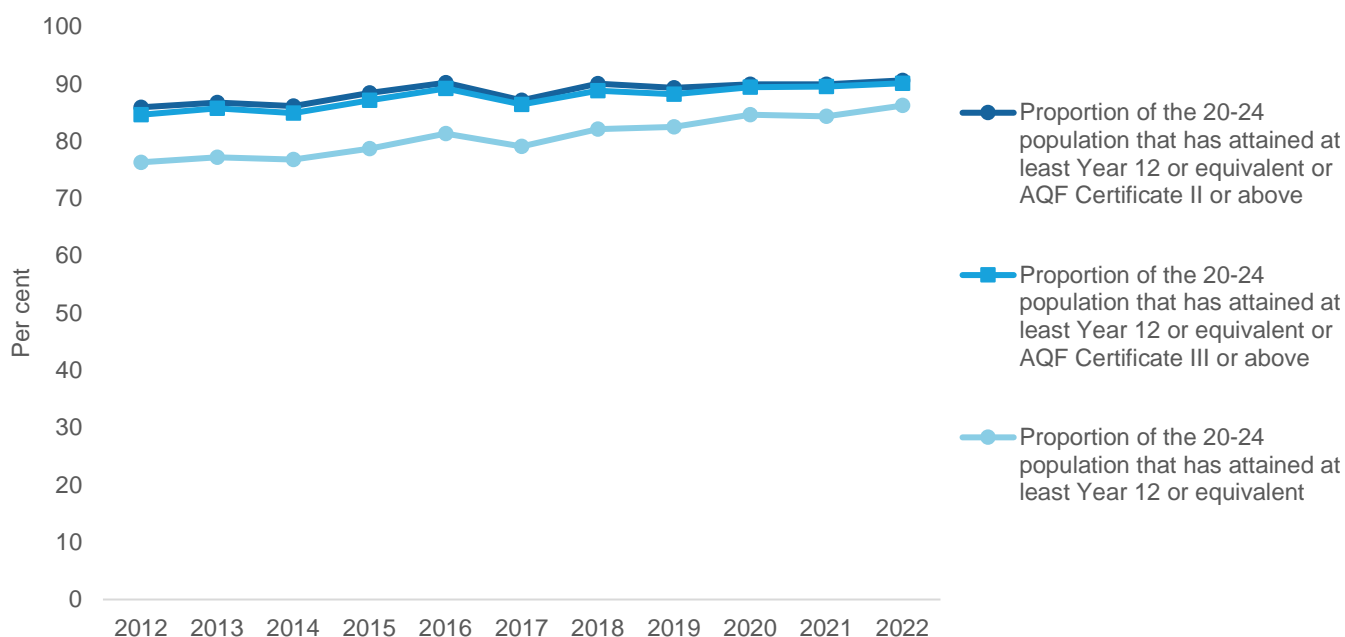
See notes for Table 7.1.

Sources: ABS, *Education and Work*, May 2022; ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2016, 2021.

See also National Report on Schooling data portal.

Figure 7.2

Proportions of 20–24-year-olds who having attained at least Year 12 or equivalent, or AGF Certificate II or above; 20–24-year-olds having attained at least Year 12 or equivalent, or AGF Certificate III or above; and 20–24-year-olds having attained at least Year 12 or equivalent Australia, 2012–2022 (%)



Source: ABS, *Education and Work, Australia*, May 2022.

There was little change in KPM 1(i) between 2012 and 2019. However, like other groups of young people, 17–24-year-olds who had left school were affected by the impact of COVID-19. The fall in this measure of 4.7 percentage points between 2019 and 2020 and the subsequent increase of 4.6 percentage points between 2020 and 2021 were both statistically significant. The increase in 2021 is likely to reflect the policy initiative to provide free and subsidised training courses to school leavers and other young adults as a response to falls in employment due to the COVID pandemic.

The 1.1 percentage point increase from 73.9% in 2021 to 75.0% in 2022 was not statistically significant, and there was no evident long-term trend in this measure between 2008 and 2022.

The Census reports KPM 1(i) as 73.4% in 2021. This is substantially up on the result of 71.0% from the 2016 Census. The KPM data set in the National Report on Schooling data portal reports no evident trend in the census measure for this KPM over the period 2011–2021.

Census data provides more robust measures by state and territory and can be disaggregated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status but is only available every 5 years. Census data for these KPMs by state and territory and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status is also reported in the National Report on Schooling data portal. However, because of sample size and other factors, SEW data for particular age groups is less reliable when disaggregated by state and territory, especially for smaller jurisdictions.³ Because the survey is not conducted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in very remote areas, and because of sample size, SEW data cannot be disaggregated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status.

³ The survey sample covers the full working-age population, so numbers of 15–19-year-olds and 20–24-year-olds surveyed are relatively small in some states and territories.