

Chapter 8: Student Attainment

This chapter reports on Year 12 certification levels, and levels of educational attainment of young people aged 20 to 24.



Completion of Year 12 or an equivalent vocational qualification is a key milestone in the formal development of young people's skills and knowledge and for improved social and economic opportunities. Young people with Year 12 qualifications are more likely to continue further study and to enter the workforce.¹

There is a commitment from Australian governments to raise the minimum level of education of young people. The current NSRA has a target to lift the Year 12 (or equivalent) or Certificate III attainment rate to 90 per cent.²

Data is collected and reported on Year 12 certification rates and Year 12 attainment. This information is used to measure the educational progress of students, schools and the nation, monitor gaps and inequalities in educational outcome, inform education policy and decision making, and allocate resources to support student needs.

¹ Australian Government *Australia's Welfare School Retention and Completion*, 2017.

² Certificate III is recognised as the international standard of equivalence of upper secondary education.

8.1 Year 12 Certification Rates

Key Facts:

In Australia in 2022:

- The proportion of the Year 12 population that met the requirements of a Senior Secondary Certificate or equivalent was 76.3% – a return to 2020 levels after increasing to 78.7% in 2021.
- Year 12 certification rates still show gaps by location. They were higher in major cities (79.4%) than in inner regional areas (67.6%), outer regional areas (69.2%) and remote/very remote areas (55.5%).
- Year 12 certification was higher for the population living in high socio-economic status areas (82.9%) than those in medium and low socio-economic status areas (75.2% and 69.7% respectively).

Over the period from 2012 to 2022:

- Year 12 certification rates increased by 3.3 percentage points.
- There was a reduction in the gender gap and remote area gap for Year 12 certifications, but the gap between Year 12 certification rates in high socio-economic status areas compared to low socio-economic status areas has widened.

Certification rates are estimated by calculating the number of students who meet the requirements of a SSCE or equivalent expressed as a percentage of the potential Year 12 population. These rates are derived from data supplied to the Australian Government Department of Education by state and territory curriculum, assessment, and certification authorities.³ The potential Year 12 population is an estimate of a single year age group which could have attended Year 12 that year, calculated as the estimated resident population (ERP) aged 15 to 19 divided by five.⁴

Figure 8.1 shows Year 12 certification rates for 2022, by gender and geolocation. Nationally, 76.3% of the Year 12 population met the requirements of a Senior Secondary Certificate or equivalent in 2022, down from 78.7% in 2021. Year 12 certification rates were higher for females (80.6%) than for males (72.2%); and higher in major cities (79.4%) than in inner regional areas (67.6%), outer regional areas (69.2%) and remote/very remote areas (55.5%).

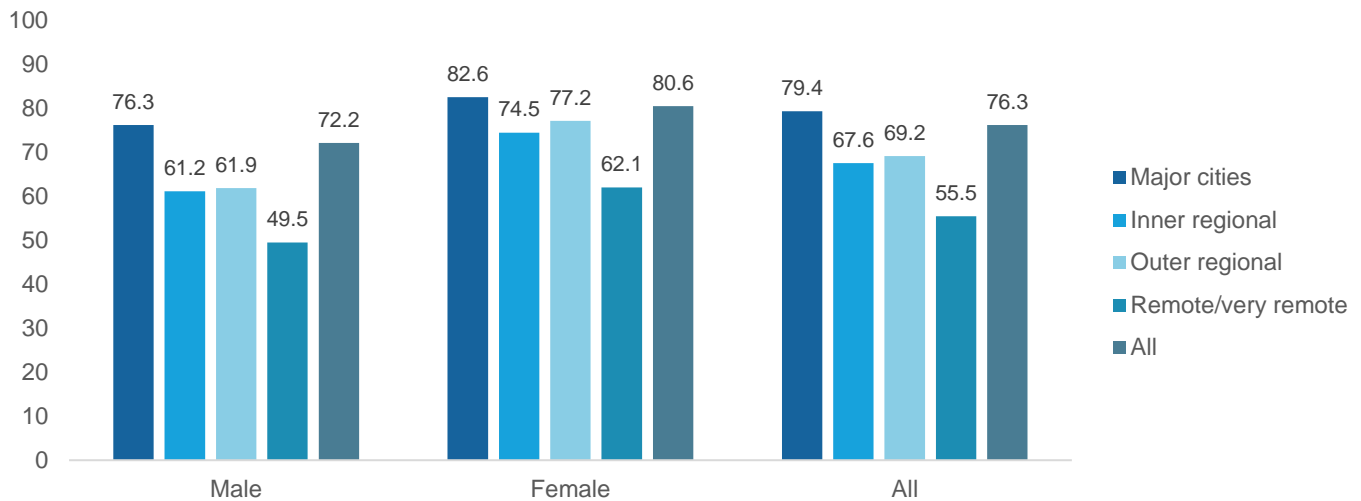
The gender difference in Year 12 certification rates was largest among the Year 12 population living in outer regional areas (15.3 percentage points higher for females than for males), and smallest among those living in major cities (6.3 percentage points higher for females). Differences in Year 12 certification rates according to geolocation were larger for males (26.8 percentage points higher in major cities than in remote or very remote areas) than for females (20.5 percentage points higher in major cities than in remote or very remote areas).

³ This indicator should be interpreted with caution as assessment, reporting and criteria for obtaining a year 12 or equivalent certificate varies across jurisdictions; and students completing their secondary education in Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes are included in reporting for some jurisdictions and not others.

⁴ Certification rates from 2017 have been calculated using ERP based on the 2016 Census. Rates for 2016 and prior are calculated using ERP based on the 2011 Census.

Figure 8.1

Year 12 certification rates, by gender and geolocation, 2022 (%)

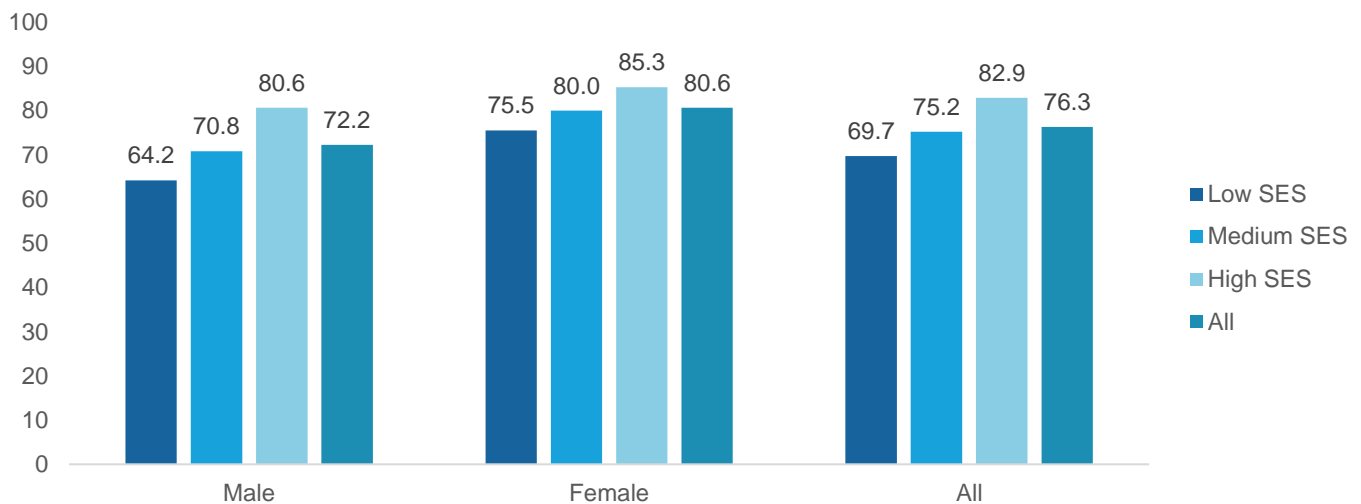


Sources: Australian Government Department of Education, derived from data supplied by state and territory curriculum, assessment and certification authorities; ABS, *National, state and territory population*.

Year 12 certification rates in 2022, by socio-economic status (SES) and gender, are presented in Figure 8.2. Among the Year 12 population living in low SES areas, Year 12 certification rates were 69.7%, compared to 75.2% in medium SES areas and 82.9% in high SES areas. Differences in Year 12 certification rates by SES were larger for males (16.4 percentage points higher in high SES areas compared to low SES areas) than for females (9.8 percentage points higher in high SES areas compared to low SES areas).

Figure 8.2

Year 12 certification rates, by gender and socio-economic status, 2022 (%)



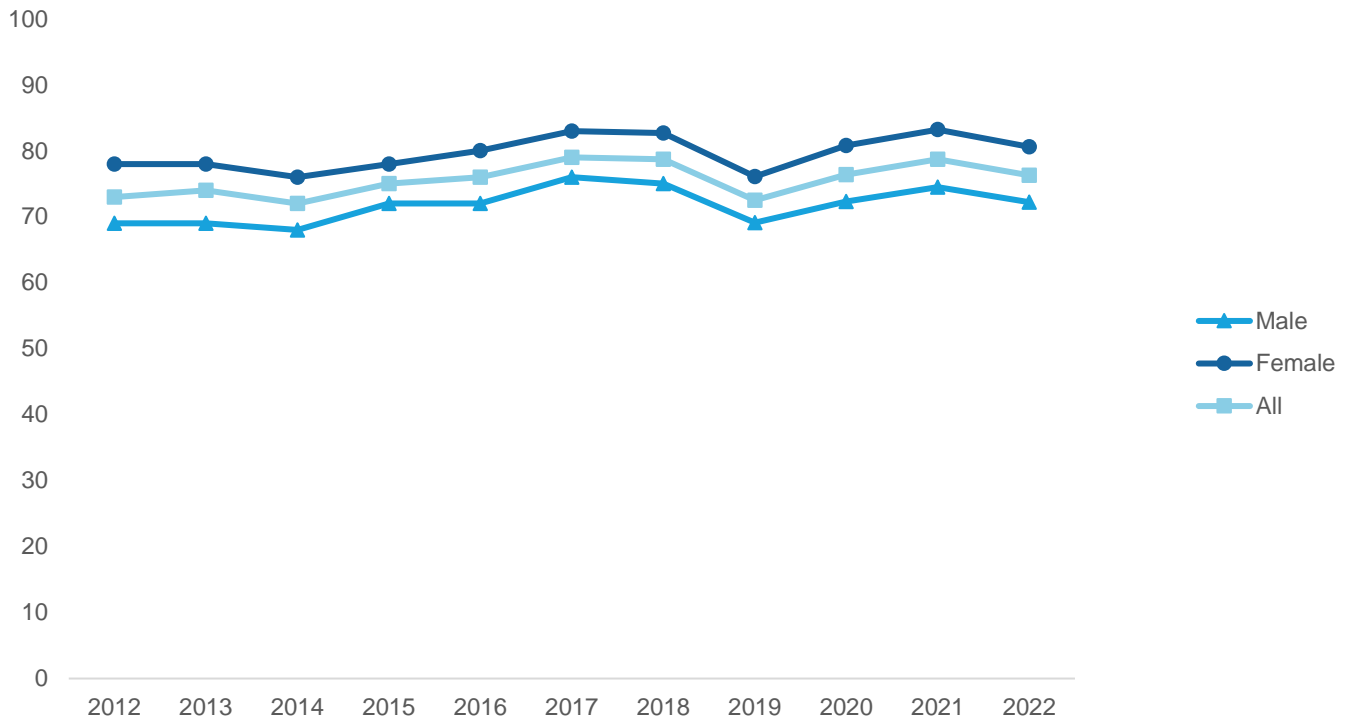
Notes: The ABS Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage has been used to calculate socio-economic status on the basis of postcode of students' home addresses. Low SES is the average of the lowest three deciles, medium SES is the average of the middle four deciles and high SES is the average of the top three deciles. The aggregation of all postcode locations into three SES categories – high, medium and low – means that there may be significant variation within the categories – the low category, for example, will include locations ranging from those of extreme disadvantage to those of moderate disadvantage.

Sources: Australian Government Department of Education, derived from data supplied by state and territory curriculum, assessment and certification authorities; ABS, *National, state and territory population*.

Figure 8.3 shows the change in Year 12 certification rates over the period from 2012 to 2022. Overall, Year 12 certification rates increased by 3.3 percentage points, from 73.0% in 2012 to 76.3% in 2022. The gender difference in Year 12 certification rates decreased slightly during this time, from 9.0 percentage points in 2012 to 8.4 percentage points in 2022.

Figure 8.3

Year 12 certification rates, by gender 2012–2022 (%)



Note: In 2014, WA had a “half cohort” complete year 12 making the Year 12 certifications for WA in 2014 significantly lower than for other years. This was also the case for Qld in 2019. These half cohorts resulted from a change to the pre-year one entry age (in 2002 and 2007 respectively) leading to approximately half the normal intake of students for that year level. This also affects Year 12 certification rates for Australia in 2014 and 2019.

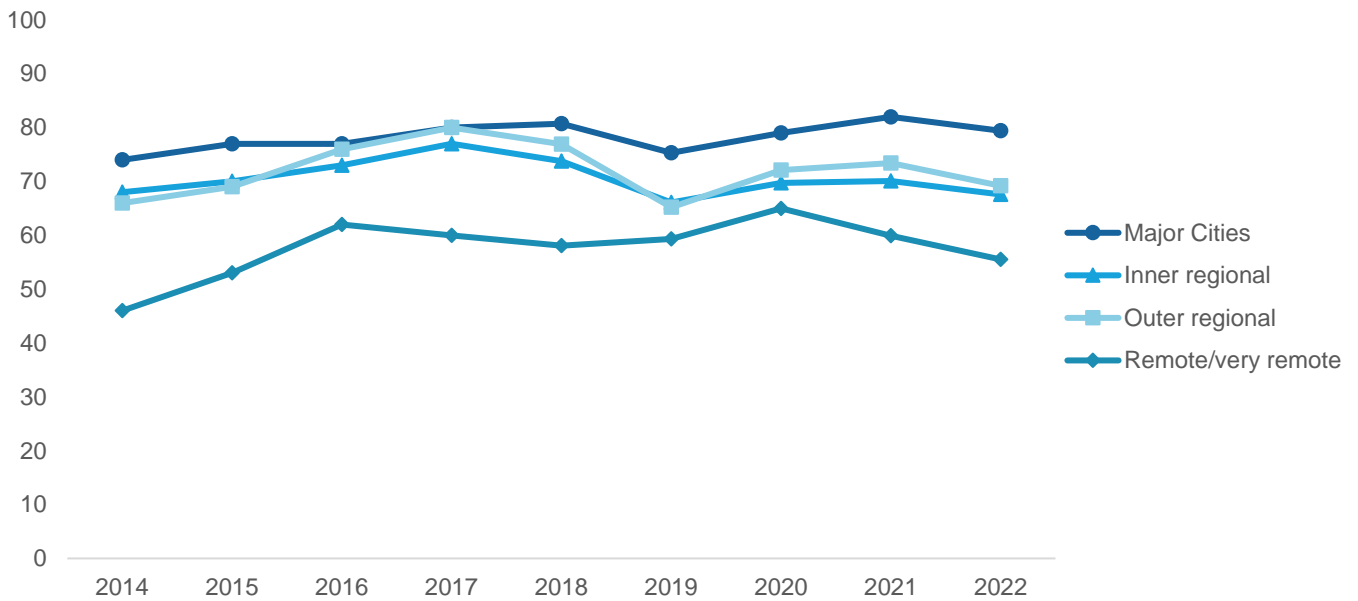
In 2023, the Australian Government Department of Education conducted a detailed review of the Year 12 certifications data for 2021 and determined that for states that shared postcodes, the data had not been allocated correctly to the state. The updated 2021 data has been published here and on the ANR data portal.

Sources: Australian Government Department of Education, derived from data supplied by state and territory curriculum, assessment and certification authorities; ABS, *National, state and territory population*.

Year 12 certification rates by geolocation for 2014 to 2022 are presented in Figure 8.4. While the difference in Year 12 Certification rates in major cities compared to remote and very remote areas is still substantial (23.9 percentage points higher in major cities in 2022), increases in certification rates among the Year 12 population in regional and remote areas (from 46.0% in 2014 to 55.5% in 2022) has resulted in a 4.1 percentage point reduction in this difference since 2014.

Figure 8.4

Year 12 certification rates, by geolocation, 2014–2022 (%)



Notes: See note for Figure 8.3.

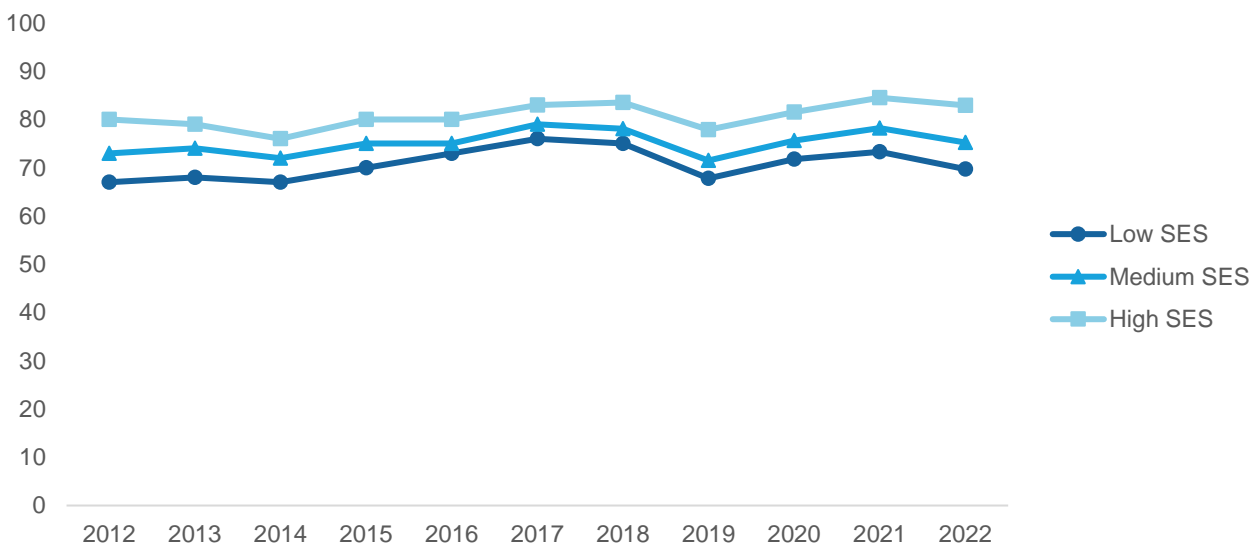
Data for 2009–2013 is available on the [ACARA website](#). From 2009 to 2013, geolocation is reported as the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) remoteness classification.

Sources: Australian Government Department of Education, derived from data supplied by state and territory curriculum, assessment and certification authorities; ABS, *National, state and territory population*.

Differences between Year 12 certification rates in high and low SES areas have remained stable since 2012. Figure 8.5 shows that in 2012 Year 12 certification rates were 13.0 percentage points higher in high SES areas compared to low SES areas. With Year 12 certification rates in high SES areas increasing from 79.0% to 82.9% during this period, the difference in Year 12 certification rates between low and high-SES areas increased to 13.2 percentage points in 2022.

Figure 8.5

Year 12 certification rates, by socio-economic status, 2012–2022 (%)



Note: See note for Figure 8.3.

Sources: Australian Government Department of Education, derived from data supplied by state and territory curriculum, assessment and certification authorities; ABS, *National, state and territory population*.

8.2 Student Attainment

Key Facts:

Among 20–24-year-olds in 2022:

- the proportion who had attained at least Year 12 or equivalent, or AQF Certificate II or above was 90.6%. This was an increase of 0.7 percentage points from 2021, and a rise of 4.7 percentage points from 2012.
- the proportion who had attained at least Year 12 or equivalent, or AQF Certificate III or above was 90.1%. This was an increase of 0.6 percentage points from 2021, and a rise of 5.5 percentage points from 2012.

The long-term upward trend in these measures is in line with long-standing government policy to increase levels of attainment for young people in Australia.

Data from the Census confirms this upward trend, with a 2.0 percentage point increase in the proportion of 20–24-year-olds who had attained at least Year 12 or AQF Certificate III or above between 2016 and 2021.

The attainment KPMs specified in the *Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia 2020* measure the level of educational attainment achieved by young Australians by the time they have reached their early to mid-20s. These measures also reflect targets set by the former COAG for youth attainment in education and training, in recognition that year 12 attainment contributes to a skilled workforce and improved living conditions for Australians.

Key performance measure 7(a)

Proportion of the 20–24-year-old population having attained at least Year 12 or equivalent or AQF Certificate II or above

Key performance measure 7(b)

Proportion of the 20–24-year-old population having attained at least Year 12 or equivalent or AQF Certificate III or above

The measures are based on the ABS SEW, which is conducted in May each year, and on the 5-yearly Census. Table 8.1 reports KPMs 7(a) and 7(b) at the national level for the period 2012–2022. It also includes these proportions as measured by the 2016 and 2021 Censuses.

While the attainment KPMs 7(a) and 7(b) refer to the completion of Year 12 or equivalent or an AQF VET Certificate, this does not imply equivalence between the award of a SSCE on the completion of Year 12 and either AQF Certificate II or AQF Certificate III.⁵

⁵ SSCE qualifications are not located at a particular level in the AQF. The volume of learning required to attain an AQF Certificate II is typically 0.5–1 year; for Certificate III it is typically 1–2 years, and for a Senior Secondary Certificate of Education it is typically 2 years (The Australian Qualifications Framework, second edition, p 14). In some instances, senior secondary students undertaking VET can complete several Certificate II qualifications as a part of an SSCE.

For comparison purposes, Table 8.1 also reports the proportion of the 20–24-year-old population in each of these years that had completed Year 12 or equivalent. This is not, by itself, a KPM for schooling, but is the main component of both KPMs 7(a) and 7(b).

Table 8.1

Proportion of the 20–24-year-old population that has attained at least Year 12 or equivalent, or AQF Certificate II or above; or AQF Certificate III or above; Australia, 2012–2022 (%)

Calendar year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Proportion of the 20–24-year-old population that has attained at least Year 12 or equivalent, or AQF Certificate II or above	85.9	86.7	86.1	88.4	90.2	87.1	90.0	89.3	89.9	89.9	90.6
CI±	1.3	1.5	1.5	1.1	1.6	1.2	1.2	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.1
Proportion of the 20–24-year-old population that has attained at least Year 12 or equivalent, or AQF Certificate II or above (Census measure)	-	-	-	-	88.6	-	-	-	-	90.3	-
Proportion of the 20–24-year-old population that has attained at least Year 12 or equivalent, or AQF Certificate III or above	84.6	85.7	84.9	87.1	89.2	86.4	88.8	88.2	89.4	89.5	90.1
CI±	1.3	1.5	1.5	1.1	1.6	1.2	1.2	1.6	1.2	1.4	1.1
Proportion of the 20–24-year-old population that has attained at least Year 12 or equivalent, or AQF Certificate III or above (Census measure)	-	-	-	-	87.9	-	-	-	-	89.9	-
Proportion of the 20–24-year-old population that has attained at least Year 12 or equivalent	76.3	77.2	76.8	78.7	81.3	79.1	82.1	82.5	84.6	84.3	86.2
CI±	1.6	1.6	1.8	1.6	1.9	1.4	1.4	1.6	1.8	1.7	1.4
Proportion of the 20–24-year-old population that has attained at least Year 12 or equivalent (Census measure)	-	-	-	-	79.5	-	-	-	-	83.7	-

Notes: Year 12 or equivalent includes AQF SSCEs issued by Australian state and territory curriculum assessment and certification authorities and equivalent qualifications such as matriculation certificates and school leaving qualifications obtained outside Australia and the International Baccalaureate. It also includes survey and Census respondents who indicated that their highest level of education is Year 12.

AQF Certificate II is a VET qualification regarded as entry-level training for employment (or a similar qualification gained outside Australia). AQF Certificate III is a VET qualification regarded as intermediate-level training for employment (or a similar qualification gained outside Australia).

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

As measured by SEW, the proportion of 20–24-year-olds who had attained at least Year 12 or equivalent, or AQF Certificate II or above – KPM 7(a) – rose from 85.9% in 2012 to 89.9% in 2020, with no change in 2021 and an increase of 0.7 percentage points to 90.6% in 2022. While the increase in this measure between 2021 and 2022 was not statistically significant, the proportion of 20–24-year-olds who had attained at least Year 12 or equivalent, or AQF Certificate II or above was above 90%. This was the former COAG target for this measure, originally to be met in 2015.

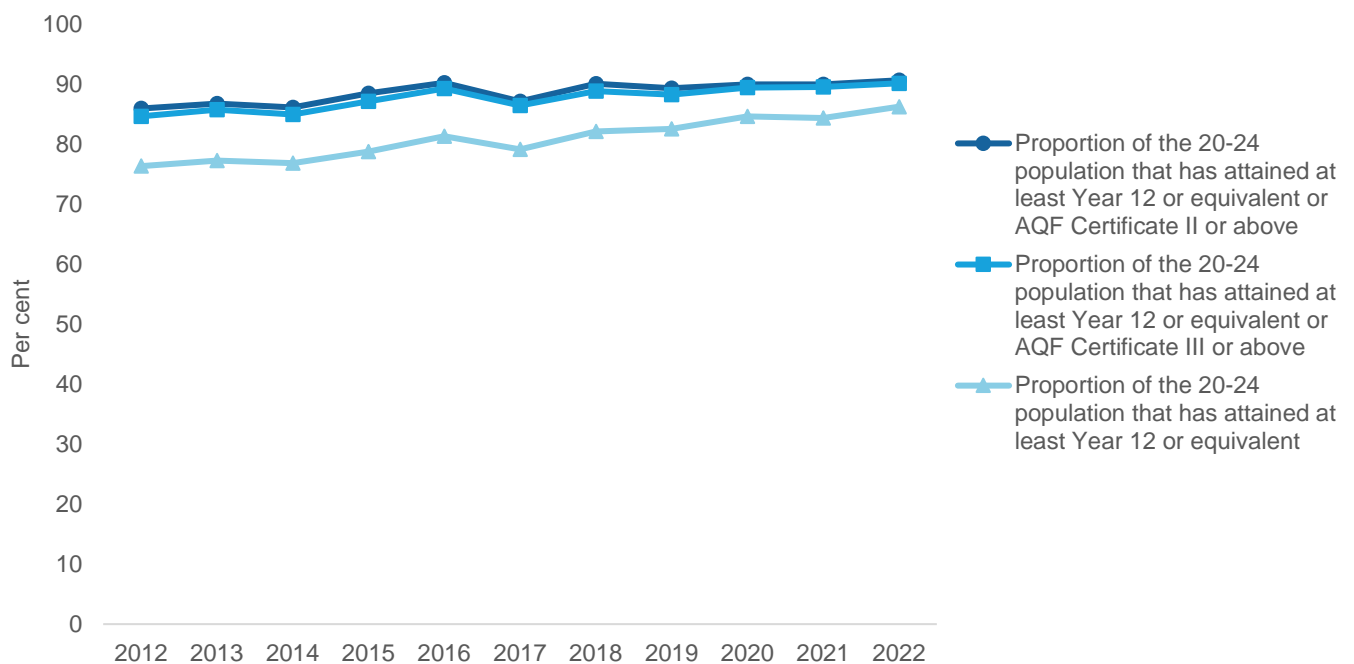
As with KPM 7(a), the proportion of 20–24-year-olds who had attained at least Year 12 or equivalent, or AQF Certificate III or above was above 90% for the first time in 2022, reaching the previous COAG target (90% by 2020).

Trend data for the annual measures of these KPMs for the period 2008–2022 is available in the Key Performance Measures data set in the National Report on Schooling data portal. This shows long-term upward trends of 0.5 percentage points per annum for both KPM 7(a) and KPM 7(b) over this period, in line with long-standing government policy to increase levels of attainment for young people.

Figure 8.6 depicts the annual movement in the 2 attainment measures from 2012 to 2022, as measured by SEW, along with the proportion of 20–24-year-olds having attained at least Year 12 or equivalent.

Figure 8.6

Proportions of 20–24-year-olds having attained at least Year 12 or equivalent, or AQF Certificate II or above; 20–24-year-olds having attained at least Year 12 or equivalent, or AQF 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.

As shown in Figure 8.1, the 2 attainment KPMs have generally moved in parallel over the period 2012–2022. There has been little difference between the 2 measures with an average difference of 0.9 percentage points over this 10-year period. Since 2020, the 2 measures have converged further, with a difference of only 0.5 percentage points in 2022.

Both KPMs also have generally moved in parallel to the proportion of 20–24-year-olds that have attained at least Year 12 or equivalent. This is partly because Year 12 attainment is the main component of both measures.

The proportion of young people completing Year 12 or equivalent is not itself a KPM for schooling, because pursuing a VET qualification post-Year 10 is considered a legitimate alternative to Years 11 and 12 as a pathway to further education and work. However, the proportion of 20–24-year-olds who have attained at least Year 12 or equivalent has risen more quickly in recent years than the proportions having attained equivalent VET qualifications. In 2022, 86.2% of 20–24-year-olds had attained at least Year 12 or equivalent. This was an increase of 1.9 percentage points from 2021, and a rise of 9.9 percentage points from 2012.

There is no observable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SEW measures of KPMs 7(a) and 7(b) in 2022. However, the qualifications held by 20–24-year-olds in May 2022 would have been attained in 2021 or earlier. The significant falls due to COVID in participation in education, training and work reported in Section 7.1 for 15–24-year-olds in 2020 may be reflected in the SEW and Census attainment measures in future.

SEW data for KPMs 7(a) and 7(b) by state and territory is provided on the National Report on Schooling data portal in the [Key Performance Measures](#) data set and in the [Student Attainment](#) data set.⁶ The Student Attainment data set also includes data on the attainment of Year 12 or equivalent and of other AQF qualifications.⁷

⁶ Due to sample size and other factors, SEW data for specific age groups (such as 20–24-year-olds) is less reliable when disaggregated by state and territory, especially for smaller jurisdictions, and cannot be disaggregated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status. Census data by state and territory is also published in the data portal and provides more reliable measures for disaggregation.

⁷ It is important to note that in measuring attainment for 20–24-year-olds, neither the SEW nor the Census measures of attainment take into account the interstate movements of young people for employment or higher education after leaving school, or the numbers of overseas tertiary students residing in each state. As measures of the effectiveness of schooling within a state, the attainment KPMs therefore understate the successful outcomes of schooling in some states and territories and overstate them in others.