

8.2 Student Attainment

Key Facts:

Among 20–24-year-olds in 2023:

- the proportion who had attained at least Year 12 or AQF Certificate II or above was 90.4%
- the proportion who had attained at least Year 12 or AQF Certificate III or above was 89.6%

Since 2013:

- the proportion of 20–24-year-olds who had attained at least Year 12 or AQF Certificate II or above has risen 3.7 percentage points from 86.7% to 90.4%
- the proportion of 20–24-year-olds who had attained at least Year 12 or AQF Certificate III or above has risen 3.9 percentage points from 85.7% to 89.6%.

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 7.1 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 2006 and 2021.

The Key Performance Measures (KPMs) for student attainment 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 reflect the targets for youth attainment in education and training set by the former by Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and in the current National School Reform Agreement. It is recognised that Year 12 attainment creates improved social and economic opportunities for young people and contributes to a skilled workforce and improved living conditions for Australians.¹

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 KPMs are based on the ABS Survey of Education and Work (SEW), which is conducted in May each year, and on the 5-yearly Census of Population and Housing.

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

Table 8.1 reports KPMs 7(a) and 7(b) at the national level for the period 2013–2023. It also includes these proportions as measured by the 2016 and 2021 censuses. 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).

While the attainment KPMs 7(a) and 7(b) refer to the completion of Year 12 or equivalent or an Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Vocational Education and Training (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.²

Table 8.1: Educational attainment of the 20–24-year-old population, Australia, 2013–2023 (%)

Calendar year	KPM 7(a): Proportion of the 20–24-year-old population that has attained at least Year 12 or equivalent, or AQF Certificate II or above			KPM 7(b): Proportion of the 20–24-year-old population that has attained at least Year 12 or equivalent, or AQF Certificate III or above			Proportion of the 20–24-year-old population that has attained at least Year 12 or equivalent		
	SEW measure	CI±	Census measure	SEW measure	CI±	Census measure	SEW measure	CI±	Census measure
2013	86.7	1.5		85.7	1.5		77.2	1.6	
2014	86.1	1.5		84.9	1.5		76.8	1.8	
2015	88.4	1.1		87.1	1.1		78.7	1.6	
2016	90.2	1.6	88.6	89.2	1.6	87.9	81.3	1.9	79.5
2017	87.1	1.2		86.4	1.2		79.1	1.4	
2018	90.0	1.2		88.8	1.2		82.1	1.4	
2019	89.3	1.4		88.2	1.6		82.5	1.6	
2020	89.9	1.2		89.4	1.2		84.6	1.8	
2021	89.9	1.2	90.3	89.5	1.4	89.9	84.3	1.7	83.7
2022	90.6	1.1		90.1	1.1		86.2	1.4	
2023	90.4	1.1		89.6	1.1		84.9	1.7	

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).

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.

Sources: ABS, Education and Work, Australia, May 2023; ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2016, 2021.

² 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.

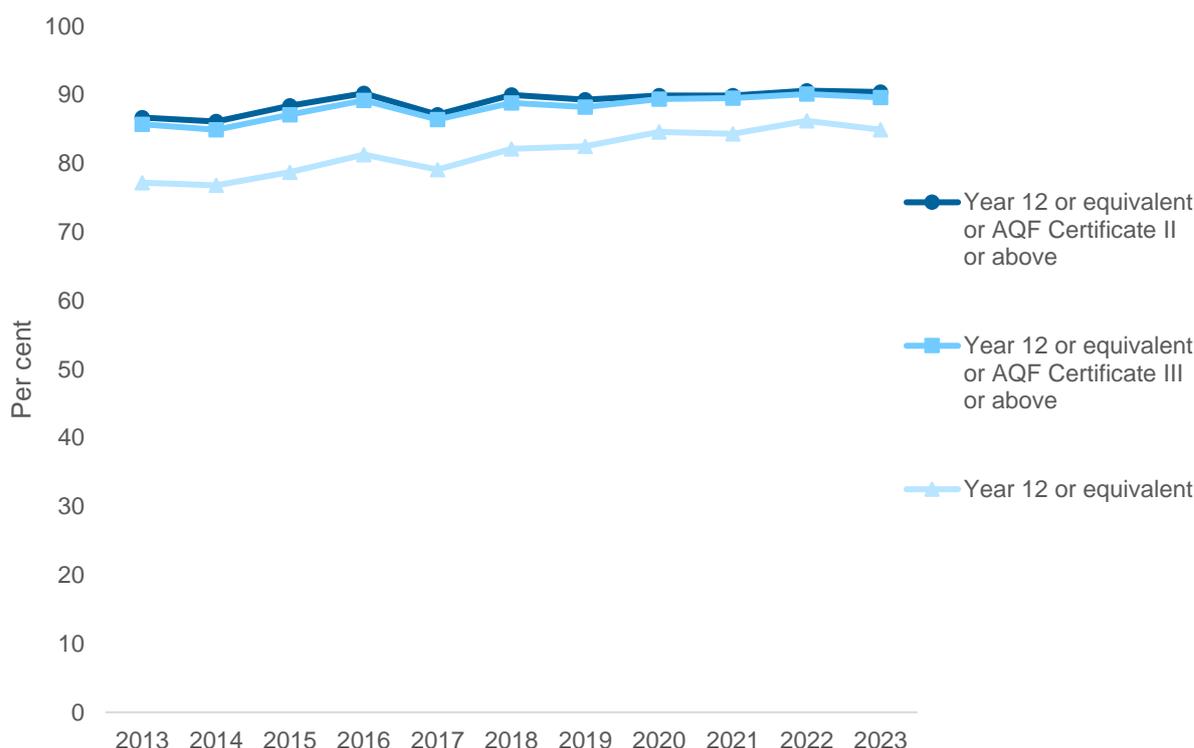
Between 2022 and 2023 attainment across both KPM 7(a) and 7(b), as measured by SEW, declined slightly. The proportion of 20–24-year-olds who had attained at least Year 12 or equivalent, or AQF Certificate II or above was 90.4%, compared to 90.6% in 2022. The proportion of 20–24-year-olds who had attained at least Year 12 or equivalent, or AQF Certificate III or above was 89.6%, compared to 90.1% in 2022.

However, over the longer-term, attainment across both KPM 7(a) and 7(b), as measured by SEW, has increased. The proportion of 20–24-year-olds who had attained at least Year 12 or equivalent, or AQF Certificate II or above has risen 3.7 percentage points from 86.7% in 2013 to 90.4% in 2023. The proportion of 20–24-year-olds who had attained at least Year 12 or equivalent, or AQF Certificate III or above has risen 3.9 percentage points from 85.7% in 2013 to 89.6% in 2023.

Trend data for the annual measures of these KPMs for the period 2004–2023 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 8.1 depicts the annual movement in the 2 attainment measures from 2013 to 2023, as measured by the SEW, along with the proportion of 20–24-year-olds having attained at least Year 12 or equivalent.

Figure 8.1: Educational attainment of the 20–24-year-old population, Australia, 2013–2023 (%)



Source: ABS, Education and Work, Australia, May 2023.

As shown in Figure 8.1, the proportion of 20–24-year-olds that have attained at least Year 12 or an equivalent VET qualification has remained quite steady over the five-year period from 2019 to 2023. There is no observable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SEW measures of KPMs 7(a) and 7(b) in 2023. However, the qualifications held by 20–24-year-olds in May 2023 would have been attained in 2022 or earlier. The significant falls in participation in education, training and work due to COVID for 15–24-year-olds in 2020 may be reflected in the future SEW and Census attainment measures.³

The 2 attainment KPMs have generally moved in parallel over the period 2013–2023. There has been little difference between the 2 measures, with an average difference of 0.9 percentage points over this period and a difference of 0.8 percentage points in 2023.

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.⁴ 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 Certificate II or Certificate III qualifications.

In 2023, 84.9% of 20–24-year-olds had attained at least Year 12 or equivalent. This was a decrease of 1.3 percentage points from 2022, after a net rise of 9.0 percentage points from 2013 to 2022. The proportion of 20–24-year-olds with equivalent VET qualifications, but who had not completed Year 12, has declined from 9.5% in 2013 to 5.5% in 2023.

In 2023, 93.0% of females aged 20-24 years held qualifications at year 12 or certificate II level or above, compared to 88.1% of males. Between 2013 and 2023, these rates increased by 3.8 percentage points for males and females, resulting in no change in the 4.9 percentage point gender gap over this period. The percentage of 20-24-year-old women with at least a Year 12 or equivalent qualification was 88.4% in 2023, an increase of 7.0 percentage points since 2013. For males, the percentage of 20-24-year-olds with at least a Year 12 or equivalent qualification increased to 81.4% in 2023, an increase of 8.2 percentage points.

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. The Student Attainment data set also includes data on the attainment of Year 12 or equivalent and other AQF qualifications.

³ For details of participation of young people aged 15 to 24 in education and/or work, please refer to Section 7.1 of this report.

⁴ This is 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.