



3.4 Tertiary education

Higher levels of educational attainment are associated with higher employment rates and higher relative earnings, more social engagement and better health (OECD 2016).

Tertiary education in Australia can be broadly categorised as either 'higher education' or vocational education and training (VET). Higher education is generally delivered in a university setting, leading to a Bachelor, Master or Doctoral degree. VET focuses on delivering skills and knowledge for a specific industry, leading to Certificate and Diploma qualifications. It is delivered by Registered Training Organisations such as Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Survey of Education and Work, non-school qualifications considered above Year 12 attainment are those at the Certificate III level or above (includes Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Bachelor degree, Post-graduate Diploma, Master degree and Doctorate) (ABS 2016; AQFC 2013).

There were 172 registered higher education providers in Australia as at October 2015, 40 of which were Australian universities (DET 2015). There were 1.4 million students enrolled at Australian higher education institutions during 2015—the vast majority (92%) in universities. Around 74% of higher education students were domestic, 71% were enrolled on a full-time basis, and 55% were female. In 2015, 1.1% of students were from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, an increase of 7.1% since 2014 (DET 2016).

In 2015, there were 4,277 VET training providers (including Australian providers operating overseas), with total enrolments of about 4.5 million students during the year. Two-thirds (67%) of all VET students were enrolled with private providers, with a further 21% enrolled in TAFE institutions (NCVER 2016).

Enrolments in non-school qualifications

According to the ABS Survey of Education and Work, in May 2016, there were 2.2 million people aged 15–64 enrolled in formal study for a non-school qualification. Of these:

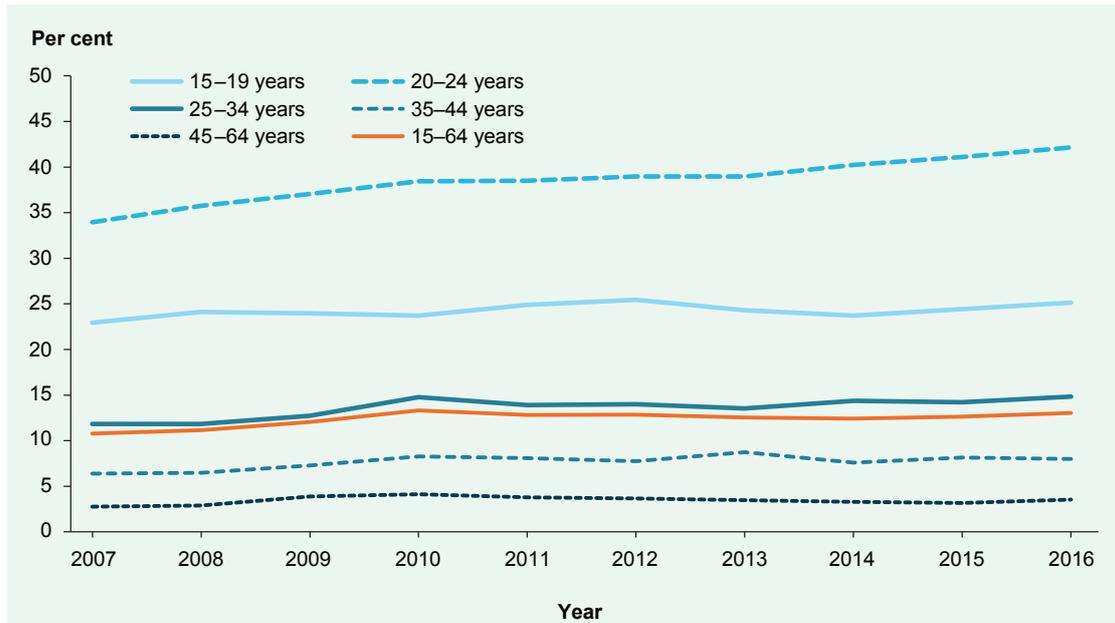
- 1.3 million (59%) were attending a higher education institution, such as a university, and 498,800 (22%) were attending a TAFE institution
- two in 5 (42%) were enrolled in a Bachelor degree, while 1 in 5 were enrolled in a Certificate III or IV (19%)
- similar proportions of males (42%) and females (41%) were enrolled in a Bachelor degree. Males (22%) were more likely than females (16%) to be studying for a Certificate III or IV, while females (17%) were more likely to be studying for an Advanced Diploma or Diploma than males (12%)
- the most common fields of study were Management and commerce (24% of people enrolled) and Society and culture (21%). Between 2008 and 2016, the proportion of enrolled students studying Engineering and related technologies fell from 12% to 8.8%, while the proportion studying Health increased from 11% to 14%





- the proportion of people studying for non-school qualifications was highest among people aged 20–24 (42%), followed by those for people aged 15–19 (25%), 25–34 (15%), 35–44 (8.1%) and 45–64 (3.5%) (ABS 2016).

Enrolments for non-school qualifications increased proportionally for all age groups from 2007–2016. The largest increases were seen among people aged 20–24 (from 34% to 42%) and 25–34 (12% to 15%) (Figure 3.4.1).



Sources: ABS 2016; AIHW analysis of ABS 2016, customised report.

Figure 3.4.1: Enrolment in study for a non-school qualification, people aged 15-64, by age group, 2007 to 2016

Attainment of non-school qualifications

As at May 2016, 59% of people (10.5 million) aged 15–74 had attained a non-school qualification. Of these:

- 44% (4.6 million people) had a Bachelor degree or higher qualification
- more than one-quarter (26%) had a qualification above a Bachelor degree level; this proportion has more than tripled since 1986 (when it was 7.2%)
- males (60%) were more likely than females (58%) to have attained a non-school qualification
- people aged 25–34 (73%) and 35–44 (72%) were most likely to hold non-school qualifications, followed by people aged 45–54 (66%), 55–64 (58%) and 65–74 (47%) (ABS 2016).





What is missing from the picture?

The annual ABS Survey of Education and Work provides the most detailed population based data on participation in education and training; however, reliable estimates by Indigenous status and for smaller geographical areas are not available from this survey. Indigenous data are available, less frequently, from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey. Both Indigenous and small level geography data are available every 5 years from the Census. Limited data for Indigenous students are available from the Department of Education and Training's higher education statistics.

Where do I go for more information?

More information on youth education is available from ABS [Survey of Education and Work](#) and [Schools, Australia](#).

References

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