



## 3.0 Introduction

Participating and engaging in learning and formal education from an early age are central to a person's development and future ability to lead a productive and fulfilling life. Low school attainment and poor engagement with school can lead to poorer outcomes across the life course, including poverty and social exclusion.

This chapter looks at some of the key aspects of secondary and higher education and training in Australia—from secondary school attendance and completion, to options such as apprenticeships, traineeships and tertiary education. As the chapter shows, education can be a lifelong pursuit and there are many important factors in considering pathways from education to employment. For example, completion of schooling and higher levels of educational attainment (particularly tertiary level qualifications) open up broader employment opportunities and outcomes (such as higher relative earnings) in the future.

In 2016, the proportion of people studying for post-school qualifications was highest among people aged 20–24 (42%), but 15% of 25–34-year-olds, 8.1% of 35–44-year olds and 3.5% of 45–64-year-olds were also enrolled.

All Australian children must attend school until they complete Year 10. Young people must then participate in full-time education, employment or training (or a mix of these) until they are 17. Reflecting this, most (91%) people aged 15–24 were engaged in education and/or employment in 2016. As well, more young Australians aged 20–24 are completing Year 12, or its equivalent, than a decade ago. The Year 12 completion rates for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have also risen over the past decade.

Young people not in education, employment or training (often referred to as the 'NEET' group) are seen to be completely disengaged from work and study. In 2016, 8.8% of 15–24-year-olds, 5.1% of 15–19-year-olds and 12% of 20–24-year-olds were not in education, employment or training.

This chapter also reviews how Australian children are faring in education, both at home and internationally. The National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests are conducted each year for all students across Australia in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. The results for 2016 were very similar to those for previous years. Big gaps remain for vulnerable groups, including for Indigenous Australians, students whose parents have low levels of education, students whose parents work in unskilled occupations, and children involved in the statutory child protection system.

On the world stage, Australia's performance of late has been mixed. It was one of 72 countries to take part in the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment—a survey of 15-year-olds' competencies in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy. Although it scored above the average for 35 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development countries, Australia's average scores have decreased significantly since 2009 for reading; since 2006 for scientific literacy; and since 2003 for mathematical literacy.

