



3.2 School retention and completion

Completing Year 12 or an equivalent vocational qualification is seen as a key milestone in the formal development of an individual's skills and knowledge and for improving their economic and social opportunities in life (see Chapter 3.1 'Pathways through education and training').

People with Year 12 qualifications are more likely to continue further study, particularly in higher education, and to enter the workforce. The Australian Government has committed to ensuring that all young people have the opportunity to complete Year 12 or its vocational equivalent. The states and territories are also committed to increasing rates of school completion.

School retention

Most young people stay at school until Year 12. In 2016, the apparent retention rate to year 12 (see Box 3.2.1) was 84%. There has been a gradual increase in the apparent retention rate over the last 6 years (up from 78% in 2010) (ABS 2017).

In 2016, the retention rate was higher for females (88%) than males (81%). This has been the case for many years (for example, rates were 83% compared with 73%, respectively, in 2010).

The apparent retention rate to Year 12 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students has increased steadily, from 47% in 2010 to 60% in 2016, but it is still lower than the non-Indigenous rate (79% in 2010 and 86% in 2016). However, the gap (between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous rate) has narrowed over the same period (from 32 percentage points to 26 percentage points) (ABS 2017).

Box 3.2.1: Measurement of retention rate

The apparent retention rate to Year 12 is an estimate of the percentage of students who stay enrolled full time in secondary education from the start of secondary school (Year 7 or 8 depending on the state or territory) to Year 12. The term 'apparent' is used because the measure is derived from total numbers of students in each of the relevant year levels, not by tracking the retention of individual students over time. A higher or increasing rate is desirable. This suggests that a larger proportion of students are continuing in school, which may result in improved educational outcomes.

Care needs to be taken, however, in interpreting this measure. It does not take account of factors such as student migration between states and territories, students repeating a year of education or returning to education after a period of absence, or the impact of full fee paying overseas students (SCRGSP 2017).





Completion of Year 12 or equivalent

Completion of Year 12 or its equivalent has risen in recent decades. This is likely to be due to several factors, including the commitment from government to raise the minimum level of education of young people (for example, national agreements for education and Indigenous reform; Box 3.2.2).

Box 3.2.2: Council of Australian Governments: selected education and Indigenous reform agreements

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) (2016) agreed to the following benchmarks:

- lift the Year 12 or equivalent or Certificate II attainment rate to 90% by 2015 (from 2008)
- lift the Year 12 or equivalent or Certificate III attainment rate to 90% by 2020 (from 2008)
- halve the gap for Indigenous people aged 20–24 in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020.

The 2015 COAG benchmark outlined in Box 3.2.2, while close, was not met (completion rate of 88% for Year 12 or a Certificate II or above in 2015, for those aged 20–24). The 2020 target of Year 12 or equivalent Certificate III attainment is on track to be met, with an attainment rate of 87% in 2015 (COAG 2016).

The target to halve the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in rates of Year 12 or equivalent attainment is also on track to be met by 2020 (COAG 2016). In 2014–15, 62% of Indigenous people aged 20–24 had completed Year 12 or equivalent or above, an increase from 45% in 2008 (SCRGSP 2016), and 'the gap' decreased to 25 percentage points (see Chapter 7.4 'Closing the gap in education').

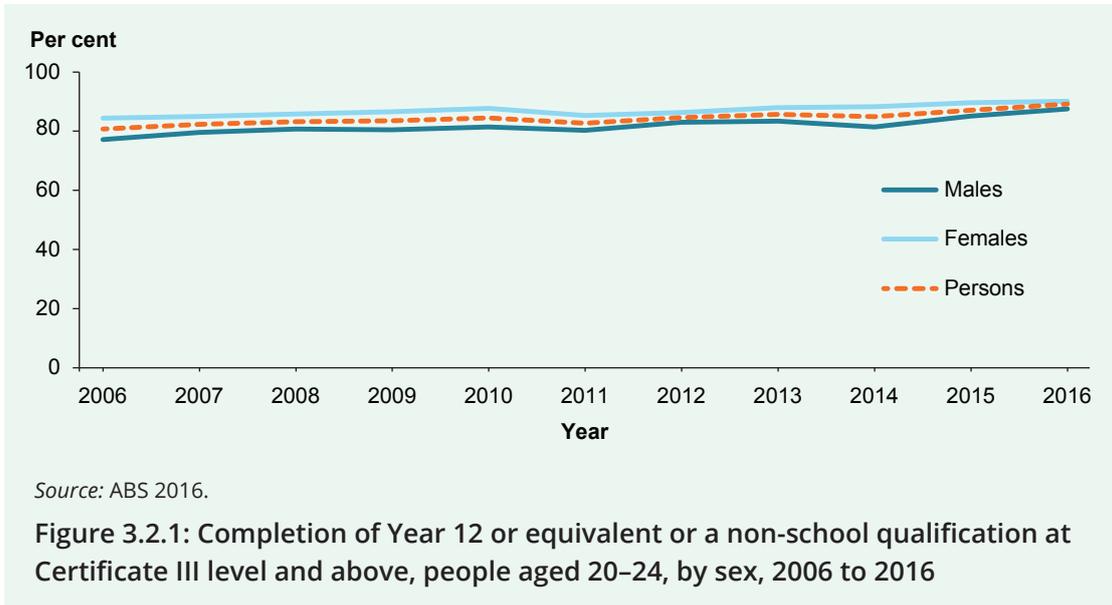
According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Survey of Education and Work, in 2016:

- 3 in 4 (76%) people aged 15–64 had an educational attainment of Year 12 or equivalent or a non-school qualification at Certificate III level or above, an increase from 65% in 2006. There was no change to this proportion when also including people with a highest qualification of Certificate II (ABS 2016).

Among people aged 20–24 in 2016:

- almost 9 in 10 (89%) had attained Year 12 or equivalent or a non-school qualification at Certificate III level or above, and 90% for Certificate II or above. This is an increase from 81% and 82%, respectively in 2006 (see also Chapter 9.2 'Indicators of *Australia's welfare*')
- females (90%) were slightly more likely to have attained Year 12 or a Certificate III or above than males (88%). This has been the case for many years (Figure 3.2.1)
- attainment of Year 12 or a Certificate III or above generally decreased with remoteness. People aged 20–24 in *Major cities* were most likely to have completed Year 12 or Certificate II or above (92%), while people aged 20–24 in *Outer regional* (76%) and *Remote and Very remote* (77%) were least likely (ABS 2016).





What is missing from the picture?

Information on apparent retention rates was sourced from the ABS National School Statistics Collection, currently a large aggregate data collection. The retention rate is therefore an estimate (an 'apparent' rate), as individual students cannot be tracked from Year 7/8 through to Year 12. Reasons for this include student migration between states and territories, transfers between school sectors, and students progressing through school slower or faster than expected (for further details, see ABS 2016). To obtain an accurate measurement of student retention rates, and account for these variables, unique student identifiers would ideally be used to track individual students over time.

Where do I go for more information?

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

References

- ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2016. Education and work, Australia, May 2016. ABS cat. no. 6227.0. Canberra: ABS.
- ABS 2017. Schools, Australia 2016. ABS cat. no. 4221.0. Canberra: ABS.
- COAG (Council of Australian Governments) 2016. Report on performance 2016. Canberra: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.
- SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) 2016.
- Overcoming Indigenous disadvantage: key indicators 2015-16. Canberra: Productivity Commission.
- SCRGSP 2017. Report on government services 2017. Canberra: Productivity Commission.

