



Australian Government
Department of Education

Incoming Government Brief

2025





Australian Government
Department of Education

Secretary
Mr Tony Cook PSM

The Hon Julian Hill MP
Assistant Minister for International Education

Dear Assistant Minister

Congratulations on your appointment as Assistant Minister for International Education. I look forward to working with you to implement your *plan for a better and fairer education system for all Australians*.

International education supports Australia's economic prosperity, security and international influence as a vehicle to extend Australia's foreign policy, trade and development interests. International students make significant economic and cultural contributions to the Australian education system and education services are Australia's fourth largest export.

My department stands ready to implement the Government's reform agenda and ensure the sustainability and quality of Australia's international education sector.

We are committed to working with you to deliver better outcomes for learners and an international education sector that meets Australia's current and future needs. We will provide national leadership and partner with Commonwealth agencies, states, territories and stakeholders to enable high quality education across the life course and world quality research that strengthens our economy and society.

We will work with you and your office to develop a strong working relationship that is underpinned by principles of trust, responsiveness and transparency.

I look forward to meeting with you and discussing your agenda further.

Yours sincerely

Mr Tony Cook PSM

May 2025

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Senior leadership

Name	Role and contact details	Executive Officer contact details
	Mr Tony Cook PSM Secretary, Australian Department of Education 	
	Ms Kylie Crane PSM Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood and Youth 	
	Ms Meg Brighton Deputy Secretary, Schools 	
	Mr Ben Rimmer Deputy Secretary, Higher Education, Research and International 	
	Mr Marcus Markovic Deputy Secretary, Corporate and Enabling Services  	 

Ways of working: service offer

We are committed to working with you to deliver on the government's and your priorities for an education system that achieves better outcomes for learners and meets Australia's current and future needs.

We will work with you and your office to develop a strong working relationship underpinned by trust, responsiveness and transparency. This service offer is a statement of principles for how we will work with you and your office.

We will work with you to:

- **Build a trusted, collaborative relationship** with you and your office, grounded in openness and deliver on your vision for the Australian education system.
- **Maintain momentum on your priorities**, balancing short- and long-term goals and ensuring resources are focused on the right things.
- **Connect the right people, advice and insights** to support your priorities and deliver on government objectives effectively and efficiently.

Guiding standards:

- **Integrity and accountability:** We will act with good faith, upholding the APS values and following through on agreed actions.
- **Responsiveness and transparency:** We will provide frank, timely and strategic advice that keeps you informed of obligations, risks and opportunities.
- **Forward-focused vision:** We will look for ways to shape and deliver impactful policies that address long-term priorities.

You can expect from us:

- **Quality advice:** We will provide strategic, engaging insights and advice to support your decisions, informed by evidence and engagement with partners and stakeholders.
- **Proactive engagement:** We will raise emerging issues early and offer targeted, actionable options that prioritise attention and resources where they are needed most.
- **Ongoing improvement:** We will continue learning and refining the way we work together to support a successful and resilient relationship.

Key facts and figures: Early childhood education and care



Services

There are 15,051 child care services in Australia

Centre Based Day Care (CBDC)	Family Day Care (FDC)	Outside School Hours (OSH)	In Home Care (IHC)
9,571	358	5,091	31

Source: Department of Education administrative data, December quarter 2024

Two-thirds of services are for profit

For profit, 67%	Not for profit, 33%
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Source: Department of Education administrative data, December quarter 2024

Most services are delivered in major Australian cities*

Major city	Inner regional	Outer regional	Remote and very remote
11,219	2,550	998	253

Source: Department of Education administrative data, December quarter 2024

*Total excludes IHC

Preschool is delivered in CBDCs or in dedicated preschools

Dedicated Preschool	CBDC
4,253	9,170

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Preschool Education Australia, 2024, cat. No. 4240.0



Workforce

The ECEC sector employs 263,400 people

Workforce	Total
Total persons employed (educators, early childhood teachers and centre managers)	263,400
Female	91%
First Nations	4%
Paid contact staff with relevant qualifications	81%

Source: Detailed Labour Force Survey (Table EQ08), Australia, Detailed, Quarterly, trended by Jobs and Skills Australia. Figures represent total persons employed under the ANZSCO unit level codes 4211 Child Carers, 2411 Early Childhood (Pre-Primary) Teachers and 1341 Child Care Centre Managers, November 2024; Department of Education National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census, 2024



Children and families

Over 1.4 million children attend child care

	CBDC	FDC	OSHC	IHC	Total
Children	857,940	70,580	546,790	1,620	1,447,460
Families	700,430	50,390	408,370	900	1,016,920

Source: Department of Education administrative data, December quarter 2024

Including 65,200 First Nations children

	CBDC	FDC	OSH	IHC	Total
Children	44,800	2,660	18,790	70	65,200
Families	34,960	2,040	13,430	40	45,010

Source: Department of Education administrative data, December quarter 2024

341,568 4 and 5-year-olds are enrolled in preschool*

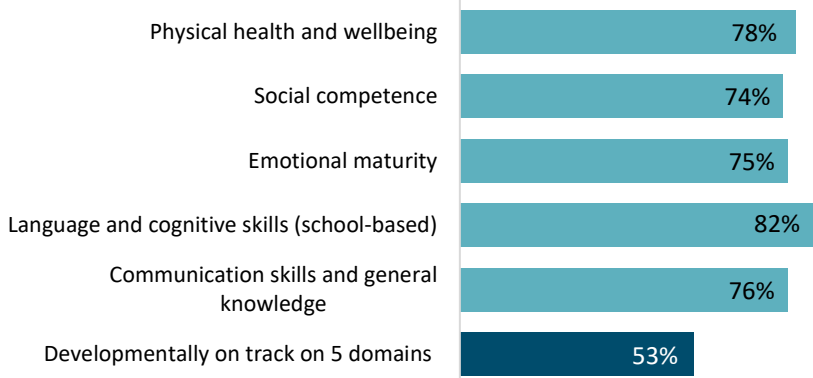
All children	First Nations	Vulnerable and disadvantaged
341,568	23,206	60,371

Source: ABS Preschool Education Australia, 2024 *At least 600 hours per year



Outcomes

Most Australian children are on track when they start school



Source: Australian Early Childhood Development Census, 2024 (embargoed)



Funding

The Australian Government subsidises child care for families

Support type	Funding 2024-25	Funding 2025-26
Child Care Subsidy	\$15.4 billion	\$16.2 billion
Support for child care system*	\$1.1 billion	\$2.4 billion
Total	\$16.5 billion	\$18.6 billion

Source: Budget 2025-26

*Includes funding for Inclusion Support Program, Community Child Care Fund, Connected Beginnings and Quality Support.

Additional funding helps the states deliver preschool

State or territory	Funding 2022-25
New South Wales	\$563.2 million
Victoria	\$514.0 million
Queensland	\$356.4 million
Western Australia	\$194.7 million
South Australia	\$116.1 million
Tasmania	\$39.2 million
Australian Capital Territory	\$38.8 million
Northern Territory	\$19.1 million
Implementation and repeaters funding	\$89.6 million
Total	\$1,931.2 million

Source: Budget Paper 2023-24 MYEFO Appendix C, Annex A – Payments to States, pp.14-20



Quality

91% of services meet the National Quality Standard (NQS)

Rating	Percentage
Services with a quality rating	92%
Services Meeting NQS or Above	91%
Services Working Towards NQS	9%
Services rated Significant Improvement Required	12 services total

Source: Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority, National Quality Framework Snapshot, Q4 2024

Key facts and figures: School education

Schools

There are 9,653 schools in Australia

	Government	Catholic	Independent
Schools	6,727	1,759	1,167
Percentage	70%	18%	12%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools Australia, 2024, Table 90a

The majority of schools are primary schools

School level	Government	Catholic	Independent
Primary	4,804	1,231	199
Secondary	1,074	318	65
Combined	506	162	763
Special	343	48	140

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools Australia, 2024, Table 35b

Students

There are 4,126,452 school students (FTE)

Full-time equivalent (FTE)	Government	Catholic	Independent
Students	2,614,508	820,061	691,883
Percentage	63%	20%	17%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools Australia, 2024, Table 43a

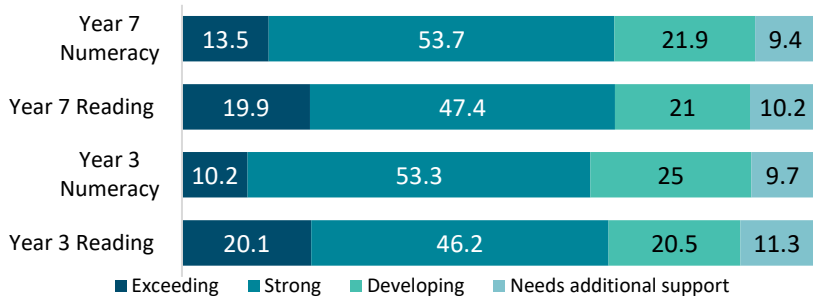
Most students study in major cities

	Major city	Inner regional	Outer regional	Remote	Very remote
Students	3,032,110	711,475	310,548	43,791	28,535
Percentage	73.5%	17.2%	7.5%	1.1%	0.7%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools Australia, 2024, Table 46a

Outcomes

Over 60% of students achieve NAPLAN proficiency standards



Source: ACARA, NAPLAN National Results 2024

Students score above the OECD average in PISA

Average score	Maths	Science	Reading
Australia	487	507	498
OECD	472	485	476

Source: ACER, PISA 2022: Reporting Australia's Results

Independent schools have the highest retention to Year 12



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools Australia, 2024, Table 64a.
Note: Apparent retention from first year of high school to Year 12.

Workforce

Schools employ 320,377 teaching staff (FTE)

FTE	Government	Catholic	Independent
Staff	199,623	61,596	59,158
Female percentage	73%	72%	67%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools Australia, 2024, Table 51a

Student-teacher ratios are lowest in independent schools

Student-teacher ratio (FTE)	Government	Catholic	Independent
Primary school	13.8	15.0	13.7
Secondary school	12.2	11.9	10.5

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Schools Australia, 2024, Table 53a

Funding

Commonwealth recurrent funding for schools will be over \$31 billion in 2025

State/territory	Government (\$ million)	Catholic (\$ million)	Independent (\$ million)	Total (\$ million)
NSW	3,481	3,130	2,661	9,272
Vic	2,902	2,947	1,930	7,779
Qld	2,630	2,180	1,944	6,754
WA	1,390	822	1,090	3,302
SA	786	776	706	2,269
Tas	276	265	167	708
ACT	184	167	117	468
NT	270	124	123	518
Australia**	11,920	10,412	8,739	31,071
Share*	38%	34%	28%	100%

Source: Department of Education funding models as at Budget 2025-26. Note: Recurrent school funding only; does not include other school funding programs such as the Capital Grants Program, the Choice and Affordability Fund, etc.

Total funding (all sources[^]) in 2023 was over \$86.8 billion

State/territory	Government (\$ million)	Catholic (\$ million)	Independent (\$ million)	Total
NSW	16,092	4,514	6,878	27,484
Victoria	11,739	4,560	4,970	21,268
Queensland	10,994	3,487	3,703	18,184
WA	5,949	1,416	2,049	9,414
SA	3,385	1,166	1,379	5,930
Tasmania	1,183	370	309	1,862
ACT	917	282	366	1,565
NT	790	153	191	1,134
Australia**	51,049	15,949	19,844	86,842
Share*	59%	18%	23%	100%

Source: ACARA, National Report on Schooling in Australia, 2023 funding (retrieved Mar 2025).
[^]Public and private funding. Public consists of recurrent funding from the Commonwealth, state and territory governments. Private includes fees, charges, parental contributions and other private sources. *Rounded to nearest million. **Totals may not match due to rounding.

Independent schools have the highest per student income

Funding source	Government	Catholic	Independent
Public	\$18,669	\$15,936	\$13,271
Private	\$759	\$5,178	\$14,008
Total	\$19,428	\$21,114	\$27,279

Source: ACARA, National Report on Schooling in Australia, 2023 funding (retrieved Mar 2025)

Key facts and figures: Higher education



Providers

There are 210 higher education providers

Category	Registered provider	Approved under HESA*
Australian university	44	43
University college	8	8
Institute of higher education	158	97
Total	210	148

Source: TEQSA National register of higher education providers
*Approved to receive Commonwealth funding under Higher Education Support Act 2003



Students

In 2023 there were 1.6 million higher education students

	2023	% of Total 2023
Total Domestic	1,076,027	67.2%
Indigenous students	23,309	2.2%
Low SES (2021 SEIFA ¹)	168,916	15.9%
Students with disability	123,139	11.6%
Regional students (2021 ASGS ²)	195,306	18.3%
Remote students (2021 ASGS)	9,620	0.9%
Total Overseas (inc offshore)	524,514	32.8%
Total Students	1,600,563	100%

Source: Higher Education Statistical Collection – Student data, Department of Education
¹Australia Bureau of Statistic's Socio-Economics Indexes for Areas
²Australian Statistical Geography Standard

Most students are undergraduates

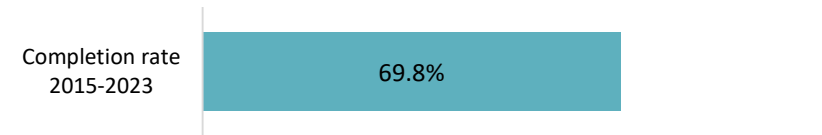
	2023	% of Total 2023
Undergraduate	1,039,766	65.0%
Postgraduate	525,101	32.8%
Enabling/Non-Award/Microcreds	35,696	2.2%
Total students	1,600,563	100%

Source: Higher Education Statistical Collection – Student data, Department of Education



Outcomes

Over 30% domestic Bachelor students do not complete in 9 years



Source: Higher Education Statistical Collection – Student data, Department of Education

Many undergraduates do not rate their experience positively

% positive rating	2023
Quality of educational experience	76.7%
Teaching quality	80.7%

Source: Student Experience Survey 2023

People with a Bachelor or higher have lower unemployment

Unemployment rate (persons aged 15-74 years)	2024
Bachelor degree or higher	2.3%
Overall unemployment	3.9%

Source: Based on information published in Australian Bureau of Statistics Education and Work, 2024, Table 22

Attainment levels are higher among younger people

	2024
Bachelor degree or higher (25-34 years)	47.2%
Bachelor degree or higher (15-74 years)	33.4%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Education and Work, May 2024, Tables 33 and 34



Workforce

143,268 people (FTE) are employed in higher education

Full-time equivalent (FTE)	2024	% of Total 2024
Full-time	104,286	72.8%
Fractional Full-time	18,303	12.8%
Estimated casual	20,679	14.4%
Total FTE	143,268	100%

Source: Higher Education Statistical Collection – Staff data, Department of Education



Funding

\$16.7 billion was spent on teaching and learning activities

	2024 (\$ billion)
Commonwealth Grants Scheme	7.8
HELP Loans ³	7.5
Other Teaching and Learning	1.4
Total	16.7

Source: HEIMS Online - Institution Payment Information Determination, Department of Education, and ISSP funding allocations and student data, National Indigenous Australians Agency. Note: Relates to programs under HESA.
³HELP loans comprise funding to providers from Government for eligible students who defer their student contribution/fees. Students' upfront payments to providers are not included. Includes all HELP schemes except VET-FEE HELP and VET Student Loans.

There are 595,342 full-time equivalent Commonwealth-supported places*

	2023
Total places	595,342

Source: Higher Education Statistical Collection – Student data, Department of Education.
*Equivalent Full-time Student Load (EFTSL)

524,413 students* of these places had a deferred contribution via HECS-HELP

	2023
HECS-HELP ⁴	524,413
FEE-HELP ⁵	66,618
OS-HELP ⁶	8,040
SA-HELP ⁷	478,233

Source: Departmental Higher Education Statistics publications *Equivalent full-time
⁴Students can use this loan to pay their student contribution amount.
⁵Students can use this loan to pay all or part of their course fees.
⁶Students enrolled in a Commonwealth supported place can use this loan to study overseas.
⁷Students can use this loan to pay their provider's student services and amenities fee.

Public expenditure on tertiary education as a percentage of total government expenditure

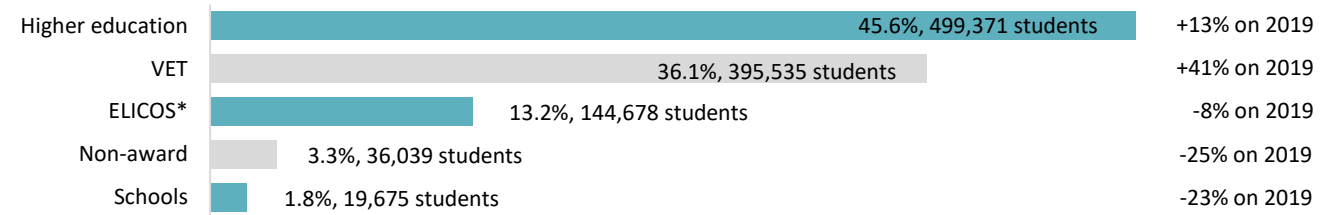
	2021
Australia	2.6%
OECD average	2.7%

Source: Education at a Glance 2024: OECD Indicators, Table C4.1, Columns (8), (10)

Key facts and figures: Research and International

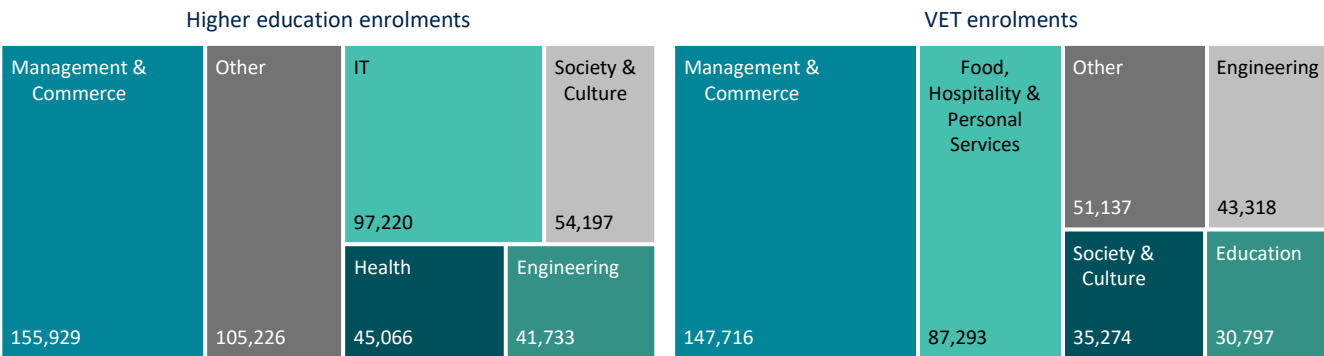
International education

Over half of 1,095,298 international enrolments in 2024 were outside higher education



Source: Department of Education, PRISMS Data, 2024 *English-language courses.

Management & Commerce most popular field of study among tertiary international students



Source: PRISMS YTD December 2024

Over 30% of international higher education students are from China

Country of origin (2024)	Number	%
China	158,664	31.8%
India	93,874	18.8%
Nepal	48,178	9.6%
Other nationalities	198,665	39.8%

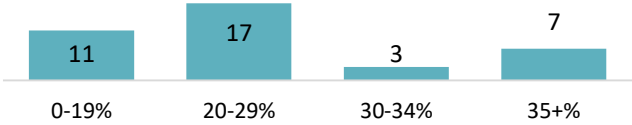
Source: Department of Education, PRISMS data, 2024.

The majority of international students study in major cities

2024	% international enrolments
Major cities	97%

Source: PRISMS

The proportion of onshore international students is over 30% in 10 universities*



Source: TCSI, 2023 *Table A public universities.

International education generated \$51 billion in export earnings in 2023-24

Sector	Income, 2023-24
Higher education	\$34.8 billion
VET	\$11.4 billion
English-language courses (ELICOS)	\$2.4 billion
Schools	\$1.2 billion
Non-Award	\$0.9 billion

Source: ABS, International Trade in Services, Education Related Travel by Education Sector, FY 2023-24 (Catalogue no. 5368.0.55.003)

OFFICIAL: Sensitive

Research funding

More than \$4 billion is distributed through the education portfolio to strengthen university sector research and development

Funding program	2024–25 Est. Actual \$'000
Research Training Program ¹	1,222,827
Research Support Program ²	1,064,398
National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS) ³	502,648
Higher Education Research Promotion ⁴	6,615
Enhance Research Capacity of Regional Universities ⁵	3,669
Launch Australia's Economic Accelerator ⁶	189,148
Trailblazers Universities Program ⁷	108,717
Increase Workforce Mobility (Training) ⁸	4,339
Increase Workforce Mobility ⁸	6,713
Total	3,109,074
Australian Research Council (excluding departmental)	1,031,328

Source: Portfolio additional estimates statements 2025–26, Education Portfolio.

¹Funding to eligible providers to support training of domestic and overseas students in research doctorate and research Masters degrees.

²Funding to providers to support systemic costs of research such as libraries, laboratories, computing centres and salaries of support and technical staff, as well as research costs not supported directly through Australian competitive grants and other sources.

³Funds the operation of critical national research infrastructure.

⁴Supports not-for-profit research promotion organisations to undertake activities to foster and promote research.

⁵Funding provided to Enhance Research Capacity of Regional Universities delivered as the Regional Research Collaboration (RRC) program.

⁶Stage-gated grant program designed to attract projects at a proof-of-concept or proof-of-scale level of commercial readiness and support them to move through the development pipeline.

⁷Provides funding to universities to supercharge their commercialisation capability and become leaders in university-industry collaboration.

⁸The Increase Workforce Mobility initiative funds the National Industry PhD Program, which supports PhD candidates to undertake industry-focused research projects.

Research students*

In 2023 there were over 66,000 Higher Degree Research (HDR) students

Domestic students	International students
39,715	26,379

Source: Higher Education Statistical Collection – Student data, Department of Education

Over 11,000 students completed a research degree in 2023

Research Doctorate	Research Masters
9,698	1,594

Source: Higher Education Statistical Collection – Student data, Department of Education

*Higher Degree Research (HDR) Student data provided for Table A and Table B universities

Your agenda



Contents - Your agenda

Your agenda

Higher Education, International & Research

Strengthening the integrity and sustainability of the international education sector

Supporting the Government's Agenda

Supporting the Government's agenda

Departmental approach to implementation

Higher education, International education and Research



Strengthening the integrity and sustainability of the international education sector

Funding	Priority
\$4.3 million over 3 years from 2025-26	

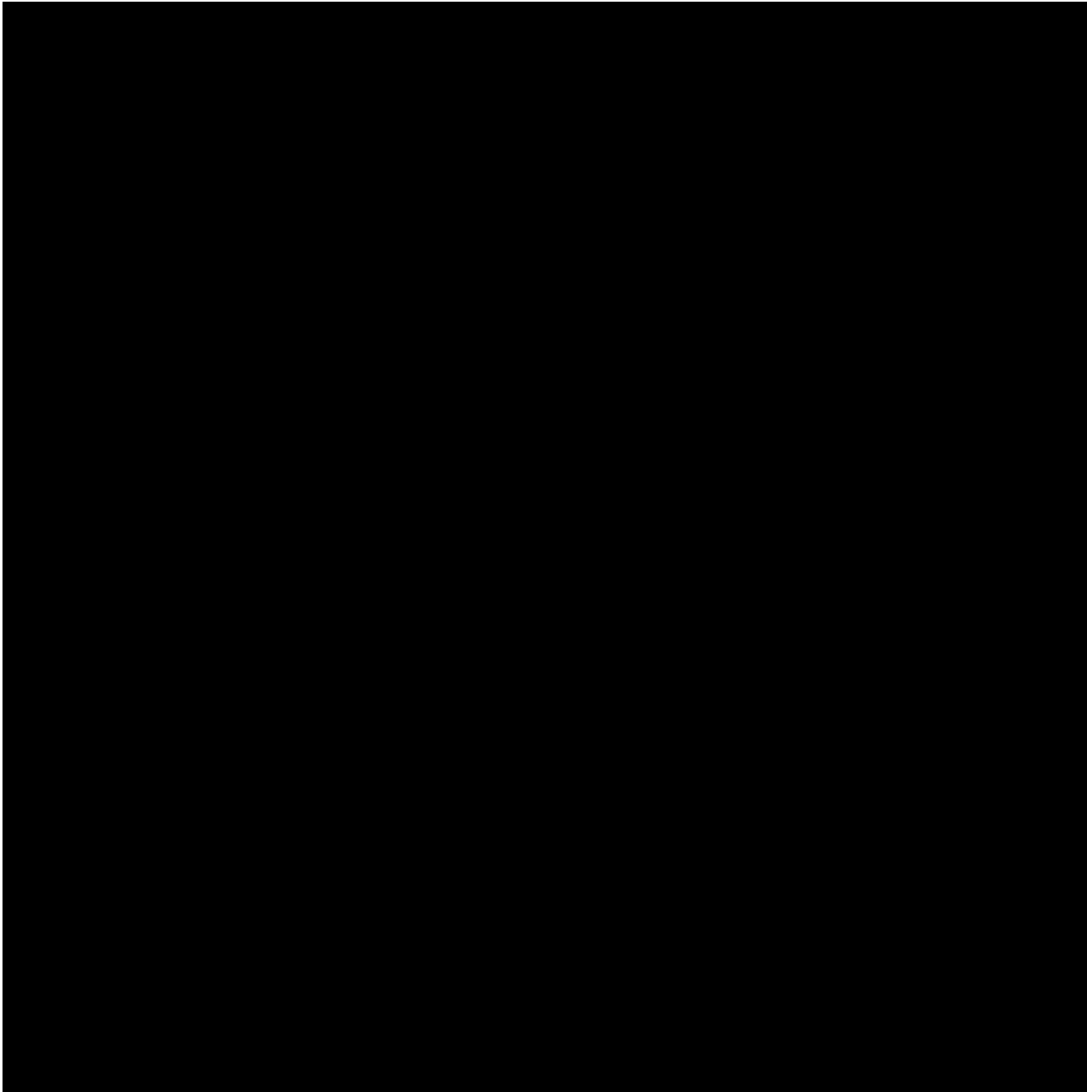
Source: https://budget.gov.au/content/myefo/download/08_App_A_WEB.pdf (p. 243)

Description

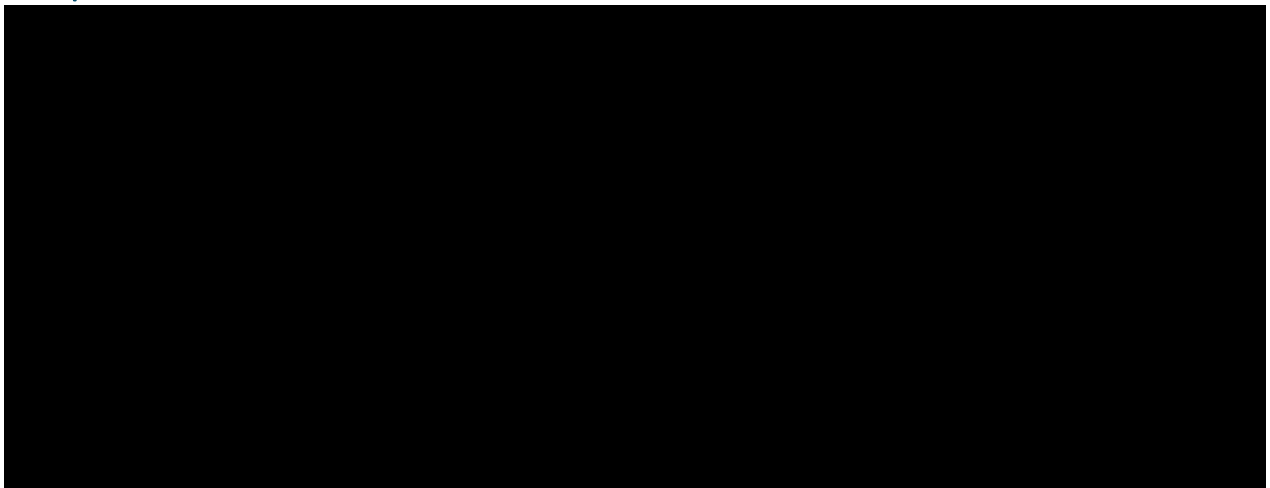
Early decisions will be required on the approach to manage the number of international students in Australia to support the sustainability and quality of the intentional education sector, consistent with the draft International Education and Skills Strategic Framework (the Framework) released in 2024. The Framework established actions for Australia’s international education sector, including implementing a managed system to deliver sustainable growth over time, and carefully considering challenges in the sector as they arise to deliver outcomes for the national interest.

Growth in student numbers is currently managed through visa prioritisation under Ministerial Direction 111 (MD111), introduced when the *Education Services for Overseas Students Amendment (Quality and Integrity) Bill 2024* (the ESOS Bill) was not passed by Parliament in 2024.

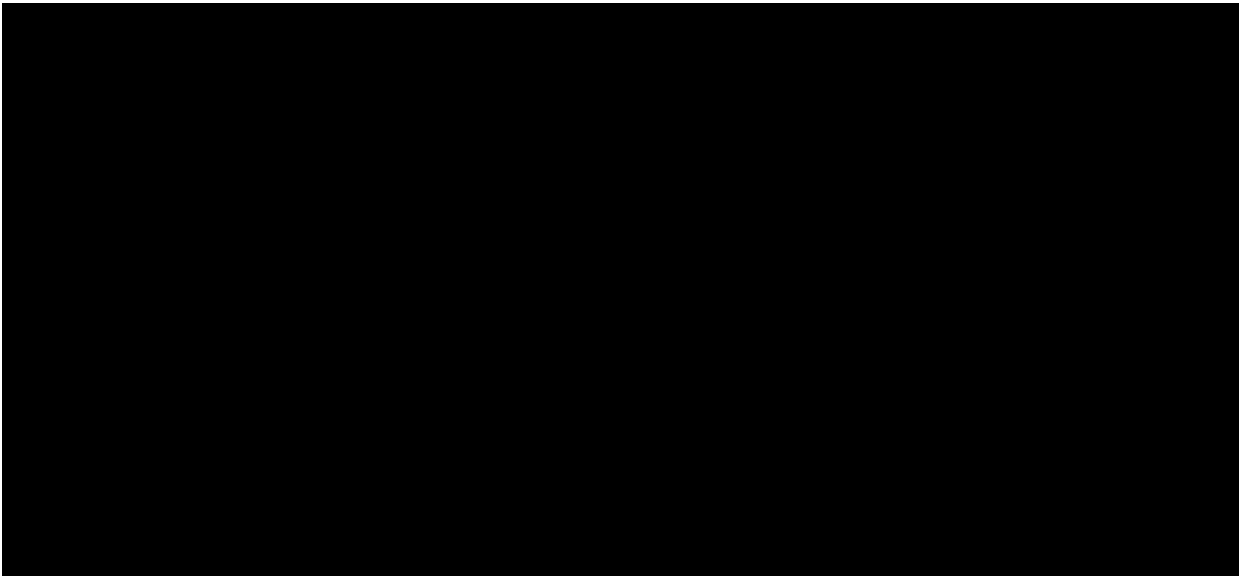
Implementation approach



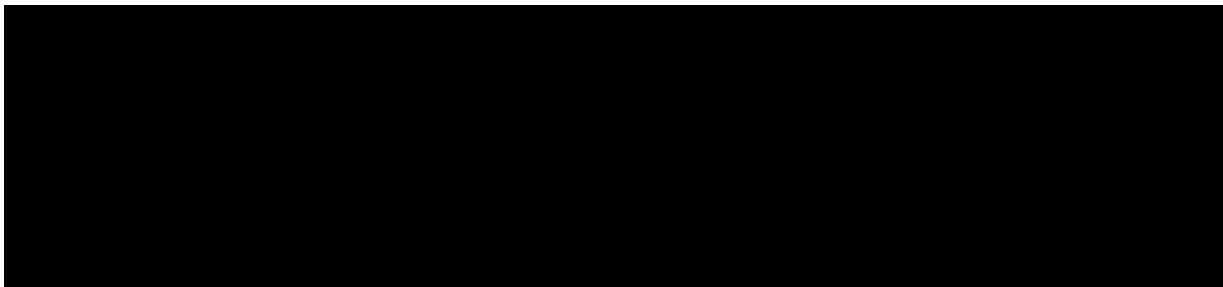
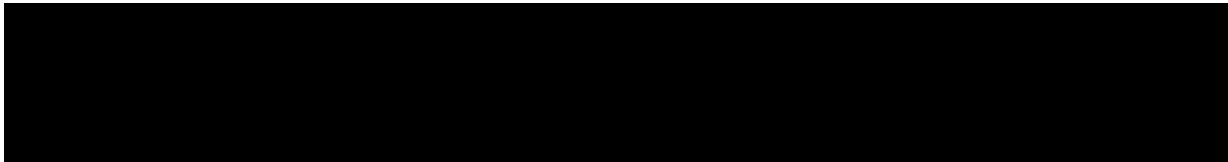
Implementation risks



Legislation



Early actions



Cost

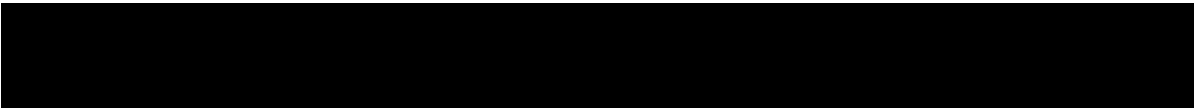
Financial impact on underlying cash balance (\$ millions): \$4.3

	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Total Impact on Underlying Cash Balance (4.3 million)	2.3	7.7	5.0	5.3	

Source: MYEFO 2024-24. Appendix A: Policy decisions taken since the 2024-25 Budget, p. 243.

Media and stakeholders

- This commitment received significant coverage from media and stakeholders throughout 2024, citing challenges to providers’ ability to undertake research and teaching and learning activities if revenue from international students is lost.



Deputy Secretary	First Assistant Secretary
Mr Ben Rimmer Higher Education, Research and International [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	Ms Karen Sandercock International Division [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

Supporting the Government's Agenda



Supporting the Government's agenda

The education portfolio supports the delivery of the government's broader agenda, including by ensuring that education policies and services align with other government priorities. This paper outlines key government commitments with strong linkages to education.

\$8.5 billion to Strengthen Medicare: More bulk billing, more doctors, more nurses

This commitment invests \$8.5 billion to strengthen Medicare by lifting bulk billing rates and building the health workforce. This includes \$617 million to build the General Practitioner (GP) and nursing workforce through:

- New medical Commonwealth supported places (CSPs) and uncapped medical CSPs for First Nations students
- Additional GP training places
- Incentive payments for new GP trainees
- Funding for paid parental leave and study leave for GP trainees
- Nursing and midwifery scholarships.

Intersection with the Education Portfolio

Education portfolio responsibilities include management of CSPs and the broader higher education sector. The funding to support more doctors and nurses will interact with these responsibilities. The Minister for Education holds the power to allocate set numbers of CSPs for 'designated higher education courses' under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*, with medicine currently the only designated course. Therefore, the Minister controls the number of medical-CSPs allocated to each provider.

Portfolio responsibilities also include the Australian Curriculum which provides national guidance to schools and teachers on what students should learn in school. There are targeted programs and initiatives within the portfolio aimed at improving engagement and learning outcomes in science and maths. These include online teaching and learning resources for mathematics and numeracy to support teachers understanding and skills in explicit teaching of maths, and Science by Doing which provides curriculum units and professional learning to support the delivery of the Australia science curriculum. These skills are critical in supporting a pipeline of students with the skills needed in the health workforce.

New Medical School at the Queensland University of Technology

This commitment is to support a new medical school at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) to train more doctors and nurses. This will support an additional 240 medical students across all year levels. Subject to accreditation from the Australian Medical Council, from 2027 QUT will be allowed to convert 48 non-medical CSPs to medical CSPs.

Intersection with the Education Portfolio

The Minister for Education can allocate the number of medical-CSPs at each higher education provider.

\$1 Billion Mental Health Investment

The \$1 billion mental health package commitment, includes:

- \$225 million for 31 new Medicare Mental Health Centres
- More than \$200 million for 58 new, upgraded or expanded headspace services
- \$500 million for 20 Youth Specialist Care Centres for young people with complex needs
- \$90 million for more than 1,200 training places for mental health professionals and peer workers.

Intersection with the Education Portfolio

Education portfolio responsibilities include management of higher education providers and will therefore interact with the additional training places for mental health professionals and peer workers. The Office for Youth, which sits within the department, is responsible for improving and harmonising policies across government that impact young people which may interact with this commitment's funding for Youth Specialist Care Centres.

There are also a range of existing programs managed or funded within the education portfolio which support wellbeing in schools. Annual funding is provided to states and territories to administer the National Student Wellbeing Program which provides more than 3,000 school communities with access to a qualified student wellbeing officer or chaplain. Additionally, My Mind Check provides school students access to free, evidence-based online mental health and wellbeing check-ins to identify mental health concerns and support needs early.

A Future Made in Australia

Under this commitment are measures to maximise the economic and industrial benefits of the move to net zero and securing Australia's place in a changing global economic and strategic landscape. This includes supporting and investing in priority industries that are aligned with the National Interest Framework, including renewable hydrogen, critical minerals processing, green metals, low carbon liquid fuels, and clean energy manufacturing, including battery and solar panel supply chains.

To make Australia a renewable energy superpower, and invest in renewable energy, this commitment includes getting the energy grid to 82% renewables by 2030. To deliver this there has been a commitment to \$8 billion of additional investment in renewable energy and low emissions technologies and a \$2 billion expansion of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation. Additionally, this commitment invests \$470 million to build the world's first commercial quantum computer and \$50 billion over 10 years to support innovation and build an integrated Defence Force.

AUKUS Agreement

The AUKUS Agreement will see the development of a nuclear-powered submarine construction yard. As part of this commitment, Australia is building a workforce with the skills to build, operate and sustain a conventionally armed nuclear-powered submarine capability.

Intersection with the Education Portfolio

The education portfolio is responsible for key elements of education, training and development of the workforce needed to deliver the clean energy transition and manufacturing industries under the Future Made In Australia and AUKUS initiatives. The responsibilities of the portfolio support the development of a pipeline of skilled and qualified workers, including in-demand science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills, required to support the delivery of national priorities, including Future Made In Australia and building Australia's submarine industry as a part of AUKUS.

The Australian Curriculum, which sits within the responsibilities of the education portfolio, sets the guidance on what STEM skills students should learn in school. The department manages a number of initiatives to strengthen the teaching and development of these skills. Additionally, the department manages programs aimed at promoting careers in STEM, including the STEM Professionals in Schools program, administered by the CSIRO, which supports STEM Professionals to share their experience with students and promote positive attitudes towards careers in STEM.

The Australian research sector has delivered significant innovations in manufacturing, renewable technologies and quantum mechanics. Portfolio responsibilities include supporting research and development for new technologies and supporting national priority industries. Programs which support research and innovation include Australia's Economic Accelerator program and the National Industry PhD Program. Both of these programs are designed to support new research and the commercialisation of research in the university sector. Additionally, the Trailblazer Universities Program is a dedicated investment in driving the commercialisation of research from 6 universities covering defence, recycling, critical mineral industry and supply chain security.

Higher wages for workers

A number of commitments have been made to increase wages for Australians including making a submission to the Annual Wage Review 2024-25, \$2.6 billion to life pay for aged care nurses, and \$3.6 billion to lift wages of early childhood workers by 15%. The increased pay for early childhood education and care (ECEC) workers, known as the Worker Retention Payment (WRP), is an interim measure while the Fair Work Commission (FWC) completes its Gender Undervaluation Review.

Intersection with the Education Portfolio

Portfolio responsibilities include ECEC and the management of the WRP. The outcomes of the FWC review, due in June 2025, will impact the implementation of the WRP.

Housing

Housing availability and affordability, for both renters and first home buyers, has been a significant focus of conversations and policy. There were 4 major housing commitments made including the \$10 billion housing plan for first home buyers, \$54 million to accelerate modern housing construction methods, banning foreign investors from buying established homes and expanding the help to buy scheme.

Intersection with the Education Portfolio

These commitments do not directly intersect with the education portfolio, however there are levers to address housing demand which have impacts on education. In place currently is Ministerial Direction No. 111, issued on 19 December 2024 by the Hon Julian Hill MP, Assistant Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs. This directed priority processing of offshore Student visa

applications for higher education and vocational education providers who have not yet reached their prioritisation threshold of 80% of their 2025 indicative allocation of new overseas student commencements. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Departmental approach to implementation

The department operates in an environment of change and reform, delivering many commitments and initiatives every year to deliver government priorities. The implementation of deliverables often involves complexities that are inherent to delivering government initiatives, legislative reform and sector transformation, within set timeframes and budgets.

The department's approach to implementation is based on proven methodologies that are practical, scalable and ensures appropriate governance is in place to support delivery.

Accountability

Purpose

A senior executive is assigned responsibility for the delivery of each of the department's significant commitments and initiatives i.e. programs and projects and is known as the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO). The SRO has overall responsibility for ensuring that a program/project achieves the outcomes and benefits set out in the approved Business Case, within budget and on schedule. SROs have sufficient seniority, accountability and experience to undertake the role, commensurate with the type of project and its significance.

To support SROs in their delivery the department has well established program, project and risk frameworks that underpin our delivery approach. These frameworks are used to deliver projects within the department as well as initiatives of significant strategic value, such as election commitments. Our frameworks are based on proven methodologies and include scalable and flexible tools and processes to support effective delivery. The frameworks require all programs and projects to develop a suite of core documents, tailored to the risk profile of the project, detailing scope, timeline, budget and outcomes.

Assurance and oversight

Project and Investment Committee (PIC)

The PIC provides advice and assurance to the department's Executive Board on the implementation of significant departmental change initiatives (programs and projects). The PIC has key roles in:

- managing the department's portfolio of programs and projects
- supporting SROs to uphold their obligations and accountabilities by ensuring programs and projects remain in line with the department's strategic objectives, government policy and financial approvals
- providing guidance and direction on programs and projects experiencing implementation issues.

The PIC is a decision-making body with responsibility for the allocation of the department's capital budget and the management of cross-portfolio issues. This includes the allocation of project resources and the prioritisation of internally funded projects to ensure alignment to the department's strategic priorities and objectives.

The Portfolio Project Office (PPO)

The Portfolio Project Office (PPO) provides guidance and support to project teams to strengthen capability and enhance the department's ability to deliver on strategic outcomes. The PPO carries out its objective by:

- improving confidence in program and project delivery through development and embedding of frameworks and supporting tools and resources
- building program and project management capability among departmental staff
- keeping the Senior Executive and program and project management community informed of portfolio wide trends, risks and issues.

Assurance activities

Project assurance is an independent process that assesses the health and viability of a program/project, to provide confidence to stakeholders that delivery is appropriate, effective, and efficient. Assurance reviews and health checks are carried out across the department's program and project portfolio.

For the department's most significant deliverables, project teams are supplemented with expert external assurance providers that provide independent assurance assessments.

Project performance reporting

The PPO is responsible for providing the department's senior executive with visibility over the department's portfolio of projects. The PPO provides monthly project portfolio reporting to the Executive Board and the PIC. This reporting highlights:

- any blockages that may be affecting programs or projects and that may require members of either the Executive Board or PIC to intervene
- reporting against project assurance activity
- analysis of portfolio trends, risks, and issues.

Additionally, the PPO provides analysis against the department's program and project portfolio to the department's Audit and Assurance Committee and Risk, Security and Governance Committee to ensure appropriateness of performance reporting and risk management strategies.

The PPO can provide reporting on the department's projects to portfolio ministers and their staff on request.

Early priorities



Stakeholders for early contact

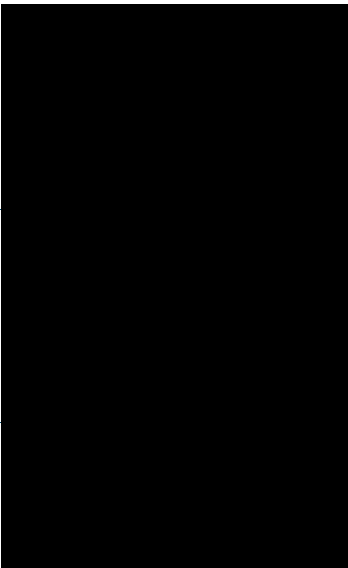
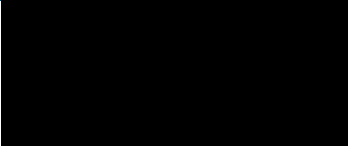


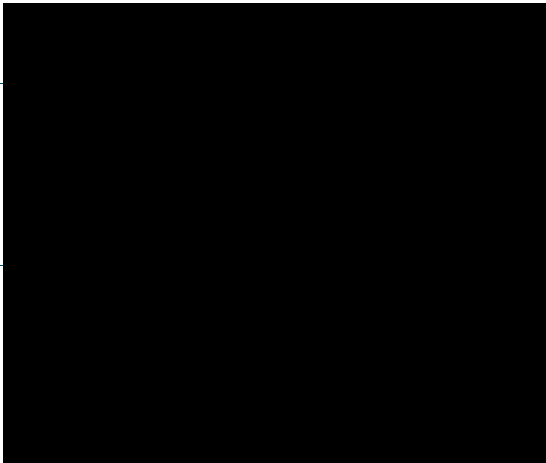
Agencies and statutory bodies

Organisation	Name	Contact details	About the organisation
Higher education, research and international education			
The Australian National University (ANU)	Professor Genevieve Bell AO FAHA FTSE Vice-Chancellor and President		ANU is a world-leading centre for research, education and policy engagement. Prof Genevieve Bell was appointed the 13th Vice-Chancellor of ANU in January 2024.
Australian Research Council (ARC)	Professor Ute Roessner CEO		ARC is a Commonwealth entity within the Australian Government. Its purpose is to help shape Australian research for the nation's economic, social, environmental and cultural benefit.
Australian Tertiary Education Commission	Professor Mary O'Kane AC ATEC Interim Chief Commissioner		The interim ATEC will be established within the Department of Education from 1 July 2025, led by two non-statutory, expert Commissioners – an interim Chief Commissioner and interim First Nations Commissioner. As the interim ATEC is non-statutory, its functions will be advisory in nature.
	Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt AO ATEC Interim First Nations Commissioner		
	Professor Barney Glover AO Jobs and Skills Australia Commissioner		
Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency	Professor Kerri-Lee Krause Chief Commissioner		TEQSA is the independent national quality assurance and regulatory agency for higher education. Professor Krause was recently appointed as the Chief Commissioner of TEQSA. TEQSA Commissioners are the Accountable Authority for TEQSA.

Higher education, Research and International education stakeholders

Organisation	Name	Contact details	About the organisation
Higher education stakeholders			
Country Universities Centre (CUC)	Chris Ronan CEO		CUC is a not-for-profit umbrella organisation that supports Regional University Study Hubs. 28 of the current 56 Hubs are affiliated with the CUC to access a range of centralised support and branding.
	Duncan Taylor Founder and Non-executive Director		
International Education Association of Australia	The Hon Phil Honeywood CEO		International Education Association of Australia provides advocacy and member services relevant to professional staff, academics and teachers across all sectors. Mr Honeywood is the Co-Convener of the Expert Members of the Council for International Education (from inception in 2016 to now).

Organisation	Name	Contact details	About the organisation
Leaders on people with disability in higher education	Graeme Innes AM Chancellor, CQUniversity		Mr Innes is a former AHRC Disability Discrimination Commissioner and participant in the Higher Education Disability Roundtable, and a key stakeholder on disability in higher education.
	Professor Paul Harpur OAM Australian Research Council Future Fellow, University of Queensland		Professor Paul Harpur OAM is a leading international and comparative disability rights legal academic and leader in higher education reforms.
Regional Universities Network (RUN)	Alec Webb CEO		Peak body for regional universities. Members are Charles Sturt University, CQUniversity, Federation University, Southern Cross University, University of New England, University of Southern Queensland, University of the Sunshine Coast.

Organisation	Name	Contact details	About the organisation
International education stakeholders			
International Education Association of Australia	The Hon Phil Honeywood CEO		
Navitas	Simon Finn CEO		Mr Finn is the Co-Convener of the Expert Members of the Council for International Education (from 2024 to now).
University Foreign Interference Taskforce (UFIT)	Professor Deborah Terry AO Deputy Chair		The UFIT brings together the university sector and Australian Government agencies to collaboratively support and build an environment of trust and resilience, and to guide universities' decision-making based on proportionate risks. The UFIT Steering Group is the primary conduit for university and Government counter foreign interference related activities.

Supporting you as Minister



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About the Portfolio

Supporting your role as decision-maker

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About the Portfolio



About the Portfolio

The Education Portfolio consists of the Department of Education, the principal portfolio entities, statutory office holders and boards, and other advisory positions.

Department

Purpose

We create a better future for all Australians through education.

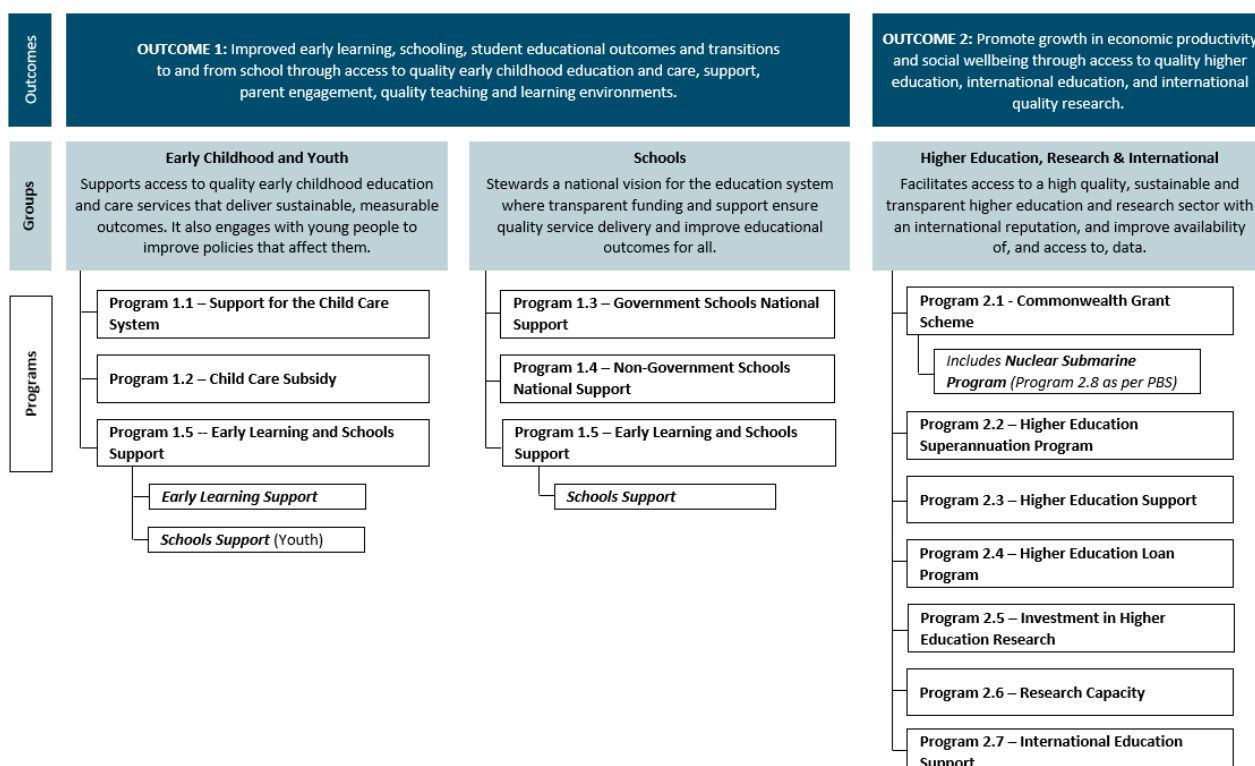
Outcomes

The intended outcomes for the department are included in the Education Portfolio Budget Statements (PBS) and in the Appropriation Acts.

- 1 Improved early learning, schooling, student educational outcomes and transitions to and from school through access to quality early childhood education and care, support, parent engagement, quality teaching and learning environments.
- 2 Promote growth in economic productivity and social wellbeing through access to quality higher education, international education, and international quality research.

Programs by Group

Various programs are administered under each Outcome. Outcome 1 is administered by the Early Childhood and Youth Group, and Schools Group, and Outcome 2 by the Higher Education, Research and International Group.



Portfolio Bodies

Portfolio Entities

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

Derek Scott – Chair, Stephen Gniel – Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Agency Outcome: Improved quality and consistency of school education in Australia through a national curriculum, national assessment, data collection and performance reporting system.

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

Dr Michele Brungies AM – Chair, Tim Bullard – CEO

Agency Outcome: Enhance the quality of teaching and school leadership through developing standards, recognising teaching excellence, providing professional development opportunities and supporting the teaching profession.

Australian Research Council

Professor Peter Shergold AC – Chair, Professor Ute Roessner AM – CEO

Agency Outcome: Growth of knowledge and innovation through managing research funding schemes, measuring research excellence and providing advice.

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

Professor Kerri-Lee Krause – Chief Commissioner, Dr Mary Russell – CEO

Agency Outcome: Contribute to a high-quality higher education sector through streamlined and nationally consistent higher education regulatory arrangements; registration of higher education providers; accreditation of higher education courses; and investigation, quality assurance and dissemination of higher education standards and performance

Australian National University¹.

The Hon Julie Bishop – Chancellor, Professor Genevieve Bell AO – Vice Chancellor

Agency Outcome: Endowed by the nation to bring credit to Australia through the quality of its research, education and contribution to societal transformation.

Statutory Offices

Tuition Protection Service

Melinda Hatton – TPS Director

Responsible for the operation of the student placement service, payments to providers for accepting students affected by a provider default and refunds or loan re credits to students where appropriate.

Education Ministers Meeting and Cross-Jurisdictional Bodies

Education Ministers Meeting

Australian Government Minister for Education – Chair

EMM is the key body for national decision making and collective action on enduring strategic issues related to early childhood education and care, school education, higher education, and international education. EMM meetings occur 4 time a year.

¹ The Australian National University is exempt, or partially exempt, from government policy orders (section 22 of the PGPA Act), is not part of the general government sector included in the Commonwealth general government sector fiscal estimates and does not have a chapter in the Portfolio Budget Statements.

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority

Annette Whitehead – Chair, Gabrielle Sinclair – CEO

Guides the implementation and administration of the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care. ACECQA is accountable to EMM and reports to Australian Education Senior Officials Committee.

Australian Education Research Organisation

Dr Lisa O'Brien AM – Chair, Dr Jenny Donovan – CEO

Position Australia's educators at the forefront of education research to improve learning outcomes for all children and young people.

Education Services Australia

Vicki Baylis – Chair, Andrew Smith – CEO (departing 30 May 2025)

Works with all education systems and sectors to improve student outcomes, enhance teacher impact and strengthen school communities.

Australian Education Senior Officials Committee

Tony Cook PSM – Chair

AESOC is directly responsible to EMM for the execution of EMM decisions.

Statutory and other bodies**Statutory Bodies**

- Australian Research Council Advisory Committee
- Australia's Economic Accelerator Advisory Board
- Higher Education Standards Panel
- National School Resourcing Board
- Tuition Protection Service (TPS) Advisory Board

Other Structures within the Portfolio

- Australian-American Fulbright Commission
- National Education and Care Services

Non-Statutory Appointments

- Regional Education Commissioner
- Interim Australian Tertiary Education Commissioners
- Co-Chair – Rapid Review into Bullying in Australian Schools

Non-Statutory Bodies

- Australian Research Council Indigenous Forum
- Australian Universities Accord Implementation Advisory Committee
- Council for International Education
- Early Childhood Policy Group (ECPG)
- Equity in Higher Education Panel
- Expert Council on University Governance
- Initial Teacher Education Quality Assurance Oversight Board
- National Respectful Relationships Education Expert Working Group

- National Research Infrastructure Advisory Group
- Preschool Outcomes Measure Expert Advisory Group
- Schools Policy Group (SPG)
- Youth Advisory Groups:
 - Civic Engagement – partner agency: Department of Home Affairs
 - Climate Change and Water – partner agency: Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water
 - Creative Industries – partner agency: Office of the Arts
 - First Nations – partner agency: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
 - Prevention of Gender-Based Violence – partner agency: Department of Social Services
- Youth Steering Committee

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partner Organisations

- National Aboriginal Education and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC)
- Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)

Governance

The department's governance arrangements support the delivery of its strategic priorities. Our governance committees play an important role in the functioning of the department and support the Executive Board to define our appetite for risk, monitor our performance, provide assurance of our activities including critical programs and projects, and shape and support our people and our culture. The committees also provide a forum for consultation on key elements on the delivery of the department's work.

Executive Board

The Executive Board is the department's key decision-making body, responsible for setting the longer-term strategy for the department, ensuring the delivery of the Government's objectives and ensuring compliance with the department's legal and financial obligations.

The Executive Board is supported by several committees:

People, Culture and Integrity Committee

Provides oversight and advice to the Executive Board on key people, culture, engagement and workforce planning related strategies and plans.

Project and Investment Committee

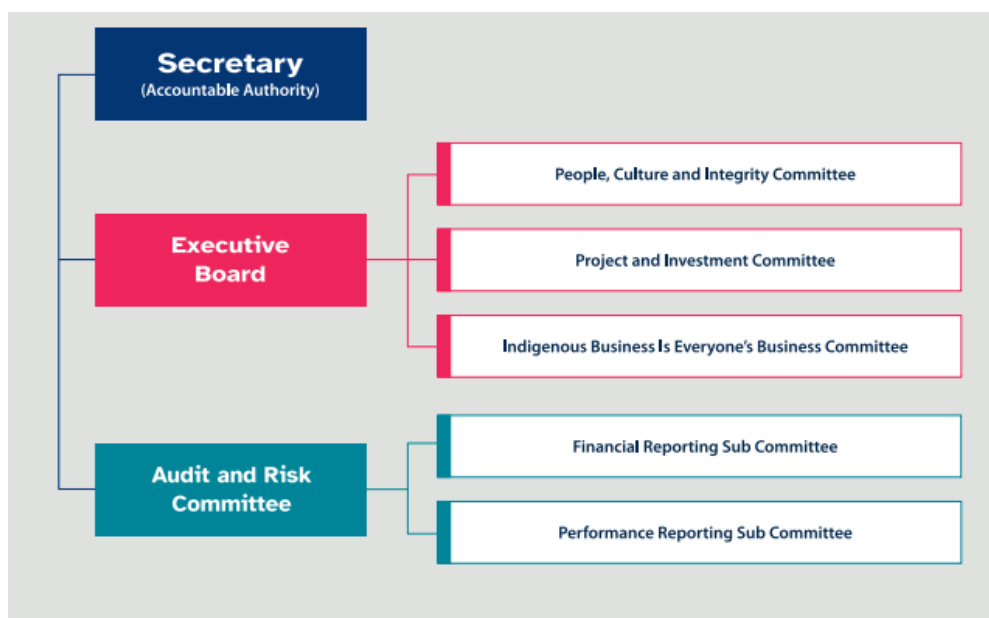
Provides oversight and assurance over the department's project portfolio and the allocation of the department's capital budget.

Indigenous Business is Everyone's Business Committee

Provides oversight and advice on key First Nations strategies and reforms, Closing the Gap Priority Reforms and the forward direction on the department's approach and actions towards reconciliation.

Audit and Risk Committee

The Audit and Risk Committee is a requirement of the PGPA Act. The committee provides advice on the appropriateness of financial and performance reporting, systems of risk oversight and management and systems of internal control. The department's Performance Reporting Sub Committee and Financial Reporting Sub Committee both report to the Audit and Risk committee.



Departmental capabilities: strategy, data, evaluation and digital

Capability review

The department is currently participating in the Capability Review Program, led by the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC). Capability Reviews are forward-looking assessments of agency capability, undertaken by independent external Senior Reviewers, to ensure that agencies can deliver government priorities and outcomes for Australians. The Senior Reviewer's report is due to be finalised in June 2025, with a departmental action plan to be developed within 90 days. The report will provide you with insights into areas of strength, challenges and opportunities for the department over the next five years, in both policy areas and operational matters.

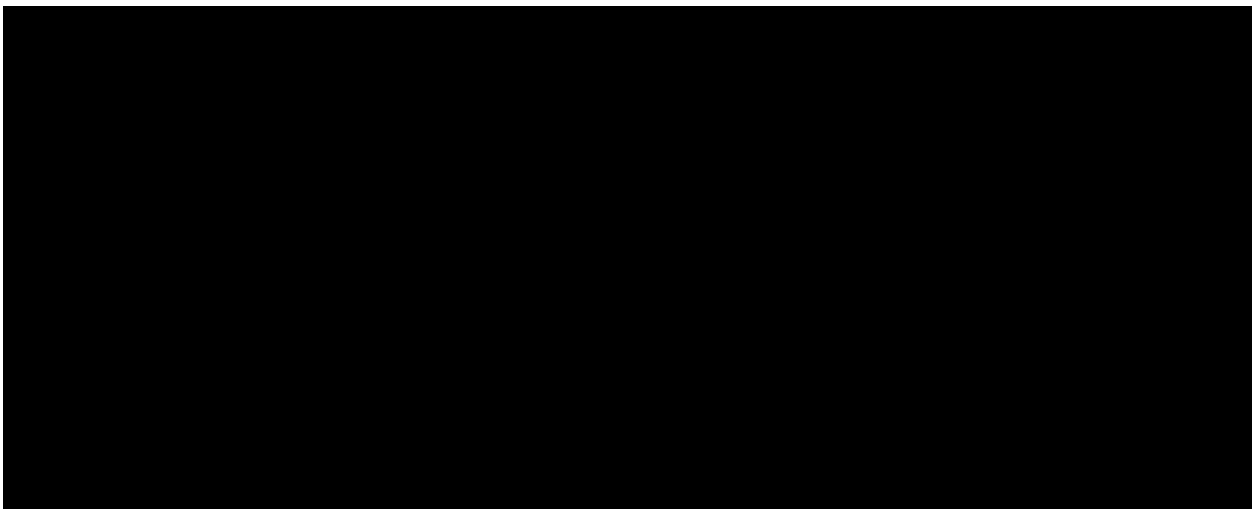
Departmental long-term strategy

The department is developing a long-term strategy as part of our legislated stewardship of the education system and support our interactions with the government, Australian public and stakeholders. The long-term strategy will help us better support you, by enhancing our ability to offer insightful and forward-thinking advice and to identify strategic risks and opportunities.

Data strategy and releases

The department's Data Strategy 2023-2025 sets the strategic direction for the department's data capability, analysis, sharing, release and development. It supports the department to create and harness data for better policy development and program management.

Consistent with the Data Strategy, the department will release, share and use its data where it is safe, legal and ethical to do so. Supporting the government's open data practices, the department's Data Strategy seeks to build trust in the community by introducing further transparency measures in relation to its data activities. There is also a well established need to improve the sharing of education data.



Corporate Plan

The Corporate Plan is the department's primary planning document prepared each year. It outlines how we will go about achieving our purpose - to create a better future for all Australians through education. You will be briefed on it before it is published.

Evaluation strategy and releases

Similar to our management of data, the department will conduct evaluations, share them with the community and stakeholders, and publish the findings and a management response on the department website.

A list of upcoming evaluations will be included in regular correspondence with your Office.

This approach has been affirmed when publishing the departments' [Evaluation Strategy](#). This strategy reflects a commitment to leveraging evidence to continuously improve the design and delivery of Education programs and policies.

Departmental digital initiatives

The department receives ICT services from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) through a shared services arrangement. Under this arrangement, DEWR provides our ICT infrastructure, application development and hosting, and cyber security.

Developing a simple, secure and connected digital education ecosystem is essential to achieving the Australian Government's vision for education reform and to align with the vision and missions of the Data and Digital Government Strategy. Equipping our workforce with modern and flexible tools and services so they can do their jobs in or out of the office in efficient and effective ways is essential for productivity, wellbeing and to support the APS Reform agenda.

Education Funding System

The Australian Government has invested \$91.7 million over three years to deliver a new digital platform to improve the way we administer \$51 billion of funding each year to Australian schools and higher education institutions.

The existing digital platforms used by the department to manage school and higher education funding relies on aging technology and a high degree of manual processing. [REDACTED]

The new Education Funding System is being delivered over a three-year period from July 2023 to July 2026 with new functions progressively released between February 2025 and July 2026. The new digital platform will transform internal and external user experience, deliver accurate and timely payments and reduce the existing administrative burden for schools and higher education providers.

Enterprise Resource Planning

Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software enables critical Financial Management, Human Resource Management, Procurement and Travel/Expense Management capabilities within the department. The Department currently relies on the ERP technology platform and shared services provided by the Department of Finance, Service Delivery Office (SDO) under an MOU arrangement.

[REDACTED]

Your role as decision-maker



Supporting your role as decision-maker

The department will support you in delivering the government's policies and programs, including through the implementation of good decision-making principles and processes. The department will provide you with advice, which is impartial, takes into account legal compliance, considers the integrity of government processes, outlines implementation and delivery risks and considers the impact of a policy on the broader Australian community.

Commonwealth responsibilities for education and key legislation

The Commonwealth has varying levels of responsibility for the operationalisation and delivery of each part of the education sector. Responsibilities include:

- The Commonwealth co-stewards the early childhood education and care (ECEC) system with the states and territories (the states) and the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). The primary role of the Commonwealth in ECEC is to provide financial assistance to families.
- The states have constitutional responsibility for school education. The Commonwealth helps shape the schooling sector, largely via funding enabled by s96 (financial assistance to the states) of the Constitution.
- The Commonwealth has responsibility for funding the higher education sector, a national policy role for regulated qualifications, and ensuring quality standard frameworks and compliance within the sector.

Key pieces of legislation that drive the department's responsibilities and work include:

- Family Assistance Law (FAL) which deals with the administration of Child Care Subsidy (CCS), including the responsibilities of providers approved to administer the CCS. The Education and Care Services National Law and National Regulations, administered by the states, deal with the quality and safety of child care providers and services.
- *The Australian Education Act 2013* is the main legislation for Commonwealth funding to government and non-government schools.
- The *Higher Education Support Act 2003* is the main legislation governing higher education funding in Australia, with the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* (TEQSA Act) underpinning the regulation and quality standards of higher education providers.
- The *Federal Financial Relations Act 2009* provides a standing appropriation for the Commonwealth to provide financial support for the delivery of services by the states.
- The department operates under a range of legislative frameworks that govern our work, including the *Public Service Act 1999*, *Privacy Act 1988*, *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, the *Public Governance Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act) and relevant workplace laws.

Other key responsibilities and legislation that fall within the responsibility of the portfolio in relation to Commonwealth entities and companies include (but are not limited to):

- The Australian Research Council (ARC) is a non-corporate Commonwealth entity established under Section 5 of the *Australian Research Council Act 2001* (ARC Act).

- The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is an independent statutory authority and a corporate Commonwealth entity, established under section 5 of the *Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority Act 2008* (ACARA Act). ACARA is jointly governed and funded by the Australian Government and the states.
- The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) is a public company limited by guarantee under the *Corporations Act 2001* and is subject to the PGPA Act. The Commonwealth is the sole member of the company and is represented by the Minister for Education.
- The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) is a ministerial-owned company, established under the *Corporations Act 2001* and subject to obligations under the *Charities Act 2013*. It is jointly owned by the Australian Government and the states.
- Education Services Australia is a not-for-profit ministerial-owned company established under the *Corporations Act 2001* and jointly owned by the Australian Government and the states.

Supporting legislative decision-making

The department will support you to make decisions within legal frameworks, including decisions in relation to the development of laws or seeking agreement for funding certain activities. Further considerations about the legal and financial limitations of ministerial decision-making powers are outlined below.

Steps for the development and passage of legislation

Law-making is a lengthy process and requires a number of steps by a range of stakeholders with finite resources that service the whole Australian Government.

The delivery of election commitments or new initiatives in your portfolio may require new primary legislation for introduction into the Parliament.

Not all new policy will, however, require new legislation. There will also be circumstances where an election commitment or new initiative can be implemented administratively within the existing legislative framework, including through the use of subordinate legislation (such as regulations or a determination).

Good law requires thorough policy analysis and scrutiny, both of which require time. Consultation, such as with the states, industry stakeholders or other ministers and departments, may be required before you are ready to settle the specifics of the policy and its implementation to a level of detail necessary to progress to drafting a bill.

Every measure included in legislation for introduction into the Parliament must have policy approval at the appropriate level. Measures with significant policy implications are considered by the Cabinet. Measures with minor policy significance are considered by the Prime Minister.

The Parliamentary Business Committee of Cabinet (PBC) is responsible for setting the government's legislation program ahead of each sitting period to determine the order in which projects can access drafting resources. Drafting cannot be undertaken without authority.

You cannot publicly commit the government to timeframes for introduction or passage of legislation. All government bills are drafted by the Office of Parliamentary Counsel (OPC), on instructions provided by the relevant department. The drafting portion of the legislation process for a bill of

small/medium size and moderate complexity will take 6 to 12 months and a bill of large size and moderate to high complexity will take 12 to 30 months.

If you are consulting on versions of the bill, you will need to allow an additional 2 months for consultation to be undertaken.

There are also requirements under the *Australian Education Act 2013* for the Minister to consult with state and territory Education Ministers when making regulations for specific purposes, such as setting the Australian Government funding share for government schools.

Constitutional risk and new government spending

All new and existing spending activities must be supported by the Australian Constitution (and, in many cases, by legislation). There are constitutional limits on the scope of the Commonwealth's power to spend.

Delivering election commitments within your portfolio will require new policy proposals (NPPs) to be developed for consideration and approval by the Cabinet or Prime Minister.

Under existing requirements, the constitutional risk of expenditure proposed in NPPs is assessed by the Australian Government Solicitor (AGS). Under those arrangements, AGS uses four risk ratings (low; medium; high; high (particularly vulnerable)) to categorise the constitutional risk of spending proposals.

Under existing requirements, NPPs with the highest constitutional risk rating of 'high (particularly vulnerable to a successful challenge that a law is unconstitutional)' cannot be brought forward for consideration by Cabinet. This is because that rating indicates that AGS has identified no constitutional support for such spending.

NPPs with a 'high' constitutional risk can only be brought forward if there is a strong case for not further mitigating that risk. This is because in such cases, while AGS will have identified some reasonable arguments in favour of validity of the spending, it does not think those arguments would be successful.

Where AGS assesses spending proposals as having a 'high' or 'high (particularly vulnerable)' constitutional risk rating, lowering this risk and bringing the policy within the Commonwealth's constitutional powers may require significant modifications to the scope or proposed method of implementing an election commitment.

In such circumstances, the department will brief you on options for delivering the election commitment with reduced constitutional risk, as informed by AGS advice. Options to lower constitutional risk include:

- targeting the commitment so that it relates to subject matters within constitutional power
- delivering funding via the states under a Federation Funding Agreement
- obtaining a referral of power from the states (where any referral will likely take considerable time and resources to negotiate).

Key decision-making fora and partnerships

The department will support you in key decision-making fora and partnerships, as provided below.

Cabinet

Government decision-making via the Cabinet is underpinned by principles of collective decision-making and responsibility and Cabinet solidarity. These principles underpin the formulation of consistent policy advice and the exercise of collective accountability. The department will support you to develop matters for Cabinet consideration and help ensure the implementation of these two guiding principles via three important operational values: consultation, confidentiality and respect for Cabinet authority.

Budget

The Budget process is the decision-making process for allocating public resources to the government's policy priorities. Through this process, the government gains the Parliament's authority to spend relevant money through the annual Appropriations Acts and other legislation that enables appropriations. The department will support you, as a portfolio minister, to bring forward policy proposals for consideration by the government during the annual Budget process.

The government produces a Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) report by the end of January each year, or within six months after the last Budget has been presented to the Parliament, whichever is later. Typically, MYEFO is released in December. Portfolio ministers can propose new or amended proposals, using the same process as for Budget proposals.

Any new proposals to spend public monies must go through a budget or MYEFO process.

Federal relations architecture and intergovernmental forums

Australia's federal relations architecture includes intergovernmental forums where Commonwealth, state and territory ministers can meet to progress a range of priority cross-jurisdictional issues.

National Cabinet is the key decision-making forum supporting federal relations, providing governments with a forum to work collaboratively on issues of national significance.

Commonwealth and state and territory ministers often work collaboratively on issues specific to their portfolio areas through intergovernmental meetings. This includes Ministerial Councils, established on an ongoing and regular basis, which provide ministers with a formal channel to resolve key priorities.

Education Ministers Meeting (EMM)

EMM is one of the regular, ongoing ministerial meetings under the Australian Federal Relations Architecture. EMM is the forum for national decision-making and collaboration for early childhood education and care, school education, higher education and international education at the ministerial level.

As the Commonwealth Minister for Education, the department supports you in your role as Chair of EMM. Australian, state and territory government ministers responsible for early childhood education, school education, higher education and international education attend the meeting. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC) is the peak First

Nations education body, working in partnership with EMM to allow for direct engagement between Education Ministers and First Nations stakeholders. NATSIEC representatives attend each meeting to bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, their expertise, and their lived experiences to the deliberations of EMM and its subcommittees.

Approximately four EMM meetings are held each year. Regular meetings enable ongoing national cooperation and consistency on strategic issues related particularly to early childhood education and school education. The Chair, in collaboration with all Education Ministers, will generally determine a forward meeting schedule at the final meeting of the previous year. [REDACTED]

In line with National Cabinet guidance, EMM agrees up to five annual priorities which deal with matters that are of significance or require national agreement. Ministers will typically only consider items at decision-making points, i.e. decisions on instigating or continuing a national initiative and decisions on adopting or commissioning projects, including scope and funding. Agendas are also guided by the activity schedule of EMM work plan. Further work, including any administrative matters that require ministerial consideration and agreement, is conducted out-of-session or delegated to senior officials.

Australian Education Senior Officials Committee (AESOC) is the primary subcommittee of senior officials supporting EMM. Membership is comprised of senior officials (department heads) from the Commonwealth and the states. AESOC provides policy advice to EMM, considers EMM papers prior to their progress to ministers and manages and coordinates jurisdictions' funding contributions for nationally agreed projects and initiatives.

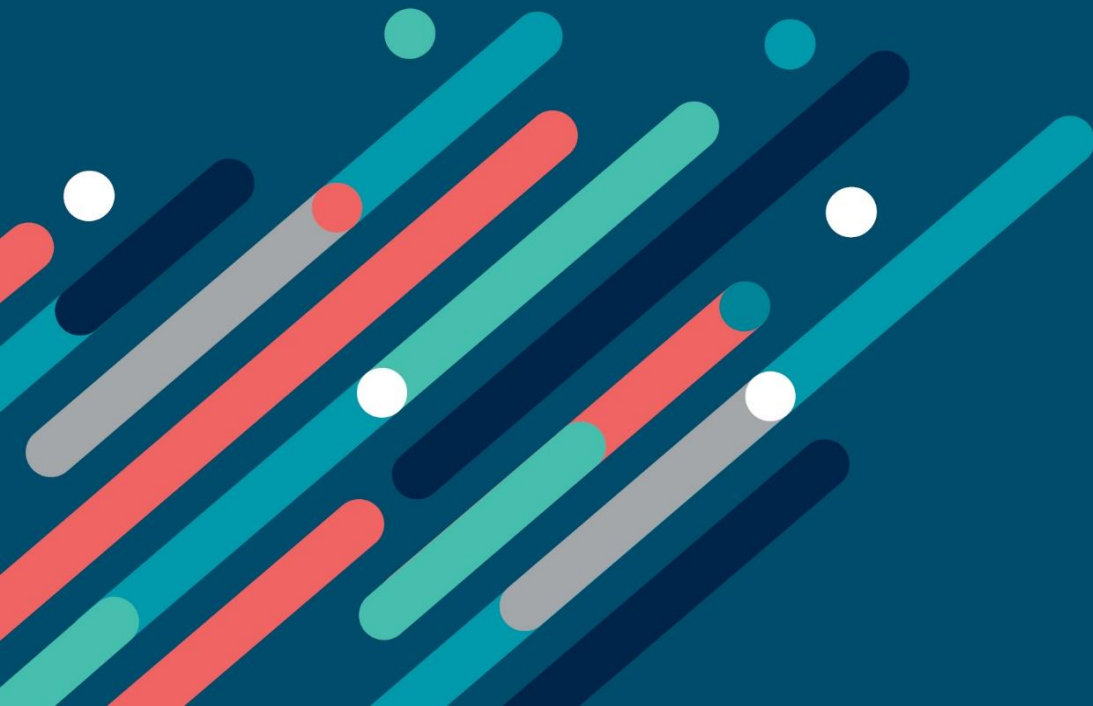
Intersections with other portfolios

The department engages across the APS and with state and territory education departments to deliver outcomes across the education system. We will support you to work with your ministerial colleagues across government to deliver the government's agenda, for example, we work with:

- Service delivery with partner agencies, including Services Australia on the shared delivery of the Child Care Subsidy for families and the ATO for the administration of the Higher Education Loan Program system
- the Department of Social Services on policies and programs for families and children and the National Disability Insurance Scheme
- the states on national policy initiatives through the Preschool Reform Agreement and the Better and Fairer Schools Agreements from 2025
- the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations on aligning education policy with workforce needs and skills, and on improving the connections between higher education and vocational education and training and schools
- The Department of Home Affairs on international education policy and migration matters
- The Department of Industry, Science and Resources on higher education and research priorities
- the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Department of Finance and the Treasury, as our central agencies, on policy coordination, program evaluations and budget considerations

- Australian Government agencies to deliver joined-up policy advice across our organisations – for example, the 18 agencies with policy or program responsibilities that affect young people
- the National Indigenous Australians Agency to support the department’s contribution to the Commonwealth’s shared commitment to the implementation of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Setting up your Office



Snapshot: First Day, First Week, First Month

First Day	First Week	First Month
The Department of Education will:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Provide Interim Departmental Liaison Officers (DLOs) <input type="checkbox"/> Provide Interim Advisors (If required) <input type="checkbox"/> Establish departmental IT accounts and issue IT equipment	<input type="checkbox"/> Provide briefing, submission and correspondence templates for consideration <input type="checkbox"/> Initiate temporary security clearances <input type="checkbox"/> Provide security containers for classified materials <input type="checkbox"/> Establish Parliamentary Document Management System (PDMS) access for advisers <input type="checkbox"/> Set up a CabNet Terminal for managing Cabinet material	<input type="checkbox"/> Meet with you to finalise DLO placements once allocations are received from the Prime Minister <input type="checkbox"/> Meet with you to discuss media services <input type="checkbox"/> Brief you with suggested legislation bids and draft letter to the Prime Minister submitting bids <input type="checkbox"/> Provide business cards <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare Question Time Briefs (QTBs) prior to the first sitting day <input type="checkbox"/> Send responses to your congratulatory letters <input type="checkbox"/> Meet with you to discuss media services <input type="checkbox"/> Undertake a security certification of your ministerial office <input type="checkbox"/> Provide PDMS training
You need to:		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Approve standard words for congratulatory letters <input type="checkbox"/> Contact ComCar and provide required details <input type="checkbox"/> Provide an official photo and your biographic details <input type="checkbox"/> Register for media monitoring alerts (if required) <input type="checkbox"/> Advise if you require any online media subscriptions <input type="checkbox"/> Advise the department of your key office contacts and your preferred ways of receiving information from department.	<input type="checkbox"/> Ministerial office staff to submit security clearance packs to AGSVA <input type="checkbox"/> Attend a security briefing from the department's Security Team. <input type="checkbox"/> Advise of any changes to briefing or correspondence templates <input type="checkbox"/> Approve proposed QTB titles <input type="checkbox"/> Provide the Minister's e-signature (optional) <input type="checkbox"/> Send all invoices for expenses aligned with ministerial duties to Minister's Office Support Team

Departmental Parliamentary Support

Departmental Liaison Officers and Interim Advisers

The department will provide interim DLOs to assist in setting up your office. The department has identified candidates for these DLO positions. They will coordinate the early flow of documentation between the office and the department. DLOs work to your Chief of Staff and report to Bernadette Murphy, Assistant Secretary, Parliamentary, Audit and Risk Branch.

In consultation with your office, permanent DLO arrangements will be finalised after the Prime Minister writes to you with the DLO allocation for your office.

Staff from the department are available to act as Interim Advisers for periods up to 12 weeks where Ministerial Advisers are on leave or while you are recruiting. These positions are funded by the department and the staff must comply with the APS Values and APS Code of Conduct, which limits their ability to engage in political or advocacy work. The department has identified policy and program specialists with an extensive background in key areas of your portfolio to act as Interim Advisers, if required.

Should you require Interim Advisers who can participate in political or advocacy work, for periods of 4 weeks or more, APS employees can be transferred to Member of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984 (MoPs) employment where they are no longer bound by the APS Code of Conduct, or an existing MoPs employee can be transferred into the position. For periods of less than 4 weeks, an existing MoPs employee can be transferred into the position.

Further guidance will be provided to your Chief of Staff on these arrangements.

Cabinet liaison

To assist in the management of your Cabinet responsibilities, a secure Cabinet terminal, a Ministerial Communications Network (MCN) multifunction device, and supporting IT infrastructure is installed in your suite as soon as practicable. Cabinet documents can be viewed on the department's network through the CabNet+ portal. These systems are vital to the coordination of Cabinet business and the distribution of documents amongst Ministers and across the Commonwealth. The department will coordinate the installation of hardware with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and meet all associated costs.

The DLOs are responsible for access to and management of Cabinet documents within your office, via CabNet+ and hardcopies as required. DLOs also assist in liaising with the Cabinet Secretary's office and the department regarding Cabinet responsibilities and matters, as required.

The DLOs liaise regularly with the department's Cabinet Liaison Officers (CLOs) regarding Cabinet business and its forward work program. CLOs are responsible for the day-to-day management of the portfolio's Cabinet program. CLOs are responsible for ensuring that all Cabinet submissions and documents prepared by the department in coordination with you and your office, are prepared and lodged in accordance with the [Cabinet Handbook](#). CLOs liaise directly with Cabinet Division at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet regarding Cabinet operations, Cabinet and

committee requirements, as well as the receipt, circulation and security of all Cabinet documentation received by or prepared in the department.

The CLOs also work closely with the department and the DLOs to ensure your attendance at meetings is supported by relevant briefings as required.

Departmental comments on external Cabinet submissions

The department will be given the opportunity to provide a formal comment on the submission of another department where the submission has relevance to, or may impact on, the education portfolio.

As outlined in the [Cabinet Handbook](#), coordination comments are the impartial advice of the Australian Public Service to the Cabinet and form part of the final Submission that is circulated to Cabinet ministers. The department's comments are cleared by the responsible Deputy Secretary, whether these are drafting suggestions or substantive policy comment on Exposure Drafts, or formal comments on Coordination Finals.

To ensure the Cabinet is receiving impartial advice, these comments are not cleared by ministers or their staff, however, your office will be informed where there are issues or sensitivities with a material impact for the portfolio.

Parliamentary Documents

Parliamentary Document Management System (PDMS)

The Parliamentary Document Management System (PDMS) is used to workflow documents between the department and your office. All ministerial briefings including question time briefs, responses to correspondence and answers to questions on notice will be provided in PDMS. PDMS is a valuable resource of historical information that is easily searched and accessible. DLOs will manage the workflow of items in PDMS for your office.

Access to PDMS will be provided to Advisers. Training and assistance in the use of PDMS is available at a time that is convenient to your office. While advisers can receive briefs and correspondence via the DLOs, it can be useful for advisers to receive these items in PDMS.

Any required hard copies of parliamentary documents will be provided via a twice daily courier service.

Courier service

A courier service between the department and Parliament House is provided two times a day, leaving the department at 10.00 am and 3.00 pm. The courier carries a lockable pouch, for transferring classified material.

Ministerial submissions

Ministerial Submissions are briefs initiated by the department that provide you with policy advice and often seek your approval or agreement. Where possible, the department will provide your office with 10 business days to consider submissions. The department will consult with your office when providing ministerial submissions as required.

Ministerial Submissions are impartial advice from the department and cannot be edited by DLOs or your staff, including the department's recommendation. If you want a submission to consider other options or considerations, we can provide you with an updated submission. If you take a different decision to that recommended by the department in the submission, you should indicate your decision on the submission and we will work with you to implement your decision.

Ministerial Briefs

Ministerial Briefs are requested by your office for information from the department. These will usually be meeting or event briefs to support you at portfolio related engagements.

Question Time Briefs

In preparation for the first sitting week of the 48th Parliament, we will provide you with a list of proposed QTB titles and a QTB template for your agreement. The department will draft QTBs and submit to your office two weeks prior to the first sitting week. A similar process will be followed for any QTBs associated with a Budget.

On a sitting day the department will update QTBs by no later than 10.00 am.

Ministerial correspondence and timeframes

Ministerial Correspondence received by your office is registered in PDMS. Your office will advise the department if a response is required and what level the response will be (Minister reply, Ministerial Staff reply or Departmental reply).

The timeframes for responses to Ministerial Correspondence is determined by your office and the department is committed to meeting these timeframes. The department's default response times, unless otherwise specified are:

VIP – 5 business days | Constituent/stakeholder – 10 business days | Standard – 20 business days

Correspondence – congratulatory letters

Incoming ministers receive congratulatory letters from various stakeholders in their first weeks in office.

The department has developed the following process for responding to these letters:

1. Ministerial correspondence received in the MO.
2. DLO forwards the correspondence to Parliamentary team for registration in PDMS.
3. The Parliamentary team sends response letters to the correspondent, using the approved standard response and your electronic signature (optional).

We will discuss the process with your office, including the process to respond to VIPs.

Campaign correspondence

The department prepares standard words when you receive a large volume of correspondence on the same topic to reduce the reply time to correspondents. There could be a delay in drafting and approving the standard words while details about government policy related to the campaign topic are being finalised.

Once standard words are approved by your office, the standard words will be updated as government policy is updated. Any updates to wording will be re-approved by your office.

E-signature

The department recommends that the MO provide your e-signature, to be held by your DLOs and Executive Level officer in the Parliamentary, Audit and Risk Branch, for use in such campaign responses. The e-signature will only be used with MO approval.

Senate Estimates hearings

The Parliamentary, Audit and Risk Branch coordinates the department and portfolio entities' appearance at **Senate Estimates** hearings. Briefing materials, including interactive PDFs and hardcopy folders, relevant to portfolio matters are provided to your office within 2 weeks of the scheduled hearings. Your office may wish to provide copies of these materials to the Senator representing you at Senate Estimates. The Secretary's office will arrange a pre-brief meeting with you as required.

Following the hearing, the Branch coordinates the preparation of answers to Questions on Notice (QoNs) and the provision of those answers to the committee.

The department will provide all responses relevant to your responsibilities to your office for clearance before they are tabled. The DLOs will assist you with facilitating feedback from your office to the department through PDMS.

Senate Order 21 (Outstanding QoNs)

This Senate Order is due to be tabled 10 calendar days prior to each Senate Estimates hearing. Prior to this, the Branch will provide a brief, with the relevant letter for tabling attached, for your consideration. Once signed, the DLOs will provide the letter to the President of the Senate and advise the department.

Senate Order 22 (Meetings held with former ministers)

This Senate Order is due to be tabled 7 calendar days prior to each Senate Estimates hearing. Prior to this, the Branch will provide a brief, with the relevant letter for tabling attached, for your consideration. Once signed, the DLOs will provide the letter to the President of the Senate and advise the department.

Parliamentary Committee Inquiries and Tabling

The Parliamentary, Audit and Risk Branch has responsibility for the central oversight and advice of portfolio related Parliamentary committee inquiries and maintains a register that can be provided to you as required. All activity relating to Parliamentary committee inquiries is captured in PDMS. Reports on relevant committees, status and monitoring of recommendations are available, as required.

The Branch supports the entire portfolio tabling process, including the tabling of annual reports (typically October) and Australian Government Response to Parliamentary inquiries, as well as coordinating and submitting twice yearly (typically March and October) the Outstanding Government responses report.

Ministerial Appointments

The Ministerial Appointments team provides central oversight of portfolio governance matters relevant to ministerial appointments. This includes reviewing all ministerial appointments briefs to you and your office on appointments to portfolio entities, advisory bodies and boards. The Ministerial Appointments team is also responsible for portfolio board reporting obligations, including the coordination and submission of Senate Order 15 (reporting on Departmental and Agency Appointments and Vacancies reports) required for ministerial appointments, and the annual Gender Balance on Australian Government Boards report.

This work supports you in meeting whole-of-government obligations, including gender balance targets on Australian Government boards.

Senate Order 15 (Reporting on Departmental and Agency Appointments and Vacancies)

Senate Order 15 is due to be tabled seven calendar days prior to each Senate Estimates hearing. Prior to this, the Parliamentary, Audit and Risk Branch will provide you and your office with a briefing, including the relevant letters for you to table. Once signed, the DLOs will provide the letter to the President of the Senate and advise the department.

Gender Balance Reporting on Australian Government Boards

The Office for Women at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet will request data on gender balance on Australian Government boards for biannual and annual reporting periods in December and July each year. These requests are approved by the Deputy Secretary, Corporate and Enabling Services and will be provided to the portfolio Minister's office.

There are standard words in all appointment briefs which include a statement on the Australian Government's gender diversity target, the Education portfolio's performance against the gender diversity target (based on the last gender balance report); the board's current gender balance; and the impact the proposed, nominated or approved candidate(s) will have on the board's gender balance.

Office Support

The department administers a range of entitlements and provides administrative services and technological support to ministers and their staff employed under the *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984*. The Minister's Office Support team is responsible for administrative support, including managing accounts with vendors and invoice payment.

All procurement is approved by the Chief of Staff and provided to the Minister's Office Support team in writing via email before purchases are made.

Invoices should be sent to the team clearly endorsed and signed: *'Certified correct for payment – goods/services received for official business use in accordance with Minister of State Entitlements'*.

The team will work with the office manager/receptionist to establish a formal email response as per above using the signature block functionality in Microsoft Outlook.

Office requisites

The department covers office requisite costs associated with the Parliament House office, for example TVs and paper shredders. The Department of Finance meets office supply costs incurred at an electorate office.

Stationery

The department will provide stationery, including paper, envelopes and business cards. Envelope and business card templates will be provided for review in the first week.

Subscriptions, memberships and fees

The department is responsible for membership fees of business organisations related to portfolio or ministerial responsibilities, payment of conference and training fees, and membership of airport lounges for your nominated staff. This includes subscriptions to online media.

ComCar

Responsibility for requesting ComCar vehicles sits with your office. The contact number for ComCar is 131 847.

The department covers the costs of car-with-driver services for you and your spouse and children. Please provide certified invoices to the Minister's Office Support Team for payment.

Private plated vehicles

The responsibility for requesting a private-plated vehicle based in Canberra, in lieu of car-with-driver services sits with your office. The SG Fleet Drive Assistance Hotline can be contacted on 1800 009 082 to organise a lease vehicle.

The department covers the costs of private-plated services for you. Please provide certified invoices to the Minister's Office Support Team for payment.

Access pass to departmental buildings

The department will provide security passes for you and your staff to enable access to the National Office at 50 Marcus Clarke Street, including basement parking on request.

Information Technology (IT) and Support

Under the shared services agreement, the **Department of Employment and Workplace Relations** administers a range of IT entitlements to support you and your staff employed under the *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984*.

The Premier Support team will be in close contact during your initial days of office to get all the details required to setup your access to the department IT systems. For the most part, this will happen automatically and will be fast tracked. Premier support staff will also guide you through the setup of your password, email and software on your new devices.

The Premier Support team aims to provide a flexible and professional service to the Minister, Ministerial office staff, and Senior Departmental Executives. Some of the key services include:

- **Designated Support Staff (personalised support)** - designed to help maximise and meet the unique needs for Ministerial and Executive staff.
- **Responsive Support** - A Premier Support hotline is provided to ensure IT Issues are resolved as quickly as possible.
- **Pro-active Support** – The Premier Support team make daily contact with each ministerial office to proactively resolve IT issues. This contact is in person at Parliament House, except when remote support has been negotiated.
- **24/7 technical support** – An on-call service provides 24-hour access to IT support to assist with problems anytime they arise.
- **Virtual Meeting Support** – Premier Support team to assist with setups of virtual meetings for ministerial and executive staff when requested and for outside of hours.

How to Contact the Premier Support Service

Outside of the Premier Support Service's daily contact with the Ministerial offices, the Premier Support hotline is the first point of contact for IT questions or issues.

The Premier Support Service can be contacted on:

- Phone: [REDACTED]
- Email: [REDACTED]

After hours support is available between 7pm and 7am by calling [REDACTED]

IT Entitlements at a Glance

	Minister	Chief of Staff	Advisers	Office Manager Personal Assistant Receptionist
Smartphone – Apple iPhone 15	✓	✓		
Smartphone – Apple iPhone 14			✓	✓
iPad	✓	✓		
Sim enabled Laptop computer (DTA) with dual monitor desk setup	✓	✓	✓	✓
Remote access soft token (MFA)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Telstra wireless card			✓ ¹	
Home broadband connection (Service is subject to available options)	✓			
Personal Printer for office	✓	✓		

¹ Media advisers only

Any requests for equipment not included in the Entitlements listed above will require a business case endorsed by the Chief of Staff. All costs for additional equipment or services are charged to the departmental ministerial cost centre.

Standard Hardware and Software

The department currently operates a Microsoft Windows environment running Windows 11 laptops and desktops with Microsoft Office 365.

Department laptops or mobile phones cannot be taken overseas. Please see options available under International Travel on page 18.

Office Printers

The department currently contracts Kyocera to provide office printing equipment (printing, photocopying, scanning and faxing). Printers to meet office requirements will be provided to each office location. Generally, this includes at least one multifunction printer/scanner, as well as a small number of smaller printers.

The department uses a print on demand solution for releasing prints from multifunction devices which provides added security.

Department Provided Laptops

The department provides a laptop to each ministerial staff member which enables access to the department's IT network and services.

The Desktop Anywhere (DTA) solution is a departmental laptop setup to provide a secure computing environment which can be used both on and outside of the network. This solution enables connectivity to the departmental network over any available open internet connection. Users have

access to departmental resources including email, network drives, applications using the DTA solution.

Remote access

The department also provides a Remote Access Solution (RAS) which enables access to the department's network. This allows staff to access work files from non-departmental computers and uses a Remote Access Token that generates a pass code for added security.

Each ministerial officer will be provided with a Remote Access service upon request.

Wireless data and broadband services

The department offers Telstra Wireless Broadband for ministerial staff. Sim enabled Laptop computer (DTA) offer internet access for work requirements while travelling within Australia.

Data usage restrictions do apply and if exceeded will result in additional monthly charges. Where excess usage is detected a Premier Support officer will discuss remediation options.

Smart phone and corporate access

The department has a standardised mobile telephone fleet and currently has contracts with Optus and Telstra as Mobile Telecommunications Service Providers. New ministers and staff will have their mobile and data services ported across to the department's Telstra account to ensure maximum coverage in Australia and internationally.

The department supplies supervised Apple IOS Devices. InTune is the department's mobile device management system which provides access to many departmental IT services such as email and MS Teams.

Video Conferencing

Video conferencing equipment can be provided in the Ministerial Electorate Office and Commonwealth Parliamentary Office in the Minister's home state and the office in Parliament House.

IT Usage Policies

The department has an Information Security Policy that informs on the use of its IT resources. Staff agree to abide by the policy by signing a New Starter form, and by accepting the notification message that is displayed when logging onto the departmental network.

A departmental network logon account is provided to all users and enables each user to access the department's IT system. It provides secure access to corporate applications, the department's network resources, email accounts and the internet.

Further information on IT Security matters can be provided by the Premier Support Team.

General IT exceptions and returns

Should you require any IT equipment or service not listed in this document, please raise them with the Premier Support team and they will assist you where possible.

When a ministerial officer leaves the department's portfolio all equipment must be returned on their last day, or within pre-negotiated timeframes.

Desktop Video Conferencing service options are also available.

Lost, stolen and damaged equipment

If equipment is lost, stolen or damaged Premier Support must be contacted as soon as possible, and a Security Incident Report form must be completed.

The user must also report lost or stolen equipment to the police and obtain a police report number, which is to be included on the security incident report form. Please note that lost equipment is treated like the item has been stolen.

Media

The Media team will work closely with ministerial media advisers on processes to support timely and effective responses to media enquiries, including the forward planning of ministerial media opportunities.

Ministers' Media Centre

The **Ministers' Media Centre** (MMC) supports the online posting of portfolio ministerial **media releases, speeches and transcripts** (e.g. media interview transcripts). The Media team will take the direction of ministerial media advisers as to what media and speech content is posted to the MMC. Please note that only content related to ministers' portfolio responsibilities will be posted by the department. Party political content will not be published to the MMC.

No immediate information is required in order to set up a new Media Centre page. Other material, such as an **official photo and biographic details**, can be uploaded when it is provided to the Media team.

Media Releases, Speeches and Transcripts

The Media team will work with ministerial media advisers in the first month to identify a **forward calendar of ministerial media, speech and other communication opportunities**. This calendar will be updated each week by the Media team and emailed to ministerial media advisers for consideration and discussion, as required.

If media advisers confirm that a minister has committed to delivering a speech for an event related to our portfolio responsibilities, or a media release is required to support an announcement, the Media team will work with the department's relevant policy/program line area(s) to draft a speech or other media material. Advisers should request event brief and speech requests through DLOs.

Media maintains and updates a forward calendar of ministerial media and event opportunities. This is updated each week by the Media team and emailed through to ministerial media advisers for consideration and discussion, as required.

Transcripts generated from media interviews that relate to portfolio matters will be published to the MMC. Transcripts are generated by the department's media monitoring provider (Streem) and are checked against delivery by department media staff before being provided to your office to final review and approval to publish. We do not fact check transcripts.

Media Monitoring Service

The Media team is responsible for managing the provision of **media monitoring services** through the department's current service provider, Streem. The department provides two morning media summary clips services: a **5:30 am Hot Issues Daily Briefing email**; and a broader **7:30 am General Clips Daily Briefing**. These summary email reports cover select key portfolio issues that are running in each day's news media. On weekends, only one 7:00 am email news summary report is provided.

Ministers and their staff can be added to the distribution lists for these media summary reports, by emailing requests through to media@education.gov.au.

Access is also available to Stroom's media portal, which is a 24/7 online media monitoring service. Ministerial staff can be set up with accounts. This can be facilitated through the Media team. Requests for training on how to use the Stroom media portal can also be supported.

Each weekday, the Media team compiles and distributes a **late afternoon media summary email**. This report is issued at approximately 4:30 pm each weekday and provides summary information of all media enquiries received and responded to by the department, as well as links to media statements on portfolio matters issued by Government and opposition spokespersons and non-government organisations and key representatives' bodies. Ministers and their staff can be added to the distribution lists for the afternoon media summary, by emailing requests through to media@education.gov.au.

Social media

The department's main social media channels are Facebook (@AusGovEducation), Instagram (@AusGovEducation), X (@AusGovEducation) and LinkedIn (Australian Government Department of Education). The department also manages the Australia's Economic Accelerator LinkedIn page (Australia's Economic Accelerator (AEA)) and a Facebook Group for Child Care Subsidy Providers (Child Care Subsidy approved providers and services). The Office for Youth have a Facebook (@Youthgovau), Instagram (@youthgovau) and LinkedIn page (Youthgovau).

Your social media accounts are managed by you and/or your staff. The department's Social Media team can provide advice in relation to best use of social media.

Newspapers

Your office may arrange supply of daily newspapers with online subscriptions or directly with newsagents or delivery providers. Home delivery of newspapers may also be arranged for the Senior Media Adviser. The department meets these costs and are approved by the Chief of Staff.

Security

Security Briefing

The department recommends that a security briefing is provided to your office and staff within the first month.

Security Clearances

The Special Minister of State Determination 2023/12 makes employment for electorate and ministerial staff employed under the *Members of Parliament (Staff) Act 1984* (Part III) conditional on obtaining and maintaining a Negative Vetting 2 security clearance (NV2). NV2 permits access to classified information and resources up to and including TOP SECRET.

Under the Protective Security Policy Framework (PSPF) the responsibilities for sponsorship and management of the security clearances of ministerial staff are shared between the department, the Department of Finance, and the Minister (or Chief of Staff as their delegated authorised officer).

Security clearances are processed through the Australian Government Security Vetting Agency (AGVSA). To be eligible for an Australian Government security clearance, an individual **must be an Australian citizen** and have a checkable background.

The department may be required to report on departmental sponsored security clearance in public accountability documents.

Responsibilities for ministerial staff security clearances

Department of Finance	Department of Education	Minister/Chief of Staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Initiate clearance process• Manage separation process	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assess temporary access requests• Manage clearance maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Notify the department and Ministerial and Parliamentary Services (MaPS) of commencing and separating ministerial staff• Encourage timely submission of clearance paperwork• Advise on personnel security risks

Access to information while waiting for a security clearance

Temporary access may be provided to allow access to information up to the PROTECTED classification without a security clearance, after the risks of doing so have been assessed. This may only be granted for a limited time period (maximum of 3 months).

Temporary access to SECRET information requires an existing Baseline security clearance and TOP SECRET information requires an existing Negative Vetting 1 (NV1) security clearance.

The department's security team will initiate the temporary access process following advice from MaPS that an application has commenced. To expedite this process, DLOs can contact the security team directly to request on behalf of the ministerial staff member.

International travel

International travel (both personal and official) carries heightened risks for you and your staff due to the nature of your work and access to Australian Government information. You and your staff may be targeted by foreign actors attempting to obtain information, cultivate relationships, and recruit via enticement or coercion.

DLOs will inform the Agency Security Adviser of any personal or official international travel. The Agency Security Adviser will then provide an International Travel Briefing for those travelling overseas. This will include information provided by intelligence agencies relevant to the destination (if available).

The Premier Support Team will also attend the briefing and provide additional information on cyber security. They may issue 'burner devices' for use while traveling as department laptops or mobile phones usually cannot be taken overseas.

Reporting Obligations

Security clearance holders are required to report changes in their personal circumstances to AGVSA. A full list of reportable changes are available on the AGSVA website and include; overseas travel, change of residence and suspicious contact.

The department will provide advice on reporting your overseas travel as part of your travel briefing.

Contact Reporting Scheme

The Contact Reporting Scheme (CRS) is a whole-of-government counter-espionage strategy managed by ASIO. Under the CRS you are required to report any foreign national interactions that were suspicious, ongoing, unusual or persistent (SOUP) to the Agency Security Adviser.

The CRS is a vital tool that helps ASIO uncover the harmful activities of foreign powers in Australia, including how they target government personnel, information, and facilities.

Official government information

The department's ICT including Email, SharePoint, Teams and network storage can contain information up to PROTECTED. However, sending or copying of security classified information to personal email accounts is strictly prohibited, this includes OFFICIAL: Sensitive and PROTECTED information.

Your office will be equipped with a secure printer terminal, secure fax and a secure phone to print, transport or discuss information classified up to classified up to Secret.

All classified information must be secured in an appropriate security container when not in use and at the close of business. Containers and safes will be provided to your office in the first week. Your

office and DLOs are responsible for ensuring documents are appropriately handled and stored in accordance with the PSPF. Information at any classification cannot be transmitted or stored on personal USB devices.

An authorised departmental courier or member of the department's Parliamentary team carries hard copy classified information between your office and the department.

Parliament House Zone Two Certification

Under the PSPF and Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) Technical Note 1/15 the department is required to certify and accredit all areas where security classified information and resources will be used, transmitted, stored or discussed. This includes the Zone Two ministerial suites of Portfolio Ministers.

The department's security team will arrange an inspection of your Parliament House ministerial office with the DLOs.

Legal

Legislation

The Schools, HERI, Legislation and Commercial Legal Branch provides legislation-related services to your office in conjunction with the Office of Parliamentary Counsel and the Parliamentary Affairs and Legislation Section of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. These services include:

- managing the portfolio's legislation program, including preparing recommended portfolio legislation bids; developing drafting instructions in conjunction with policy areas for the Office of Parliamentary Counsel; coordinating drafting and settling bills and their supporting documents; and coordinating making regulations and other legislative instruments and registering them on the Federal Register of Legislation
- monitoring the passage of Bills through the House and Senate, and preparing regular reports (weekly legislation updates) for ministers and others on portfolio legislation and related issues
- providing assistance for Senate Committee inquiries into particular portfolio legislation
- coordinating portfolio input for updating the Administrative Arrangements Order after elections/ministerial reshuffles.

Section **1.5 Supporting your role as decision maker** details the steps for the development and passage of legislation.

Freedom of Information

The department's Freedom of Information (FOI) processing and decision-making are centralised in the Corporate, Early Childhood and Youth Legal Branch. When an FOI application is received, the coordinator liaises with relevant business areas of the department to identify relevant documents and to seek views about release and whether or not the decision maker should rely upon any applicable exemption provisions.

The department provides your office with regular summaries about current and recently completed FOI applications. These reports are provided every three weeks.

The department can provide assistance in processing FOI requests made to a minister. The FOI Act extends the right of access to official documents of a minister, who is independent of the department for the purposes of FOI. It is open to the minister to authorise members of their staff to make decisions on FOI requests received by the minister and the department will prepare an appropriate instrument for this purpose.

Contact List

Corporate and Enabling Services Executive

Name	Position	Contact Details
Marcus Markovic	Deputy Secretary, Corporate and Enabling Services	[REDACTED]
Jasna Blackwell	First Assistant Secretary, People, Parliamentary and Communications	[REDACTED]

Parliamentary, Audit and Risk Branch

Name	Position	Contact Details
Bernadette Murphy	Assistant Secretary, Parliamentary, Audit and Risk Branch	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	A/g Director, Cabinet and Parliamentary Services	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	Director, Parliamentary Workflow, Appointments and Systems	[REDACTED]
Minister's Office Support Team		[REDACTED]

- [Departmental Parliamentary Support](#)
- [Office Support](#)
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- [Cabinet liaison](#)
- [Senate Estimates hearings](#)
- [Parliamentary Committee Inquiries and Tabling](#)
- [Ministerial Appointments](#)

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- [Information Technology \(IT\) and Support](#)
- [IT Entitlements at a Glance](#)
- [Standard Hardware and Software](#)

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- [Social media](#)

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- [International travel](#)
- [Contact Reporting Scheme](#)
- [Official government information](#)

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- [Legislation](#)
- [Freedom of Information](#)

Strategic context



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Strategic context

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Key themes



Key themes

The opportunity of education

Education drives our national prosperity and supports better futures for all Australians. It develops human capital – the foundation of productivity growth. It creates a bigger, better skilled, more productive workforce, which we need for our economy to grow and compete in the decades ahead. It enables our workforce to adapt more readily to structural change and economic shocks. Education plays a crucial role in enabling everyone to participate and share in our national prosperity, including by delivering the skills and qualifications Australians need into the future.

However, not enough Australian students are completing school and more effort is required to ensure they finish their education with the skills for further education and employment opportunities. Declining Year 12 completion rates coupled with declining student performance in domestic assessments of reading and numeracy, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, falls short of meeting the projected future need.

Through education, people develop the skills and knowledge to access job opportunities, better connect with their communities and better understand the changing world around them. More than that, education meaningfully reduces inequality and entrenched disadvantage in favour of a more socially inclusive and mobile society.

Education is also a means to extending Australia's national interests, including in foreign policy, trade and development, and research. International education extends into schools, vocational education and training (VET) and higher education, delivering benefits to our economy, communities and international students. Domestic research plays a vital role in driving economic prosperity and addressing national priorities. Australian researchers are best positioned to address Australia's unique challenges, helping to build and maintain sovereign capability in strategic industries and enhance Australia's international standing and influence.

Education is a lifelong experience. Australians engage with the education system in a range of ways right from early childhood and throughout their lives.

The Australian Government provides national leadership, funding and programs to ensure all Australians continue to learn and grow at all stages of life. However, states and territories have primary responsibilities for key elements of education policy and service delivery.

Education system performance

The performance of Australia's education system plays a critical role in shaping national development, with ongoing efforts to assess and enhance student outcomes, drive equity and overall system effectiveness. However, there are common challenges and opportunities cutting across education sectors which require continued focus.

Meeting Australia's changing skill needs

The education system must remain adaptive and forward-looking as social and economic challenges evolve. These challenges significantly influence educational outcomes and priorities. Several larger forces are reshaping Australia's economic landscape, each with profound implications for the

education system – for example technology developments, changing industries and skills needs – leading to accelerating demand for key workers and persistent and growing inequality. To effectively meet these challenges, education must maintain focus on foundational skills, be agile, evidence-based and closely align with economic planning and social equity goals.

The Australian education system continues to focus on enabling all people to have access to quality education that is tailored to support them, and provides opportunities to close education and achievement gaps. For example, the need for increased and ongoing access and engagement with tertiary education is closely tied to skills shortages at national, state, and local levels. As of 2024, a third of occupations are in a state of national shortage with around half of occupations in shortage in professions of national priority related to health, engineering, teaching, and information communication and technology. These professions, largely fall into STEM fields and typically require some form of tertiary qualification. As such, skills shortages in areas of national priority are likely to continue and so to the demand for access to tertiary education and a demand for focus on strong STEM foundations.

Rapid transformation of technology

Technology access, infrastructure, cybersecurity, and implications of using technology like artificial intelligence are critical challenges across all education sectors, with impacts for equity, privacy and quality of teaching and learning. Technological advancements and the increasing digital divide are significantly reshaping the landscape of education, offering new opportunities and challenges. This includes the rise of online learning, virtual classrooms, and personalised learning experiences, while also raising concerns about equitable access to technology and digital skills.

Securing economic stability in a volatile global economy

The entire education system requires focus on building a future-proof workforce through skills development, industry aligned education, lifelong learning and equity in access to quality teaching and learning. A robust education system can support Australia in its economic development in the face of volatility. For example, fostering quality research and building collaborative partnerships across national boundaries, when conducted in a safe and trusted way, can enhance Australia's national interests and have greater impact.

Creating a productive and transformed economy

The Australian education system can create a more productive and transformed economy. An emphasis on critical thinking, creativity and digital literacy prepares learners for a rapidly evolving economy. Australia faces several interconnected challenges in creating a productive and transformed economy through education. Key issues include inequitable access to quality education, and ensuring that education settings continue to keep pace and remain responsive to evolving workforce needs.

Retaining the strengths of a cohesive and functioning society

Education equips individuals with the skills needed to contribute meaningfully to both the economy and their communities. However, when access to quality education is uneven, it can deepen social divides and perpetuate cycles of disadvantage. Issues of systemic inequality, cultural bias and marginalisation of minority communities can weaken social cohesion. If education fails to evolve

alongside societal and technological changes, it risks alienating younger generations and creating a disconnection.

Quality education for everyone

Our education system delivers high quality outcomes for most Australians, but some people continue to miss out. With nine out of ten jobs being created in Australia requiring tertiary education, it is important to continue to build an education system that delivers for every Australian.

Our Early Childhood Education and Care sector contributes to most children being developmentally on track when they start school, but there are some who miss out. Our school system has delivered improvements for many students and compares favourably with international counterparts. But improvements have not been universal, and more is needed to lift outcomes for students who experience disadvantage. The number of students finishing high school at the moment is going backwards. This is of particular concern in public schools, where it has dropped from 81% to 74% in the last 10 years. More effort is required to ensure they finish their education with critical skills for further education and employment opportunities.

An integrated and sustainable system

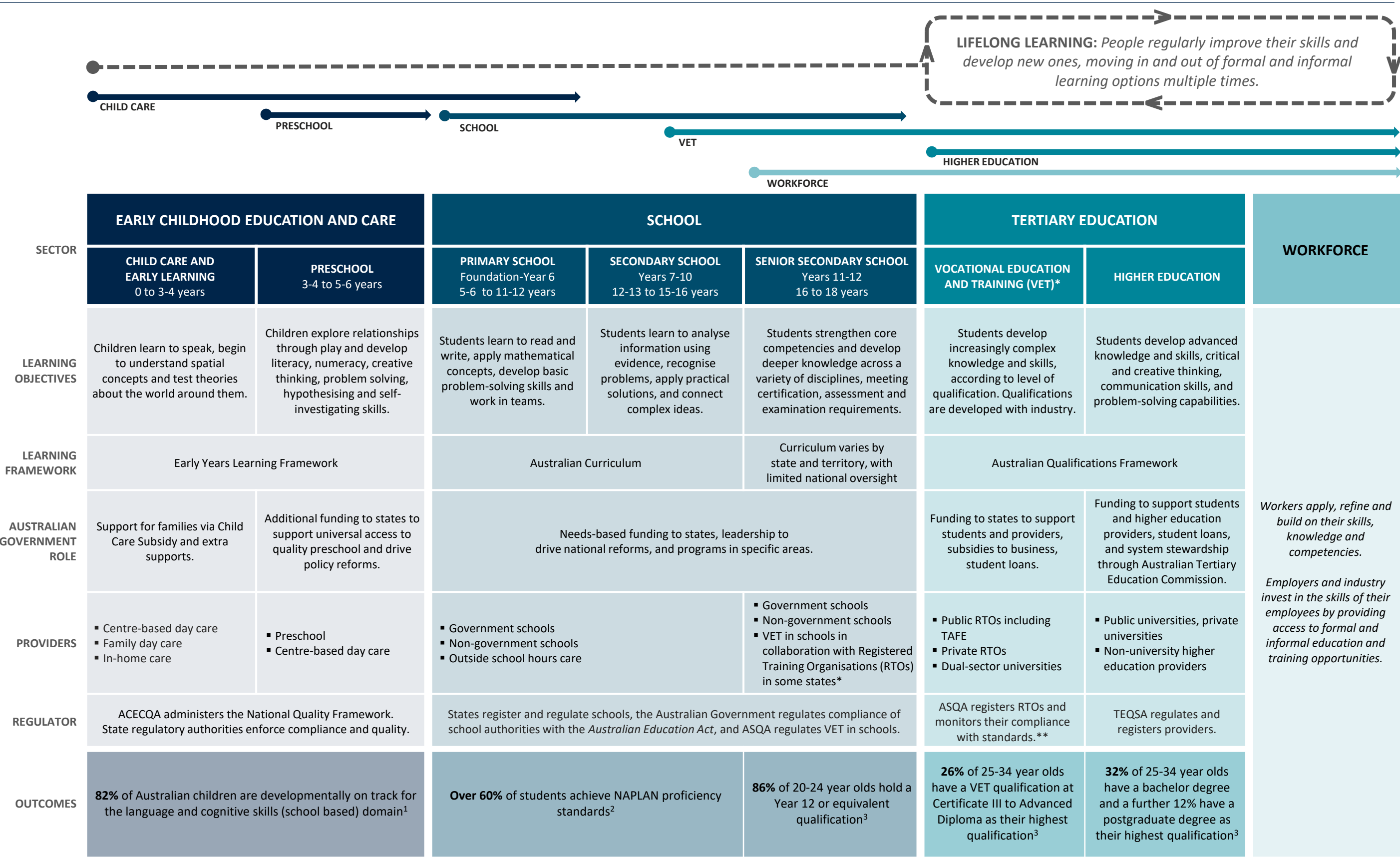
When education systems are well connected, it enables smoother transitions for students as they progress through each stage. Integrated systems support consistent learning frameworks, shared learning outcomes and better alignment between qualifications and pathways. Integration supports more effective governance and coordination between the Australian Government, state and territory governments and sectors for connected reform efforts, laying the foundation for a more resilient and reflexive education system.

However, further work is required to improve education system integration. For example, in the tertiary sector more work is required to achieve the policy objective of greater alignment between higher education and the VET sector. An integrated tertiary system allows for alternative pathways to obtaining qualifications, such as tertiary preparation programs and enabling programs, and pathways through other qualifications like a VET diploma into a bachelor degree and vice-versa.

Australia's education system plays a key role in re-skilling and developing capabilities. However, our education system itself faces workforce challenges in attracting and retaining staff. Continued effort is required to meet demand. Persistent shortages, uneven distribution of expertise and high attrition rates are compounded by systemic barriers which require coordinated effort in collaboration with states to address systemic issues (e.g. workload pressures and career progression).

Learning lifecourse

Education is a lifelong experience. Australians engage with the education system in a range of ways. The Australian Government provides national leadership, funding and programs to ensure all Australians continue to learn and grow at all stages of life.



¹AEDC, 2024, embargoed

²ACARA, NAPLAN National Results, 2024

³ABS, Survey of Education and Work, 2024

*Outside of department remit. Overseen by Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

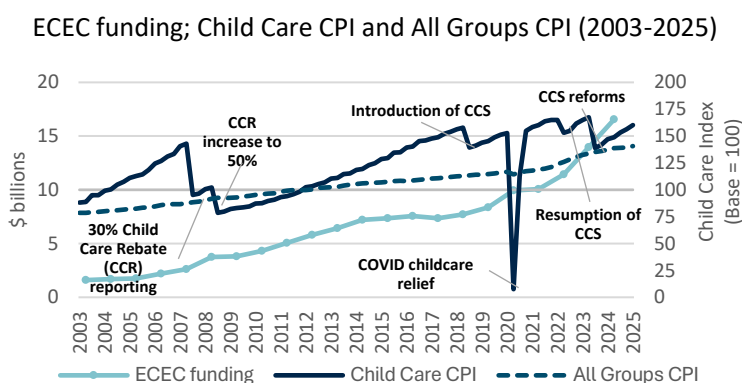
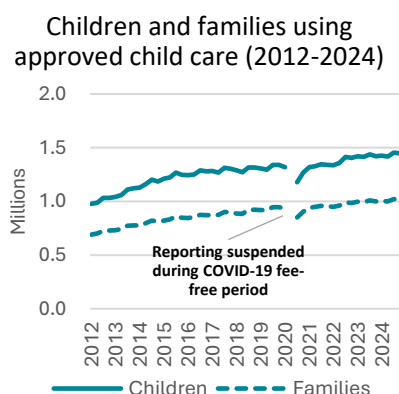
**Victoria and Western Australia have separate VET regulators

Education outcomes and outlook

Insights into how well the education system helps Australians achieve their full potential and drives economic and social wellbeing.

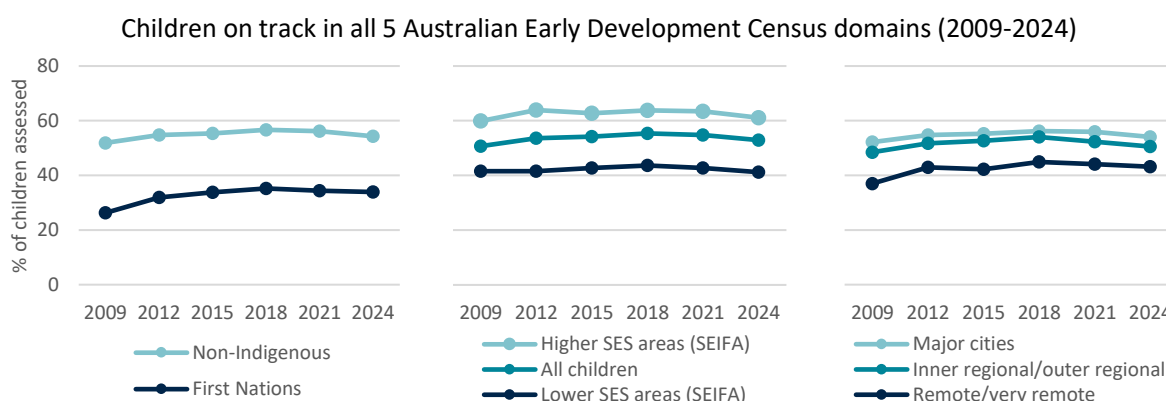
More families and children are benefitting from early childhood education and care than ever, but affordability is a continuing issue

Use of approved child care fell due to the pandemic but now exceeds pre-pandemic levels; Affordability remains an ongoing policy focus



The number of children and families accessing approved child care (i.e. eligible to receive Child Care Subsidy (CCS) payments from the government) has continued to increase, rebounding after the pandemic to now exceed 1.4 million children. Child Care CPI, which tracks out-of-pocket costs, rose 8.9% over the 12 months to March 2025, outpacing CPI growth of 2.4%, and is 14.9% higher than in 2018 when the child care subsidy was introduced.

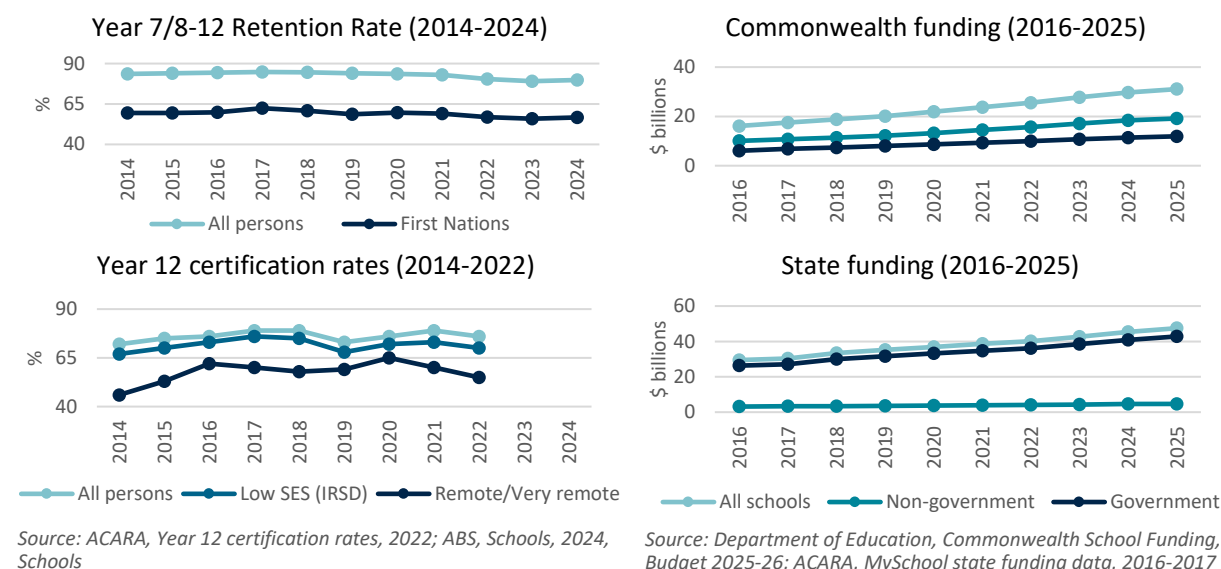
ECEC is supporting most children to be on track in their development when they commence school, but significant gaps remain for disadvantaged cohorts



While most children are ‘developmentally on track’ in all five AEDC domains (“All children”), this rate has declined since 2021. This decline is even more apparent for disadvantaged cohorts – First Nations children, children from lower socio-economic areas, and children from regional and remote areas – where even more children have moved from being on track, to being developmentally at risk or even developmentally vulnerable. Persistent gaps for these cohorts suggest additional supports may be required to strengthen key areas of development relevant to their education.

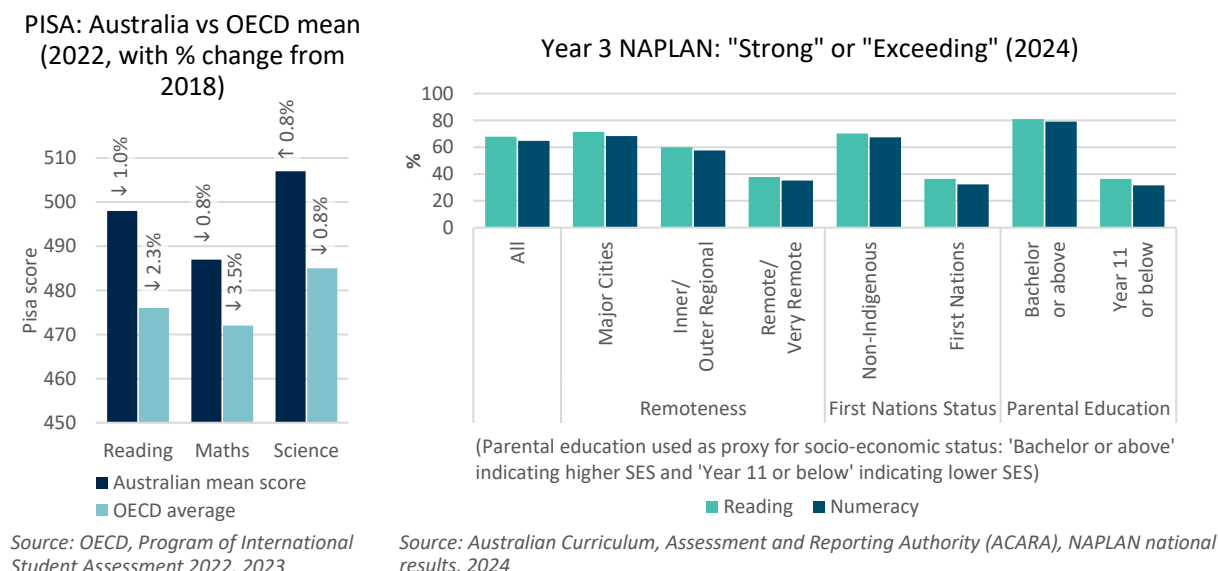
The school system has delivered improvements for some students, but more is needed to lift outcomes for all, especially for students experiencing disadvantage

Not enough Australian students are completing school; more effort is required to ensure they finish their education with critical skills for further education and employment opportunities



The number of students remaining in (retention rate) and completing school (certification rate) is far too low. For some learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and in government schools, this rate has even declined over the past 10 years. School funding will continue to increase as the government will provide an additional 5% of the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) to all states and territories by 2034. This funding is tied to reforms that aim to lift education standards.

While our international ranking has held steady, Australian student performance is dropping, and disadvantage gaps continue in domestic assessments of reading and numeracy

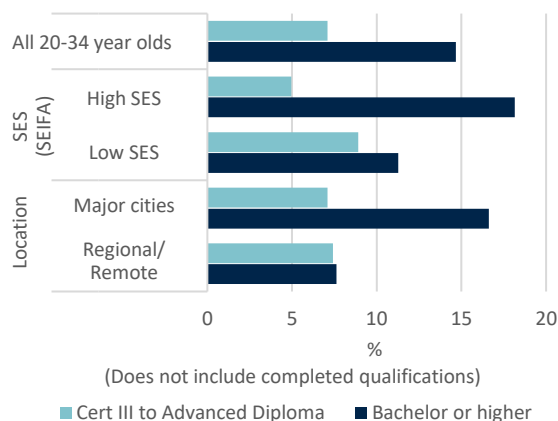


Australian PISA results have declined over time but still outperform the OECD international average in all three domains. Further, while Australian school children generally perform well in reading and numeracy as assessed by NAPLAN, results decline by remoteness and are lower for First Nations and lower SES cohorts. Reforms under the new agreement aim to provide earlier support for students who need it.

Australia's tertiary system enables the majority of young people to attain a post-school qualification, but capability and aspiration gaps remain

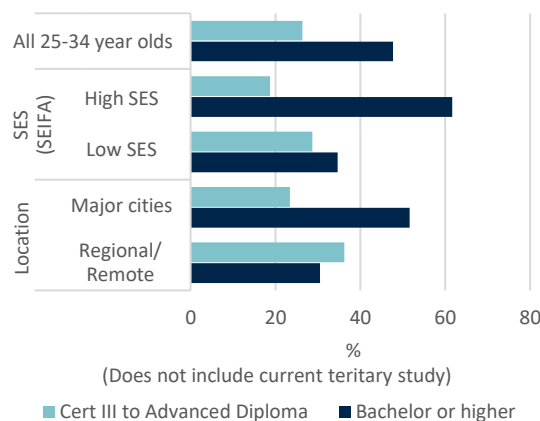
Many young people are successfully transitioning to post-school study, but support may still be required for some groups to build aspiration and do well in study

Currently engaged in post-school study (2024),
20-34 year olds



Source: ABS, Education and Work, Australia, 2024

Current highest level of post-school
attainment (2024), 25-34 year olds

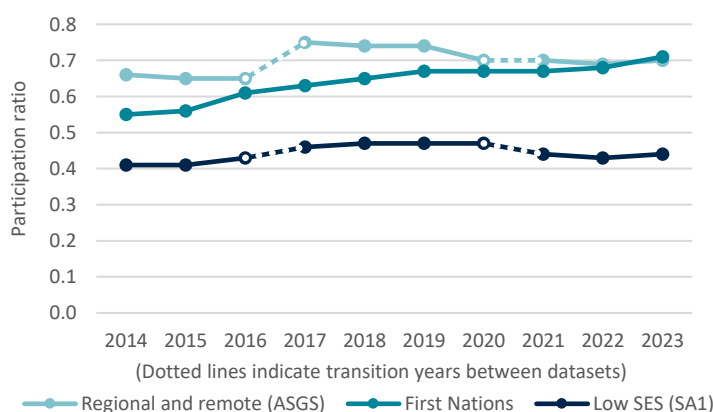


Source: ABS, Education and Work, Australia, 2024

Most young people attain a tertiary qualification (74% of 25-34 year olds in 2024). However, some groups, including young people from lower SES and regional/remote backgrounds, have lower levels of engagement and attainment in tertiary education. In addition, 15-24 year olds in regional/remote areas are almost twice as likely as those in major cities to not be studying or employed (19% vs 10% in 2024). There may be a need to help young people build aspiration for further study.

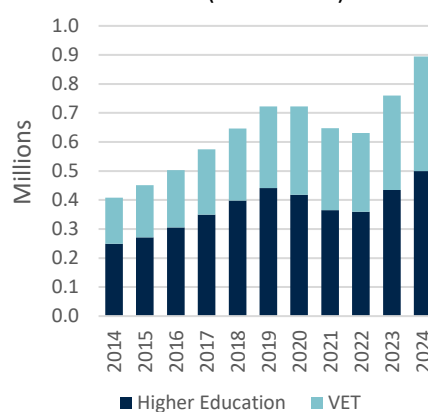
Domestic higher education student numbers remain below pre-Covid levels, while international tertiary student numbers have rebounded strongly, particularly in VET

Participation ratios for equity groups (2014-2023)



Source: Department of Education, Selected Higher Education Statistics – Student data – Section 16 Equity Performance Data, 2023

International student enrolments by
sector (2014-2024)

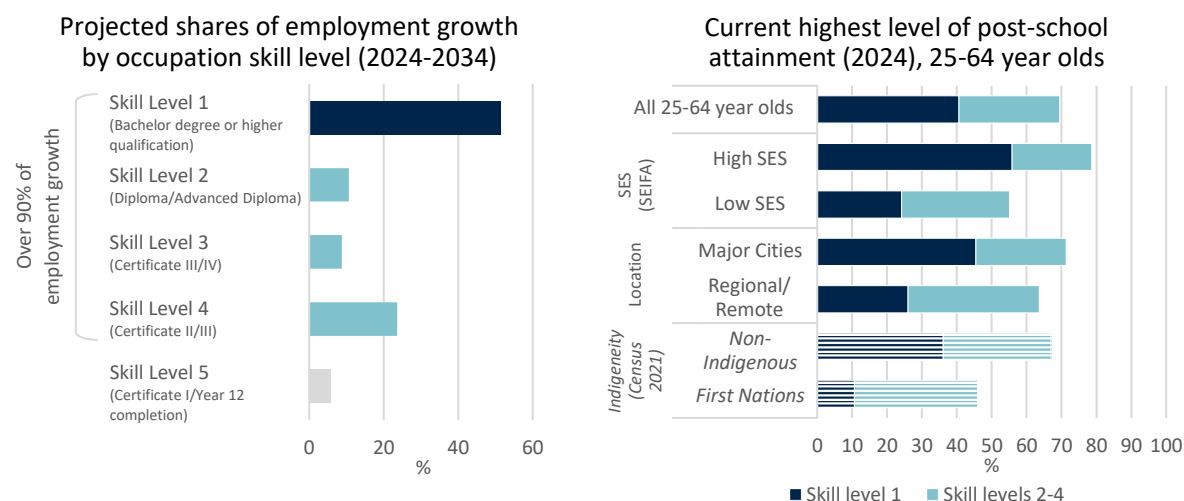


Source: Department of Education, International Student Data as at December 2024, 2024

The number of commencing domestic university students has dropped since its peak of over 446,000 in 2020. Likely a result of the Covid shock, numbers are recovering slowly. A notable success is that the participation ratio of First Nations people in higher education rose 16 percentage points between 2014 and 2023. More work is needed to help lower SES participation grow and regional and remote participation recover. Meanwhile, international student enrolments in higher education grew by 39% between 2022 and 2024 and almost doubled (46%) in VET over the same period.

Our education system helps create and sustain a prosperous nation, cohesive society and strong democracy

Education plays a crucial role in enabling everyone to participate and share in our national prosperity, including by delivering the skills and qualifications Australians need into the future

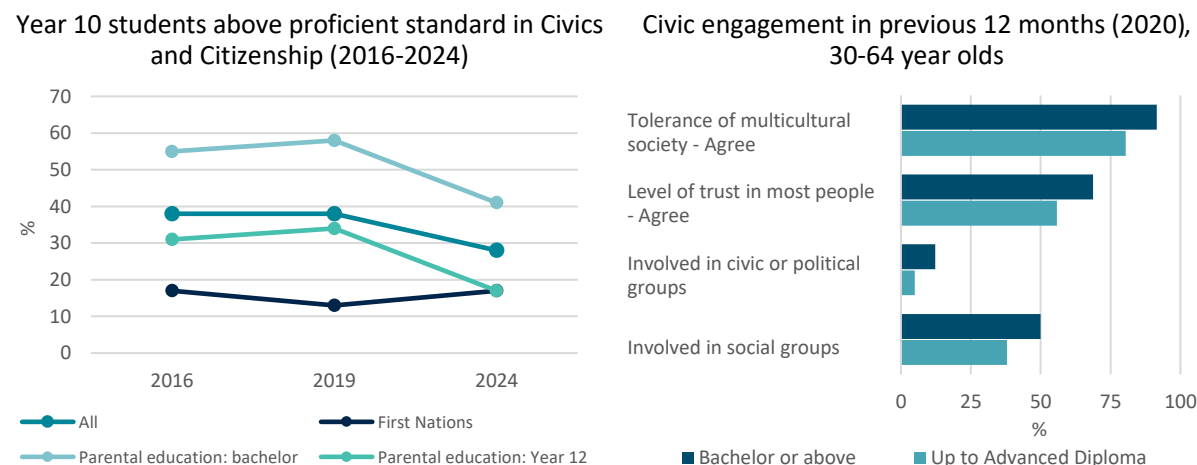


Source: Jobs and Skills Australia, Employment Projections - May 2024 to May 2034, 2024

Source: ABS, Education and Work, Australia, 2024; Census of Population and Housing 2016, 2021

By 2034, over 90% of new Australian jobs created are projected to require post-school qualifications, with half requiring a bachelor or higher. Tertiary qualifications increase employment prospects, and also a person's expected income. The proportion of working age people with qualifications is slowly growing but currently falls short of meeting the projected future need. Increasing attainment among under-represented cohorts, including lower SES and First Nations, is likely to be needed.

Higher levels of educational attainment are linked with greater levels of individual civic and community behaviour and also foster greater civic awareness in their children



Source: National Assessment Program, Sample assessments national reports - Civic and Citizenship, 2016-2024

Source: ABS, General Social Survey, 2020

Higher education attainment is associated with greater levels of tolerance, trust, and involvement in social, civic or political groups. Year 10 students whose parents have a bachelor level education are consistently more proficient in civics and citizenship (NAP-CC), illustrating an intergenerational benefit of education. However, proficiency is declining and only 28% of all students were proficient in 2024. This could have ongoing implications, given survey data shows satisfaction and participation in democracy is higher for people with greater levels of civic education (Australian Public Service Commission, Trust and Satisfaction in Australian Democracy survey report, 2023).

Sector overviews



Early childhood education and care

The benefits of early childhood education and care (ECEC)

ECEC delivers both immediate and long-term benefits for children, families, and the economy. High-quality ECEC supports children's early development and school readiness, setting strong foundations for lifelong learning, well-being, and future employment outcomes. Access to ECEC also enables greater workforce participation, particularly among parents of young children, helping to boost labour supply and support broader economic productivity.¹

Over the decade to 2023, the labour force participation rate of mothers with children under 15 years increased from 68% to 79%, driven by rising participation among mothers of children aged 0-4 years.² At the same time, growing evidence highlights the critical role of high-quality ECEC, particularly preschool, in reducing developmental vulnerability,³ and promoting school readiness. Children who attend ECEC are more than 1.6 times as likely to be school ready (assessed as being on track across all 5 Australian Early Development Census domains) compared to children who do not attend.⁴ Early participation in ECEC is also associated with stronger long-term outcomes, including higher rates of completing secondary and tertiary education, improved employment prospects, and greater lifetime earning potential.⁵

Outline of the sector

The ECEC sector comprises child care (provided to children aged 0 to 12 years) and preschool (consisting of 15 hours per week over 40 weeks in the year before full-time schooling). Child care services are delivered in four settings:

- Centre Based Day Care (CBDC): provided in centres with qualified educators (63% of the market).⁶
- Outside School Hours Care: provided outside normal school or preschool hours for school and preschool children.
- Family Day Care: provided to small groups of children in the home of an educator or venue.
- In Home Care: delivered in the home for families unable to access other types of child care.

The sector has a mix of large and small providers, with two-thirds of providers operating for profit.⁷

Preschool programs are delivered either in CBDC (around two-thirds) or dedicated preschools. Some states are moving towards delivering 30 hours of preschool per week and extending preschool to the 2 years before full-time school (3 years olds).

¹ Productivity Commission, A path to universal early childhood education and care, Vol 2, 2024 p. 127.

² Productivity Commission, A path to universal early childhood education and care, Vol 2, 2024 p. 242.

³ Department of Education, First Five Years: What makes a difference? (internal report), p. 37, 78.

⁴ Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), 2024. The AEDC for 2024 will be released in 2025. Please note, that all related information will remain under strict embargo until its official publication.

⁵ Productivity Commission, A path to universal early childhood education and care, Vol 2, 2024 p. 16.

⁶ Department of Education, Administrative data, December quarter 2024.

⁷ Department of Education, Administrative data, December quarter 2024.

Governance and funding

The Australian Government and the states and territories (states) share responsibility for the ECEC sector. The Australian Government has primary responsibility for child care policy and funding, while the states lead the delivery of preschool programs.

The Australian Government provides substantial funding through the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) to help families meet the cost of child care. It also provides extra support for particular groups and needs through vehicles such as the Additional Child Care Subsidy, Inclusion Support Program and Community Child Care Fund.

In addition, the Australian Government provides funding to support the states to deliver the baseline 15 hours of preschool per week over 40 weeks. The Preschool Reform Agreement (PRA) 2022-25 delivers this funding to the states and, in return, they agree policy reforms. Since 2022, states who rely on market delivery of preschool in CBDC settings have been permitted to fund fee relief for children attending preschool in a CBDC without the family's CCS entitlement dropping.⁸ The enabling provisions for this expire at the end of 2025, along with the PRA.

The Australian Government also works with the states to set shared policies for the sector, such as the National Quality Framework (NQF).

Regulatory oversight

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) is the independent authority that assists governments administering the NQF for children's education and care. The NQF consists of the National Law (comprising the Education and Care Services National Law), regulations for approved ECEC providers (comprising the Education and Care Services National Regulations), the National Quality Standard which sets benchmarks for quality (e.g. educator-to-child ratios), assessment and ratings process against the standards, and national learning frameworks (curriculum).

ECEC services in each state are regulated against the NQF by the state Regulatory Authority. Authorised officers employed by those authorities monitor services, enforce compliance, conduct assessment and rating visits, and investigate incidents and complaints. In Home Care is regulated separately by the Australian Government. Since early 2025, the Australian Government has started regulating the Community Child Care Fund restricted services to ensure a small number of services out of scope of the NQF comply with quality and safety requirements.

Educator workforce

The ECEC sector employs 263,400 people,⁹ made up of educators, early childhood teachers and centre managers. The sector has faced challenges attracting and retaining staff for some time, leading to a shortage of 21,000 workers as of September 2024.¹⁰ While the ECEC workforce is growing (7.3% increase over the year to November 2024), it needs to increase by 8% to ensure staff are not working overtime, and a further 8% to meet demand for qualified workers.¹¹

⁸ Productivity Commission, A path to universal early childhood education and care, Vol 3, 2024 p. 95-97, 103.

⁹ Trended by Jobs and Skills Australia, Labour Force Survey (EQ08), Australia, Detailed, Quarterly, November 2024.

¹⁰ Jobs and Skills Australia, Early Childhood Education and Care Capacity Study final report, 3 September 2024.

¹¹ Jobs and Skills Australia, Labour Market Insights, Internet Vacancy Index, December 2024.

A strong and stable workforce is essential to maintaining the quality of ECEC services and ensuring positive outcomes for children.

Learner wellbeing and behaviour

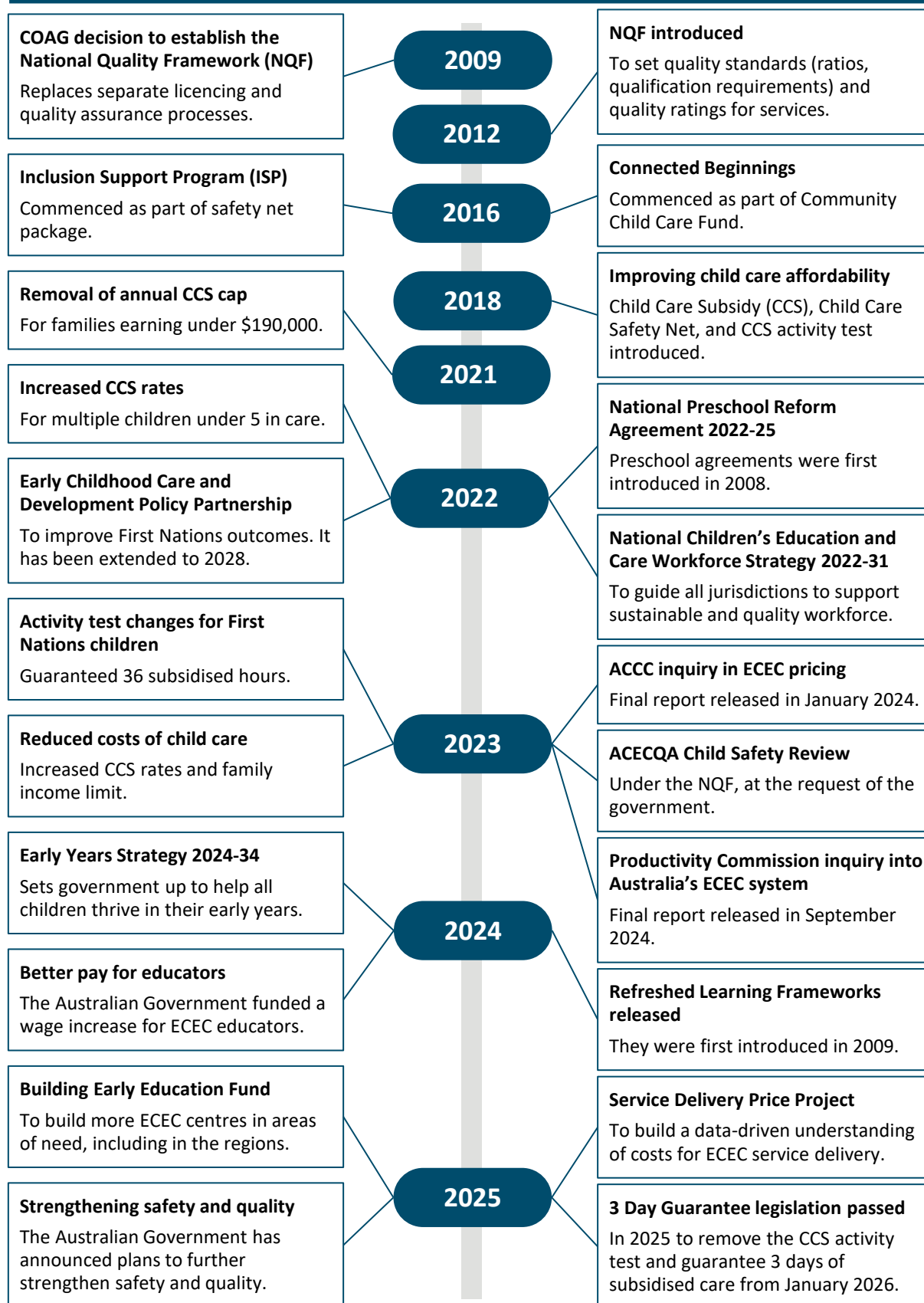
Children and families with additional needs are underrepresented in ECEC and can experience barriers to access and participation.¹² Evidence shows the benefits of ECEC are stronger for children experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage.¹³ For example, attending formal child care is associated with higher rates of being developmentally on track in all domains for First Nations children, those with a language background other than English, and children from single parent households.¹⁴

¹² Productivity Commission, A path to universal early childhood education and care, Vol 1, 2024 p. 22.

¹³ Productivity Commission, A path to universal early childhood education and care, Vol 2, 2024 p. 21.

¹⁴ Department of Education, First Five Years: What makes a difference? (internal report), p. 32.

Reform journey



School education

The value of school education

Schooling supports young people to realise their full potential by providing the skills they need to participate in society and the economy. Increasing the proportion of students who receive a Year 12 certificate by 7.5 percentage points by 2030 could add up to an estimated \$65 billion (in today's dollars) to the economy over the period to 2050 and increases a person's expected lifetime income by 20%.¹

All Australian governments have agreed common goals for schooling in Australia through the 2019 Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration. Mparntwe sets out 2 fundamental commitments for schooling: that Australian schooling should promote excellence and equity, and that all young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community. These commitments drive the reform activities under the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (BFSA) 2025-2034 and BFSA - Full and Fair Funding (Full and Fair Funding Agreement).

Outline of the sector

There are 9,653 schools in Australia, comprising two sectors: government schools (70% of schools), and non-government schools (30% of schools).² Catholic schools are a significant proportion of the non-government school sector, comprising 18% of all schools in Australia. Between 2019-24, there has been a 4.6% increase in total enrolments, with a shift from government to non-government schools. Since 2019, Independent schools had the largest increase in total enrolments (18.5%), followed by Catholic schools (6.6%), and government schools (one per cent).³

Governance and funding

While school education is primarily the responsibility of state and territory governments (the states), the Constitution enables the Australian Government to steward the schooling sector, largely via funding and national agreements. For example, the Australian Government and the states work together to agree national policy settings for education such as a national curriculum, national data collection and reporting, national testing, and teaching standards.

In addition to the Department of Education, there are four key educational bodies focused on aspects of national schooling: the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Agency (ACARA), the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO), the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), and Education Services Australia (ESA).

The Australian Government's contribution to school system funding is calculated according to a Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) comprising a base amount for every primary and secondary school student, and 6 additional loadings that provide extra funding for disadvantaged schools and student priority cohorts. Funding responsibilities are shared between the Australian Government and

¹ Department of Education, [Australian Universities Accord: 2024-25 Budget Summary](#), 2024; Department of Education, analysis (unpublished), 2025.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), [Schools](#) Table 90a, 2024.

³ ABS, [Schools](#), 2024.

the states. For government schools, the states provide the majority of funding, whereas the Australian Government is the majority funder for non-government schools. In addition to recurrent funding for the school system, the Education portfolio will contribute an additional \$717 million in 2025-26 to strengthen education outcomes.

Better and Fairer Schools Agreements 2025-2034

The BFSA and Full and Fair Funding Agreement are key mechanisms under the *Australian Education Act 2013* (the Act) for the provision of Australian Government funding and progressing national school education reform. Through the Full and Fair Funding Agreement, the Australian Government will increase its contribution for government schools to 25% of the SRS. The Northern Territory is the only jurisdiction on the BFSA for which the Australian Government has agreed to fund 40% of the SRS for government schools. Through the Agreements, parties commit to targeted reforms focused on three priority areas:

- equity and excellence
- wellbeing for learning and engagement
- a strong and sustainable workforce.

Underneath the BFSA and Full and Fair Funding Agreement, bilateral agreements set out Australian Government and state SRS funding share contributions and actions to improve educational outcomes. These include activities under the three key reform areas as well as initiatives that support priority equity cohorts such as First Nations students, students in regional, rural and remote areas, students with disability and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Bilateral agreements with Victoria and Western Australia need to be finalised in 2025.

Educator workforce

There are 364,845 teaching staff (320,377 full time equivalent) and approximately 10,000 principals currently working in schools across Australia. Teacher attraction, retention and shortages continue to be a challenge for Australian schools, despite ongoing efforts at the national and jurisdictional levels to attract more people to teaching and address workload pressures and other challenges. By 2029, an additional 7,700 teachers will be needed to teach an anticipated 99,000 additional students in our schools.⁴

To achieve a strong and sustainable workforce, parties have committed to initiatives under the BFSA and Full and Fair Funding Agreement, that:

- develop, recognise, reward and/or deploy highly expert teachers
- increase access to high-quality and evidence-based professional learning and provide quality assured curriculum resources
- strengthen teacher and school leader wellbeing
- increase teacher attraction, retention and diversity.

⁴ Department of Education calculation using: ABS, Schools Student teacher ratio, 2024; Department of Education, School funding model as at Budget 2024-25, 2024.

Learner outcomes, wellbeing and engagement

Academic trends

Assessment data provides a health check of Australian student, school and system achievement and provides insight into academic trends. Australia's overall performance within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) continues to decline since the first cycle in 2000. Between 2018-22, OECD average PISA performance dropped significantly, while Australia's performance remained relatively stable. As a result, Australia's international performance has improved relative to the OECD average.⁵ PISA 2025 is currently underway and will be published in 2026.

Trends in the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) are harder to measure as the 2023 changes to the NAPLAN measurement scale reset the time series. While the 2024 NAPLAN results showed around two thirds of students are considered to be in the top two proficiency levels, nearly 1 in 10 students need additional support to meet expectations in literacy and numeracy. The 2025 NAPLAN results are expected to be published in late July/early August this year.

Academic attainment of students from priority equity cohorts is typically lower than other students. This trend holds across assessments. Students are more likely to do well if they live in an urban location, have a more advantaged background, or are non-First Nations. While this provides some overview, there are gaps in the availability of data for some cohorts, especially students with disability. A review of the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia is planned under the BFSa and Full and Fair Funding Agreement as a national enabling initiative to consider the range of student level outcome data that is captured, and appropriate disaggregation of data to provide a richer picture of academic trends.

Wellbeing, engagement and retention

Wellbeing is a key foundation for student engagement, learning and achievement at school. Various influencing factors can contribute to student wellbeing, including the learning environment, social media and bullying. Social media can expose young people to harmful content that may contribute to negative classroom behaviours and attitudes, often directed at female or marginalised students and teachers, and bullying at school or online can contribute to non-attendance and poorer engagement and outcomes.⁶ In 2021, 3 in 10 students reported having a negative online experience related to bullying at school.⁷

Attendance and retention rates are key statistics for understanding students' engagement at school. The overall student attendance rate across Years 1 to 10 has declined slightly, from 88.6% in 2023 to 88.3% in 2024. This is in comparison to the pre-COVID attendance rate of 91.4% in 2019.⁸ School enrolment and attendance data are also used to monitor progress in educational outcomes of First

⁵ Department of Education, Internal analysis of PISA 2022 results; OECD, [PISA 2022 Results: Volume I](#), 2023

⁶ Australian Government eSafety Commissioner, [Mind the Gap: Parental awareness of children's exposure to risks online](#), 2022; Zhao, X., Roberts S. & Wescott S., [Institutional responses to sexual harassment and misogyny towards women teachers from boys in Australian schools in the post-#metoo era](#), *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 2024.

⁷ Australian Government eSafety Commissioner, [The digital lives of Aussie teens](#), 2021.

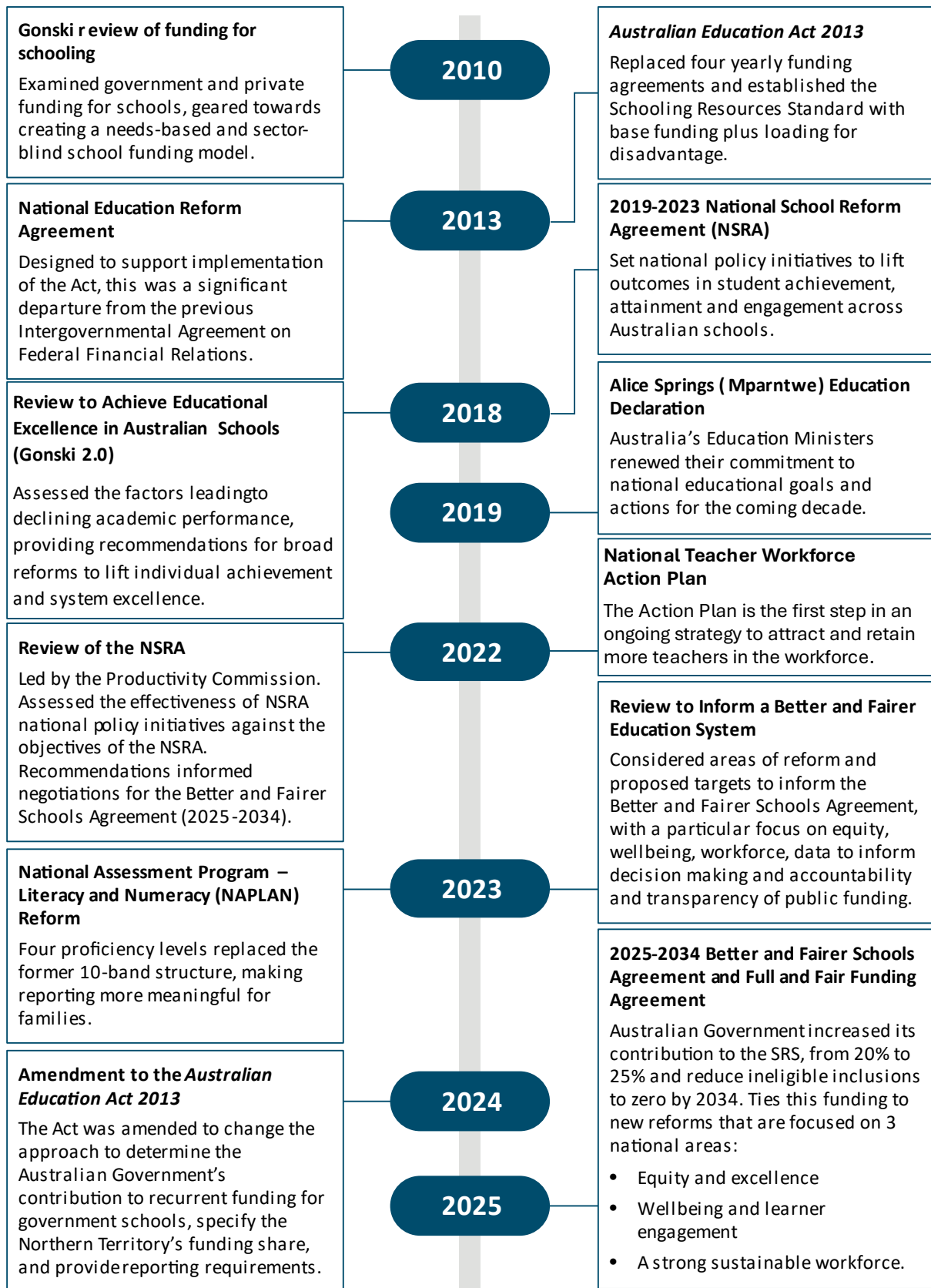
⁸ ACARA, Student attendance data, 2024.

Nations students under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap – specifically, Target 5 (Student learning potential) and Target 7 (Youth engagement).

To effectively target or leverage national action, a better understanding is required of the influencing factors on student wellbeing, attendance, retention and outcomes, including for priority equity cohorts. The BFSa includes an improvement measure to lift attendance rates, and a commitment to undertake work to better understand school attendance, its impact on learning and mechanisms to advance evidence-based approaches to addressing non-attendance, including school refusal. The BFSa also includes the national priority area of ‘wellbeing for learning and engagement’, which provides a mechanism for continued work with states and territories to identify and progress relevant national action.

Jurisdictions implement their own frameworks and strategies for wellbeing and bullying in schools, collect student wellbeing data through annual student surveys of Years 4 to 12, and have also implemented policies to ban or restrict smartphones in public schools.

Reform journey



Youth

There are 4.7 million young people aged 12 to 25 in Australia, comprising nearly 20% of the population. They want a say on the issues, policies and programs that affect them. As they transition into adulthood, young people become more active participants in the economy, society and democracy. Their perspectives and experiences are invaluable in shaping policies and programs that affect their lives and shape the future of the nation.

By actively involving young people in decision-making, the government ensures policies and programs genuinely reflect the diverse voices within Australia's youth community.

Governance: the Office for Youth

The department has been responsible for administering youth policy since 2021.¹ The Office for Youth connects young people, the youth sector, and government to provide opportunities for young people to be included in decision-making and improve the policies and programs that affect them. It does this through 3 priorities:

- recognising and listening to young people
- empowering young people to advocate and engage with government
- supporting government to work with young people.

The Office for Youth convenes Youth Advisory Groups with ministers and Australian Government agencies to provide advice on programs and policies affecting young people. Between 2023 and 2025, 12 Youth Advisory Groups have worked with 13 departments and agencies.

The Office for Youth also:

- works with the Youth Steering Committee on enhancing engagement between government and young people and supports them to provide advice on cross-cutting policy initiatives
- coordinates the annual National Youth Forum, which draws young people and government together to discuss policy solutions to issues that matter to young Australians, and the National Youth Week, which celebrates the achievements of young people
- sponsors the Young Australian of the Year Awards to recognise the important contributions that young people make to Australian society, and
- provides funding for the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition as the peak body for young people.

Top concerns for young people

Recent consultation by the Office for Youth identified 5 issues of greatest concern to young people.

Cost of living

Approximately 1 in 5 young people are experiencing financial stress,² including financial hardships or concerns about financial security. This has negative impacts on their mental health, relationships,

¹ "Youth affairs and programmes including youth transitions" was transferred from the Department of Health as per Administrative Arrangements Order of 18 March 2021

² Fila, K, Teo, SM, Gan, D, Browne, V, Baker, D, Menssink, J, Boon, B, Brennan, N, Di Nicola, K & Gao CX, [Counting the cost of living - the impact of financial stress on young people](#), 2024

and physical health.³ Cost of living pressures risk pushing young people out of education pathways and into the workforce prematurely, with negative consequences for their long-term career prospects and earning potential.⁴

Mental health

More than three-quarters of mental health concerns occur before the age of 25, and suicide remains the leading cause of death among young people.⁵ Poor mental health and wellbeing is associated with school refusal and disengagement from learning⁶ and higher education students who access mental health services are less likely to complete their studies.⁷ Rates of psychological distress among young adults increased during the pandemic,⁸ and these elevated rates are likely to continue.⁹

Climate change and the environment

More than one-third (35%) of young people identified climate change and the environment as an important topic for them. Research has found the majority (90%) of young people believe they have a right to a healthy environment,¹⁰ and two-thirds (67%) of young people believe concerns about the climate are having a negative impact on youth mental health.¹¹

Housing affordability, rent and home ownership

Estimates suggest more than 28,000 young people aged 12-24 experienced homelessness in 2021.¹² The majority (74%) of young people accessing specialist homelessness services alone are not enrolled in any form of education or training. The most common services homeless young people seek are living skills and personal development, and educational and employment assistance.¹³

Education and training

While the majority of young people aged 15-24 are engaged in work or study (81%),¹⁴ some require additional support to realise the financial and social benefits of further study and work. In 2023, 12% of young people decided between Years 10 and 11 of school that they no longer planned to attend university.¹⁵ Gender also continues to shape aspirations, with females more likely to pursue higher education, while males and non-binary students are more likely to pursue vocational training.¹⁶

³ Filia, K, Teo, SM, Gan, D, Browne, V, Baker, D, Menssink, J, Boon, B, Brennan, N, Di Nicola, K & Gao CX, [Counting the cost of living - the impact of financial stress on young people](#), 2024

⁴ The Smith Family, [Pathways, Engagement and Transitions: Dynamic post-school pathways of young people experiencing disadvantage](#), 2023

⁵ Beyond Blue, [Youth and mental health](#), 2024

⁶ Commonwealth of Australia, [The national trend of school refusal and related matters](#), 2023

⁷ Department of Education, Skills and Employment, [Completing Higher Education](#), 2019

⁸ Biddle, N, Edwards, B, Gray, M & Sollis, K, [Mental health and relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), 2020

⁹ The University of Sydney, [Moving on from COVID means facing its impact on mental health, say experts](#), 2023

¹⁰ Australian Conservation Foundation, [The right to a healthy environment and a safe climate](#), 2023

¹¹ Orygen Institute, [Youth mental health and climate distress](#), 2023

¹² Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), [Estimating Homelessness: Census](#), 2023

¹³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [Specialist homelessness services annual report 2023–24](#), 2025

¹⁴ ABS, [Education and Work, Australia](#), 2024

¹⁵ Amup, J, [Young People's University Plans After Year 10](#), 2024

¹⁶ Chowdhury, I & Edwards, B, [How educational plans differ by gender](#), 2023

Reform journey

Youth Summit

100 young Australians participated in discussions on their priorities and Australia's future.

2008

Office for Youth established

Compact with Young Australians introduced

Giving young people aged 15-24 an entitlement to an education or training place, subject to admission requirements and course availability.

2009

National Youth Participation Requirement introduced

Ensuring young people participate in schooling until they complete Year 10, and engage in education, training or employment (or a combination of these) until they reach age 17.

2010

The National Strategy for Young Australians introduced

A guide for future government action to encourage and help young people (aged 12-24) take charge of their lives.

National Centre for Excellence in Youth Mental Health established

2014

Office for Youth functions mainstreamed into Department of Education, other portfolios, and states and territories.

Youth mental health and suicide prevention plan

To promote the mental wellbeing of young and First Nations Australians.

2019

Youth taskforce established

To report to the minister on options for whole-of-government coordination on policies and programs impacting youth.

National Youth Policy Framework released

Acknowledges challenges faced by young people, particularly from the impacts of COVID-19, and outlines whole-of-government policies and programs to improve the lives of young people living in Australia.

2021

2022

Office for Youth re-established

To support the contribution of young people and advocates in government decision-making.

Engage! strategy released

Outlines a vision to ensure all young people across the country can have a say on issues that affect them.

2024

Key facts and figures: Youth



Young people

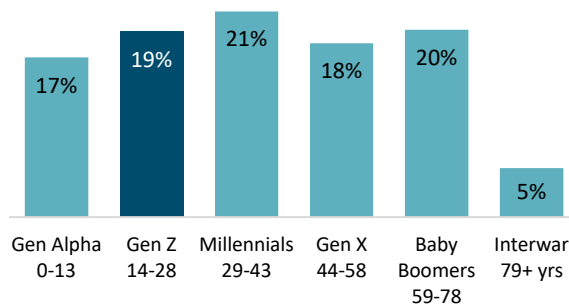
There are 4.7 million young people*

Young people	Number	% youth pop.	% total pop.
First Nations	217,825	5	3
Born overseas	795,310	18	29
Carers (15+)	178,646	4	10
Have disability	137,491	3	6

Source: ABS, 2021 Census

*Office for Youth engages people aged 12-25 years

They are approximately one-fifth of the population



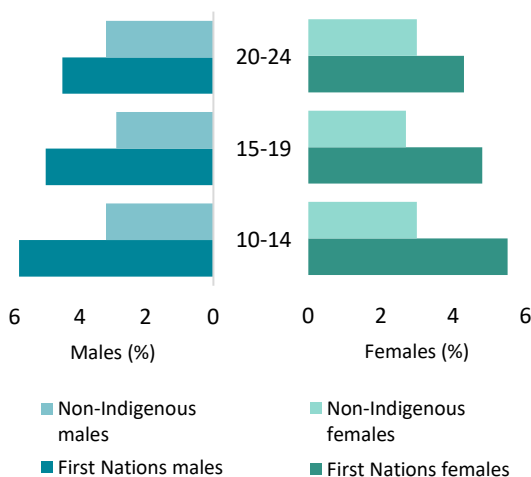
Source: ABS, 2021 Census

Most young people live in major cities

Major cities	Inner regional	Outer regional	Remote & very remote
74%	17%	7%	2%

Source: ABS, 2021 Census

First Nations population is younger than the non-Indigenous population



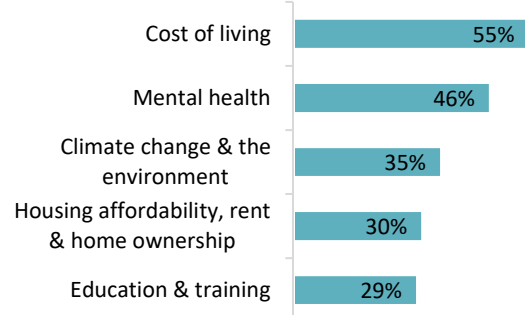
Source: ABS, Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, August 2023

OFFICIAL: Sensitive



Top concerns

Cost of living, mental health top issues



Source: Office for Youth, 2024

Growing proportion in financial stress

	Age 22	Age 23
In financial stress	30%	37%
Didn't get medical care	17%	22%
Went without meals	15%	19%
Couldn't pay utility bills	14%	19%

Source: LSAY, Generation Z: life at 23, September 2024



Youth outcomes

Most young people work and/or study

Young people aged 15-24 years	%
Fully engaged in work or study	81
Primarily full-time study	51
Primarily full-time work	25
Partially engaged	11
Not engaged in study or employment	9

Source: ABS, Education and Work, Australia, May 2024

Further study more likely if attain Year 12

Studying non-school qualification (2024)	%
Finished Year 12 or equivalent in 2023	61
Completed Year 11 or below in 2023	42

Source: ABS, Education and Work, Australia, May 2024

Youth unemployment is double overall

	%
Youth unemployment (15-24 years)	9
Overall unemployment	4

Source: ABS, Labour Force, Australia, February 2025

Sector overviews | Youth | Incoming Government Brief 2025

Higher education (teaching and learning)

Overview

Higher education boosts economic growth by driving productivity, creating a skilled workforce and fostering innovation through research. Higher education graduates enjoy better job prospects, lower unemployment, and 30% higher lifetime income compared to those with only Year 12 qualifications.¹

Students

1.6 million students were enrolled in higher education in 2023, the highest since 2016. This includes:²

- 834,310 in Commonwealth-supported places (CSPs)
- 202,610 domestic full fee-paying students
- 66,580 research students
- 524,514 overseas students.

The level of education attainment varies across the Australian population:³

- 47.2 per cent of those aged 25-34 had a bachelor's degree or higher in 2024
- 51.7 per cent of people aged 25-34 in metropolitan areas and 30.7% in regional areas had tertiary qualifications in 2024
- 51.6 per cent of women aged 25-34 had a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 38.4% of men in 2024
- 9.3 per cent of 25-34 years old First Nations people had a bachelor's degree or higher, this compares to 43.5% of non-First Nations Australians in 2021.

Providers

Australia's higher education teaching and learning sector has a diversity of providers. This includes 210 not-for-profit and for-profit providers, including public and private universities, university colleges, and institutes. These providers offer qualifications from undergraduate to postgraduate levels. There are 43 universities of which 39 (89.3%) are government Table A providers listed in the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (HESA), within the total 210 providers. In 2024, 89.3% of all students were enrolled at a Table A provider. Of the Table A universities, 6 are dual-sector universities that provide a significant number of both VET and higher education qualifications.

Table A universities are dispersed across Australia, with 9 being regionally headquartered and a further 14 having campuses in regional or remote Australia. These providers can belong to an association of like-providers such as the Group of Eight (represents 8 research-intensive universities), the Australian Technology Network of Universities (represents 6 universities that focus on innovation and technology), and the Regional University Network (represents 7 universities in regional Australia).

¹ Australian Government Department of Education, [Australian Universities Accord: 2024-25 Budget Summary](#), 2024; Australian Government Department of Education, analysis (unpublished), 2025.

² Australian Government Department of Education, Higher Education Statistics, 2023.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Education and Work, Australia, May 2024; ABS, Population: Census 2021.

The sector also includes 56 Regional and 15 Suburban University Study Hubs which have supported students in being able to access a place closer to their home to undertake their study since the Regional University Study Hubs program was established in 2018-19.

Funding

The government and students are the primary funders of higher education, with the government providing 53% of overall funding for teaching and learning, and students providing, on average, 47%. HESA governs funding, administration, reporting, and access to student loan programs. There are 2 components of higher education funding that the government currently provides for teaching and learning, with different amounts for provider type, study area and course level. This incorporates a contribution to providers:

- Through grants from the government for students in a CSP
- From students who can either pay up front or opt to defer their contribution through a Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) loan.

Students in CSPs (usually undergraduate students at Table A universities and some postgraduate students) are supported by subsidies through the Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS). Students in CSPs also make a contribution, the maximum of which is set in legislation, with most deferring payment of their contributions through HECS-HELP loans. How much is covered by a CSP, and how much the student pays, depends on the type of course being studied. For example, students pay a higher proportion of the cost of tuition for law and economics subjects, while the government covers a higher proportion of the costs for nursing and teaching subjects.

Other students, such as those studying at non-Table A universities and non-university higher education providers, do not receive support through the CGS and must meet the full cost of their tuition, which they are able to defer through the FEE-HELP if they wish.

The government pays the student contribution to providers upfront when it is deferred by the student through a HELP loan. Students repay the loan to the government, if they earn sufficient income in the future.

For the 2024 grant year, \$16.7 billion in HESA funding was allocated for higher education, including:

- CGS: \$7.8 billion to support tuition at Table A universities
- HELP: \$7.5 billion, with \$5.4 billion for HECS-HELP; and around \$2 billion for FEE-HELP, plus \$200 million for smaller HELP programs.

Repayment of outstanding HELP loans is administered by the Australian Taxation Office through the tax system. As at 30 June 2024, there were 2.9 million debtors holding \$81.1 billion of outstanding HELP loans. In the 2023-24 income year, debtors made \$4.9 billion of compulsory repayments and \$1.9 billion in voluntary repayments.

The government's current funding arrangements also include programs to boost participation, support students, and address skill shortages, with targeted funding to help underrepresented students overcome barriers.

Changes to funding arrangements

Following the Australian Universities Accord, government announced a range of changes to funding arrangement for teaching and learning, including:

- A new Managed Growth Funding System to allocate and pay for places, commencing in 2027
- A new Needs-based Funding approach, commencing in 2026.

Both of the changes require further policy consideration, decisions of government and legislative processes over the coming 12 months.

Governance and regulation

Most publicly funded universities are established under specific federal, state or territory legislation as autonomous institutions with a governing body that is responsible for providing the strategic oversight and legal accountability for each university. Universities' annual reports are reviewed by the respective jurisdictions' Auditors-General, submitted to the parliaments and made publicly available to ensure transparency.

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), under the *TEQSA Act 2011*, ensures higher education providers comply with the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021*. The Higher Education Standards Panel is an expert statutory advisory body, independent of TEQSA and established under the TEQSA Act, with responsibility for providing advice to the Minister for Education on making or varying the Threshold Standards and how to maintain the quality and standards of Australia's higher education system.

The National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Response to Gender-based Violence (National Code) was developed to establish standards and requirements that higher education providers must meet to effectively prevent and respond to gender-based violence. Legislation to enact the National Code was introduced to Parliament in 2025 but did not secure passage prior to the election.

On 23 January 2025 the government announced the members of a new Expert Council on University Governance (the Council). The Council was agreed by the Education Ministers Meeting to strengthen university governance in response to Priority Action 5 of the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report and will provide advice in the context of the 10 priorities for reform, agreed by Education Ministers to improve transparency, accountability, engagement and representation on university governing bodies. The Council will provide expert and technical governance advice to federal and state and territory education ministers about how to improve university governance and performance, with universities required to implement standards.

Government support for students and staff

Beyond offering support for academic achievement, the government supports other aspects of non-academic achievement, such as safety and wellbeing.

The Minister for Social Services administers payments which provides financial support to students, including Youth Allowance, Rent Assistance, Austudy and others.

Racism remains a significant issue in higher education, requiring coordinated efforts from the government, providers and the broader community to ensure students and staff can work in a safe environment. In December 2024, the Australian Human Rights Commission delivered an interim report for its Respect at Uni project to update the government on the project's progress, highlighting pervasive racism experienced by both students and staff at Australian universities. The interim findings reveal trends in racism, including increased antisemitism and Islamophobia, and structural discrimination, with significant impacts on wellbeing, participation, and performance.

TEQSA is updating its guidance to help institutions meet Threshold Standards to address safety and free speech challenges, in consultation with universities, student groups, and government representatives, including Special Envoys to Combat Antisemitism and Islamophobia. Additional targeted effort is underway to combat antisemitism, following significant dissatisfaction with provider handling of Jewish student and staff safety following the horrific events of October 7, 2023 in Israel.

The government mandates that providers have a Support for Students Policy, detailing the academic and non-academic support available, with annual public reporting. Through HESA the government also requires that providers who choose to collect a Student Services and Amenities Fee, which is an amount students pay annually to their provider to receive a range of student services, use it for the specified services which are set out in HESA.

The National Union of Students is a peak representative and advocacy body for all post school students in Australia. The National Tertiary Education Union is the union that represents staff in universities.

International education

Overview

International education supports Australia's economic prosperity, security and international influence. International students make significant economic and cultural contributions to the education system and education services are Australia's fourth largest export. Over one million student enrolments contributed \$51 billion to the economy in 2023-24, and their spending made up nearly half of GDP growth in 2023.¹ International student fees are a core revenue source for many Australian universities, making up 22% of total university revenue in 2023.² International student delivery is less core, with some public providers teaching students through outsourced, private delivery. Australia's internationalised education system enables both domestic and international students the opportunity to develop cross-cultural competencies and international networks that boost Australia's soft power influence and advance our regional and global interests.

Education is a vehicle to extend Australia's foreign policy, trade and development interests. Increasing the diversification of student enrolments will support foreign policy, help ensure Australia is equipped with the skilled workers needed for the future and strengthen sector resilience to geopolitical influence. The education sector is susceptible to security challenges, such as threats to research security and intellectual property. Work has been ongoing to safeguard Australian universities from foreign interference, protect university students and staff, and to ensure institutions can benefit from international collaboration.



International student enrolments

The international education sector faced serious challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. In January 2022, international student enrolments were down 30% on pre-pandemic levels of January 2020. By early 2023, sector growth saw the number of international students up 15.2% from 2022, a return to pre-pandemic levels.

A strong driver of growth has been the international vocational education and training (VET) sector, which saw a 41% increase in international enrolments in 2024 compared to 2019. More specifically, enrolments at private VET providers doubled between 2022 and 2024. In 2023 there were 1.6 million higher education students, and 32.8% were overseas students (including offshore). For some providers, international students made up nearly half of their enrolments.

Increased scrutiny of the student visa program has highlighted the escalation of exploitation and disreputable behaviour of some providers and education agents. Ministerial Direction 107 (MD107) was implemented in December 2023 and prioritised visa processing for providers classified as 'low risk'. While effective at reducing fraudulent visa applications, MD107 also had the effect of favouring large metropolitan higher education providers at the expense of regional universities.

¹ Australian Government Department of Education, [Education export income – 2023-24 financial year](#), 2025.

² Parliament of Australia, [Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade](#), 2023.

On 18 December 2024, Ministerial Direction (MD111) replaced MD107. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Stakeholder engagement and agency responsibilities

The Council for International Education (Council), established in 2016, is a consultative forum to support Australia's role in international education and training. The Council consists of 5 ministers with portfolio responsibility for aspects of international education, as well as 8 expert members from across the sector. [REDACTED]

Australian education providers, through their peak representative bodies, work with the government on the sector's health and growth, including through the department's quarterly International Education Stakeholders Forum.

Government oversight of the sector requires collaboration with states and territories. The department holds biannual meetings with international education areas from each jurisdiction through the Commonwealth, State and Territory International Education and Training Forum.

The department maintains close working relationships with other federal agencies related to intake of international students, including the Department of Home Affairs, Austrade, and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Relationships with Austrade and Home Affairs are particularly important in ensuring alignment of international education policy, regulation, marketing and promotion, and in upholding visa integrity.

Wider impacts of the international education sector

International students play a key role in Australia's economy, especially in the hospitality, retail and aged care sectors. While studying, 56% of international students undertake paid work during academic periods, increasing to 70% during holiday breaks.³ Approximately 52% of international students live in a private rental, 9% live in student accommodation on campus, 11% in other student housing and the remainder with friends or family.⁴ According to ABS data, up to 97% of international students were enrolled at campuses in major Australian cities in 2024. This includes the campuses of regional universities who establish sites in metropolitan areas as an integral part of their financial sustainability. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Once studies are completed, 50% of international graduates working in Australia are employed below their skill level and outside their field of qualification.⁵ These students can contribute new ideas, perspectives and multicultural diversity to Australian communities and workplaces more broadly, and this can be particularly beneficial in the regions, if more work is undertaken to align courses of study with areas of skills needs.⁶

³ Australian Government Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT), [International Graduate Outcomes Survey](#), 2022.

⁴ QILT, [2023 Student Experience Survey](#), 2024.

⁵ Australian Government Treasury, [Working Future: The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities](#), 2023.

⁶ Parliament of Australia, [Inquiry into Australia's tourism and international education sectors](#), 2023.

Research

Overview

Australian universities are internationally recognised for their high-quality research and scientific capabilities. With 0.3% of the world's population, Australia produces 3.5% of the world's scholarly output and 7.3% of the world's most highly cited publications. Universities are responsible for around 60% of Australia's basic research and 45% of applied research.¹

Reforms in recent years have sought to enhance home-grown ideas, innovation, commercialisation and the translation focus of the university research sector to increase diversification of the Australian economy and to drive a stronger manufacturing capability. Specifically, these reforms intend to maximise the value of investment in research, improve linkages between research and industry, and increase industry investment in research and development (R&D).

Governance and funding

The government's total investment in research and development for 2024-25 was around \$14.4 billion, with \$4.3 billion distributed through the education portfolio for university research.² The Australian university research system is also supported by state and territory governments, which in 2022 financed \$606 million or 4.33% of higher education expenditure on R&D,³ and by government programs in other portfolios such as the Medical Research Future Fund and those administered by the Department of Industry, Science and Resources, CSIRO and various other bodies in portfolios like Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

Government funding for university research is provided through a dual funding system involving competitive grants and research block grants to support the systemic costs of research and research training.

- **Australian Competitive Grant R&D Income** provides around \$2.46 billion for competitive grants through a range of agencies such as the National Health and Medical Research Council (\$718 million) and the Australian Research Council (\$782 million). Funding is allocated on a competitive basis with selection by expert panels.
- **Research block grants** provide approximately \$2.3 billion per annum and incorporate the Research Support Program for the systemic costs of research, and the Research Training Program for the training of higher degree by research students.

Research commercialisation

The government funds a number of initiatives that promote research translation and commercialisation. These programs focus on areas of national priority and in sectors where Australian research can build scale and have real world impact. Key initiatives which are reforming Australia's research commercialisation landscape include:

¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, [Main Science and Technology Indicators](#), 2019-20.

² Australian Government Department of Industry, Science and Resources, [Science, Research and Innovation Budget Tables](#), 2024-25.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Research and Experimental Development Higher Education Organisations](#), 2022.

- **Trailblazer Universities Program:** ‘Trailblazer’ universities collaborate with industry to translate and commercialise research in national priority areas including defence, critical minerals, food and beverage, space, and recycling and green energy. They are working to drive transformational change in the culture and practice of university-industry collaboration, ensuring more of Australia’s great research leads to practical commercial and societal outcomes. \$300 million invested in 6 Trailblazers has been matched by \$300 million from universities and around \$700 million from industry. Governance is industry led. Open intellectual property arrangements are deployed to encourage innovation. Academic staff can work in the Trailblazers without hindering their academic careers.
- **Australia’s Economic Accelerator:** This program provides grants to universities to work on projects with industry, helping them bridge the gap between basic research and commercialisation. Projects support proof of concept and proof of scale activities (translation research), with the aim of getting projects ready for commercialisation. The program is led by a governance board of industry leaders to ensure that research activities are clearly aligned to industry priorities and commercialisation opportunities.
- **Building an Applied Research Workforce:** Funding PhDs and fellowships that engage and spend time with industry and provide commercialisation skills to support the development of an industry-focused research and innovation workforce.

National Research Infrastructure

Australia’s university research system is underpinned by access to critical National Research Infrastructure (NRI). The NRI network provides merit-based access to researchers from all domains, not just universities, supporting outcomes across a range of government priorities and policy areas. Some NRI is delivered through national bodies such as CSIRO, while other elements are delivered through the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS). NCRIS underpins Australia’s investment in research infrastructure and is distinct in its emphasis on collaboration instead of competition.

In 2018, the government announced a total of \$4 billion over 12 years (2018 to 2029) for NCRIS to support researchers to access a range of nationally significant assets, facilities, and services. These support leading-edge research and innovation in priority areas. The NCRIS 2025 Guidelines released \$435 million in funds for 2024-25 to 2027-28 to build capability in National Digital Research Infrastructure, Research Translation, Environment and Climate Infrastructure, and the NRI Workforce priorities identified in the NRI Roadmap.

Currently, NCRIS supports 26 projects and an international membership. Around 90,000 Australian and 10,000 international users are supported each year, including 5,000 industry users, contributing to around 4,000 research publications each year.⁴

Findings from the 2021 NRI Roadmap highlighted the importance of new investments being developed in areas with the potential to deliver real change in research capability, support national sovereignty and position Australia as a global leader in the future. The development of a Roadmap for implementation from 2026 will refresh advice to government and focus future investments in areas of emerging technological opportunity and national priority.

⁴ Australian Government Department of Education, [NCRIS Factsheet](#), 2021.

Reform journey

1989 - Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS)

HECS commenced allowing students to defer their student contributions through an income contingent loan (ICL).

1989

2001 - Establishment of the Australian Research Council (ARC)

The ARC advises the government on research matters and administers the National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP), a significant component of Australia's investment in research.

2001

2008 - Review of Australian Higher Education (the Bradley Review)

Major independent review examining the direction of the higher education sector. The Final Report included a series of recommendations, including proposing a 'demand driven' system.

2008

2012 - Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA)

TEQSA was established by the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* (TEQSA Act) to introduce national consistency in the regulation of higher education providers.

2012

2018 - Funding caps

Funding caps for domestic bachelor students were introduced in 2017-18 MYEFO, ending the demand driven funding system.

2018

2020 - National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy (the Napthine Review)

This strategy focused on improving tertiary education participation and outcomes for students from regional, rural and remote areas with measures across funding, student support and access and research capacity.

2020

1995 - Introduction of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)

The AQF is an agreed policy of Commonwealth, state and territory ministers introduced to underpin and reinforce a national system of qualifications in Australia, encompassing higher education, vocational education and training (VET), and schools.

1995

2005 - Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA)

HESA reformed the higher education funding system, including introducing the Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) and HECS expanded to full-fee paying students through FEE-HELP.

2005

2009 - Commencement of the National Research Grants Program

Supports the highest-quality fundamental and applied research and research training through national competition.

2009

2012 - Demand driven funding

Demand driven funding system for CGS introduced from 2012, uncapping the number of domestic bachelor enrolments at public universities.

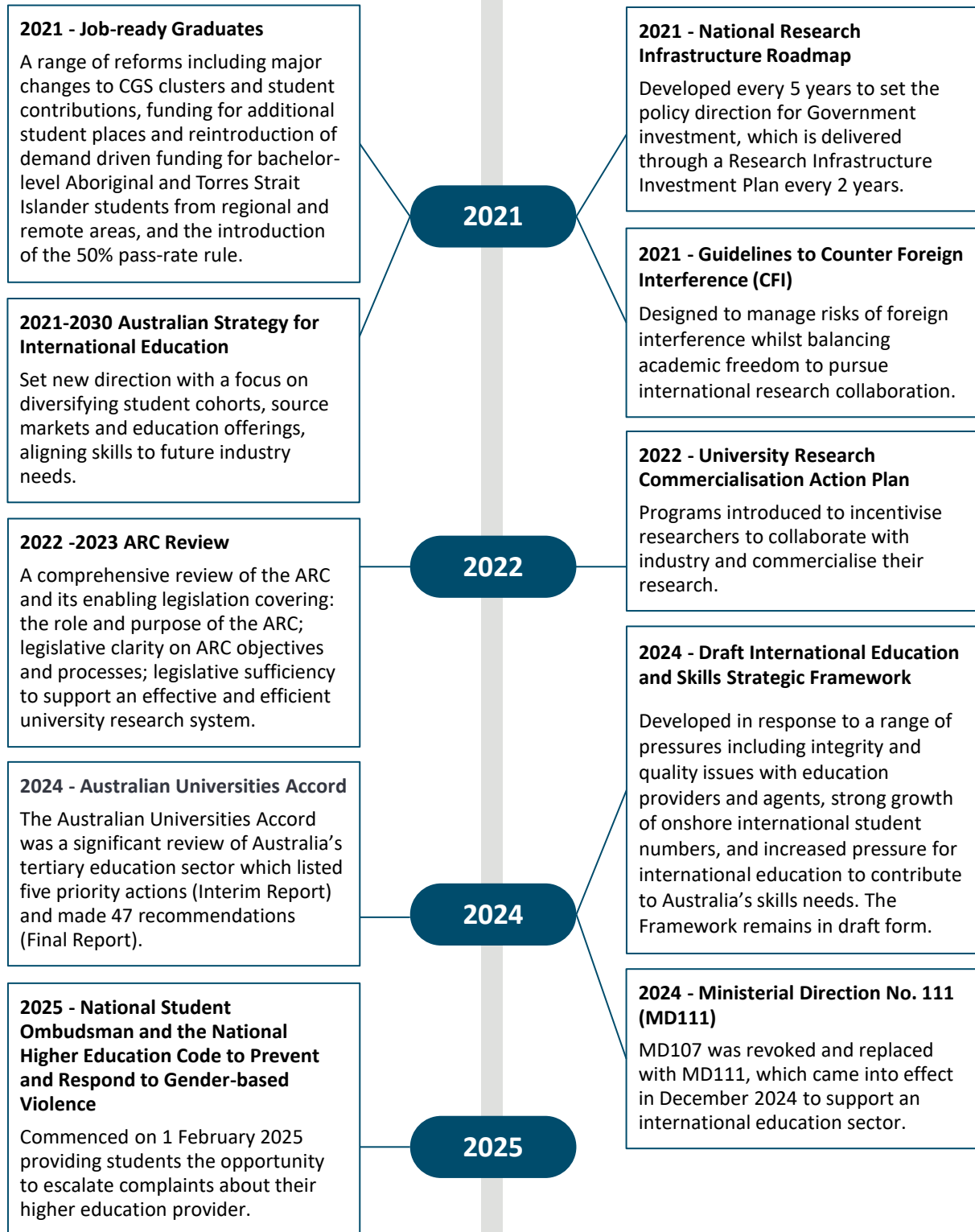
2012

2019 - Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000 (ESOS) amendments

Changes removed red tape and aligned the Act with domestic quality assurance frameworks administered by TEQSA and the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA).

2019

Reform journey



Cross-cutting issue overviews



Commonwealth-State relations

Effective Commonwealth-state relations are critical to delivering the government's agenda. Responsibility for early childhood education and care (ECEC), schooling and tertiary education is shared with states and territories (states). While the Commonwealth provides an increasingly significant leadership and funding role to meet national priorities, states have primary responsibility for policy and service delivery within their respective jurisdictions in many aspects of education.

Productive relationships between state, territory and Commonwealth Governments are critical to promote policy reforms that are of national significance.

Commonwealth-state relations architecture

The National Cabinet and the National Federation Reform Council govern relations between the Commonwealth and states. It aims to streamline intergovernmental decision-making.

The Council on Federal Financial Relations (CFFR), comprising the Commonwealth Treasurer as Chair and all state and territory treasurers, is responsible for overseeing the financial relationship between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments. CFFR reports to the National Cabinet under the Australian Federal Relations Architecture.

Education Ministers Meeting (EMM)

EMM is chaired by the Commonwealth Minister for Education. EMM is the forum for national decision-making and collaboration for ECEC, school education, higher education and international education at the ministerial level. In line with National Cabinet guidance, EMM agrees up to five annual priorities which deal with matters that are of significance or require national agreement.

The major intergovernmental agreements which agree shared national goals and activities and provide states with extra funding to assist in the costs of delivery, supported by EMM are:

- Preschool Reform Agreement (2022-2025)
- Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (2025-2034) (BFSA)
- Better and Fairer Schools Agreement – Full and Fair Funding (2025-2034) (Full and Fair Funding Agreement), as a requirement of funding provided under the *Australian Education Act 2013*
- National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (agreed in 2022, ongoing).

Australian Education Senior Officials Committee (AESOC)

Australian Education Senior Officials Committee (AESOC) is the primary subcommittee of senior officials supporting EMM. Membership is comprised of senior officials (department heads) from the Commonwealth and state and territory governments. AESOC provides policy advice to EMM, considers EMM papers prior to their progress to ministers and manages and coordinates jurisdictions' funding contributions for nationally agreed projects and initiatives.

Partnership with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC)

Education Ministers have committed to a formal partnership with NATSIEC.¹ Aunty Geraldine Atkinson, Co-Chair NATSIEC, attends EMM and AESOC, with NATSIEC CEO Shaz Davis attending Schools Policy Group (a standing working group of AESOC) and work is underway for representation to be extended into the Early Childhood Policy Group. This partnership reflects Education Ministers commitment to a more direct engagement mechanism with First Nations representatives on education and followed a co-design process that determined NATSIEC the most appropriate body.

Commonwealth and state roles and responsibilities

Early childhood education and care

ECEC is a joint responsibility of the Commonwealth and the states, working closely with the ECEC sector. Jurisdictions are collectively responsible for policy and rules that govern the operation of the sector through national law, national regulations and the National Quality Framework (NQF). The Commonwealth funds the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) to provide guidance, resources and services to support the sector to improve outcomes and ensure nationally consistent regulation. States – through their regulatory authorities – are responsible for administering the NQF and for the quality and safety of approved services.

In terms of funding, the Commonwealth's primary role is to assist families with the cost of child care through provision of the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and safety net measures. The Commonwealth also supports universal access to preschool through transfers to states for service delivery via the Preschool Reform Agreement.

Schooling

States have constitutional responsibility for schools. They regulate both government and non-government schools and are responsible for implementing the curriculum and overseeing assessment and school policies. The Commonwealth's levers for influencing schooling are predominantly through conditions of funding provided under the Commonwealth *Australian Education Act 2013*, including ensuring compliance with the ongoing funding and national policy requirements under the Act. States provide the majority of government funding to government schools and the Commonwealth provides the majority of government funding to non-government schools. The Commonwealth and the states commit to continue to work together through EMM, recognising their complementary roles in the federation.

Under section 22 of the *Australian Education Act 2013*, to be eligible for Commonwealth financial assistance for schools, states must be: party to an agreement where the Commonwealth and one or more states are parties to the agreement; it is open to states to become party to the agreement; and the agreement relates to school education reform.

The BFSa, which came into effect on 1 January 2025, and the Full and Fair Funding Agreement, which came into effect on 24 January 2025, replace the National School Reform Agreement which expired on 31 December 2024. The BFSa and the Full and Fair Funding Agreement will run for 10 years, to 31 December 2034. In addition to funding arrangements, it commits all parties to targeted reforms

¹ At the time of drafting, the department was waiting on official confirmation from WA Government.

focusing on three priority areas: equity and excellence, wellbeing for learning and engagement, and a strong and sustainable workforce.

Tertiary

Responsibilities in tertiary education are split:

- States lead delivery of Vocational Education and Training (VET), with a smaller but significant role in university governance
- the Commonwealth leads national funding and regulatory arrangements across both VET and higher education.

Within higher education, most publicly funded universities are established under specific federal, state or territory legislation as an autonomous institution with a governing body that is responsible for providing strategic oversight and legal accountability. Universities' annual reports are reviewed by the respective jurisdictions' Auditors-General, submitted to the parliaments and made publicly available to ensure transparency.

The Australian Government announced a new Expert Council on University Governance (the Council), agreed with Education Ministers, to provide expert and technical governance advice to Commonwealth, state and territory Education Ministers about how to improve university governance and performance. The Council will assist ministers in strengthening university governance and ensuring universities are safe and welcoming places to work and study in.

The relationship between the Commonwealth and states for higher education is a complex system of shared responsibilities, funding and policy development. The Commonwealth is the primary source of funding for higher education through the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (HESA), which legislates mechanisms such as the Higher Education Funding Program, Research Block Grants and specific programs like HECS-HELP. The Commonwealth also allocates funding through programs aimed at increasing participation from underrepresented groups, supporting research and fostering innovation, via HESA and the *Australian Research Council (ARC) Act 2001*.

From time to time, states contribute funding for specific measures, especially infrastructure projects. More strategically, states are also engaged in the progress of universities in their jurisdiction, and the contribution those providers are making to overall economic and social development. Close coordination with the states is required for higher education governance and the development of tertiary policy affecting both higher education and VET, including oversight of the Australian Qualifications Framework.

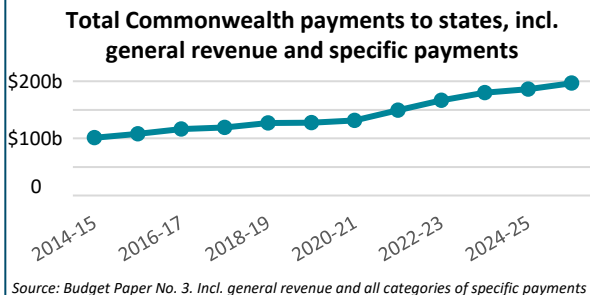
The policy objective of greater harmonisation between higher education and the VET sector, as recommended by successive reviews, also requires much greater levels of collaboration between the Commonwealth and states, given state responsibilities in the VET system.

The *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* introduced national consistency in the regulation of higher education providers. States are consulted on standards that are used to regulate higher education providers. The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency is the independent national regulator responsible for registering, regulating and assuring the quality of all providers of higher education in Australia.

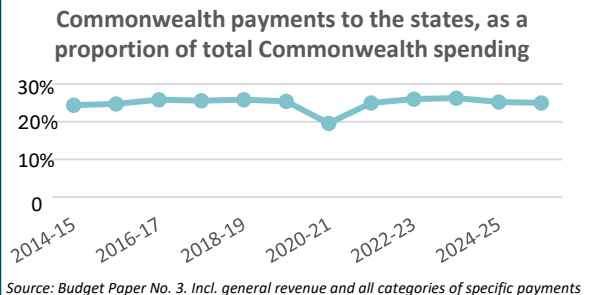
Data snapshot

In 2025–26, the Commonwealth will provide the states with approximately \$196.5 billion in total payments for general revenue assistance and specific payments (e.g., for health, education, infrastructure, among other things). This comprises approximately 25% of total Australian Government expenditure

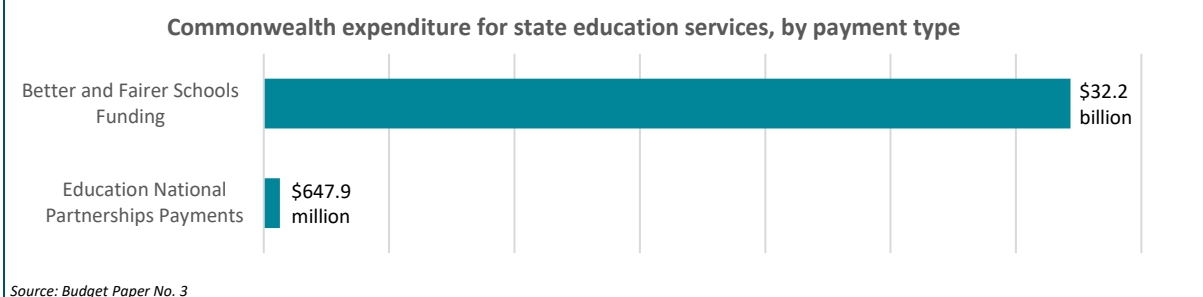
1. Since 2014, total Commonwealth payments to states have increased by 94%



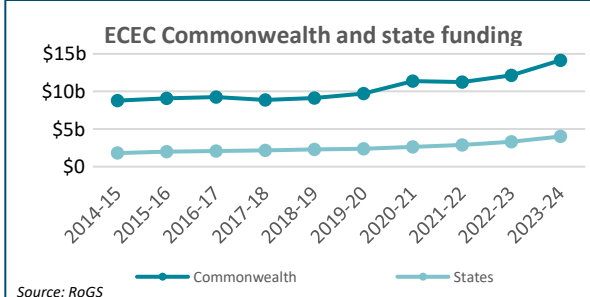
2. While payments have increased significantly since 2014, proportion is steady with overall expenditure



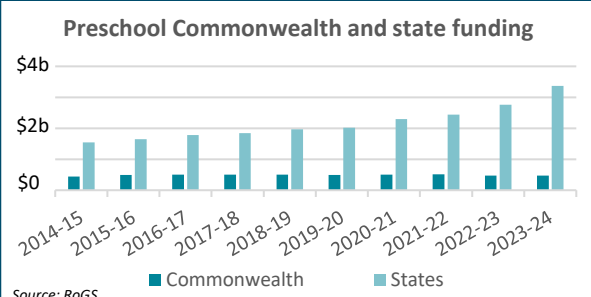
3. In 2025–26, the Commonwealth will provide \$32.8 billion to support state education, incl. \$32.2 billion in Better and Fairer Schools funding and \$647.9 million through National Partnership payments



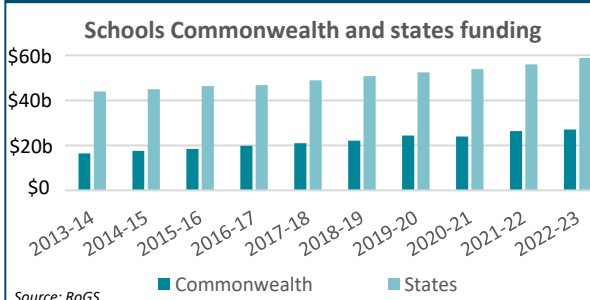
4. The Commonwealth provides the greatest proportion of ECEC funding



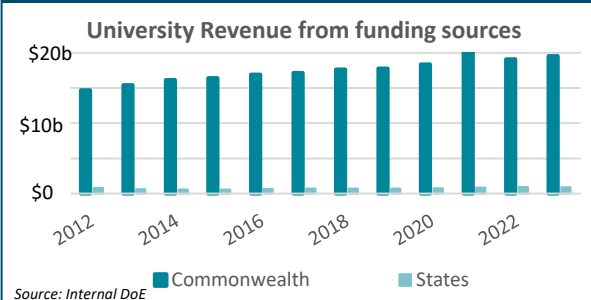
5. State governments provide the majority of funding for preschool programs



6. Schools are funded through a combination of Commonwealth and state funding



7. The majority of university revenue is provided by the Commonwealth



Reform journey

Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations (IGA FFR)

Key change in intergovernmental relations

Established a new framework for the Commonwealth's financial relations with states. It represented the most significant shift in Commonwealth-state relations for decades.

2008

National plan for school improvement

Introduced a national school funding model which ties funding to concrete improvements, focussed on quality teaching, quality learning, transparency and accountability.

2009

National Quality Framework (NQF)

Introduced to set quality standards, e.g. educator ratios, qualification requirements and quality ratings.

2012

National School Reform Agreement, (2019-2024)

A set of strategic reforms between the Commonwealth, states, and territories to lift student outcomes across Australian schools.

2013

2019

Australian Education Act 2013

Replaced four yearly funding agreements and established the Schooling Resources Standard. It created a national approach to school funding and adopted a needs-based funding model.

Formation of National Cabinet

Key change in intergovernmental relations

Established 13 March 2020, and comprising the Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers, to lead a unified and coordinated response to COVID-19 across the Federation.

2020

National Federation Reform Council

Replaced the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) model.

National Teacher Workforce Action Plan

Education Ministers agreed on a National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (Action Plan) which sets out a clear pathway to addressing the national teacher workforce shortage.

New Federation Funding Agreements Framework (FFA)

New governance arrangements for Commonwealth-state funding agreements. It recognises that states have primary responsibility for many areas of service delivery, but that coordinated action is necessary to address Australia's economic and social challenges.

Preschool Reform Agreement (2022-2025)

Funding is contingent on states and territories agreeing to an ambitious reform agenda. It is the first time the Commonwealth funding for preschools will be ongoing.

2021

2022

Intergovernmental Agreement on Data Sharing

Commits all jurisdictions to share public data as a default position, where it can be done securely, safely, lawfully and ethically.

NATSIEC-EMM Partnership Agreement

Education Ministers entered into a formal partnership agreement with NATSIEC.

2025

Better and Fairer Schools Agreement – Full and Fair Funding (2025-2034)

Shared reforms between the Commonwealth, states and territories focus on improving outcomes for all students and building the capacity and capability of the education workforce.

Tertiary education

The importance of the tertiary education system

Tertiary education underpins Australia's prosperity by enhancing the value of a person's skills and experience, producing a labour market that better meets employer needs in a rapidly changing world. The tertiary education system encompasses all post-secondary education, spanning full qualifications and short courses, microcredentials, and skill sets from both the vocational education and training (VET) and higher education sectors.

According to the Australian Productivity Commission, growth in educational attainment has been a major contributor to Australia's productivity growth with over half of 25–34-year-olds now holding a tertiary qualification.¹ This has further impact as growth in labour productivity has accounted for around 70% of growth in real gross national income per person in Australia over the last 30 years.²

Analysis commissioned by Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) indicates over the next 10 years, more than 9 out of 10 new jobs (around 92%) expected to be created will require post-secondary qualifications. Australia will need a tertiary education system that delivers on this outcome and focuses on encouraging greater access to, and participation in post-secondary education, regardless of the pathway a student or learner takes through the VET or higher education sectors.

Current and emerging workforce and skill needs

The structure of Australia's labour market has changed in recent decades. There has been a clear trend toward service-based industries as well as higher-skilled occupations, driven by technological change, demographic shifts due to an ageing population, and the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. In Australia, healthcare and social assistance is now the largest employing industry.

As jobs become more highly skilled and specialised, demand from employers for tertiary educated employees increase, as does the need for continued education across the lifespan. In the current labour market, around 51% of jobs require a vocational qualification, with 35% requiring a bachelor's degree or higher.³ Analysis commissioned by JSA projects that over the next 10 years, 42.6% of employment growth will be in occupations that will require a vocational qualification, and 51% will be in occupations that will require a bachelor's degree or higher.⁴ Other JSA research on emerging roles in the Australian labour market projects that fields including care work, energy transitions and digital transformation will need workers trained through both VET and higher education.⁵ This means there is an increasing need for workers to undergo further education either in VET or higher education, and it is likely that future workers will be required to draw on skills and knowledge acquired across both sectors at various points in their life.

¹ Australian Productivity Commission, 5-year Productivity Inquiry: From learning to growth (Inquiry Report - Volume 8), 2023, p.55.

² The Australian Government Treasury, Working Future: The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities, 2023, p.53.

³ Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA), Employment Projections, 2024.

⁴ JSA, Employment Projections, 2024.

The need for increased and ongoing engagement with tertiary education is closely tied to skills shortages at national, state, and local levels. As of 2024, 33% of occupations are in a state of national shortage, with 48% of occupations in shortage from the professional occupational groups, including those related to health, engineering, teaching, and information communication and technology.⁵ These professional occupations typically require some form of tertiary qualification. As such, skills shortages in areas of national priority are likely to continue and so to the demand for access to tertiary.

Delivery all the way across the skills continuum will be important. Despite the projected growth in occupations needing higher level skills, occupations that require skills commensurate with a Certificate III or IV (which have the most apprenticeship pathways) currently have the lowest fill rate and the least suitable applicants per job vacancy.⁶ This highlights the need to ensure that the tertiary education system as a whole needs to operate in a way that does not unintentionally strain areas of the labour market whilst trying to address emerging priorities.

Tertiary student outcomes

Tertiary attainment has positive outcomes for graduates. JSA found that VET graduates saw a median income uplift of \$11,800 per annum compared to their income prior to training. In addition, reliance on income support dropped by 39% after course completion, and 8% of all VET graduates pursued higher education after completion while 16% enrolled in a higher-level VET qualification.⁷

Department of Education analysis shows that graduates with a bachelor's degree have a median income uplift of \$30,000 in comparison to those with year 11 attainment or below.⁸ Australians with a doctoral degree are up to six times more likely to be in the top 10% of all incomes in Australia compared to other levels of educational attainment.⁹

Attainment of post-secondary qualifications also leads to higher economic participation rates, lower unemployment and higher full-time weekly earnings, with the higher the qualification, the higher median weekly earnings for individuals.¹⁰

In addition, evidence shows tertiary attainment is also positively associated with community engagement, advocacy and volunteering, trust and tolerance, healthy behaviours, environmental conservation activities, employment and business.¹¹

The structure of tertiary education in Australia

The tertiary education system plays a vital role in providing both general and occupation-specific skills. In Australia, tertiary education is bifurcated, comprising a VET sector and a higher education sector. Each of these sectors is funded, regulated, legislated and delivered separately, though learning outcomes for all regulated tertiary qualifications are set out in the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF).

⁵ JSA, [2024 Occupation Shortage List: Key Findings and Insights Report](#), 2024.

⁶ JSA, [Occupation Shortage Report \(December Quarter 2024\)](#), 2025, p.7.

⁷ JSA, [Strong and Responsive VET Pathways](#), 2024.

⁸ Australian Government Department of Education, [Universities Accord Review Panel, Australian Universities Accord Final Report](#), 2024, p.73.

⁹ Australian Government Department of Education, [Benefits of Educational Attainment: Income](#), 2024.

¹⁰ JSA, [Better Together, The Jobs and Skills Report 2024](#), 2024.

¹¹ Australian Government Department of Education, [Benefits of Educational Attainment: Income](#), 2024.

	Vocational Education and Training	Higher Education
Number of active providers	3,607 Registered Training Organisations (RTOs): ¹² <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 technical and further education (TAFE) providers • 2,920 private training providers • 340 schools • 14 universities • 184 community education providers • 125 enterprise providers. 	210 higher education providers: ¹³ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 39 Table A universities (total of 44 universities) • 8 university colleges • 159 institutes of higher education.
AQF Levels offered	Offers qualifications at AQF levels 1–8: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certificates I-IV • Diplomas/Advanced Diplomas • Graduate Certificates/ Graduate Diplomas. In early 2025, Skills and Education Ministers endorsed a new qualification type, called a vocational degree, for use at AQF level 7 (the same level as the higher education bachelor's degree). ¹⁴	Offers qualifications at AQF levels 5–10: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diplomas/Associate Degrees • Bachelor's Degrees • Graduate Certificates/ Graduate Diplomas • Master And Doctoral Degrees. In addition, almost half of all registered higher education providers also deliver VET courses. ¹⁵
Student enrolments (2023)	5.1 million students enrolled in VET sector qualifications, with around 325,000 international students. ¹⁶ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.3 million enrolled in nationally recognised programs, which includes full qualifications • 3.5 million in subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program. Most training provision is through private training providers, with 77.6% of student enrolments, compared with 15.1% at TAFEs. ¹⁷	1.6 million students enrolled in higher education, of which 525,000 were overseas students: ¹⁸ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around 967,000 students studying bachelor's degrees • 525,000 were undertaking postgraduate study.

Differences between VET and higher education

The differences in how the sectors provide education and learning reflect the broader differences between the two sectors, the traditional roles and the underlying purposes that each has had.

¹² National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), [Total VET students and courses](#), 2023.

¹³ Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), [National Register](#), 2025.

¹⁴ Australian Government Department of Education, [International Students - Monthly Summary \(December 2024\)](#), 2025.

¹⁵ TEQSA, [TEQSA Annual Report 2023-24](#), 2024, p. 29.

¹⁶ Australian Government Department of Education, [International Students - Monthly Summary \(December 2024\)](#), 2024; NCVER, [Latest VET Statistics \(March 2025\)](#), 2025.

¹⁷ NCVER, [Total VET students and courses](#), 2023.

¹⁸ Australian Government Department of Education, [Selected Higher Education Statistics \(2014-2023\)](#), 2025; Australian Government Department of Education, [Higher Education Statistics: 2023 Section 2 – All Students](#), 2024.

The VET sector has tended to focus on vocationally oriented knowledge and skills, with some qualifications delivered through apprenticeship and traineeship models. Responsibility and funding for VET is shared between the Australian and state and territory governments, with each state or territory administering their own training system. Most VET providers are regulated nationally by the Australian Skills Quality Authority, except in Victoria and Western Australia where there are state regulators.

By contrast, the government has primary responsibility for policy and funding of higher education, which focuses on advanced-level knowledge and research. Higher education providers are regulated by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency.

Over the years, many have noted the potential of the two sectors to complement each other and learn from each other's strengths. The distribution between 'vocational' and 'advanced' has become less relevant and less significant. There have been frequent calls for higher education qualifications to become more applied and relevant to workforce needs.¹⁹ Others have questioned VET's emphasis on skills for specific job roles in an increasingly advanced and rapidly changing economy.²⁰ This has led to collaboration between providers from both sectors, either to create pathways for students to deepen or broaden their learning, or through attempts to create integrated qualifications. Barriers to this collaboration range from practical issues such as the administrative burden of curriculum mapping and dealing with multiple fundings systems, to cultural issues such as differences in terminology, learning and assessment approaches and lack of parity of esteem between the sectors.

Pathways into tertiary education

The most common entry point into the tertiary education system is soon after completing senior secondary school, though many people enter and re-enter the system later in life. Senior Secondary Certificates of Education are AQF qualifications issued by the curriculum, assessment and certification authority in each state and territory to students meeting the requirements for successful completion of secondary schooling. Students may take courses that lead to an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank for higher education entry, other generalist courses, or VET courses (generally Certificate II and III) that count towards their Senior Secondary Certificate of Education.²¹

Alternative pathways to desired qualifications include tertiary preparation programs, such as enabling programs, Certificate IV in Tertiary Preparation and articulation pathways through other qualifications, such as from a VET diploma into a bachelor's degree. These alternative pathways are more often used by equity groups, such as learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds, those from regional and remote areas, and First Nations students.²²

The importance of aspiration and outreach for learners

Ensuring that aspiration and outreach is promoted successfully and well for all learners, including school leavers, those who leave school early, and mature-aged learners, is key to nurturing confidence and encouraging participation in all forms of tertiary education.

¹⁹ Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DEWR) Review of University-Industry Collaboration in Teaching and Learning, 2021.

²⁰ DEWR, Qualification Reform Design Group, Unlocking the Potential of VET, 2024.

²¹ NCVER, VET In Schools 2023, 2023.

²² National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Equity implications of non-ATAR pathways: Participation, academic outcomes, and student experience, 2022.

Data from the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority shows that the national apparent retention rate from Year 10 to Year 12 has decreased from 80.7% in 2013 to 78.7% in 2023.²³ This means that more students are not continuing on to complete their secondary schooling and may be finding other pathways to learn or earn.

At present, there are a range of national, state and local based approaches to aspiration, careers advice and outreach, spanning across schools, VET and higher education. These approaches vary significantly depending on the local setting. They are not always designed agnostically to respond to, and facilitate, the ambition of the learner and may sometimes be geared towards a particular pathway, such as a VET course or qualification or a higher education qualification.²⁴ These approaches also tend to be restricted to undertaking outreach at a single point in the education lifecycle, such as undertaking outreach and nurturing aspiration to students nearing the end of secondary school, rather than to all learners, regardless of where they are in their lifelong learning journey.

International experiences can provide examples of practice that could be applied in an Australian context as part of potential new approach to aspiration and outreach. The United Kingdom's Uni Connect program brings together 29 partnerships of universities, colleges and other local partners to offer activities, advice and information on the benefits and realities of further education.²⁵ It does this by supporting attainment raising through impartial, collaborative outreach, and through higher education providers engaging schools directly.

The role of tertiary education in supporting lifelong learning

As labour market needs change, people will increasingly need to return to tertiary education and training to meet workforce requirements, and many people will undertake study in both sectors across their lifetime.²⁶ In 2023, 11% of commencing domestic undergraduate students were admitted on the basis of a prior VET course, and 14% of commencing students undertaking a VET qualification had a previous highest qualification at bachelor's degree or higher.²⁷ Transitions are also not limited to full qualifications, with many students undertaking microcredentials offered in either VET or higher education, or developed by industry.²⁸

Students may go on to further study following a microcredential, or use it to upskill and reskill for work.²⁹ In 2023, 24% of commencing students undertaking a VET short course had previously completed a bachelor's degree or higher.³⁰

²³ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), National Report on Schooling in Australia 2023, 2025.

²⁴ University of Newcastle, Pressure to attend university: Beyond narrow conceptions of pathways to a "good life", 2023.

²⁵ United Kingdom Government Office for Students, Uni Connect, Office for Students, 2024.

²⁶ JSA, Opportunity and Productivity: Towards a Tertiary Harmonisation Roadmap, 2025.

²⁷ Australian Government Department of Education, Higher Education Statistics, 2025; NCVER, Total VET Activity Data, 2025.

²⁸ Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Review Panel, Review of the Australian Qualifications Framework, 2019.

²⁹ AQF Review Panel, Review of the Australian Qualifications Framework, 2019.

³⁰ NCVER, Total VET Activity Data, 2025.

With many people transitioning between VET and higher education and the labour force, it is important that these transitions are smooth and easy to navigate.³¹ These pathways are supported through credit and recognition of prior learning processes which help reduce duplication in learning undertaken by a person, as well as collaboration between VET and higher education providers and with industry and employers.

Key considerations and principles for a tertiary education system

To ensure Australia's tertiary education system continues to meet the needs of learners and industry into the future, it is important for the system to be:

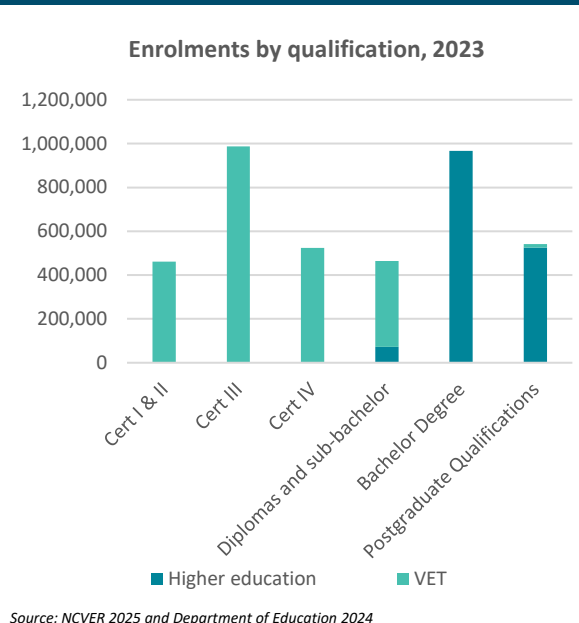
- **High quality:** demonstrating excellence in teaching and learning
- **Accessible:** supporting socioeconomic mobility for learners
- **Industry linked:** helping learners to succeed in the labour market and industry to meet its workforce needs
- **Connected:** leveraging VET's strengths in applied learning and higher education's strengths in theoretical learning and research
- **Adaptable:** responding to economic and technological changes in society
- **Equally valued:** supporting and investing in both sectors to meet Australia's skills needs.

³¹ JSA, Opportunity and Productivity: Towards a Tertiary Harmonisation Roadmap, 2025, p. 10-11.

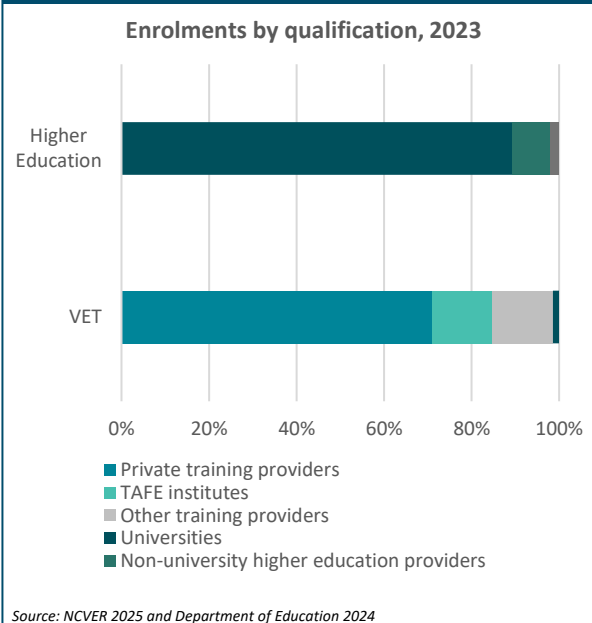
Data snapshot

The VET and higher education sectors offer different qualifications with differing types of providers. Both sectors are important in preparing the workforce for the future. Data shows that over the next ten years there will be an increased need for all qualifications, but particularly for Bachelor degrees and higher.

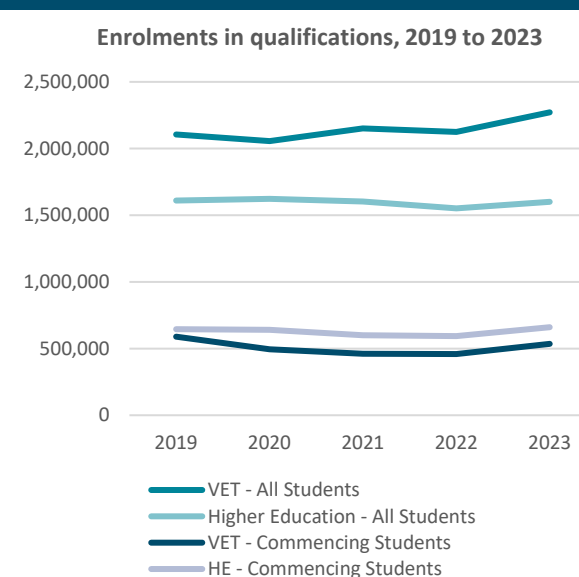
1. Compared to higher education, VET has higher total enrolments, of which most are Certificate IIIs. Enrolments in higher education are concentrated in Bachelor degrees.



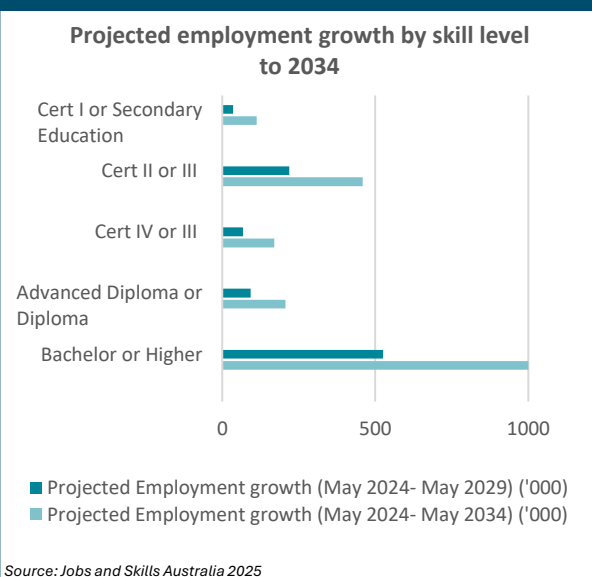
2. Higher education is largely serviced by public universities, while VET is mostly serviced by private training providers.



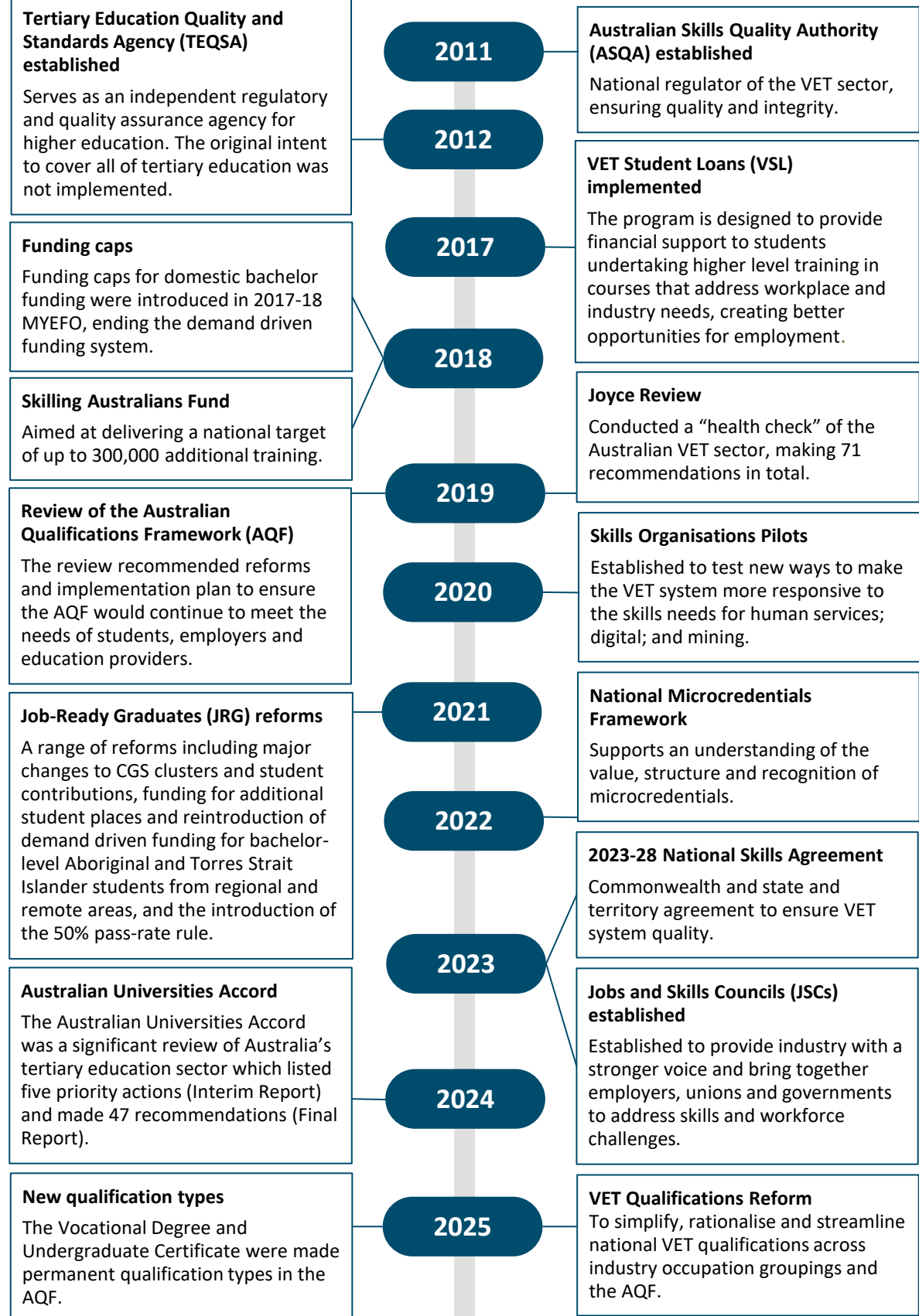
3. From 2019 to 2023 enrolment in VET and higher education remained relatively steady. From 2019 to 2022 there was a dip in the number of commencing VET students, but this number increased in 2023. VET has a higher number of overall enrolments.



4. Long term employment growth over the next ten years will increase for all qualifications, but particularly for Bachelor degrees or higher. This shows a need to increase Australians studying in general, but especially at advanced levels.



Reform journey



Gender-based education outcomes

Gender-based disparities affect the educational aspirations and outcomes of learners, preventing them from achieving their full potential. Ensuring the education system meets all learners' academic and wellbeing needs benefits individuals and the broader economy, by boosting economic participation and productivity. The education system can play an important role addressing gender-based gaps at each stage of learning.

Early childhood education and care

Gender-based differences in learning and behaviour emerge early. At school entry, boys are consistently more likely than girls to be developmentally vulnerable in key domains relating to school readiness, and more than twice as likely as girls to be developmentally vulnerable in two or more domains (17% of boys, 8% of girls in 2024 – see the *Data snapshot* for further information). While boys and girls do develop at different rates throughout childhood, these patterns indicate many boys begin school behind girls in key areas of development relevant to their continuing education.

School education

Gender-based disparities continue through school, impacting academic success, aspiration and safety. Girls consistently outperform boys in reading (71% of Year 3 girls read at a 'strong' or 'exceeding' level compared to 62% of boys), while boys continue to outperform girls in numeracy (67% of Year 3 boys are 'strong' or 'exceeding' in numeracy compared to 60% of girls - see the *Data snapshot* for the latest NAPLAN results disaggregated by gender). Gender-based gaps in maths and science results remain some of the widest in the world.¹

There are clear differences in retention. Despite a narrowing in the apparent retention rate from Years 7/8 to 12, boys are still less likely to stay in education (77% of boys and 84% of girls)² and less likely to complete Year 12 or equivalent³ (87% boys, 93% girls).⁴ The government funds a range of initiatives, including the Clontarf Foundation's program to support engagement, increase retention, and further the education and employment of First Nations boys.

Subject selection also differs. While girls are increasingly approaching parity in Year 12 STEM subjects like maths and agriculture, they represent only 25% of enrolments in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) subjects like IT, physics and engineering.⁵ Girls aged 12-17 are half as likely as boys to consider a career in STEM.⁶ The government funds the Curious Minds Program, to inspire girls to study STEM subjects in Year 11 and 12 and consider pursuing STEM careers after school. It also implements the National STEM School Education Strategy 2016 – 2026.

¹ Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), [TIMSS 2023 Australia, Volume 1: Student performance](#), 2024

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), [Schools](#), 2024

³ Measured as Year 12 or equivalent or a non-school qualification at certificate level III or above.

⁴ ABS, [Education and Work, Australia](#), 2024

⁵ Department of Industry Science and Resources, [STEM Equity Monitor](#), 2024

⁶ Ibid.

There is growing concern about increasing rates of gender-based violence and harassment by male students, and its impact on the safety and wellbeing of both educators and other students.⁷ Since 2022-23, the Government has delivered the Consent and Respectful Relationships Education measure in partnership with states, territories and the non-government schooling sectors to support schools to invest in evidence-based, age-appropriate and expert-developed consent and respectful relationships education tailored to their communities. The government also provides support to the Engaged Classrooms initiative, which provides resources for teachers to manage classroom behaviour. Additionally, it provides support to a range of student wellbeing and antibullying measures, including the Anti-Bullying Rapid Review which will look at what is working and what needs strengthening in relation to bullying and its underlying causes in schools.

Higher education and post school study

Gender-based trends in aspiration and outcomes persist into higher education and post school study. Women account for 56% of all commencing higher education students, and 62% of all domestic graduates. Across all 25-34 year olds, 54% of women hold a qualification at bachelor level or above, compared to 40% of men.⁸ Women hold the majority of outstanding Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) debts (approximately 59% of total HELP debt), but while they typically take longer to repay their loans, this is the flip side of women benefitting more from the income-contingent nature of the HELP system. More information on these workforce participation trends is below.

There are persistent gender-based disparities in study and training fields. Women make up less than 40% of STEM enrolments,⁹ and men continue to dominate vocational training pathways, comprising 75% of all apprenticeships and traineeships (excluding school based traineeships),¹⁰ and 80% of all apprenticeships in trade occupations like electricians, plumbers and chefs.¹¹ The government delivers the Women in STEM Cadetships and Advanced Apprenticeships to encourage engagement in STEM.

Gender-based violence remains a concern in higher education. One in 20 students report they have been sexually assaulted and 1 in 6 report being sexually harassed.¹² In 2025, the National Student Ombudsman was established, providing a trauma-informed pathway for higher education students to escalate complaints about their higher education provider. Additionally, a National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence is being established to hold higher education providers to consistently high standards for proactively preventing and responding to gender-based violence, including in student accommodation.

⁷ See for example: Sanders & Kendall (1 August 2024), '[Concerns student sexism towards teachers contributes to gendered violence](#)', *ABC News*

⁸ ABS, [Education and Work, Australia](#), 2024

⁹ Department of Industry Science and Resources, [STEM Equity Monitor](#), 2024

¹⁰ ABS, [Education and Work, Australia](#), 2024

¹¹ Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, [Fact sheet for Women apprentices in male dominated trades](#), 2024

¹² Social Research Centre, [National Student Safety Survey 2021](#), 2022

Workforce

Differences in educational experiences and pathways then flow through to differences in workforce outcomes. Gender imbalances across different occupations in turn contribute to gender wage imbalances. For example, many industries where women are relatively over-represented are also those that have relatively lower wages.

This portfolio contributes directly to closing gender-based gaps in participation which enhances employment outcomes. Women's workforce participation has increased to a near-record high of 62.8%, compared to men at 70.9%.¹³ Women are also more likely to work part-time or take leave due to unpaid care responsibilities.¹⁴ The availability and affordability of child care therefore impacts parental (especially mothers) workforce participation. The Child Care Subsidy (CCS) helps to address these gender gaps and enable parents, especially women, to participate more fully in the workforce (see [Early childhood education and care](#) in this Strategic Context section for more information).

The education workforce is significantly impacted by persistent gender-based disparities. The early childhood education and care workforce is around 92% women.¹⁵ In schools, women make up 82% of full time equivalent primary school teachers, and 62% of full time equivalent secondary school teachers.¹⁶ Despite this, men hold 29% of senior leadership positions.¹⁷ In higher education, women make up 45% of the total staff at senior lecturer level or above,¹⁸ but only 27% of Vice-Chancellors of Australian universities.¹⁹ There are a few key strategies where all governments act to address gender-based gaps in the education workforce, including the ECEC National Workforce Strategy, the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan, and developing the First Nations Teacher Strategy, which aim to elevate the educator profession and encourage diversity.

¹³ ABS, [Labour force, Australia](#), 2025

¹⁴ ABS, [Gender indicators](#), 2024

¹⁵ Department of Education, [National Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Census](#), 2024

¹⁶ ABS, [Schools](#), 2024

¹⁷ Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), [Australian Teacher Workforce Data](#), 2022

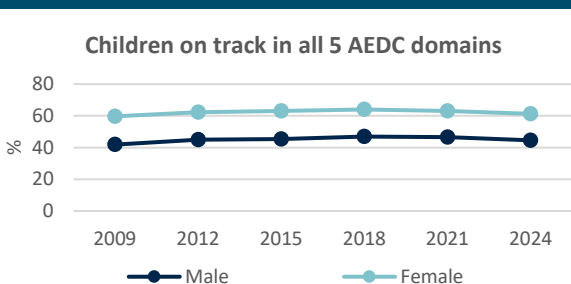
¹⁸ Department of Education, [Key findings from the 2024 Higher Education Staff Statistics](#), 2024

¹⁹ Department of Education, administrative data (unpublished), 2024

Data snapshot

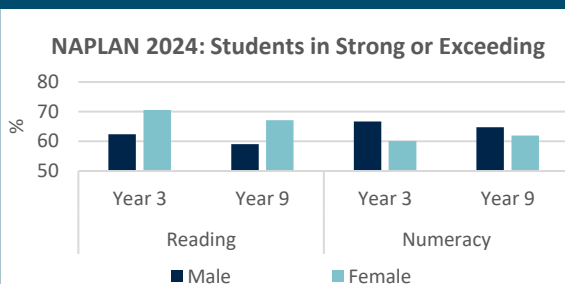
There are persistent gender-based disparities across the education life course and into the workforce, reflecting differences in aspiration and engagement.

1. Girls are more likely than boys to be on track in all 5 of the AEDC domains.



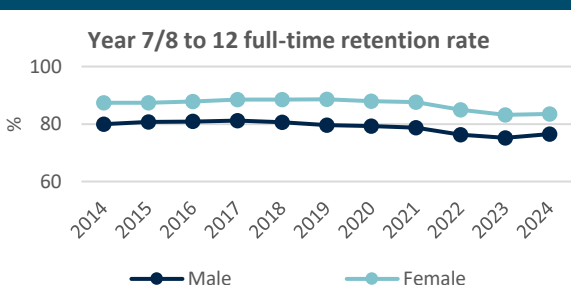
Source: Australian Early Development Census, AEDC data 2009 – 2024 (Embargoed)

2. NAPLAN results show girls outperform boys in reading while boys outperform girls in numeracy.



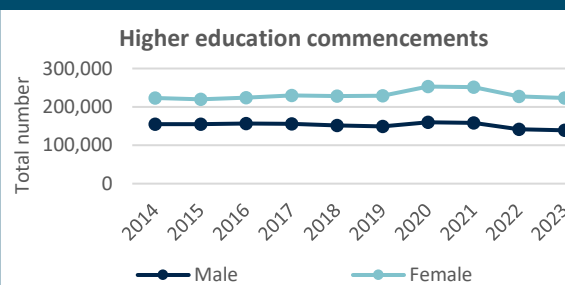
Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, NAPLAN data, 2024

3. The gap in year 12 retention rates has narrowed, but boys are less likely to stay in education.



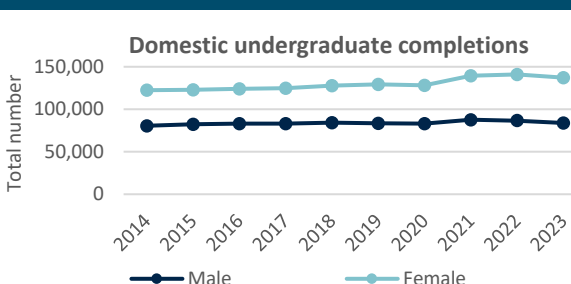
Source: ABS, Schools, 2024

4. More women than men commence higher education.



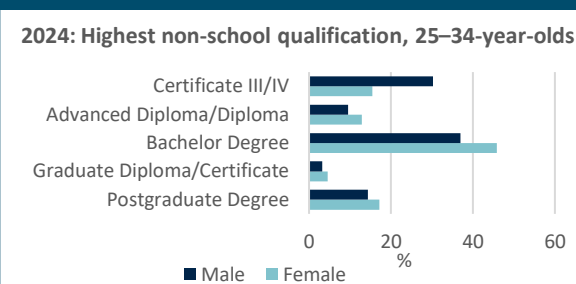
Source: Department of Education, Higher Education Statistics, 2023

5. Women make up more of the domestic undergraduate completions.



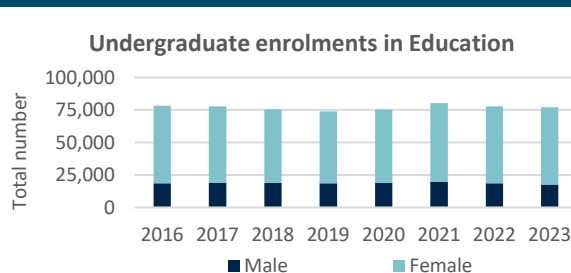
Source: Department of Education, Higher Education Statistics, 2023

6. Women are more likely to hold a post school qualification, at a higher level, than men.



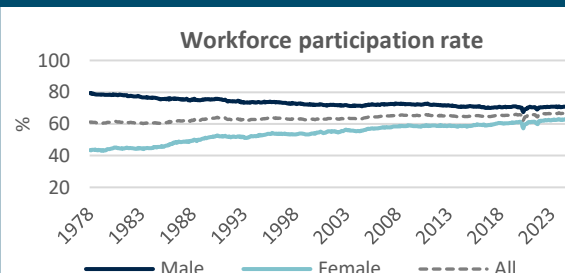
Source: ABS, Education and Work, Australia, 2024

7. Women remain far more likely to study Education at university.



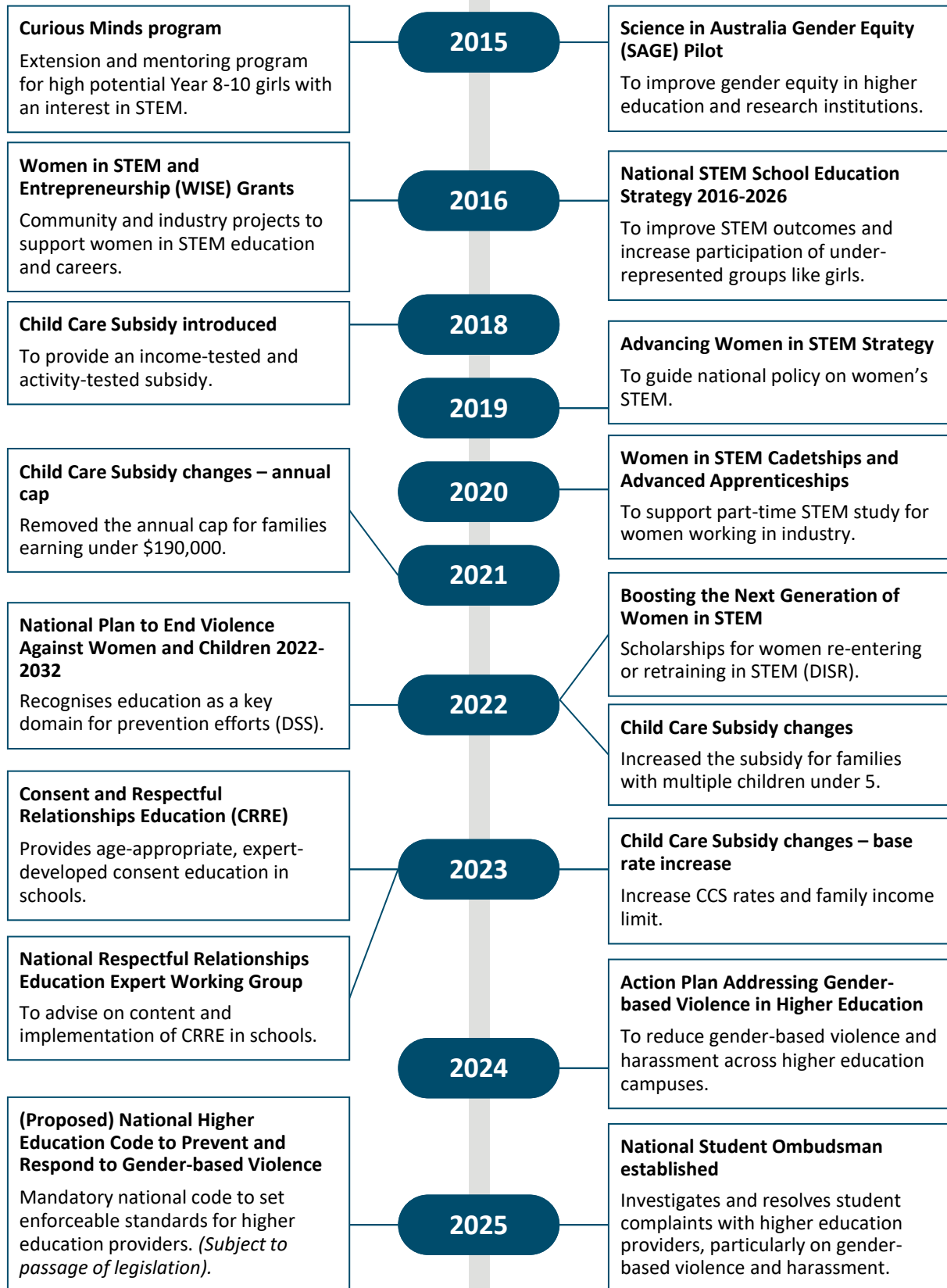
Source: Department of Education, Higher Education Statistics, 2023

8. The gap in workforce participation rate has narrowed but still persists.



Source: ABS, Labour Force, Australia, 2025

Reform journey



First Nations peoples' outcomes

Australia's First Nations population comprises more than 980,000 people (around 3.8% of the total population), with approximately one third of the population under 15 years of age.¹ Within the education sector: 4.5% of children using child care identified as First Nations (December 2024); 6.6% of school students identified as First Nations (2024); and 2.2% of the total proportion of higher education students identified as First Nations (2023).²

First Nations peoples continue to experience poorer outcomes across most socio-economic measures compared to other Australians, including lower rates of education, health and wellbeing, and employment, and overrepresentation in the criminal justice and child protection systems.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the Agreement) is a bi-partisan shared agreement between all Australian governments and the Coalition of Peaks, which is a representative body of more than 80 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations. The Agreement aims to improve life outcomes among First Nations peoples, committing parties to achieving 19 socio-economic targets, with 5 targets sitting within the education portfolio. Improving education outcomes is crucial to supporting improvements in other socio-economic domains.³

Closing the Gap Target	Current data (Year)	On track?
Target 3: By 2025, increase the proportion of children enrolled in Year Before Full Time Schooling (YBFS) early childhood education to 95%.	101.8% (2023)	On track
Target 4: By 2031, increase the proportion of children assessed as developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to 55%.	33.9% (2024)	Worsening, not on track
Target 5: By 2031, increase Year 12 or equivalent qualification attainment (age 20-24) to 96%.	68.1% (2021)	Improving, not on track
Target 6: By 2031, increase the proportion of First Nations people aged 25-34 years who have completed a tertiary qualification (Certificate III and above) to 70%.	47.0% (2021)	Improving, not on track
Target 7: By 2031, increase the proportion of First Nations youth (15-24 years) who are in employment, education or training to 67%.	58.0% (2021)	Improving, not on track

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Estimates and Projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, July 2024.

² Department of Education, Child Care Subsidy December quarter 2024 data tables, March 2025; Department of Education, Key findings from the 2023 Higher Education Student Statistics, March 2025; ABS, Schools, February 2025.

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Education of First Nations people, September 2023.

Priority reforms

The Agreement is built around 4 Priority Reforms which underpin essential acceleration towards the achievement of the socio-economic targets and aim to fundamentally change the relationship between the Australian Government and First Nations communities. The Priority Reforms are:

1. Formal partnerships and shared decision-making: critical to accelerating policy and progress
2. Building the community-controlled sector: to deliver better informed services
3. Transforming government organisations: to be culturally safe, responsive and eliminate racism
4. Shared access to data and information at a regional level: to inform shared decision making.

The Productivity Commission's review of the Agreement, released in February 2024, found that "progress in implementing the Agreement's Priority Reforms has, for the most part, been weak and reflects tweaks to, or actions overlayed onto, business-as-usual approaches".⁴ The report makes 4 recommendations to government: share power; recognise and support Indigenous Data Sovereignty; fundamentally rethink mainstream government systems and culture; and implement stronger accountability.

First Nations stakeholders and partnerships

To support progress on Closing the Gap, partnership agreements have been established with First Nations peoples and communities that help embed the priority reforms of the National Agreement.

Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP)

The ECCDPP is an Australian Government commitment that brings together all governments and First Nations representatives to develop joined-up policy recommendations to improve early childhood outcomes for First Nations children and families. The ECCDPP is one of 5 policy partnerships established under Priority One of the Agreement on Closing the Gap. It was endorsed by the Joint Council on Closing the Gap in August 2022 and is funded until 30 June 2028, with the remit covering all early childhood outcomes, including those the department has responsibility for under Closing the Gap.

The ECCDPP provides an established and mature mechanism for the Australian Government to refine and target policy and program reforms across portfolios and gain community support with sponsorship from First Nations representatives. Through engagement with the ECCDPP, the Australian Government can test and facilitate the inclusion of community-led perspectives and evidence to focus policy reforms and front-line service delivery to areas of high impact and with the most disadvantage.

Part of the ECCDPP's role is to commission independent research. Two research reports were commissioned by the ECCDPP (a research report on Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations funding model options and an evidence review on optimal hours of early childhood education and care) and delivered in 2024. The two reports were provided to the Productivity Commission to inform its inquiry into early childhood education and care (ECEC). The ECCDPP also delivered its first set of recommendations to the Joint Council on Closing the Gap in July 2024, one of which refers to developing implementation advice on the research reports.

⁴ Productivity Commission, Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Study report Volume 1, p. 3, January 2024.

Formal Partnership Agreements between the department and First Nations peak organisations

The department has formal funding and partnership agreements in place with relevant national peak First Nations organisations - the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC) and SNAICC – the National Voice for our Children (SNAICC), with both agreements being signed in March 2025. These agreements realise the Australian Government's commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, to work in partnership and share decision making with First Nations peoples (Priority Reform One) and build the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Organisation sector (Priority Reform Two), as well as to meet the strong partnership elements and adequate funding expectations (National Agreement clauses 32 and 33). They ensure that First Nations perspectives inform policy and program design on matters impacting First Nations children and families, and that NATSIEC and SNAICC are supported to represent the voices of communities to implement reforms where relevant.

The agreement with SNAICC, the national peak for First Nations children, affirms their role as a peak partner with the department on matters affecting First Nations children and families in ECEC. The agreement with NATSIEC, the national peak body for First Nations education across the lifelong learning cycle, ensures that First Nations perspectives and solutions are considered in education policy decisions.

The department takes a collective responsibility approach in which all areas of the department are expected to consider the needs of First Nations students in the delivery of its work. This is supported by First Nations led branches in the early childhood, schooling and higher education branches. The department's Executive oversee this work via an Indigenous Business is Everybody's Business Committee that reports to Executive Board.

Australian Tertiary Education Commission

In the 2024-25 Budget \$54 million of funding was provided to establish the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC). ATEC will be an independent steward for the tertiary education sector working reduce barriers between vocational education and training, and higher education, support the target to lift tertiary attainment to 80% by 2050 and improve equity of tertiary participation and attainment. ATEC will be led by three Commissioners, including a dedicated First Nations Commissioner who will ensure First Nations perspectives are central to the higher education sector.

Progress on Closing the Gap Targets

Early childhood education and care

There are 2 targets in the Agreement which cover outcomes in ECEC.

- **Target 3:** By 2025, increase the proportion of children enrolled in Year Before Full Time Schooling (YBFS) early childhood education to 95%. This target is **on track** to be met. The most recent data, from 2023, shows 101.8% of First Nations children were enrolled in YBFS early childhood education, up from 76.7% in 2016 (the baseline year).⁵ This progress is consistent in all jurisdictions except the Northern Territory. In 2025, all governments will work with First Nations partners to refresh Target 3. This process is being led by the National Indigenous Australians Agency with support from the department as lead agency responsible for Target 3.

⁵ Enrolment proportions exceed 100% for some areas due to the numerator and denominator being from different sources.

It is anticipated the target will consider both enrolment and attendance data for First Nations children participating in YBFS ECEC.

- **Target 4:** By 2031, increase the proportion of children assessed as developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to 55%. Progress on this target is worsening and is **not on track** to be met. The latest data, from 2024, showed 33.9% of First Nations children were assessed as developmentally on track in all five AEDC domains, a decrease from 35.2% in 2018 (the baseline year).

Improving progress against Target 4 requires effort from all relevant portfolios, including Education, Social Services, and Health and Aged Care. The education portfolio's key levers for supporting better early childhood outcomes for First Nations children relate to supporting high quality and culturally responsive ECEC—with activity within mainstream programs to support First Nations children and families to engage in the system, and additional targeted initiatives.

Under the ECEC Worker Retention Payment (WRP) progress against Priority Reform 2 (build the community-controlled sector) is supported by providing a 15% wage increase on modern award rates for the ECEC workforce. In implementing the WRP, the department has engaged SNAICC to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to prepare and apply for the WRP—including ensuring ACCOs will be adequately compensated through the WRP funding review process.

More targeted initiatives include:

- Connected Beginnings: a place-based program operating in 50 sites across Australia supporting integration of local support services and supporting children and families to access culturally appropriate support services, including ECEC
- the Community Child Care Fund Restricted Expansion program: establishing new high quality and mostly community controlled ECEC services, mainly in remote and very remote areas—currently 8 sites in contract with further sites to be announced
- the Intensive ECEC Model Trial: aiming to lift school readiness, including cognitive skills, resilience, and socio-emotional development, for vulnerable and disadvantaged children—supporting up to 200 children across 4 sites, including a dedicated First Nations site co-designed with SNAICC and launched in early 2024.

School education

There is one target in the Agreement covering outcomes in school education.

- **Target 5:** By 2031, increase Year 12 or equivalent qualification attainment (age 20-24) to 96%. This target is **not on track** to be met. The most recent data, from 2021 (noting data is only available every 5 years in the Census), shows 68.1% of First Nations people aged 20-24 years had attained Year 12 or equivalent qualification, up from 63.2% in 2016 (the baseline year).

The Australian Government supports the participation of First Nations children in schools through a number of initiatives, including the Better Fairer Schools Agreement 2025-2034 (BFSA) (also including the BFSA – Full and Fair Funding Agreement) and the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan. In the BFSA, the Commonwealth has committed to develop a First Nations education policy in partnership with First Nations education stakeholders, and state and territory governments. The BFSA also commits governments to support development and implementation of policies in line with the Priority Reforms of the Agreement. The National Teacher Workforce Action Plan was developed to

address national teacher workforce shortages. The plan includes an action to attract and retain more First Nations teachers through the development of a First Nations Teacher Strategy.

The Schooling Resource Standard (SRS), which is used to calculate the total public funding schools require to meet students' educational needs, includes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander loading which provides extra funding for each First Nations student. In 2025, the Australian Government will provide an estimated \$0.6 billion under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander loading.

Higher education

There are 2 targets in the Agreement which cover higher education outcomes.

- **Target 6:** By 2031, increase the proportion of First Nations people aged 25-34 years who have completed a tertiary qualification (Certificate III and above) to 70%. This target is **not on track** to be met. The latest data, from 2021, showed 47% of First Nations people aged 25-34 years had completed Certificate III or above. This is an increase from 42.3% in 2016 (the baseline year).
- **Target 7:** By 2031, increase the proportion of First Nations youth (15-24 years) who are in employment, education or training to 67%. This target is **not on track** to be met. The latest data, from 2021, showed 58% of First Nations people aged 15-24 were fully engaged in employment, education or training.

The Australian Government supports the participation of First Nations peoples in higher education through various initiatives, including demand driven funding for First Nations students attending university. From 2021, First Nations peoples from regional and remote areas were guaranteed Commonwealth supported places at university. In 2024 this was expanded to all First Nations people, allowing students to attend the university of their choice for any non-medical course of study. In 2026, this will be expanded to cover courses in medicine.

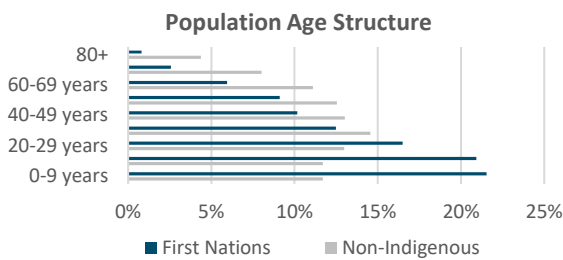
Additionally, on 1 July 2025, the administration of the Indigenous Student Success Program (ISSP) is transferring to the Department of Education from the National Indigenous Australians Agency. This program provides supplementary funding to universities to help First Nations students take on the demands of university and succeed. Universities can offer scholarships, tutorial assistance, mentoring and safe cultural spaces, and other personal support services.

The Regional University Study Hubs program improves access to tertiary education for students living in regional and remote areas of Australia. The hubs support educationally underrepresented groups including First Nations students, to access and succeed in tertiary education. There are 56 Regional University Study Hubs located across the country. As of November 2024, 5,270 students were registered with 42 hubs, and more than 12% of students identified as First Nations students (compared to 2.2% of higher education students who identified as First Nations students in 2023). Additionally, building on the success of the Regional Hubs Program, in 2024 the Suburban University Hubs program was launched to bring more tertiary education opportunities to outer metropolitan areas, recognising that the majority of First Nations peoples live in major cities.

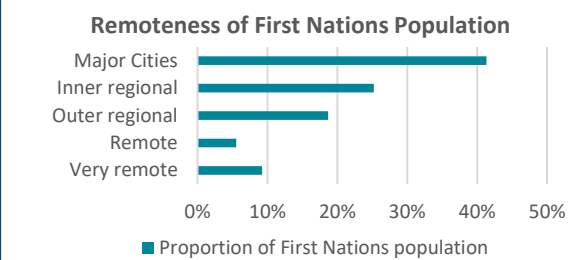
Data snapshot

First Nations peoples make up a larger proportion of remote populations, with those in rural areas facing greater barriers to education. Only one of the 5 Closing the Gap education targets is on track to be met.

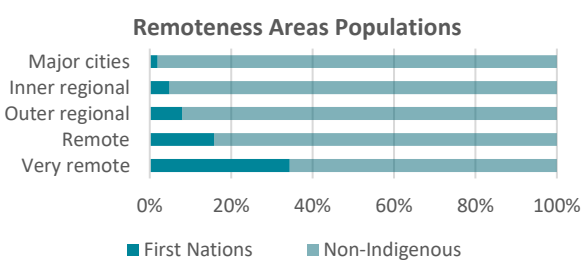
1. The First Nations population has a relatively younger age structure.



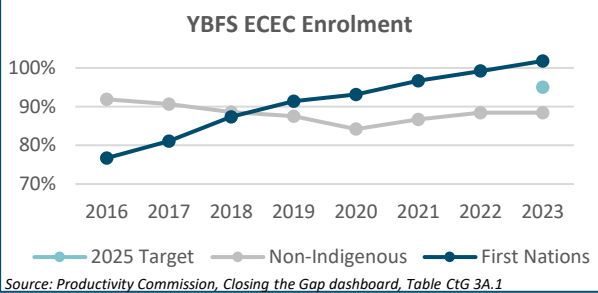
2. The majority of the First Nations population live in major cities.



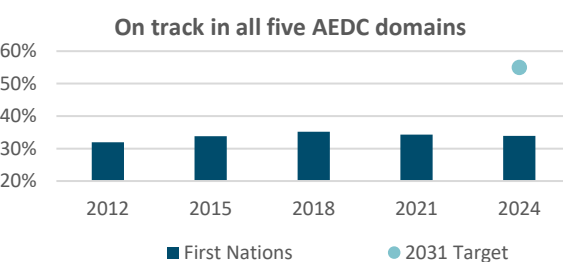
3. First Nations people represent a higher proportion of remote and very remote populations.



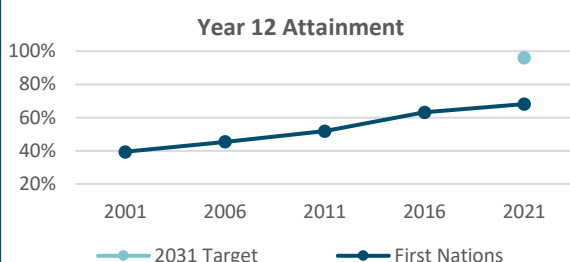
4. Target 3, YBFS enrolment in early childhood education, is on track to be met.



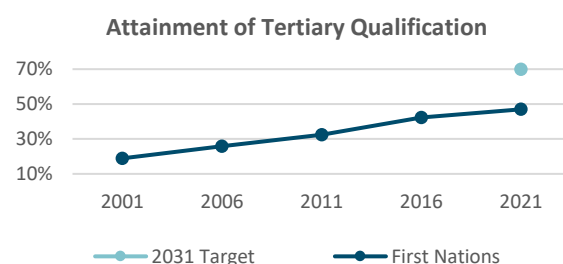
5. Target 4, proportion of children assessed as on track in all five domains of the AEDC, is not on track.



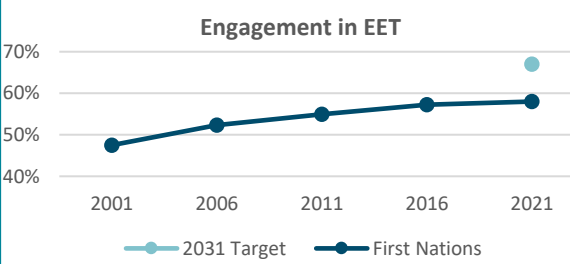
6. Target 5, increase in Year 12 or equivalent attainment, is not on track to be met.



7. Target 6, increase in tertiary qualification, is not on track to be met.



8. Target 7, increasing engagement in employment, education or training, is not on track to be met.



Reform journey

Commitment to refresh the Closing the Gap agreement

As the Agreement approached its 10-year anniversary, with some targets due to expire, government leaders committed to work together, and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to refresh and renew the work.

2016

Indigenous leaders present Statement to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) setting out priorities for a new Closing the Gap agenda

COAG agreed to establish a genuine, formal partnership guided by principles of empowerment and self-determination and supported by a community-led, strengths-based strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to move beyond surviving, to thriving.

Joint Council on Closing the Gap

Formed to provide high-level accountability arrangements, the Joint Council is co-chaired by the Minister for Indigenous Australians and the Lead Convenor of the Coalition of the Peaks.

2018

National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap 2019-2029

This agreement was signed by all Australian governments, the Coalition of the Peaks and the Australian Local Government Association. It supports shared decision making.

2019

National Agreement on Closing the Gap

This agreement was signed by all Australian governments and the Coalition of the Peaks. The Agreement fulfilled a commitment from the National Partnership Agreement signed in 2019.

2020

Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership

One of 5 policy partnerships established under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, covering all early childhood outcomes.

2022

Australian Universities Accord

The final report was delivered in February 2024 and made a number of recommendations to increase First Nations engagement in higher education.

2024

Productivity Commission Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

The report found that governments have largely not fulfilled their commitments and that fundamental changes are required to deliver on the Agreement.

Formal Partnership Agreements with SNAICC and NATSIEC

The department entered into agreements that formalise the roles of SNAICC and NATSIEC in informing strategies and actions to improve outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Education Ministers entered into a formal partnership agreement with NATSIEC to support greater direct First Nations education engagement via NATSIEC as the national peak body.

2025

2031

Set year to achieve many socio-economic Closing the Gap targets, including in education.

Learners from regional and remote areas

Regional and remote Australia

Just over a quarter of the Australian population lives in regional Australia, with this population comprised of 64% in Inner Regional areas, 29% in Outer Regional areas, and 7% in Remote or Very Remote areas.¹ Regional Australia is made up of many different types of communities, each with its own unique needs, population and community culture. The population of combined regions continues to grow, but at approximately half the rate of metropolitan areas.² Currently, 14.5% of First Nations people live in Remote or Very Remote Australia.³

Learners in regional and remote areas

Learners in regional and remote communities face several challenges, including fewer educators and limited choice for schools, early childhood education and care services. Additionally, access to technology, support services, transport, and other infrastructure that supports access to quality education is often less readily available in regional Australia than in metropolitan areas. While learners in regional and remote Australia account for a significant proportion of the student population, the rates of participation, attainment and completion of education milestones decreases the further students are from major cities. These gaps widen over time resulting in lower Year 12 attainment for regional students but is particularly pronounced at the university level.⁴

Early childhood education and care

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) availability tends to be reduced in regional and remote areas. While the overall number of approved child care places has grown by about 17% between 2018 and 2022, approved places in Remote Australia and Very Remote Australia has remained flat, even when accounting for differences in population size.⁵ Quality of services also tends to be poorer in regional or remote areas which may discourage families from enrolling their children and limits overall participation. This means that children living in these areas are more likely to miss out on the academic and social benefits of ECEC.⁶ In 2024, 77% of children in major cities attended child care, compared to 6% in Outer Regional and less than one per cent in Remote and Very Remote areas.⁷

There are a number of programs in place to address access to ECEC in regional and remote areas. The Community Child Care Fund (CCCF) program, including Connected Beginnings, funds around 700 services across Australia to ensure that families have access to quality care where the market might not otherwise support service provision. Overall, funding of \$617.6 million over 4 years

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), [Rural and Remote Health](#), 2024.

² AIHW, [Rural and Remote Health](#), 2024.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), [Census of Population and Housing - Counts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians](#), 2021.

⁴ Australian Government Department of Education, [National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy \(Napthine Review\)](#), 2019.

⁵ Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), [Childcare Inquiry \(Final Report\)](#), 2023.

⁶ Australian Government Productivity Commission, [A path to universal early childhood education and care \(Inquiry Report – Volume 1\)](#), 2024.

⁷ Australian Government Department of Education, administrative data, 2024.

(2024-25 to 2027-28) is available, with around 85% of funding in 2024-25 supporting services in regional or remote locations.

The CCCF assists services to stay open and ensure continuity of care in vulnerable and disadvantaged communities, including those in regional and remote parts of the country. There have been previous grant opportunities targeted to support providers set up new services in regional and remote areas where there is limited access to ECEC.⁸ For example, in October 2023, \$16 million was offered to 28 providers to establish 47 new services in 38 communities experiencing with limited or no supply.⁹ In some situations, services may also be eligible to apply for emergency funding under the CCCF special circumstances grants.

School

Over 25% of Australian school students are enrolled in schools in regional or remote areas and 81% of these students are enrolled in government schools.¹⁰ Students in regional areas face more challenges to access and achieving educational milestones than their metropolitan peers. Challenges including teacher workforce shortages, school choice, transport to school, and student support in schools are exacerbated by the remoteness.¹¹ Gaps between regional and metropolitan students are evident in participation rates and are reflected in academic performance including NAPLAN results.¹² In 2024, 24% of students in Very Remote schools were rated as 'strong' or 'exceeding' achievement level for reading compared with 71% of students in major city schools.¹³ Additionally, year 12 completion rates are 24% lower in regional communities compared to major cities.¹⁴

A number of government initiatives seek to address these gaps and support school-aged students in regional and remote areas. The Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) provides additional recurrent funding for students at regional or remote schools through the school location loading and the school size loading. Per student funding for regional and remote schools is estimated to be \$9,386 in 2025, compared to \$7,143 for metropolitan schools. Students living in rural, regional and remote locations are a priority cohort for the purposes of both the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (2025-2034) and Better and Fairer Schools Agreement – Full and Fair Funding (2025-2034). As part of both agreements, the improvement measures for Year 12 certification, learning equity and student attendance will be disaggregated, where available, to improve understanding of the outcomes of rural, regional and remote students and students from other priority cohorts.

There are programs assist with increased access to resources and school choice, including the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program which is a program offering up to 100 scholarships to provide funds for secondary school boarding fees and associated costs for students and their families from regional and remote areas in Australia. The Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme's Basic and Additional Boarding Allowances provide financial support to families to assist with boarding school expenses. ABSTUDY provides support to eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

⁸ Australian Government Department of Education, Limited Supply Grant, 2025.

⁹ Australian Government Department of Education, Limited Supply Grant, 2025.

¹⁰ ABS, Schools Australia 2024, Table 46a, Students (FTE) by Australian Statistical Geography Standard remoteness area, 2024.

¹¹ Australian Government Department of Education, Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (Final Report), 2018.

¹² Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), National Report on Schooling in Australia, 2023.

¹³ ACARA, NAPLAN national results, 2024.

¹⁴ ACARA, National Report on Schooling in Australia (Chapter 8, Student Attainment), 2022.

attending boarding schools to assist them with school fees, a living allowance, and a fares allowance, as administered by Services Australia.

The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) administers the Indigenous Boarding Provider Grants Program which supports boarding facilities and First Nations boarding students from Remote and Very Remote communities to finish schooling. The Curious Minds program provides hands-on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) camps supported by a mentoring program, and prioritises girls from regional and remote locations, those from low socio-economic backgrounds, and First Nations people. The National Lending Library prioritises loans to schools in remote or regional locations, schools with high First Nations Australian student enrolments and schools with lower Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage scores.

Other government initiatives aim to benefit regional education by attracting and retaining teachers to the areas, including the Reduction of Higher Education Loan Program Debts for Teachers in Very Remote Areas program. This program involves waivers of indexation on accumulated Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) debt and reduction of accumulated HELP debt for teachers who move to teach in regional areas. Additionally, under an action as part of the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan, high achieving teachers are placed in teaching positions in Australian secondary schools experiencing teacher workforce shortages, including but not limited to schools located in rural, regional and remote areas, and those who are STEM-trained.

Students from a rural, regional or remote area which are undertaking an accredited Initial Teacher Education (ITE) qualification are a priority cohort for the Commonwealth Teaching Scholarships Program. Up to 5,000 scholarships (1,000 per year over 5 years) are being provided to attract more high-quality candidates from diverse cohorts into teaching. Scholarship recipients can receive up to \$40,000 (up to \$10,000 per year of study). In return, scholarship recipients are required to teach in a government school or government-run early learning setting for a time equivalent to the length of their ITE degree once they graduate. Recipients may also be eligible for a top up payment of \$2,000 if they undertake their final year professional experience placement in a remote area.

Higher Education

There are a number of universities serving communities in regional and remote Australia, with 9 regionally headquartered and a further 14 having campuses in regional and remote Australia.

Based on the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data, regional and remote Australians are almost half as likely to have a bachelor's degree or higher by age 35 and are 40% less likely to have a Certificate IV or higher compared to people from metropolitan locations. Several factors contribute to reduced higher education attainment for students who grew up in regional and remote areas including limited local study options and the financial, emotional, and social challenges associated with relocating to study.¹⁵

Government initiatives such as the Regional University Study Hubs program support learners from regional and remote Australia to access and complete higher education from any Australian institution, without having to leave their community. The 56 Study Hubs across Australia are designed to complement, rather than replace or duplicate existing university investments in regional areas and have different operating models to reflect specific circumstances and local community needs. For example, the Uni Hub Spencer Gulf in South Australia, Taree Universities Campus in NSW,

¹⁵ Parliament of Australia, [Regional and remote higher education: a quick guide](#), 2022.

and Pilbara-Kimberley University Centres in WA operate a supported course model where they partner with universities to offer courses locally to small groups of students to address skills needs.

Another model is the Wuyagiba Study Hub in Southeast Arnhem land which provides on-Country university education for remote Aboriginal students and offers a two-way university pathway program. Around 15,000 students have been supported by the Study Hubs since the program's establishment in 2018-19 resulting in increased university participation and completion in regional Australia.¹⁶

Additionally, current and past government programs have focussed on bridging gaps between learners from regional and remote communities and those from metropolitan areas. These programs seek to drive productivity and increase the research capacity of regional universities. This is achieved through additional payments to school leavers from regional or remote areas who relocate to undertake higher-level tertiary education (Tertiary Access Payment); increased funding for students at campuses in regional areas and for students from regional backgrounds (Regional Loading Program and Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program); and through additional places for medical students and graduates in and from regional Australia.

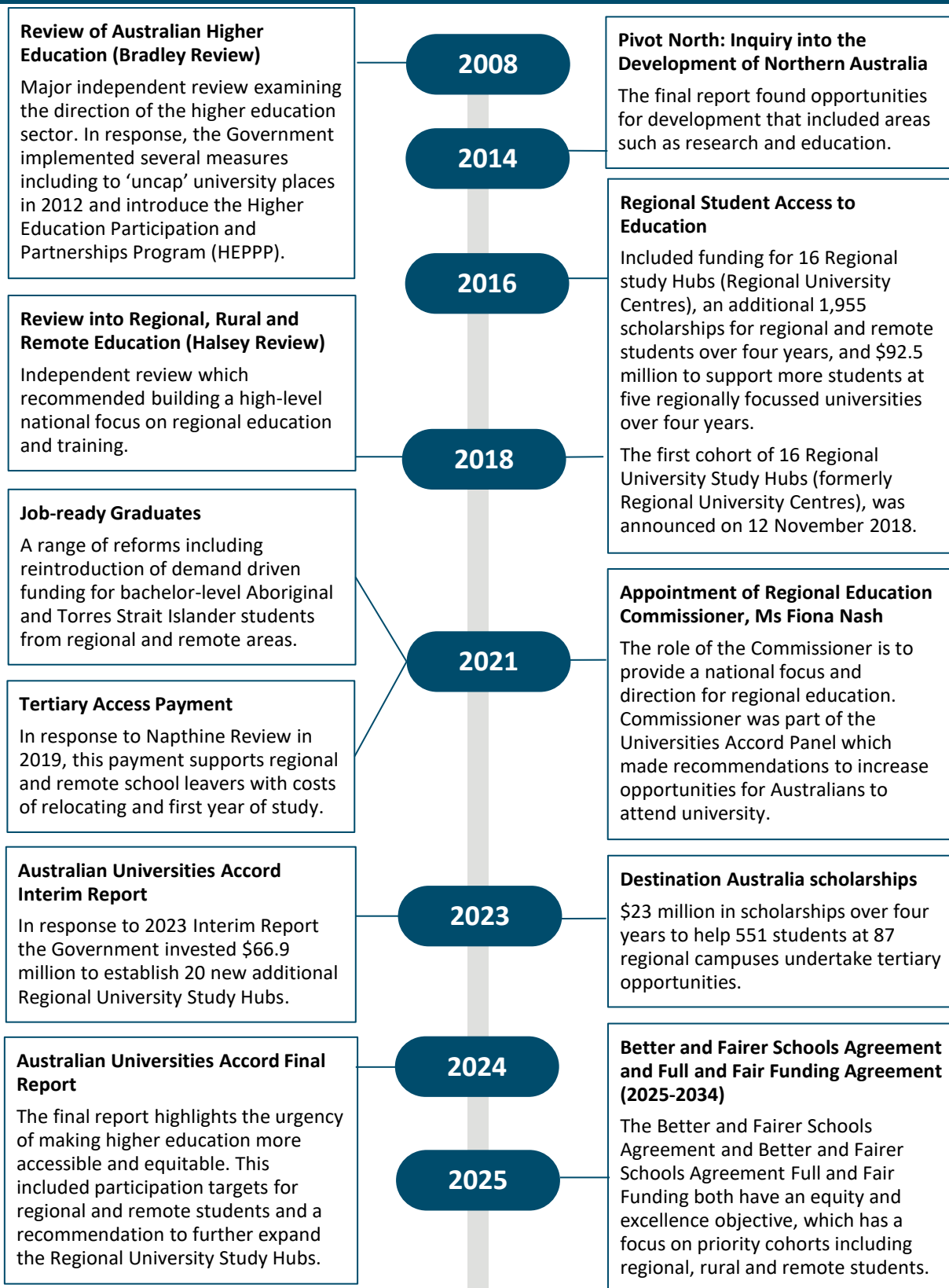
To address specific skills shortages in rural and remote areas, the government operates two programs that provide targeted reductions in HELP debts for teachers working in Very Remote areas, and eligible doctors and nurse practitioners working in regional, Remote, and Very Remote areas. This can include reductions in both accumulated HELP debts and the indexation on accumulated HELP debts. A legislated review of the HELP debt reduction program for doctors and nurse practitioners is required to be undertaken in 2025 and 2028 to make recommendations about the potential expansion of these approaches to other sectors of high skills need in regional and remote Australia, including health, mental health, and education sectors.

Regional Education Commissioner

The Regional Education Commissioner (the Commissioner), the Hon Fiona Nash, works closely with government to improve access, participation and attainment outcomes in regional and remote education, informed by her engagement with key regional and remote stakeholders. The Commissioner has a remit spanning ECEC, and schools and tertiary education, and delivers an annual report to the Minister for Education.

¹⁶ Australian Government, Budget 2025-26: Regional Ministerial Budget Statement 2025-26, 2025.

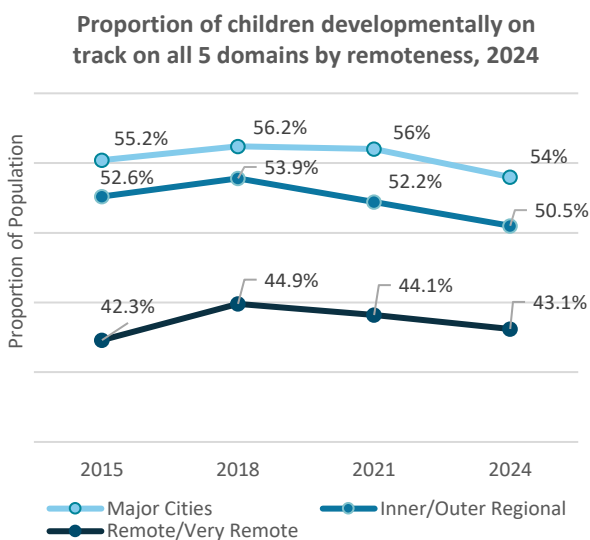
Reform journey



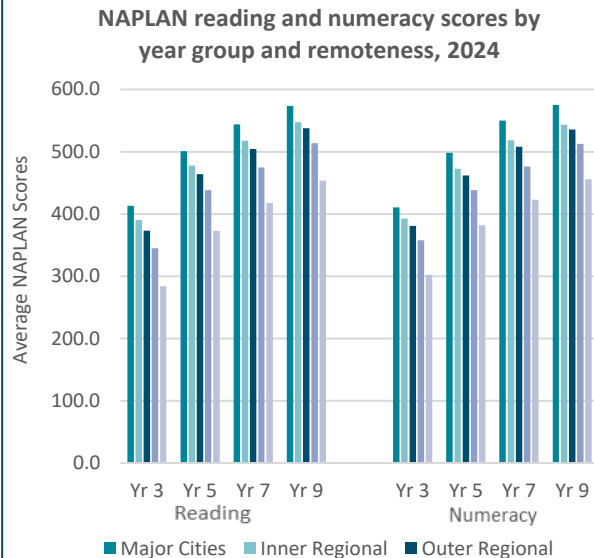
Data snapshot

Learners from regional and remote areas of Australia face additional barriers and challenges through their education journey. Data shows that childhood development and academic outcomes, as well as year 12 and university completion, can be negatively impacted by each increase in geographic remoteness.

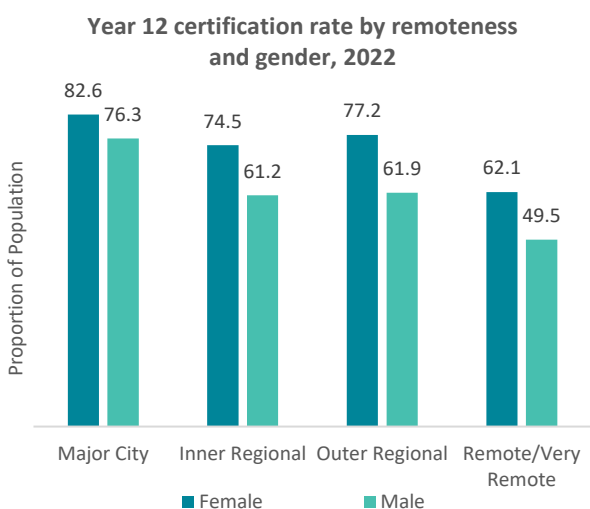
1. The proportion of children developmentally on track on all 5 Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) domains has declined since 2018. As remoteness increases, children are more likely to be behind than their peers living in major cities.



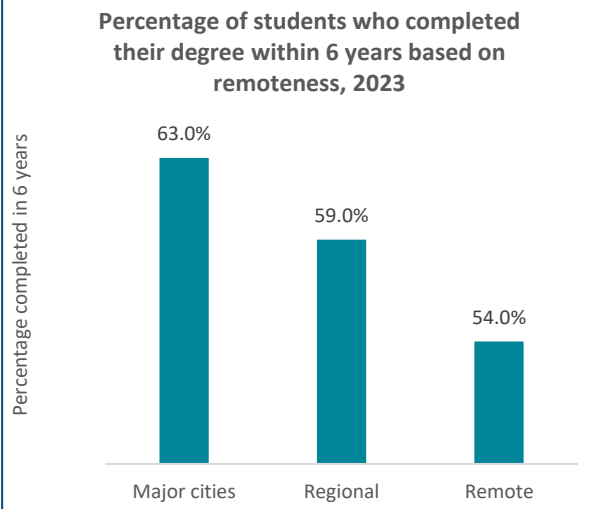
2. As remoteness increases, NAPLAN student performance decreases for reading and numeracy. This trend is consistent across every year group, showing that remoteness has a strong impact on academic performance.



3. Year 12 certification rates decreases as remoteness increases. The data also shows that across all remoteness levels female students are more likely to receive a year 12 certificate, and the gender gap is even larger for outer regional and remote compared to major city.



4. Students from major cities were more likely to complete their degree within 6 years compared to their peers in regional and remote areas. This indicates there may be additional barriers faced by students in regional and remote locations to university completion.



Learners from less advantaged or low socio-economic areas

Relative socio-economic advantage can be defined as the level of access people have to material and social resources, and their ability to participate in society.¹ Areas of socio-economic advantage and disadvantage are spread throughout Australia. Learners from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds face unique challenges in education, including potential for lower academic outcomes, limited access to resources, and increased stressors. These challenges can impact their ability to achieve their education potential and reduce productivity across their lifetime. Students from areas of less socio-economic advantage often require greater support and resources than their peers to bridge gaps and overcome barriers to positive learning outcomes. By developing programs that target learners from lower socio-economic areas, the government can increase access to quality child care and education, improving outcomes, opportunity and productivity across the life course.²

Early childhood education and care

The early years (0-5 years of age) of a child's life are particularly influential and can have a significant impact on a child's overall development, sense of identity, health, learning, safety, resilience and happiness throughout their life.³ Access to quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) through child care and preschool services can help to identify and close academic and other gaps between children from lower socio-economic advantaged areas and their peers. This gap includes the proportion of children who are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains, which is higher in the lowest socio-economic areas than in the highest socio-economic areas (51% compared with 39%).⁴ Additionally, access to affordable ECEC means parents and carers can work, train, study and volunteer which, in turn, boosts Australia's economy.

Payments made by the Commonwealth include the Child Care Subsidy which provides families with heavily subsidised access to child care services, including additional targeted assistance available for less advantaged communities and children. These supports assist families to cover costs, facilitates access to quality early learning opportunities, and encourages workforce participation (particularly for secondary income earners who are primarily women). Barriers to understanding or accessing the Child Care Subsidy can mean children from these areas with lower socio-economic advantage are more likely to miss out on accessing ECEC services.

Schooling

In addition to early childhood education and care, schooling is the most critical time in the learning life course to identify and support students from less advantaged areas. Vulnerabilities and learning gaps emerge in the early school years for students from low socio-economic areas.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Census of Population and Housing, 2016.

² Bonner et al., Why Australia keeps falling short of our educational goals, 2021.

³ Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS), Why children and their early years matter. An evidence summary in support of the Early Years Strategy 2024–2034, 2024.

⁴ Australian Government Department of Education, Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), 2024.

Less than 1 in 5 students who are behind in literacy and numeracy in Year 3 catch up and stay caught up.⁵ In 2022, the percentage of students aged 15 who attained the National Proficiency Standard of mathematical literacy in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment increased with each increase in socio-economic quartile: 30% of students in the lowest quartile achieved proficiency, 44% in the second, 59% in the third, and 72% in the highest quartile.⁶

A widening gap in learning outcomes between students from areas of lower and higher disadvantage also results in increasingly reduced educational attainment, aspiration, and engagement with learning for students over the school years. For many, access to digital technologies and skills remains a significant challenge, with the impact intensified for those from lower socio-economic households. Increasing digital literacy remains a fundamental enabler for teachers and learners to benefit from opportunities for technology to strengthen engagement and learning. Australian schools have some of the highest levels of social segregation and this has increased over time with areas of increasingly concentrated disadvantage emerging in the government school sector.⁷

Students from areas of lower socio-economic advantage require higher levels of support, additional resources, and individual guidance to achieve, and maintain positive learning outcomes than their peers.⁸ Government support to attract and retain highly effective teachers and leaders with access to high-quality curriculum resources and professional development, can assist in providing education that meets individual student needs.⁹

The department plays an important role in supporting schools and students from lower socio-economic advantage and their families to navigate schooling and to reduce the socio-economic segregation of the schooling system. Central to this is supporting the Australian Government's stewardship and leadership of the schooling system and overseeing the needs-based education funding for all Australian schools through the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS). This is given effect through national school reform agreements between the Australian Government, states and territories to provide funding to states and territories and establish joint priorities and education reforms for the schooling sector. The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (2025-34) and Better and Fairer Schools Agreement – Full and Fair Funding (2025-34) commenced in January 2025 and include reforms to improve outcomes of students from lower socio-economic advantage backgrounds. These students are defined as a priority equity cohort and both agreements provide for disaggregated improvement measures for Year 12 certification, learning equity and student attendance, where available, to improve understanding of their outcomes.

⁵ Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO), Fewer than 1 in 5 students who are behind in Year 3 catch up and stay caught up, August 2023.

⁶ Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), PISA 2022: Reporting Australia's results – Volume 1: Student performance and equity in education, p. 80.

⁷ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Equity in education: breaking down barriers to social mobility, 2018; Australian Government Department of Education, Improving Outcomes for All: The Report of the Independent Expert Panel's Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System, 2024.

⁸ Australian Government Department of Education, Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools, 2018.

⁹ Australian Government Department of Education, Improving Outcomes for All: The Report of the Independent Expert Panel's Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System, 2024.

Higher education

Participation in higher education by people from lower socio-economic backgrounds has grown since 2006, however learners from disadvantaged areas still achieve lower levels of education than those in other areas.¹⁰ Students living in areas of relative advantage are more likely to be enrolled in training or studying (47%), than those in the most disadvantaged areas (33%).¹¹ Addressing barriers to participation is important for Australia's future; to achieve the tertiary attainment target of 80% of working aged people by 2050, barriers to entry to university need to be addressed alongside improved harmonisation with the vocational education system.¹²

Students from lower socio-economic areas have a lower university participation and completion rate due to a number of factors, including lower parental educational attainment, academic preparedness, information deficits resulting in lack of support for aspiration, lack of cultural and social capital, need to balance financial pressures with study, family and carer obligations, and employment whilst studying. Students from these backgrounds are often underrepresented in areas of study that are more expensive or have unpaid placements or work experience, limiting their education choices and career aspirations.

Current initiatives to support choice in higher education students include the Commonwealth Prac Payments (CPP) which will provide, from 1 July, financial support to higher education and VET students in relevant disciplines while undertaking mandatory placements, Suburban University Study Hubs which help to make tertiary study more visible and accessible for students and are located in less socio-economically advantaged locations in metropolitan areas, and FEE-FREE Uni Ready courses, which provide pre-qualification preparation to prepare students for higher education study.

Additionally, the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) provides grants to Table A Universities to implement outreach initiatives to build aspiration and academic and wellbeing support initiatives for students to access and complete their studies. From 2026, the HEPPP is to be replaced by demand driven Needs-based Funding and a dedicated Outreach Fund. Providers would use Needs-based Funding to deliver student-centred academic and support services to improve student outcomes meaning more students from under-represented backgrounds (including students from low socio-economic areas) complete higher education.

Because higher education graduates have higher earnings than those without a non-school qualification reduced higher education attainment rates in students from less advantaged backgrounds can contribute to a cycle of socio-economic disadvantage.¹³ Australian children's economic position is in part due to their parent's economic position. There is a strong intergenerational link between a parent's income, opportunities and wellbeing, and the income, opportunities, and the wellbeing of their children. An ongoing challenge is how the government ensures that all Australians are offered educational opportunities regardless of their background and are not constrained by the economic and social experiences of their families.¹⁴

¹⁰ Australian Government Department of Education: [Higher Education Statistics Collection, Table 11.1, 2020; School students in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas \(internal document\)](#), 2024.

¹¹ ABS, [Work-related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21 financial year](#), 2022.

¹² Australian Government Department of Education, [Australian Universities Accord Budget Summary](#), 2024.

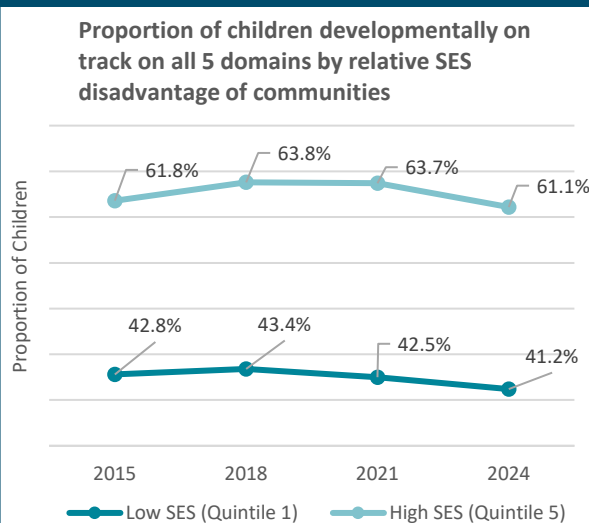
¹³ ABS, [Characteristics of Employments, Australia, Table 6.2](#), 2024.

¹⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing, [Intergenerational Transmission of Disadvantage in Australia](#), 2019.

Data snapshot

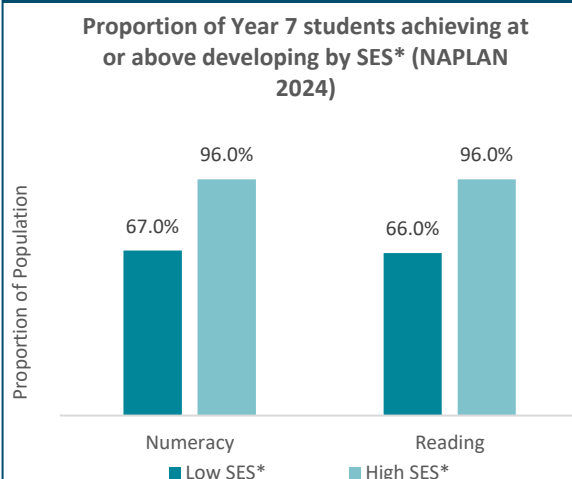
Students from areas of low socioeconomic advantage face additional barriers and challenges throughout their education journey. The data below, which starts at child development and ends at university completion, demonstrates that socioeconomic factors continue to impact learners throughout every learning stage and into adulthood.

1. Since 2018 the proportion of children developmentally on track on all 5 domains has declined. Children living in the most disadvantaged communities are more likely to fall behind than those living in less disadvantaged communities.



Source: AEDC 2024

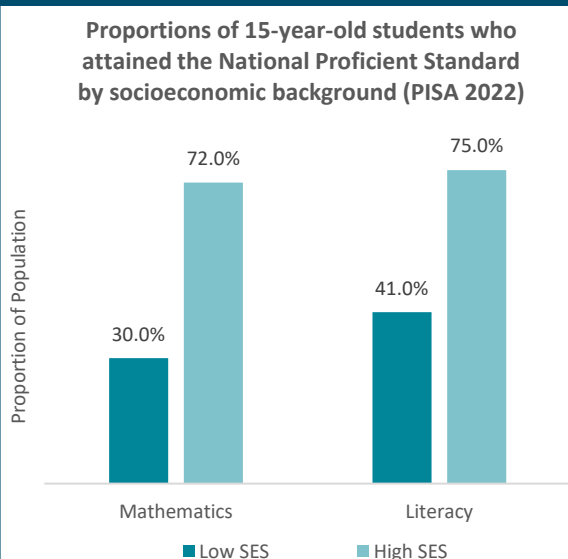
2. Learners from low SES backgrounds are less likely to achieve at or above NAPLAN proficiency level in numeracy and reading in year 7. This shows that a gap already exists between low and high SES students when students start high school.



Source: NAPLAN 2024

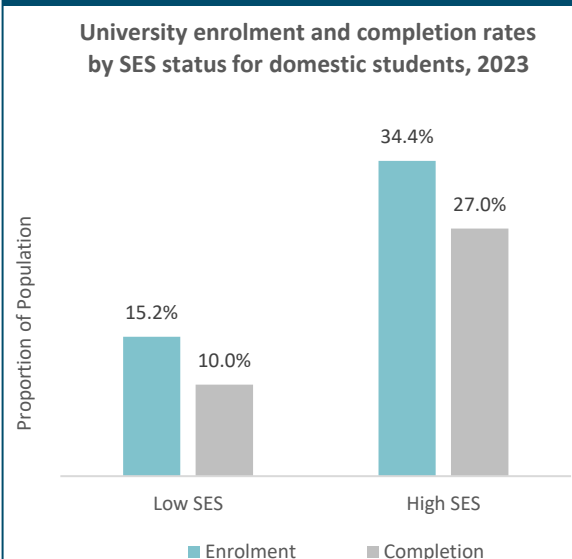
*Note: for the purpose of this analysis parental education has been used as a proxy for SES.

3. Low SES 15-year-old students are less likely to attain the national proficient standard in mathematics and literacy compared to high SES peers, showing that in high school the gap between low SES and high SES students continues to widen.



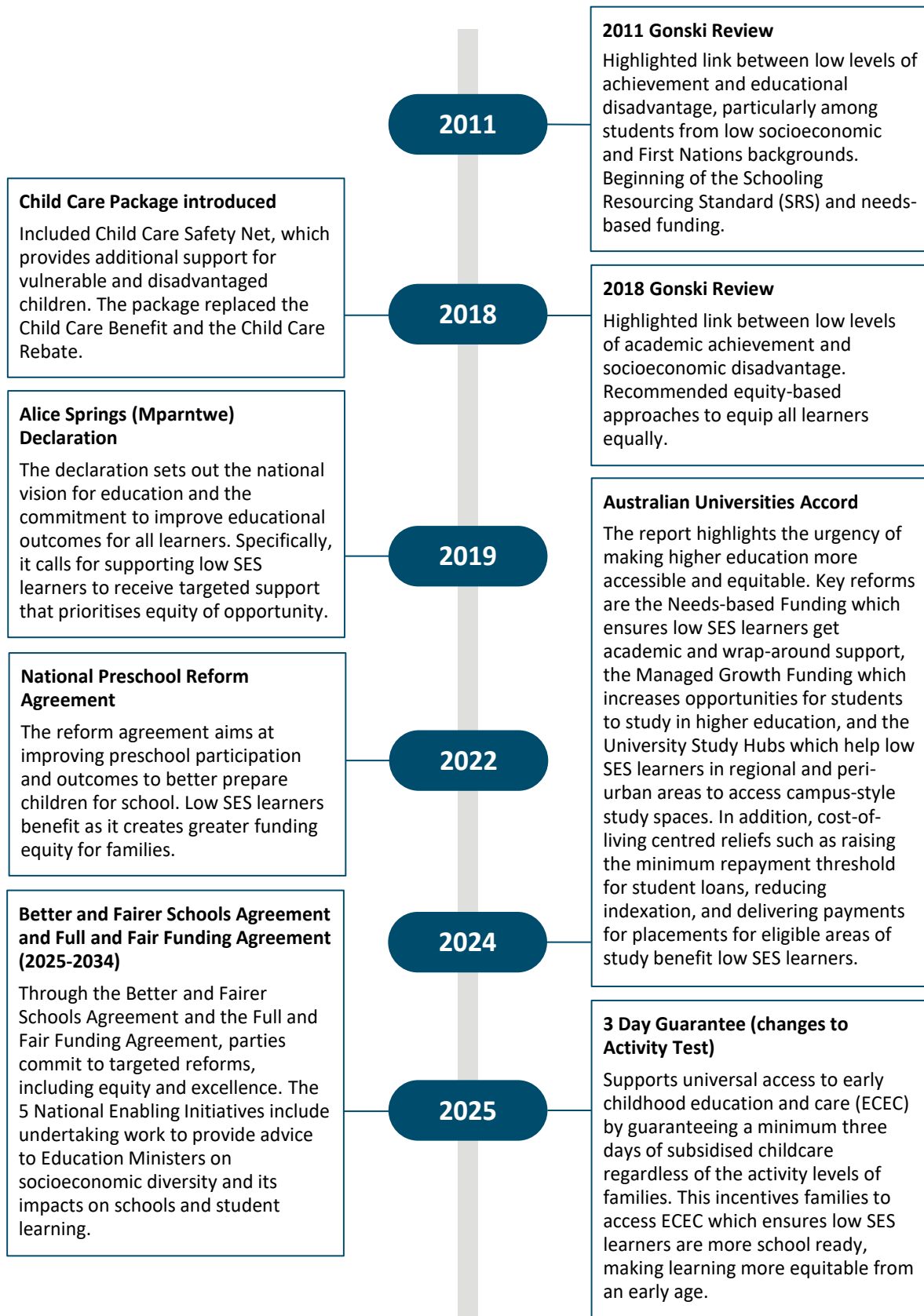
Source: PISA 2022

4. Learners from SES backgrounds are less likely to enrol in university compared to high SES peers. This shows that the gap continues from high school to higher education.



Source: TCSI 2023

Reform journey



Learners with disability

Context

Australia's population includes approximately 5.5 million people with disability.¹ Full participation and inclusion of people with disability in all aspects of Australian society can deliver broad social and economic benefits, as well as individual benefits such as increased independence and greater connection with community. However, there is still a way to go. People with disability tend to have lower rates of participation across the education life course relative to people without disability, and experience poorer outcomes, though this is improving.

Education plays a critical role but exists within a broader ecosystem of supports for people with disability. Recent major reviews and inquiries, including the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Disability Royal Commission) and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Review highlighted system-wide concerns and limitations. In particular, the Disability Royal Commission and NDIS Reviewers called for decisive action to improve inclusion for learners with disability and greater accountability and transparency for this growing cohort.

Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031, as agreed by all Australian governments, has a focus on strengthening mainstream systems and services and includes ambitious targets and measures for improving inclusion across the lifespan. It includes education and learning among its 7 outcome areas and is the primary mechanism through which Australia fulfils its commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Trends for learners with disability across the education system

Participation in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) for children with disability has been increasing in recent years. In 2013, 70.7% of children from birth to age 5 with disability were attending a Child Care Subsidy (CCS) approved child care service, compared to 90% in 2021.²

Trends in enrolments and outcomes for students with disability in all school settings need to be better understood, however over the period 2020–24, students receiving an educational adjustment due to disability grew from 20.3% (814,767 students) to 25.7% of all students (1,062,638 students).³

While the number of undergraduate learners identifying as having a disability is growing (increasing from 5% in 2011 to 12.7% in 2023), this increase is still below population parity.⁴ Furthermore, learners with disability are less likely to complete higher education than other learners and have lower overall educational attainment. In 2022, 19.7% of people with disability had a bachelor degree or higher, compared to 35.3% of people without disability.⁵

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), [Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers](#), 2022.

² Productivity Commission, [Report on Government Services](#), 2016; Productivity Commission, [Report on Government Services](#), 2025.

³ ACARA, [National Report on Schooling in Australia, School students with disability](#), 2024.

⁴ Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success, [Students with disability in Australian higher education \(Nov 2024 update\)](#), 2024.

⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, [People with disability in Australia](#), 2024; ABS, [Autism in Australia](#), 2022.

Australian Government levers

The government provides support to people with disability through mainstream and targeted programs in each sector. For example, in ECEC, the National Quality Framework and Inclusion Support Program are important levers for the Australian Government to drive improved outcomes for people with disability.

The Schooling Resource Standard student with disability loading is estimated to provide \$4.3 billion in Australian Government funding in 2025. Since 2018, the student with disability loading has been based on the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD). As well as informing Australian Government funding allocations, the NCCD informs educational planning and policy development, and assists education authorities and schools to make provisions for students with disability.

Australian Government reform in higher education disability funding has expanded incentives for universities to improve the support they provide for learners with disability, alongside new reporting requirements to ensure they are accountable and transparent in the way they spend this money. The funding is supplemented with the provision of enabling infrastructure to enhance provider capacity and capability to deliver the right support to the people who need it most and improve the pipeline from school to higher education to graduate outcomes.

The Disability Support Program (DSP) is an ongoing program that comprises the Disability Support Fund (DSF), the Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (ADCET) and the Capacity Building Fund. These initiatives provide funding to publicly funded universities to build institutional and sector capacity and capability to support learners with disability to access, participate and succeed in higher education, as well as provide resources on inclusive teaching and learning in higher education.⁶

Funding for the DSF component increased by approximately \$40 million per year (indexed) in the 2024-25 MYEFO, which effectively quadrupled current funding levels. The DSF is an important lever for the Australian Government to improve provider accountability in higher education. Examples of eligible support include Universal Design for learning, dedicated disability support staff, sign-language interpreters, invigilation costs, screen-reading and dictation software. In 2025, the reporting regime will be further strengthened to ensure the significant increase in funding is creating the desired outcomes for learners with disability.

Disability Standards for Education

The Disability Standards for Education 2005 (the Standards) clarify the obligations of education and training providers under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA).⁷ The Standards aim to ensure learners with disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as learners without disability.

⁶ Department of Education, [Higher Education Disability Support Program](#), 2025.

⁷ Department of Education, [Disability Standards for Education 2005](#), 2025.

The Standards are reviewed every 5 years, with the next review to occur in 2025. The 2025 review will take into account recommendations from the Disability Royal Commission and a commitment in the National Autism Strategy 2025-2031 to ensure consideration of the needs of autistic people.⁸

Significant work has been undertaken to implement recommendations arising from the 2020 Review of the Standards. This includes support for educators to meet their legal and professional obligations, and new co-designed resources to help learners with disability and their families understand their rights.⁹

Public consultation has also been completed on including the ECEC sector in the Standards – this has been a longstanding unresolved issue from past reviews. The amendments, once made, will mean the Standards apply to all education sectors from ECEC to higher education.

Key reviews and commitments to improve inclusive education

Multiple recent national reviews and inquiries have significant implications for the inclusion and outcomes of children and learners with disability in education settings. Reviews have highlighted three focus areas:

- Improved learning and wellbeing outcomes – Learning environments are inclusive and deliver learners with disability the supports and adjustments needed to meet individual learning needs and participate fully in their schooling community.
- Workforce development and capability – Equipping educators with the resources, professional development and system-level supports they need.
- Data, funding and accountability – Ensuring transparency of information to improve access, participation and outcomes of learners with disability.

Commitments from recent reviews and inquiries include:

- Disability Royal Commission – In July 2024, all Australian governments affirmed their support for the Disability Royal Commission’s vision for more accessible and inclusive education for school students with disability and agreed in principle to 8 of the 10 recommendations (all governments noted the two recommendations on special/segregated education).¹⁰ All governments have agreed to commence biannual reporting on progress against Disability Royal Commission recommendations from June 2025.
- NDIS Review – Made several recommendations regarding inclusive education, including protecting the right to inclusive education and better connecting NDIS and schooling systems. A joint response is yet to be released by Australian governments.
- Foundational Supports – In December 2023, National Cabinet agreed to jointly design Foundational Supports (outside of individualised NDIS supports) which could be delivered through existing government service settings, including early childhood and school settings where appropriate

⁸ Department of Education, [Consultation on changes to the Disability Standards for Education 2005](#), 2025; Department of Social Services, [National Autism Strategy 2025-2031 First Action Plan 2025-2026](#), 2025.

⁹ Department of Education, [Implementation Report for the recommendations of the 2020 Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005](#), 2024.

¹⁰ Department of Social Services, [Australian Government Response to the Disability Royal Commission](#), 2024.

- [Better and Fairer Schools Agreement \(BFSA\) 2025-2034](#) – Commits to ongoing implementation of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 and several national priority reform areas aimed at improving student outcomes and ensuring equitable access to quality education.
- [Universities Accord](#) – Included a focus on inclusion in higher education as part of lifting the tertiary education attainment rate and to ensure that all Australians, including people with disability, have access to higher education opportunities.
- [National Autism Strategy 2025-2031](#) – Commits to a safe and inclusive society where all autistic people are supported to thrive in all aspects of life, including within education settings.

Data and evidence issues

Recent reviews including the Disability Royal Commission have highlighted that there is currently limited data to answer some fundamental questions about learners with disability. Specific areas for improvement include definitions, student experience and outcomes, and data integration. Many existing data assets are held at the state and territory level, and only limited aggregate data is available to the department. This includes the NCCD.

In June 2023, all Australian governments signed a Memorandum of Understanding to participate and supply data into the National Disability Data Asset (NDDA). The NDDA is a key initiative to improving the national evidence base available to develop policy and practice for inclusive education.

Engagement is ongoing with state and territory officials about the process for including state owned education data assets, such as NAPLAN, to help improve the visibility of outcomes for learners with disability.

The BFSA and BFSA Full and Fair Funding Heads of Agreement include a review of the Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia as an agreed national enabling initiative. This review will consider the range of student level outcome data that is captured, appropriate disaggregation of data and possible new measures to capture access, participation and outcomes for students with disability.¹¹

Under the National Autism Strategy First Action Plan 2025-2026, the department is also leading a commitment to examine the barriers that autistic learners experience across higher education, including optimising collection of student disability data.¹²

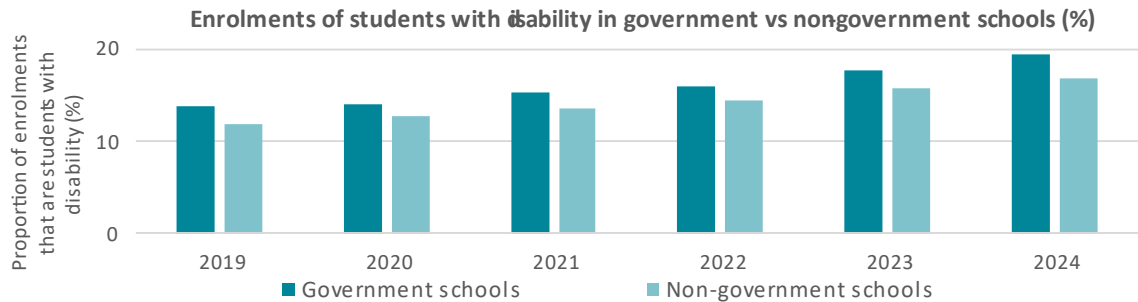
¹¹ Department of Education, [Heads of Agreement \(Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025-2034\)](#), 2024.

¹² Department of Social Services, [National Autism Strategy 2025-2031 First Action Plan 2025-2026](#), 2025.

Snapshot of people with disability in education

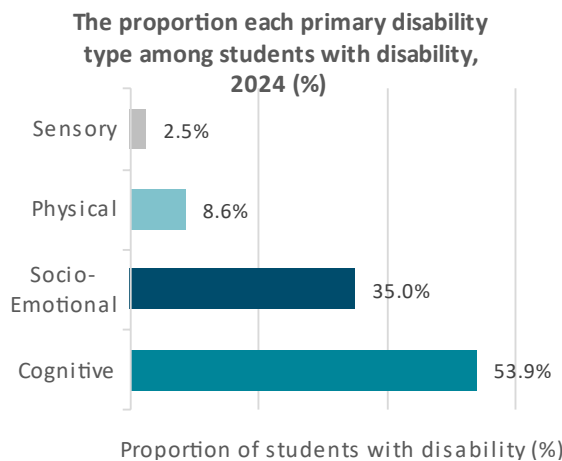
Australia's population includes approximately 5.5 million people with disability, approximately one in five Australians (ABS, 2022).

1. Government schools have higher enrolments of students with disability than non-government schools.



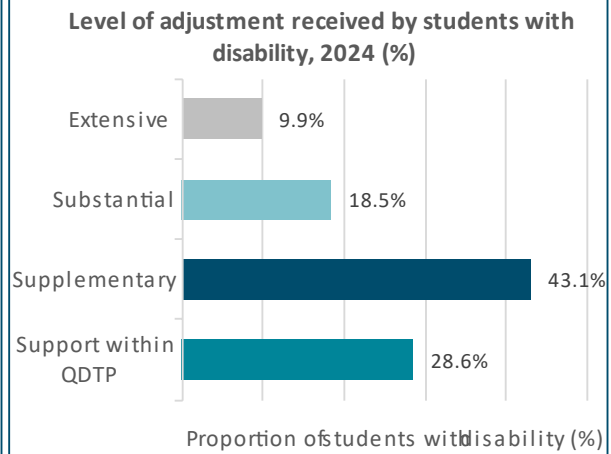
Source: Department of Education's school funding models as at PEFO, 2025

2. Most school students with disability have a cognitive or socio-emotional disability.



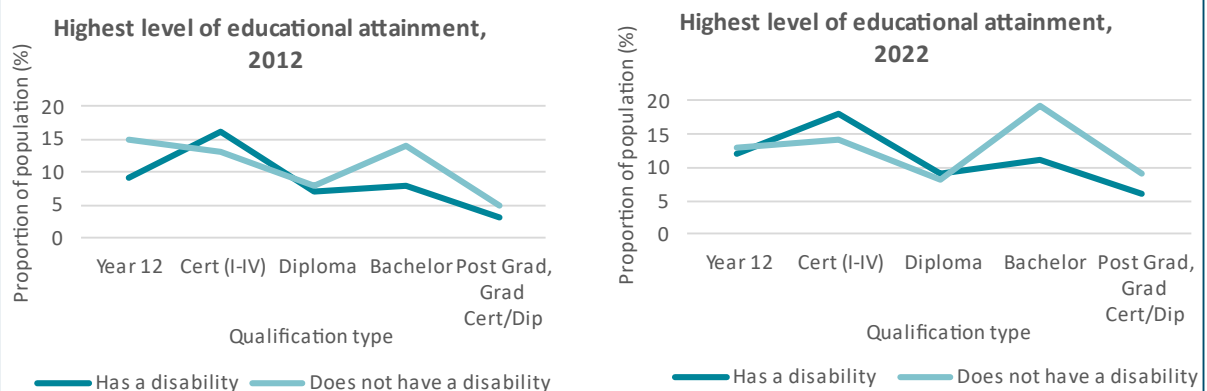
Source: ACARA, School students with disability, 2024

3. Almost half of students with disability receive a supplementary level of adjustment at school



Source: ACARA, School students with disability, 2024

4. People without disability are increasingly obtaining higher levels of education, while people with disability remain most likely to achieve a certificate-level qualification.



Source: ABS, Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2022 & 2017 TableBuilder extract

Reform journey

Disability Discrimination Act 1992

Made it unlawful to discriminate against someone due to their disability, including in education.

1992

Disability Standards for Education

Clarifies the obligations of education providers and the rights of people with disabilities in relation to education. They sit under the *Disability Discrimination Act*.

2005

National Disability Strategy 2010 - 2020

A commitment by all departments to a unified, national approach to inclusion for people with disability.

2010

School funding disability loading

Introduced as part of needs-based recurrent school funding model.

2014

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

Funds personalised supports related to disability support needs

2016

Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD)

A national approach to counting school students with disability, with adjustment based on teacher judgement, rather than medical diagnosis. Implementation involved investment in teacher capability in line with the Disability Standards for Education.

2017

Changes to the *Australian Education Act* 2013

The student with disability funding loading is calculated using data from the NCCD.

2018

Australia's Disability Strategy 2021 - 2031

Calls on all Australians to ensure people with disability can participate as equal members of society. There is greater focus on government accountability for implementation and outcomes, and an emphasis on the role of mainstream systems in supporting people with disability.

2021

Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability

Makes recommendations for a more inclusive society that supports people with disability.

In December 2023, Education Ministers agreed an initial priority was to identify opportunities for national collaborative action.

In 2024 all Australian governments agreed in principle to 8 of the 10 joint Disability Royal Commission inclusive education recommendations.

2023

NDIS Review

Presents recommendations around protecting the right to inclusive education and improving integration between the NDIS and school education systems.

Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (BFSA) 2025-2034

Commits to ongoing implementation of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 and several national priority reform areas aimed at improving student outcomes and ensuring equitable access to quality education.

2025

National Autism Strategy 2025-2031

Sets out the vision for a safe and inclusive society for all autistic people. One where we support and empower autistic people to thrive, in all aspects of life.

