

Participation in Education and Training 1980-1994

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report contributes substantially to the body of evidence available about participation by young people in education and training in Australia. It presents results on the patterns and processes of educational participation for four national cohorts of young Australians. These cohorts are samples of persons born in 1961, 1965, 1970 and 1975 respectively, who were aged 19 in 1980, 1984, 1989 and 1994 respectively. For each of the cohorts, the following types of educational participation are documented:

- * completion of Year 12
- * entry to higher education from Year 12
- * participation in higher education
- * participation in a TAFE course (excluding apprenticeships and traineeships)
- * participation in an apprenticeship or traineeship
- * participation in any form of post-school education and training.

In the report, educational participation is indicated by whether or not a particular individual ever participated in a particular form of education by age 19. This measure -- made possible by the longitudinal nature of the data on each of the cohorts -- produces estimates that are marginally higher than those obtained using more conventional cross-sectional data. Nevertheless, the trends in educational participation documented in this report are consistent with those reported from other sources.

In the analyses, patterns of educational participation by age 19 are examined for each of the categories of gender, parent's occupation and education, family wealth, father's country of birth, urban and rural background, State of schooling, school sector and level of early school achievement. Additional analyses address the effects of these variables independently of one another, and also independently of variables describing early school achievement, type of school attended, self-concept of ability and post-school expectations about study and work.

Despite the possible duplication, it is useful to discuss the results first from the perspective of each of the background characteristics and then under the heading of each of the types of education and training.

The Background Characteristics

The main findings are:

Gender

Participation in higher education by young females increased substantially during the period from 1980 to 1994, largely as a consequence of improved retention rates to Year 12, but also because of increased rates of transition from Year 12 to higher education. Among members of the cohort aged 19 in 1994, 42% of females had participated in higher education by age 19, compared with only 34% of males. Participation in vocational education and training by young females remained substantially below that for young males over the period from 1980 to 1994, but this gap narrowed -- in part because of the decline in the importance of apprenticeships (in which females are under-represented); in part because of the expansion of traineeships (in which females are better-represented); and in part because of the expansion on non-apprenticeship vocational education and training (in which females are better-represented).

Parent's Occupation and Education, and Family Wealth.

Three components of socio-economic status -- parent's occupational status, parent's education and family wealth -- were examined. Across all four cohorts, young people from backgrounds of higher parental occupational status, better parental educational attainment and greater family wealth were more likely to have completed Year 12, to have entered higher education from Year 12 and to have participated in higher education by age 19. Young people from these backgrounds were less likely, however, to have undertaken vocational education and training, although in the early 1980s young people from backgrounds of greater family wealth were more likely to have participated in vocational and educational training.

Of the three components of socio-economic status, parental occupational status was the only variable to have a significant effect upon patterns of educational participation -- notably participation in higher education -- independently of all other variables included in the analyses. Much of the impact of socio-economic status, particularly as indicated by parental education attainment and family wealth, upon educational participation was transmitted through other characteristics, particularly school achievement, type of school attended and post-school expectations.

While participation in any form of post-school education and training by age 19 increased across all categories of socio-economic status over the period from 1980 to 1994, the striking advances made during the mid 1980s in the participation rates of young people from lower socio-economic status backgrounds were not maintained up to 1994.

Ethnicity.

Three categories of persons were identified: those whose father had been born in Australia; in another English-speaking country; or in a non-English-speaking country. Across all cohorts, young people from non-English-speaking backgrounds were more likely to have completed Year 12, to have entered higher education from Year 12 and to have participated in higher education by age 19. There were no significant differences, however, in the extent to which young people from each of the three categories accessed TAFE programs, and participation in apprenticeships was generally not affected by ethnic

background, except in 1980 when young people from non-English-speaking backgrounds were less likely to have undertaken an apprenticeship.

Rural and Urban Students.

Respondents were identified as rural or urban on the basis of the population density of the Local Government Area in which their school was located when the cohorts were initially sampled. The quartile with the lowest population density was labelled rural. Across all four cohorts, the Year 12 completion rates, rates of entry to higher education and higher education participation rates by age 19 for rural students were well below those for urban students, especially so in 1994. Participation in

vocational education and training was not noticeably affected by school location, except in 1994 when rural students were more likely than urban students to have entered TAFE or to have commenced an apprenticeship. The relative disadvantage of rural youth in terms of participation in post-school education and training was similar in the mid 1990s to the levels that prevailed in the early and mid 1980s. Gains made in the late 1980s had disappeared.

Public and Private Schools.

School type depended upon whether students were in a government, Catholic or independent school in the early years of their secondary schooling. Across all four cohorts, students from independent schools were more likely to have completed Year 12, to have entered higher education from Year 12 and to have participated in higher education by age 19 than were students from either government or Catholic schools. While much of this variation was due to differences in parent's occupational status, levels of school achievement and post-school expectations, there remained an identifiable effect of this variable upon educational participation once the influence of these other differences were removed.

Students from government schools participated in vocational education and training to a greater extent than students from independent schools. The participation rates for students from Catholic schools lay between those for students from the other two sectors, but somewhat closer to the participation rates for students from government schools.

School Achievement.

Four categories of school achievement were identified -- students in the highest, third, second and lowest quartiles of results on standardised multiple choice reading and mathematics tests. Students with higher achievement scores were far more likely to have completed Year 12, entered higher education from Year 12 and participated in higher education by age 19, across all cohorts. Over the period from 1980 to 1994, programs taught in TAFE (other than apprenticeships and traineeships) progressively tended to attract more students from the lower end of the achievement range, and the achievement profile of apprentices also declined through much of the 1980s, though this trend was reversed for the cohort aged 19 in 1994.

Changes in educational participation

The main trends were:

Year 12 completion more than doubled -- up from 35% in 1980 to 78% in 1994. The students who were more likely to complete Year 12 were female, came from higher socio-economic backgrounds, were from a non-English-speaking background, lived in urban areas, had attended an independent school, and had higher levels of early school achievement. Apart from gender and ethnic background, differences in the rates of Year 12 completion decreased among categories of the background variables during the period 1980 to 1994.

Entry to higher education from Year 12 was almost unchanged throughout the period of the study -- about half of all persons who completed Year 12 went on to higher education. Year 12 graduates who were female, from higher socio-economic backgrounds, from a non-English-speaking background, lived in an urban area, had attended an independent school, and who had higher levels of early school achievement were more likely to enter higher education. During the period 1980 to 1994, differences in higher education entry increased for all characteristics except ethnic background.

Participation in higher education almost doubled -- from 20% in 1980 to 38% in 1994. The overall increase resulted from the increase in Year 12 completion coupled with an almost unchanged entry rate from Year 12 to higher education. Persons who were female, from a higher socio-economic background, from a non-English-speaking background, had lived in an urban area, had attended an independent school, and who had higher scores on the measures of early school achievement were more likely to participate in higher education. During the period 1980 to 1994, differences in higher education participation rates between males and females increased. The relative participation of students from the middle two quartiles of early school achievement also increased. Differences associated socio-economic status and rural-urban location were unchanged, while higher education participation rates converged for categories of ethnicity and school type.

Participation in non-apprenticeship TAFE courses showed a consistent increase --up from 13% in 1980 to 20% in 1994. Attendance at a TAFE college is one of the most equitable forms of education in Australia. In 1994 the characteristics associated with a higher likelihood of participation were lower socio-economic status, rural background, attendance at a government school, and membership of the lowest quartile of early school achievement. During the 14 years covered by the study, however, the pattern of participation changed -- the difference which had favoured girls in 1980 almost disappeared by 1994, the advantage of young people from higher socio-economic background in 1980 had been reversed by 1994, and there was a shift towards greater participation by rural youth and by young people from the lower end of the early school achievement profile.

Participation in apprenticeships declined substantially in the early 1990s -- down from 18% in each of 1980 and 1984, to 16% in 1989, and then to 12% in 1994. This decline

was offset somewhat by an increase in traineeships -- up from 2% in 1989 to 3% in 1994. Persons who were male, from the middle of the socio-economic distribution, from a rural background, had attended a government school, and who were from the lowest 75% of the early school achievement distribution were more likely to have participated in apprenticeships.

Participation in post-school education and training increased from 49% in 1980 to 67% in 1994. Entrants to further education and training became more likely to have completed Year 12 -- up from 43% in 1980 to 75% in 1994 -- but the post-school participation of early school leavers also improved. Participants in post-school education and training were more likely to be male, from a higher socio-economic background, from a non-English-speaking background, to live in an urban area, to have attended an independent school, and to have higher scores on the literacy and numeracy tests. Relative participation rates for most background characteristics were either unchanged or converged between 1980 and 1994.