

Highest Level of Schooling Completed

Intercensal changes to question design

Changes resulting from the replacement of the former Australian Bureau of Statistics Classification of Qualifications (ABSCQ), which was used to classify education questions in the 1991 and 1996 Censuses, with the Australian Standard Classification of Education (ASCED), which was implemented for the 2001 Census are discussed in detail in the 2001 Census of Population and Housing Fact Sheet — *Education — Changes for 2001 Census*.

ASCED was introduced to achieve better comparability across sources concerned with collecting, storing and disseminating data on educational activity. The implementation of ASCED resulted in a change in the question design relating to schooling: from requiring respondents to answer the age left school in the 1996 Census (refer to Figure 1), to the highest year of schooling completed in the 2001 Census (refer to Figure 2).

FIGURE 1: 1996 Census, Age Left School Question

22 How old was the person when he or she left primary or secondary school?

- For persons who returned after a break to complete their schooling, mark the age at which they last left school.

☐ Still at primary or secondary school
☐ Did not go to school
☐ 14 years or younger
☐ 15 years
☐ 16 years
☐ 17 years
☐ 18 years
☐ 19 years or older

FIGURE 2: 2001 Census, Highest Level of Schooling Completed Question

25 What is the highest level of primary or secondary school the person has completed?

- Mark one box only.
- For persons who returned after a break to complete their schooling, mark the highest level completed when they last left.
- See page 10 of the Census Guide for more information about year equivalents.

☐ Still at school
☐ Did not go to school
☐ Year 8 or below
☐ Year 9 or equivalent
☐ Year 10 or equivalent
☐ Year 11 or equivalent
☐ Year 12 or equivalent

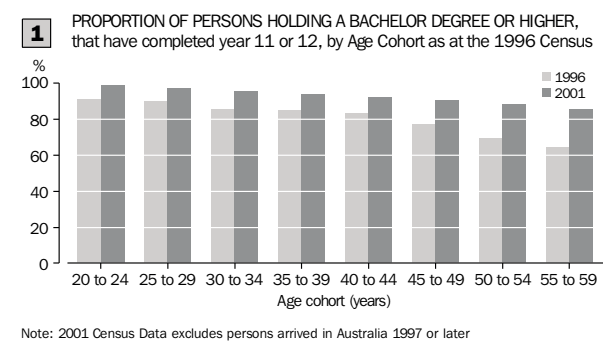
Intercensal comparability

In previous Censuses, data for age left school were used as a surrogate for highest level of schooling completed and have been used to derive highest level of schooling completed using the following rules:

TABLE 1: Derivations, Highest Level Of Schooling Completed, 1996 Census

Derivation
If Age Left School = 14 years or below; Highest Level of Schooling = Year 8 or below
If Age Left School = 15 years; Highest Level of Schooling = Year 9
If Age Left School = 16 years; Highest Level of Schooling = Year 10
If Age Left School = 17, 18 or 19 years or over; Highest Level of Schooling = Year 11 or 12

Using the derivations listed in Table 1, which makes considerable assumptions about the level of schooling completed for each 'age left school', cohort analyses between the 1996 and the 2001 Census would yield statistics shown in Graph 1 shown below. Cohort groups contain the same people between Censuses. For example, persons aged 30 to 34 years in the 1996 Census (and represented in the horizontal axis of Graph 1) would be aged 35 to 39 in the 2001 Census.



Graph 1 demonstrates that using 1996 Census data, a much lower figure is obtained for those that have completed Year 11 or 12. This difference may be due to the following factors:

- the substantial improvement in data quality in 2001, as a result of this question measuring the outcomes of the school education system, as opposed to the previous question which focussed on the age profile of persons leaving school;
- significant interstate variation in the age at which students complete a given year of education, complicated by students whom may repeat a given schooling level, meaning that it is very difficult and inaccurate to measure highest level of schooling completed using the derivations listed in Table 1; and
- changes of wording of question — people perceive it as a 'qualification' question, rather than an 'attendance at school' question.

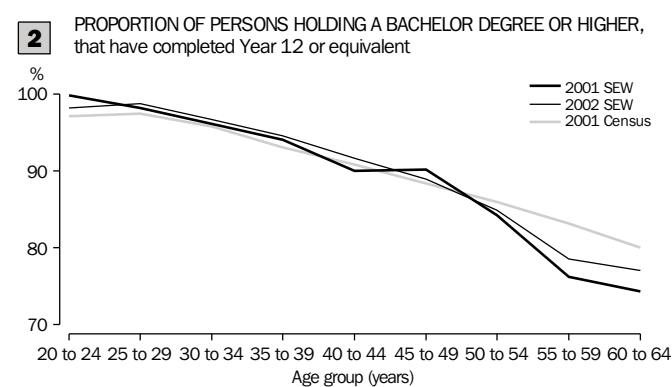
Comparability with Survey Data

For the 2001 Census, it is not possible (without making considerable assumptions) to accurately derive highest year of schooling completed because one of the response options to the question of highest level of schooling completed was 'still at school'. Consequently, it is not possible to compare highest level of schooling completed between the 2001 Census and

surveys, such as the 2001 Survey of Education and Work (SEW).

In the 2006 Census, the response option 'still at school' will no longer be available, which will enable the identification of level of highest year of schooling completed to date of all respondents, and will result in full comparability with ABS Survey data. This exclusion will also enable the derivation of Level of Highest Educational Attainment, resulting in expanded data on the outcomes of the education system at a small geographic level being available through the Census.

However, given that it is highly unlikely that many persons would be 'still at school' and have completed Year 12 or equivalent, comparisons between the Census and ABS Survey data can be undertaken for this schooling level. Graph 2 shows a comparison between the 2001 SEW, 2002 SEW and the 2001 Census for persons who have completed a Bachelor degree or higher and have completed Year 12 or equivalent by age group.



Related Census Papers and Fact Sheets

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002, *2001 Census of Population and Housing Fact Sheet, Education — Changes for 2001 Census*, ABS, Canberra

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003, *2001 Census: Level, Main Field and Year of Completion of Highest Non-School Qualification*, ABS, Canberra