



Australian Social Trends

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Article: Education across Australia

AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS

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Education across Australia

In 2006, the proportion of Indigenous people aged 25–64 years with a non-school qualification (29%) was nearly double that in 1996 (15%).

Education contributes to economic growth and improves individual wellbeing. It also plays an important role in fostering and maintaining a positive and cohesive social environment. Higher levels of educational attainment are associated with increased employment opportunities and higher wages, and contribute to improving Australia's economic standing. The changing structure and growth of the Australian economy has increased the demand for a diverse, skilled workforce, with higher levels of educational attainment required to meet this demand.

Today, Australians are more highly educated than ever before. However, despite increases in the levels of educational attainment, some groups in society still experience difficulty in gaining education beyond compulsory schooling. The range of subjects and levels of study available to students living in rural and remote areas is often more limited than for those living in the city. In addition, people living in rural and remote areas may encounter considerable difficulties in accessing educational institutions (see also *Australian Social Trends 2003*, Regional differences in education and outcomes, pp. 91–95).

Qualifications across Remoteness Areas

According to the Survey of Education and Work, in 2006, 59% of Australians aged 25–64 years had a non-school qualification, up from 46% in 1990. This was largely due to an increase in the proportion of people in this

Data sources and definitions

Data presented in this article are mainly drawn from the 1996 and 2006 Censuses of Population and Housing in order to describe participation in education and education outcomes across Australia, and how they vary with remoteness and Indigenous status.

Remoteness Area (RA) is a structure of the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC), covering the whole of Australia. It is intended to classify areas sharing common characteristics of remoteness into broad geographical regions (Remoteness Areas). The remoteness of a point is measured by its physical distance by road to the nearest urban centre. As remoteness is measured nationally, not all Remoteness Areas are represented in each state or territory. There are six RAs in the structure: Major Cities of Australia; Inner Regional Australia; Outer Regional Australia; Remote Australia; Very Remote Australia; and Migratory Australia. The Remoteness Area names used in this article are abbreviated versions of these official terms, with 'Australia' omitted. For further information see *Statistical Geography Volume 1 – Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC), 2006* (ABS cat. no. 1216.0).

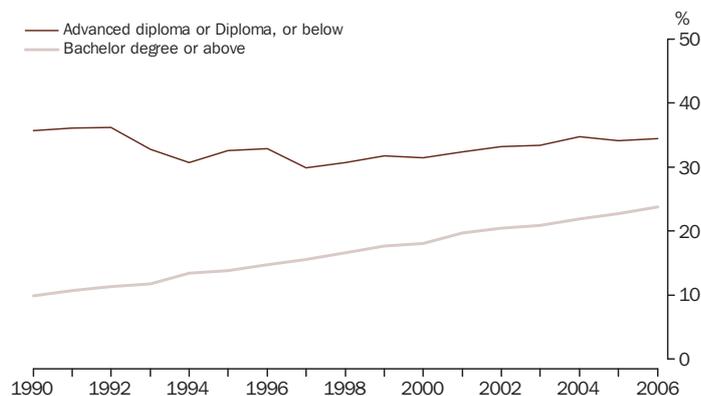
Non-school qualifications are those awarded for educational attainments other than those of pre-primary, primary or secondary education. Non-school qualifications collected in the census include: Postgraduate Degree, Master degree level, Graduate diploma and Graduate certificate, Bachelor Degree, Advanced diploma and Diploma level, and Certificate I, II, III & IV levels. For further information see *Australian Standard Classification of Education (ASCED)* (ABS cat. no. 1272.0).

age group whose highest non-school qualification was a Bachelor degree or above, from 10% in 1990 to 24% in 2006.

Despite the overall increase in the proportion of the Australian population with a non-school qualification, improvements in educational attainment have not been evenly distributed across different geographic regions. While there was an increase between 1996 and 2006 in the proportion of people with a non-school qualification across all geographic regions, the gains were greatest in Major Cities (from 44% in 1996 to 57% in 2006) and smallest in Very Remote areas (from 30% in 1996 to 36% in 2006). In 2006, the proportion of people with a non-school qualification declined with increasing levels of remoteness.

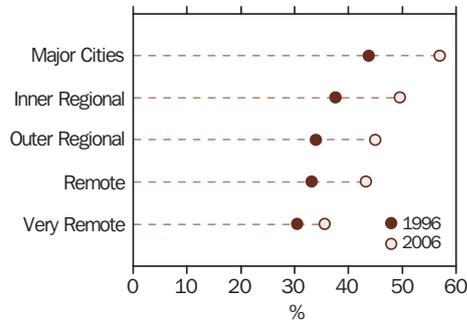
The relatively low proportion of the population with non-school qualifications in Remote (43%) and Very Remote (36%) areas

People aged 25–64 years: highest non-school qualification



Source: ABS 1990–2006 Surveys of Education and Work.

People aged 25–64 years with a non-school qualification(a) by Remoteness Area



(a) People who stated they had a non-school qualification but did not state the type or inadequately described the level of education were excluded prior to the calculation of percentages.

Source: ABS 1996 and 2006 Censuses of Population and Housing.

is in part due to the higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in these areas (see *Australian Social Trends 2008*, Population distribution, pp. 9–12) and their lower levels of educational attainment. The lower rates of the population with a non-school qualification outside of Major Cities may also be related to post secondary education being perceived

Census and the Survey of Education and Work

Data on people with non-school qualifications are available from both the Census of Population and Housing and the Survey of Education and Work (SEW). Both the census and the SEW aim to identify the highest level of non-school qualification that a person has completed.

In the 2006 Census, the proportion of people aged 25–64 years with a non-school qualification was 54%, compared with 59% in the 2006 SEW.

This difference can be attributed to the different scope, coverage and collection methods of the two collections. In particular, the SEW collects detailed information using trained interviewers, either face-to-face or by telephone. This allows for clarification of concepts and more accurate responses to questions.

Unlike sample surveys, the census is distributed to all households in Australia. As such, census data can be used to examine population characteristics in smaller geographic areas and for smaller sub-populations than would otherwise be reliably available from surveys. The SEW, while conducted in both urban and rural areas in all states and territories, excludes people living in very remote parts of Australia.

as less relevant to life and career opportunities by some people living in rural and remote areas.¹

People aged 25–64 years: level of highest non-school qualification by Remoteness Area — 2006

	Major Cities	Inner Regional	Outer Regional	Remote	Very Remote	Total(d)
Level of highest non-school qualification	%	%	%	%	%	%
Above Bachelor degree(a)	7.5	3.9	2.9	2.7	2.2	6.2
Bachelor degree	19.1	11.3	9.9	9.7	7.8	16.5
Advanced diploma and Diploma	10.3	8.5	7.6	7.2	5.8	9.7
Certificate III and IV	16.7	22.0	21.2	20.3	16.3	18.2
Certificate I and II	1.2	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.8	1.3
Total with non-school qualification(b)	56.9	49.5	45.0	43.2	35.6	54.0
<i>Total non-Indigenous(c) with non-school qualification(b)</i>	<i>57.1</i>	<i>49.9</i>	<i>45.8</i>	<i>45.6</i>	<i>47.8</i>	<i>54.5</i>
<i>Total Indigenous(c) with non-school qualification(b)</i>	<i>37.8</i>	<i>33.0</i>	<i>27.5</i>	<i>21.9</i>	<i>14.5</i>	<i>29.4</i>

(a) Includes Postgraduate Degree and Graduate Diploma/Graduate Certificate.

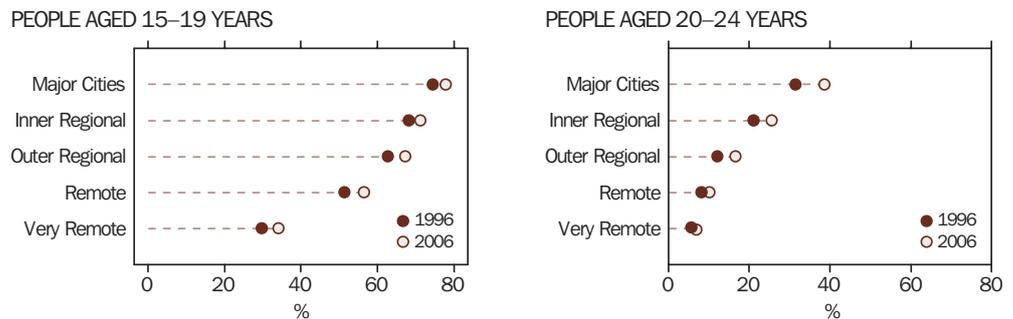
(b) People who stated they had a non-school qualification but did not state the type of qualification, or for whom the type or level of qualification was inadequately described, were excluded prior to the calculation of percentages. Includes certificate not further defined.

(c) Excludes those who have not stated their Indigenous status.

(d) Includes those in Migratory Australia and those who had no usual address.

Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing.

People attending an educational institution(a) by Remoteness Area



(a) People who did not state whether or not they were attending an educational institution, or did not state the type of educational institution they were attending, were excluded prior to the calculation of percentages.

Source: ABS 1996 and 2006 Censuses of Population and Housing.

Despite this, in 2006 almost half (48%) of the non-Indigenous population living in Very Remote areas had a non-school qualification.

The highest level of non-school qualification attained varies with remoteness. In 2006 in Major Cities, 27% of people aged 25–64 years had a Bachelor degree or higher qualification compared with 15% in Inner Regional areas and even lower rates in the other remoteness categories. A Certificate III/IV was the highest level of qualification for about one in five people of this age in Inner Regional (22%), Outer Regional (21%) and Remote (20%) areas.

Staying in education

Post compulsory education and training is important for building the stock of skills in the labour market and is a key determinant of economic and social wellbeing.² For young people aged between 15 and 24 years, participation in education has increased over the past decade. Reflecting the location of educational institutions, the gains in participation for 20–24 year olds occurred in the more accessible areas. Among 15–19 year olds, the gains, although modest, were greater in Outer Regional and more remote areas.

According to the census, three-quarters (75%) of 15–19 year olds were attending an educational institution in 2006 (compared with 71% in 1996), with most (72%) of the students in this age group attending a secondary school. Some of this increase reflects changes in the education system in recent years whereby a number of state governments have increased the minimum school leaving age.³

Small increases in participation were recorded for this age group across all Remoteness Areas and especially in Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote areas. Nevertheless, in 2006, participation in education for 15–19 year olds decreased with

increasing remoteness, from 78% in Major Cities to less than half that rate (34%) in Very Remote areas.

Among young people aged 20–24 years, around one-third (34%) were attending an educational institution in 2006, up from 27% in 1996. Increases in participation in education for this age group were observed in Major Cities (from 32% in 1996 to 39% in 2006), Inner Regional areas (from 21% to 26%) and Outer Regional areas (from 12% to 17%).

The high proportion of 20–24 year olds attending an educational institution in Major Cities includes young people who have moved from regional and remote areas to participate in higher education. In 2004, the Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth found that over one-quarter of 23 year olds who had been living in non-metropolitan areas at age 16 (in 1997) had moved to metropolitan areas since that time, with the move most often associated with university study.⁴ The five percentage point increase in the proportion of 20–24 year olds attending an educational institution in Outer Regional areas (from 12% in 1996 to 17% in 2006) represents a relatively dramatic change in relative terms, due in part to the smaller population bases of these areas.

...school completion and further education

School completion is an important social goal as early school leavers face the risks of restricted social and labour market opportunities and financial insecurity.⁵ Nevertheless, alternative pathways through education increasingly exist to improve the transition from education to work for those who have not completed Year 12, nor obtained an apprenticeship.²

Virtually all 19 year olds have left school (98% in 2006). In 2006, among this group, 72% had completed Year 12 or equivalent,

People aged 15–19 years who had left school(a): selected indicators by Remoteness Area — 2006

Remoteness Area	Did not complete year 10(a) %	Completed year 10/11 %	Completed year 12 %	Total(b) %	% attending educational institution	
					Of those who completed year 12 %	Of those who did not complete year 12(a) %
Major Cities	5.9	28.5	63.4	100.0	66.2	27.0
Inner Regional	9.4	42.4	46.0	100.0	47.4	26.8
Outer Regional	9.7	45.8	42.0	100.0	37.2	21.9
Remote	13.6	47.1	36.0	100.0	22.8	15.0
Very Remote	35.9	36.1	21.8	100.0	16.0	5.9
Australia(c)(d)	7.4	33.2	57.1	100.0	60.6	25.6

(a) Excludes those who did not state whether or not they were attending an educational institution or did not state the type of educational institution they were attending.

(b) Includes those who stated they did not attend school.

(c) Includes those who stated they had left school but had not stated the highest year of schooling completed.

(d) Includes people in Migratory Australia and those who had no usual address.

Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing.

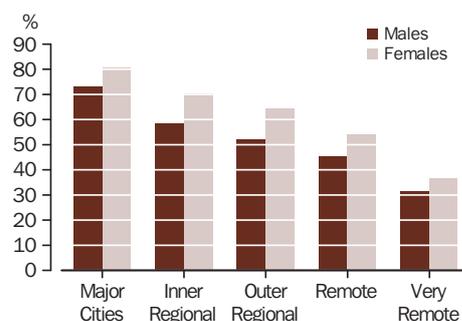
with higher rates of completion among females than males (77% compared with 68%). The proportion who had completed Year 12 declined with increasing remoteness, with a consistent pattern of higher rates of completion among females than males. To some extent, differences by remoteness are influenced by people moving location after leaving school for study or work.

A potentially 'at risk' group are those young people who have left secondary school without completing Year 10. In 2006, 7% of 15–19 year olds who were no longer attending high school had not completed Year 10. This proportion was considerably higher in Remote (14%) and Very Remote areas (36%).

Some young people who did not complete all years of school are participating in education and training at other educational institutions. In 2006, around one-quarter (26%) of young people aged 15–19 years who had left school without completing Year 12 were attending an educational institution. Lower rates of participation were observed in Remote (15%) and Very Remote (6%) areas.

Not surprisingly, the rate of participation in education beyond secondary school was much higher for those young people who had completed Year 12 (61%), than for those who had not (26%). Across Remoteness Areas, there were differences in participation in further education for young people who had completed Year 12. In 2006, almost two-thirds (66%) of 15–19 year olds in Major Cities and almost half of those in Inner Regional areas (47%), were undertaking further study having completed Year 12, compared with 16% in Very Remote areas.

People aged 19 years who had completed Year 12(a) — 2006



(a) Excludes those people who were still attending school.

Source: 2006 Census of Population and Housing.

Indigenous people in education

Although there remains a marked difference in Year 12 completion rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, there have been improvements in educational participation and attainment for Indigenous people across Australia in the past decade.

In 2006, just over half (51%) of all Indigenous 15–19 year olds were participating in education, up from 43% in 1996. This increase occurred in Major Cities as well as regional and remote areas. The biggest proportional change occurred in Very Remote areas, increasing from 22% in 1996 to 28% in

2006 (representing a 27% increase). Substantial increases also occurred in Major Cities, Outer Regional and Remote areas.

There was also an increase in participation in education for Indigenous people aged 20–24 years (from 11% in 1996 to 13% in 2006), although this increase was mostly confined to Major Cities and Inner Regional areas.

In 2006, Indigenous young people aged 19 years had lower rates of Year 12 completion than non-Indigenous young people of the same age overall (37% compared with 74%) and across all Remoteness Areas.

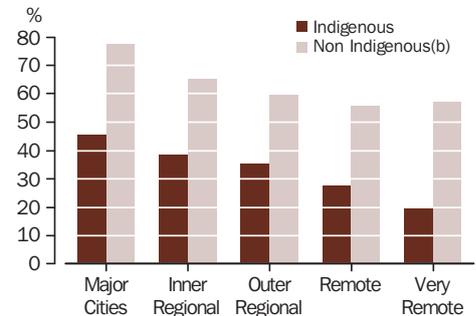
...non-school qualifications

Between 1996 and 2006, increases in educational attainment among Indigenous people corresponded with increased levels of participation in education. In 2006, the proportion of Indigenous people aged 25–64 years with a non-school qualification (29%) had nearly doubled from that in 1996 (15%).

This increase in educational attainment was mostly due to a marked increase in the proportion of Indigenous people whose highest qualification was a Certificate or Advanced Diploma, from 12% in 1996 to 23% in 2006. The proportion of the Indigenous population whose highest qualification was a Bachelor degree or above was relatively small (compared with the non-Indigenous population) but doubled in the ten years to 2006 (from 3% in 1996 to 6% in 2006).

Increases in the proportion of Indigenous people with a non-school qualification occurred across all geographic regions, with the largest rises seen in Major Cities and Inner Regional areas, where there were increases of close to 15 percentage points in both areas between 1996 and 2006.

People aged 19 years who had completed Year 12(a) — 2006



(a) Excludes those who were attending school.
(b) Excludes those who did not state their Indigenous status.

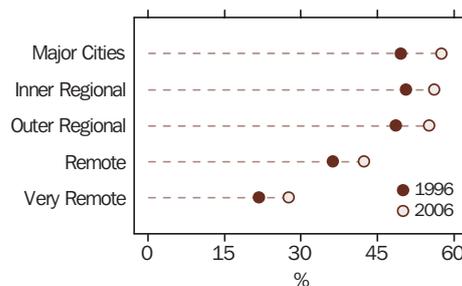
Source: 2006 Census of Population and Housing.

Endnotes

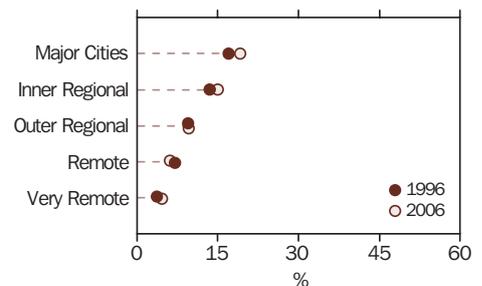
- 1 James, R 2000, *TAFE, University or Work? The early preferences and choices of students in Years 10, 11 and 12*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER).
- 2 Kilpatrick, S Abbot-Chapman, J and Bayes, H 2002, *Youth Participation in Education: a review of trends, targets and influencing factors*, viewed 25 June 2008, <<http://www.crlra.utas.edu.au>>.
- 3 The government of South Australia increased the minimum school leaving age from 15 years to 16 years effective from 2003. The Queensland Government increased the minimum school leaving age from 15 to 16 years, or on finishing Year 10 in 2003. The government of Western Australia increased the minimum school leaving age from 15 to 16 years of age in 2006, and from 16 to 17 years of age in 2008, effective from 2006. The government of Victoria increased the minimum school leaving age to 16 years in 2007.
- 4 Hillman, K and Rothman, S 2007, 'Movement of Non-Metropolitan youth towards the cities', Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth Research Report 50, Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER).
- 5 National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM), 1999, *The Cost to Australia of Early School-Leaving*, viewed 25 June 2008, <<http://www.dsf.org.au/papers/50.htm>>.

Indigenous people attending an educational institution(a) by Remoteness Area

PEOPLE AGED 15–19 YEARS



PEOPLE AGED 20–24 YEARS



(a) Excludes those people who did not state whether or not they were attending an educational institution or did not indicate the type of educational institution they were attending.

Source: ABS 1996 and 2006 Censuses of Population and Housing.

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