
A Early childhood, education and training preface

Part A: Early childhood, education and training preface

Education is a life-long activity, beginning with learning and development in the home through to more formal settings — including child care, preschool and the three sectors that comprise Australia’s education and training system (the school education, vocational education and training (VET) and higher education sectors).

The following chapters of this Report cover child care (including outside school hours care) and preschools (chapter 3), school education (chapter 4), and VET (chapter 5). References are made to information contained in other parts of this Report, such as chapters and related attachment tables. Reference to specific figures, boxes, and tables are prefixed accordingly (for example ‘Box 3.1’ is in chapter 3, being the Children’s services chapter in this compendium).

Areas of government involvement in Early childhood, education and training (ECET) that are not covered in this Report include:

- universities (although some information is included in this preface where necessary to provide a complete picture)
- income support payments for students
- adult community education (except VET programs)
- VET activity delivered on a fee-for-service basis by private and community education providers.

Australia’s ECET sector has a range of objectives, some of which are common across all sector components (for example, to increase knowledge and equip students with the skills for life-long learning) while others are more specific to a particular sector. The objectives listed here reflect the latest period concerned for this Report (2007-08 for children’s services, 2006-07 for school education, and 2007 for VET).

- The objectives of children’s services are to meet the care, education and development needs of children in a safe and nurturing environment, to provide

support for families in caring for their children, and to provide these services in an equitable and efficient manner (2009 Report, box 3.2). Children's services have both education and care objectives and the Children's services chapter presents both of these.

- The objectives of school education services, as reflected in the national goals for schooling (2009 Report, box 4.1), include a focus on developing the capacities and talents of all young people so they have the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and values for a productive and rewarding life.
- The objectives of VET services, as reflected in the national strategy for VET 2004–10 (2009 Report, box 5.3), include a focus on providing industry with a highly skilled workforce to support strong performance in the global economy; making employers and students the centre of VET; strengthening communities and regions economically and socially through learning and employment; and providing opportunities for Indigenous Australians to acquire skills to access viable employment.
- The objectives of higher education services, as reflected in the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*, include contributing to the development of cultural and intellectual life in Australia, and appropriately meeting Australia's social and economic needs for a highly educated and skilled population.

Australian governments view early childhood development, education and training as key means to improve economic and social outcomes, as well as to improve the equity of outcomes in society. The link between early childhood development and achievement at school is well established, as is the link between education and skills and workforce participation and productivity. Research indicates that early childhood, education, skills and workforce development policies could boost workforce participation by 0.7 percentage points, and productivity by up to 1.2 per cent by 2030 (PC 2006). This corresponds to an increase in gross domestic product (GDP) of around 2.2 per cent, or around \$25 billion in today's dollars.

In March 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) committed to a comprehensive new reform agenda, including a focus on improving productivity. The COAG Productivity Agenda includes early childhood development, schooling, and skills and workforce development (COAG 2008b).

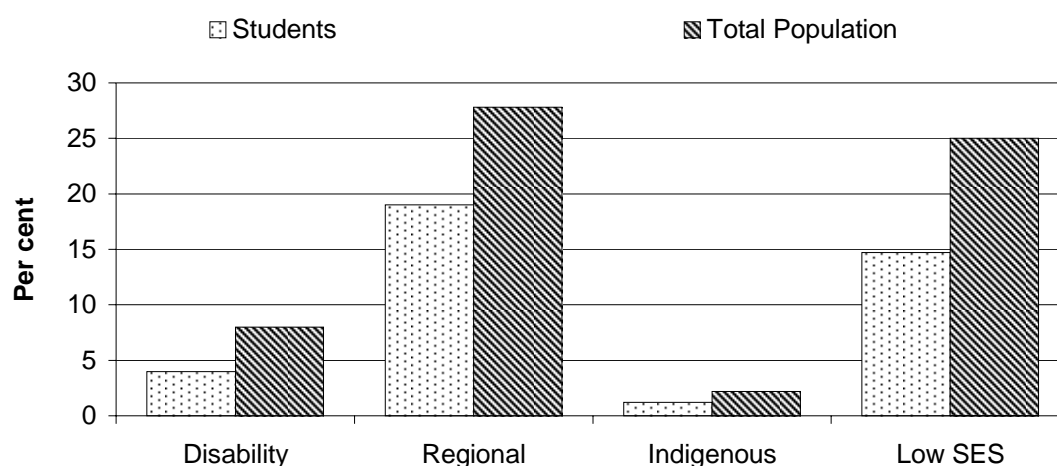
Measuring the performance of the sector

Selected equity and effectiveness indicators

School completion/non-completion, and school leaver destinations

In higher education, there is an under-representation (compared to the proportion of the relative group in the community) among people from regional areas of Australia, people with a disability, those with disadvantaged/low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous Australians (figure EP.1). (Additional data for Indigenous students are presented later in this preface.)

Figure EP.1 Higher education participation by selected groups compared to share of total population, Australia 2006



Source: DEEWR (2007) *Higher Education Student Statistics, 2006*; DEEWR (unpublished); table EPA.1; 2009 Report, figure B.9, p. B.16.

Indigenous Australians and ECET

The particular needs of Indigenous Australians for services in the ECET sector was reflected in the endorsement of Indigenous-specific targets by COAG in 2008 (COAG 2008a). These include increasing access to quality early childhood education for four year olds in remote communities, reducing the gap in literacy skills for school-age children, and increasing year 12 (or equivalent) attainment.

Attachment table 3A.21 in the Children's services chapter of the 2008 Report (SCRGSP 2008) includes data on the representation of Indigenous children aged

0–5 years and 6–12 years among users of Australian Government supported child care in 2006 — the latest available data for Indigenous children. At a national level, Indigenous children from both age groups participated in child care at a lower rate than their representation in the community. In the 0–5 age group, 1.8 per cent of children were represented in child care, compared to 4.4 per cent represented in the community. In the 6–12 age group these representations were 1.6 per cent compared to 4.3 per cent, respectively.

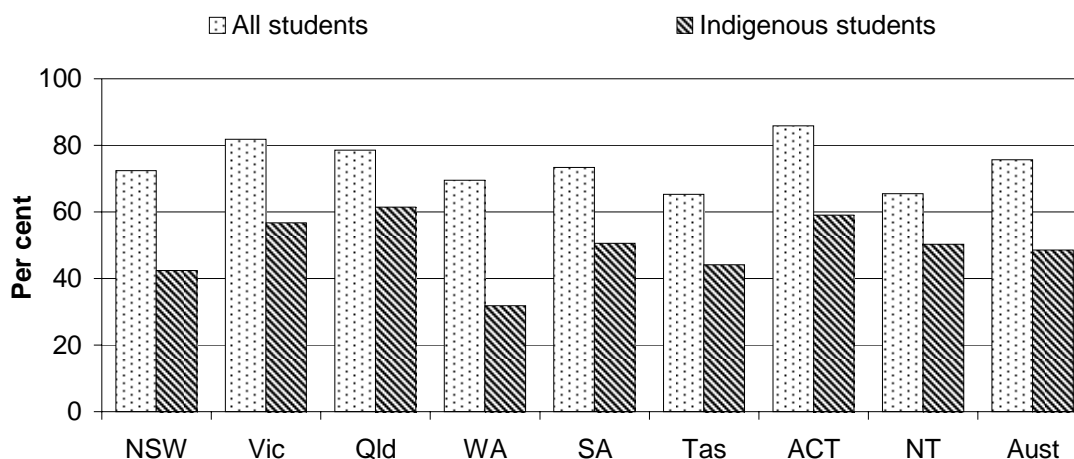
Data on children aged 3–5 years in government funded preschools are provided in table 3.2 in the Children’s services chapter of the current Report for 2007-08. Nationally, the representation of Indigenous children in preschools was a similar proportion (4.9 per cent) to their representation in the community (4.5 per cent).

The *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, 2006* reported that the proportion of Indigenous students in government preschools who were assessed as being literacy ready to start school had increased from 64.9 per cent nationally in 2002 to 65.3 per cent in 2006, and the proportion assessed as numeracy ready increased from 64.4 per cent in 2002 to 67.7 per cent in 2006 (DEEWR 2008). However, the disparity in academic performance between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students increases as students progress through school (SCRGSP 2007, p. 7.18). Longitudinal data for student outcomes are not currently collected.

Research has shown that achievement in years 5 and 7 literacy and numeracy is a key determinant of whether students continue to year 12 and entry into higher education (ACER 2004).

Nationally, the apparent retention rate of Indigenous students from year 10 to year 12 was 48.5 per cent in 2007, compared to 75.6 per cent for all students (figure EP.2). In interpreting this indicator, note that nationally 9.5 per cent of Indigenous students left school before year 10 — compared to 0.9 per cent of all students — so are not included in the base year for retention from year 10 to year 12. This baseline varies across jurisdictions.

Figure EP.2 **Apparent retention rates from year 10 to year 12, full time secondary students, 2007^{a, b, c}**



^a Apparent retention rates are affected by factors that vary across jurisdictions. For this reason, variations in apparent retention rates over time within jurisdictions may be more useful than comparisons across jurisdictions. ^b The exclusion of part time students from standard apparent retention rate calculations has implications for the interpretation of results for all jurisdictions, but particularly for SA, Tasmania and the NT where there are high proportions of part time students in government schools (table 4.4 in 2009 Report, chapter 4). ^c Ungraded students are not included in the calculation of apparent retention rates. This exclusion has particular implications for the NT, where 10.9 per cent of Indigenous secondary students are ungraded (compared with an average of 4.2 per cent for the rest of Australia), in 2007, and this should be considered when interpreting the data.

Source: ABS (2008) *Schools Australia 2007*, Cat. No. 4221.0; table 4A.69; 2009 Report, figure B.23, p. B.31.

In 2006, 32 per cent of the year 12 Indigenous student cohort undertook a senior secondary certificate course aimed at gaining university entrance, compared to 78 per cent of the non-Indigenous student cohort. Of these students, 11 per cent attained a score that would gain them university entrance, compared to 47 per cent of non-Indigenous students (DEEWR 2008).

Indigenous students in senior secondary school were more likely to participate in 'VET in Schools' activities. Nationally in 2005, Indigenous students comprised 3.0 per cent of students participating in VET in Schools, although they made up only 2.2 per cent of all students (NCVER 2008). Similarly, Indigenous students made up a higher proportion of VET students than their proportion in the population (VET attachment table 5A.1 of this Report).

Cross-cutting issues

The link between early childhood development and achievement at school is well established, as is the link between education, skills, workforce participation and

productivity. Information in the Early childhood, education and training preface in the 2009 Report points to some of these relationships for Australians.

Special needs groups

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the 2009 Report provide various data in relation to Indigenous populations as well as other special needs groups such as people with a disability, people living in remote areas, people with a language background other than English (LBOTE), and people from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds (table B.1). (This compendium only includes those data relating specifically to Indigenous people.)

Table EP.1 **Some data reported on special needs groups in ECET chapters of the 2009 Report**

	<i>Children's services (chapter 3)</i>	<i>School education (chapter 4)</i>	<i>VET (chapter 5)</i>
Indigenous people	✓	✓	✓
People with a disability	✓	✓	✓
People in remote areas	✓	✓	✓
People with a language background other than English	✓	✓	✓
People from low SES backgrounds	✓	✓	

Source: 2009 Report, table B.1, p. B.34.

Special needs groups are not discrete, with some individuals belonging to more than one of these groups. For example, there is a greater incidence of low socioeconomic status and certain types of disability amongst Indigenous people compared with the general population (ABS (unpublished) *2006 Census of Population and Housing*). People with a severe disability are often disadvantaged in terms of workforce participation (ABS 2004), which may lead to lower socioeconomic status.

Attachment tables

Attachment tables for data within this preface are contained in the attachment to the compendium. These tables are identified in references throughout this chapter by an 'A' suffix (for example, table EPA.1 is table 1 in the early childhood, education and training attachment). The table included in the attachment is listed below.

Table EPA.1 Higher education participation by selected groups compared to share of total population, 2006

References

- ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2004, *Disability, Ageing and Carers 2003*, Cat. no. 4430.0, Canberra.
- ACER (Australian Council for Educational Research) 2004, *What do we know about the experiences of Australian Youth?*, Melbourne.
- COAG (Council of Australian Governments) 2008a, *Productivity Agenda Working Group — Education, Skills, Training and Early Childhood Development: outcomes, progress measures and policy directions 12 March 2008*, Canberra, <http://mediacentre.dewr.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/85499B3A-E77F-4A55-9735-F8CD853EB072/0/Comminque.pdf> (accessed 18 April 2008).
- 2008b, *COAG Communiqué 26 March 2008*, http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2008-03-26/index.cfm#supplementary (accessed 1 December 2008).
- DEEWR (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) 2008, *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, 2006*, Canberra.
- NCVER (National Centre for Vocational Education Research) 2008, *Australian vocational education and training statistics: VET in Schools 2005*, Adelaide.
- PC (Productivity Commission) 2006, *Potential Benefits of the National Reform Agenda*, Report to the Council of Australian Governments, Canberra.
- SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) 2007, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2007*, Productivity Commission, Canberra.
- 2008, *Report on Government Services 2008*, Productivity Commission, Canberra.