

Are young people learning or earning?

Levels of participation in education and the labour market are frequently cited indicators of the wellbeing of young people.¹ Research suggests that young people who are not fully engaged in education or work (or a combination of both) are at greater risk of unemployment, cycles of low pay and employment insecurity in the longer term.² Participation in education and training and engaging in work are also considered important aspects of developing individual capability and building a socially inclusive society.³

Increasing educational participation and improving transition to work outcomes for young Australians are the key objectives of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment.⁴ This agreement is aimed at providing measures to support engagement in education and training of young people aged 15–24 years.

Data source and definitions

Data in this article come from the ABS 2009 Survey of Education and Work (SEW). It combines labour force concepts with education enrolment information to measure levels of engagement by young people aged 15–24 years.

Employed full-time: employed persons who usually worked 35 hours or more a week (in all jobs) and those who, although usually working less than 35 hours a week, worked 35 hours or more during the reference week.

Employed part-time: employed persons who usually worked less than 35 hours a week (in all jobs) and either did so during the reference week, or were not at work in the reference week.

Unemployed: persons who were not employed during the reference week, and had actively looked for (and were available to start) full-time or part-time work at any time in the four weeks up to the end of the reference week.

Not in the labour force: persons who were not in the categories 'employed' or 'unemployed'.

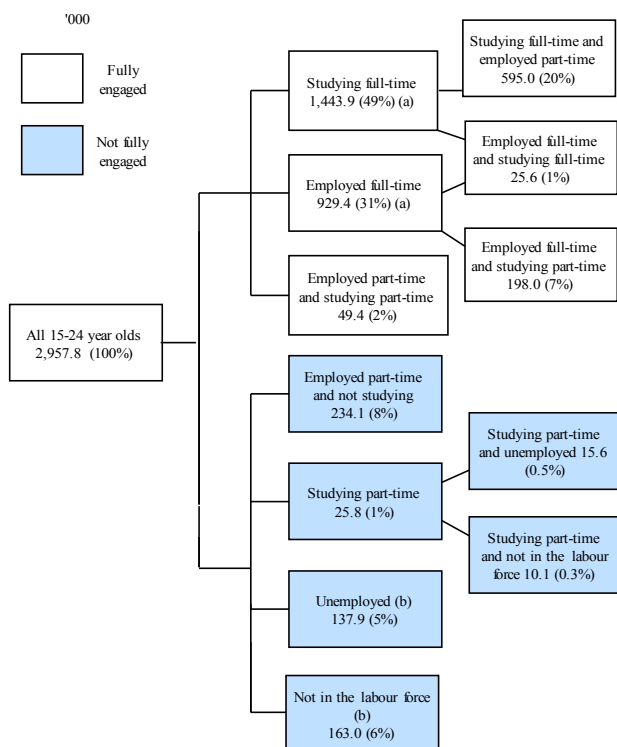
Enrolled: refers to persons registered for a course of study in the particular reference period at an educational institution. People enrolled at the time of the survey were asked whether they were studying their course full-time or part-time.

Fully engaged: people who, in the survey reference week, were in full-time work or in full-time education, or in part-time work combined with part-time education.

Not fully engaged: includes people who, in the survey reference week, were working part-time (but not studying), unemployed (regardless of whether studying part-time), studying part-time (and not working) and not in the labour force (except those who were full-time students).

School leavers: persons aged 15–19 years who attended school in 2008 but were not attending school prior to the survey date in May 2009.

Young people aged 15-24 years, engagement in education and the labour force – May 2009



(a) Includes 26,000 people (1%) who were in both full-time employment and full-time education, therefore components add to more than total.

(b) Excluding those who were studying.

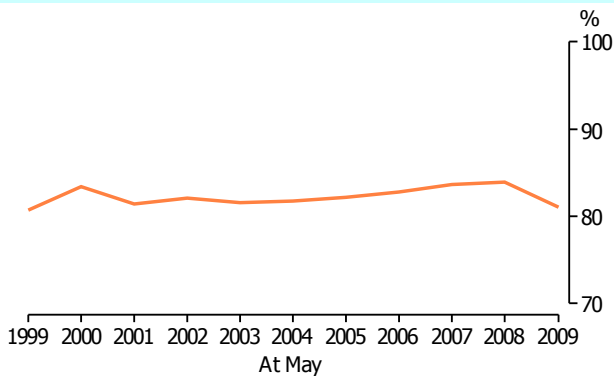
Source: ABS 2009 Survey of Education and Work

Participation in education and work

In 2009, the majority (81%) of young people aged 15–24 years (from a total of around three million) were fully engaged in either education or work. Almost a half (49%) were studying full-time for a qualification, while almost a third (31%) were in full-time employment. A small proportion (around 2%) were engaged in both study and work on a part-time basis.

While most young people aged 15–24 years were fully engaged, some 561,000 (19%) were not. These were made up of 8% of young people who worked part-time (without being

Fully engaged in education or work, 15-24 year olds – 1999-2009



Source: ABS 1999, 2000 Transition from Education to Work; ABS 2002-2009 Surveys of Education and Work

enrolled in study), 5% who were unemployed, and another 6% who were not in the labour force. A very small proportion of young people (25,700 or around 1%) were enrolled in part-time study only.

...over the decade

Over the last decade, the proportion of young people who were fully engaged in education or work at the time of the May survey has been relatively steady, ranging from 81% in 1999 to a peak of 84% in 2008, then falling back to 81% in 2009. While the proportion of young people who were fully engaged was the same in both 1999 and 2009, the share of those who were in full-time education has increased from 45% to 48% between these time points, reflecting increases in both the completion of secondary school and the undertaking of further post-school education.

The recent economic downturn is the likely cause of the three percentage point decline in the proportion of fully engaged young people between 2008 and 2009. The most marked

change between these two years was the decline in the proportion in full-time work (from 35% to 31%). This was accompanied by increases in the proportions of:

- unemployed young men and women, most particularly among those aged 17-19 years;
- men aged 20-24 years doing part-time work; and
- women aged 20-24 years undertaking full-time study.

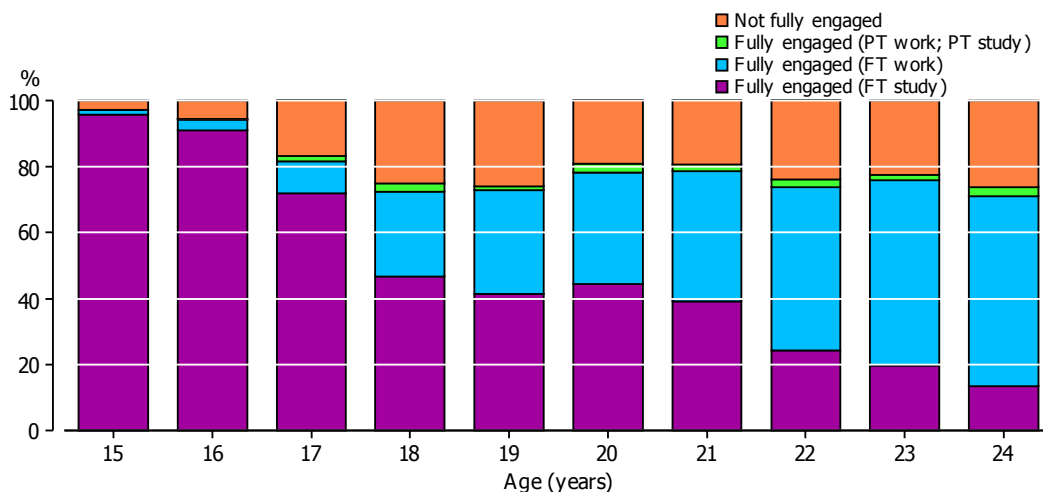
For a broader analysis of the labour-market impacts of the economic downturn, see Australian Social Trends March 2010, '[The labour market during recent economic downturns](#)' (ABS cat. no. 4102.0).

By age

Full engagement in either work or study was highest in the younger ages, where, not surprisingly the majority were still attending school. In 2009, all but 3% of 15 year olds and 6% of 16 year olds were fully engaged. From ages 17 to 19 years, where young people are increasingly likely to have recently left school, the proportion who were fully engaged dropped steeply: to 83% among 17 year olds and to 75% and 74% among 18 and 19 year olds respectively. By 20-21 years of age, the level of engagement picked up slightly (to 81%), but fell away again in the older ages, with the lowest level being 74% at 24 years.

The pattern of full engagement shows the gradual shift from the predominance of full-time education in younger ages to predominantly full-time work in older ages. In 2009, each age between 15 and 20 had higher proportions in full-time education than in full-time work. At 21 years, the proportions in full-time work and full-time education were

Engagement rates, 15-24 years – May 2009



Source: ABS 2009 Survey of Education and Work

equal (39%), and by age 24, 58% of people were in full-time work and just 14% were in full-time education.

Young people not fully engaged

Reasons why young people may not be fully engaged in education or work may include the search for work following completion of studies, the decision to take time out for travel, to care for a child or relative, or because of personal illness or disability.²

Overall, 16% of 15–19 year olds (224,000 people) were not fully engaged in 2009. Just over half of them were not working or studying at all, being either unemployed or not in the labour force, while part-time workers made up most of the balance. Of the non-fully engaged people this age, males were more likely than females to be unemployed, while females were more likely to be not in the labour force than males.

Among 20–24 year olds, a greater proportion of women were not fully engaged than men (24% and 20% respectively) and as with the 15–19 year olds, women were more likely to be not in the labour force than men, and men were more likely to be unemployed. Differences in the type of non-full engagement between men and women at this age are in large part a reflection of women's greater likelihood of being a carer of young children. Mothers made up 39% of the not fully engaged women of this age. This contrasts with not fully engaged men this age, where fathers made up just 7%, and fully engaged women where only 4% had a child.

In addition to women caring for their children, there were some other groups of young people who had higher than average representation among the not fully engaged population. For example, Indigenous people were more than twice as likely as other young people to not be fully engaged. Similarly, young people living

Study and work overload

While working part-time jobs is desirable and necessary for many students, there are concerns that excessive working hours combined with the study workload may be detrimental to performance and wellbeing.

In October 2009, a parliamentary committee report, '*Adolescent Overload? Report of the inquiry into combining school and work: supporting successful youth transitions*' was released which examined the growing number of students who were combining schooling with part-time work. The committee recommended a number of proposals, including: ensuring that further research is undertaken to gain a better understanding of the impact that part-time work has on the education attainment of young people and knowing what support may be required to assist young people who combine study and work.⁵

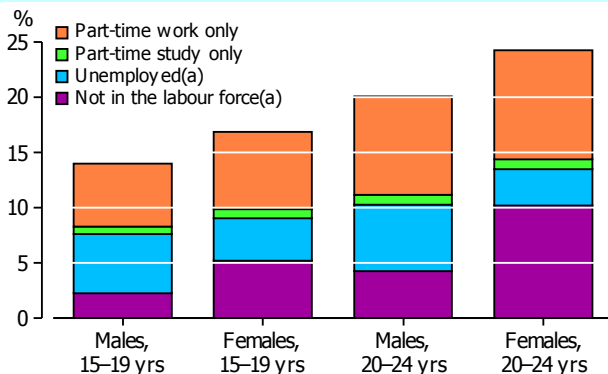
According to the ABS Survey of Education and Work, in May 2009, 41% (or 595,000) of Australia's 1.4 million full-time students aged 15–24 years worked a part-time job most weeks, and 2% (26,000 full-time students) worked a full-time job. A third of full-time secondary school students worked a part-time job, and 53% of full-time students doing higher education or TAFE worked, including 3% who worked full-time.

In November 2008, the median number of hours worked by full-time students each week was 16, and one in five usually worked 25 hours or more per week.

Source: ABS 2009 Survey of Education and Work; ABS 2008 Forms of Employment Survey.

in areas belonging to the lowest quintile of relative socioeconomic disadvantage were around 50% more likely to be not fully engaged. Young people who left school without completing year 12 and who had not done any further study (or weren't currently doing so in May 2009) had a non-fully engaged rate around three times higher than that of young people overall and made up just under half (47%) of the non-fully engaged population.

Non-fully engaged people, category of engagement – May 2009



(a) Excludes people who were studying part-time.

Source: ABS 2009 Survey of Education and Work

Non-full engaged rates by selected characteristics, 15-24 years – May 2009

	Non-full engaged rate	Proportion of non-engaged population
	%	%
Mothers	74.5	15.3
Live in areas comprising the lowest quintile of disadvantage	29.2	28.7
Did not complete yr 12(a)	55.0	47.1
Total 15-24 year olds	19.0	100.0

(a) And hasn't done/is not doing any non-school qualification.

Source: ABS 2009 Survey of Education and Work

May 2009 outcomes of 2008 school leavers, by highest year completed

	Year 11 or below	Year 12	Total
	%	%	%
Fully engaged	47.4	73.2	65.9
Full-time work	28.2	17.2	20.3
Full-time study	16.8	53.8	43.4
Not fully engaged	52.6	26.8	34.1
Part-time work	15.1	15.4	15.3
Unemployed	18.5	8.4	11.3
NILF	18.1	2.3	6.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
	'000	'000	'000
Total	84.4	213.5	297.9

Source: ABS 2009 Survey of Education and Work

Recent school leavers

In 2008, almost 300,000 young people finished school (72% of them completing year 12). Of these school leavers, 66% (196,000) were fully engaged in May 2009 (43% in full-time study and 20% in full-time work, with 2% working and studying part-time). School leavers who did not complete year 12 were over twice as likely to be unemployed as those who completed year 12 (19% and 8% respectively), and nearly nine times more likely to not be in the labour force (18% and 2% respectively).

...full-time students

Of the 130,000 school leavers who were enrolled in full-time study, almost two-thirds were studying for a bachelor degree, while the remaining third were studying for a certificate or diploma level qualification. The most popular fields of study for full-time students were management and commerce (19%), followed by society and culture (16%), creative arts (13%), engineering (11%) and health (10%).

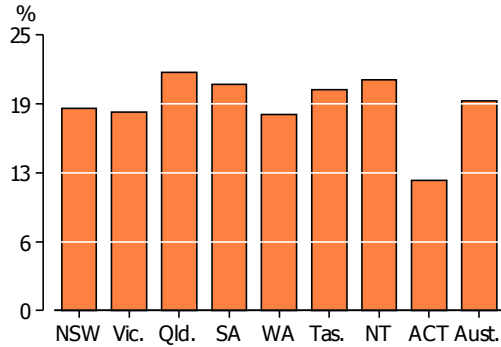
A relatively small number (23,000) of school leavers who reported gaining a place in an educational institution in 2009, had declined or deferred the opportunity. Seven out of ten of them were employed, although more often in part-time than full-time work.

...full-time workers

Of the 61,000 school leavers who were working full-time, more than a third (35%) were working as technicians and trade workers. The next most common occupational group was labourers (23%), followed by sales workers (18%) and clerical and administrative workers (12%).

Just over one-third of school-leavers (35%) who had full-time employment were doing apprenticeships or traineeships, the majority (73%) in technical and trade occupations. The

Not fully engaged, states and territories, 15-24 years – May 2009



Source: ABS 2009 Survey of Education and Work

most popular field for apprentices was construction trade workers (29%), followed by automotive and engineering trades (20%) and electrotechnology and telecommunications (18%), with 5% doing hairdressing apprenticeships.

...non-fully engaged school leavers

Of the 34% of 2008 school leavers who weren't fully engaged, just under half were working part-time. Sales work and labouring were the most common kinds of work occupying 37% and 35% respectively of those with a part-time job.

One in three of the non-fully engaged school leavers were unemployed and one in five were not in the labour force. The 2008 school leavers who did not complete year 12 were twice as likely to be not fully engaged in May 2009 as those who did finish year 12.

State and territory snapshot

The proportion of young people who were not fully engaged varied across the country, but most notably was the relatively low level in the Australian Capital Territory with a non-fully engaged rate of 12% in 2009, compared with 19% nationally. Western Australia, Victoria and New South Wales were just below the national level, each with 18%. Queensland had the highest rate of non-fully engaged young people in 2009 with just under 22%. However, over the previous five years, the highest non-full engagement rates were experienced in Tasmania and the Northern Territory.

Looking ahead

In April 2009, COAG agreed to a Compact with Young Australians to increase engagement in education and training. The Compact (which forms the foundation of the National Partnership on Youth Attainment), comprises a National Youth Participation Requirement, an entitlement to government subsidised education or training places for 15–24 year olds, and changes to Youth Allowance and Family Tax Benefit making

education and training preconditions for these payments. In order to qualify for Youth Allowance (other), people under the age of 25, without a Year 12 or equivalent qualification, must be in education or training.⁶

Endnotes

- 1 Foundation for Young Australians, 2009, [How Young People are Faring 2009](#), Foundation of Young Australians, Melbourne, p. 48, <www.fya.org.au>.
- 2 Pech, J., McNevin, A. and Nelms, L., 2009, [Young People with Poor Labour Force Attachment: A survey of concepts, data and previous research](#), Australian Fair Pay Commission, Canberra p. 7 <www.fwa.gov.au>.
- 3 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, [Overview of the Social Inclusion Agenda](#), DEEWR, Canberra, <www.socialinclusion.gov.au>.
- 4 Council of Australian Governments, 2009, [National Partnership Agreement On Youth Attainment and Transitions](#), COAG, Canberra, <www.coag.gov.au>.
- 5 Commonwealth of Australia, October 2009, [Adolescent Overload? Report of the inquiry into combining school and work: supporting successful youth transitions](#), the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Education and Training, Canberra, p. 2, <www.aph.gov.au>.
- 6 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, [Compact with Young Australians, Learning or earning: New education and training requirement for 15-24 year olds](#), DEEWR, Canberra, <www.deewr.gov.au>.