Australia

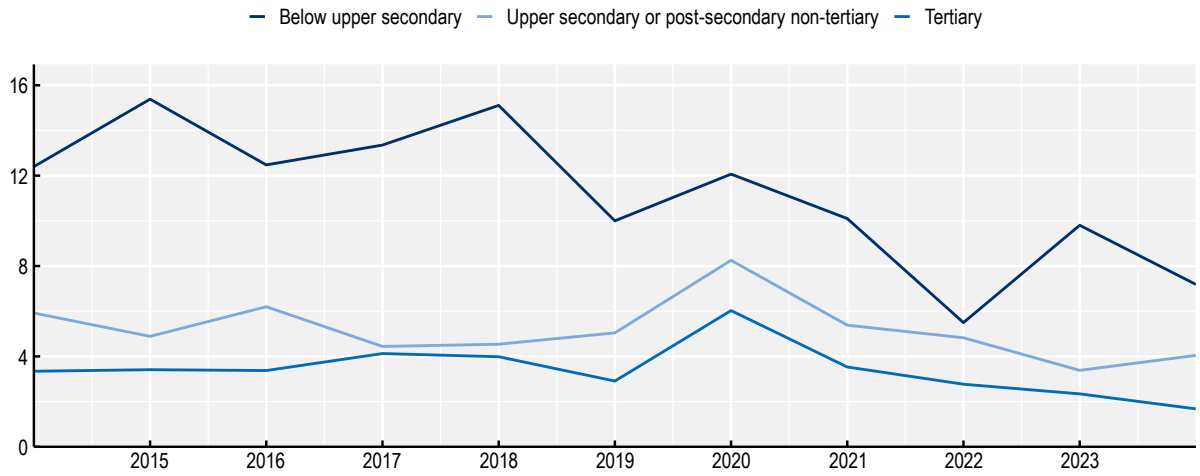
This country note provides an overview of the key characteristics of the education system in Australia based on data from *Education at a Glance 2025*. In line with this year's thematic focus, it emphasises tertiary education while also covering other parts of the education system. The data in this note are provided for the latest available year. Readers interested in the reference years for the data should refer to the corresponding tables in *Education at a Glance 2025*.

The output of educational institutions and the impact of learning

- The share of young adults (25-34 year-olds) without upper secondary attainment continues to decline across the OECD, reaching an average of 13%. This trend also continues in Australia, where the share fell from 9% to 8% between 2019 and 2024.
- Individuals with greater educational attainment generally face a lower risk of unemployment and earn higher wages. Completing upper secondary education is particularly important in reducing the risk of unemployment. On average across the OECD, 12.9% of economically active young adults (25-34 year-olds) without an upper secondary qualification are unemployed, compared to 6.9% of those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment. Those who go on to gain a tertiary qualification see a relatively smaller further reduction in unemployment, with 4.9% of tertiary-educated young adults unemployed on average across the OECD. This pattern is similar in Australia (albeit at a lower level): 7.2% of young adults without an upper secondary qualification are unemployed, compared to 4% of those with upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary attainment and 1.7% of those with tertiary attainment (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Trends in unemployment rates of 25-34 year-olds in Australia, by educational attainment (2014 to 2024)

In per cent



For data, see OECD (2025) *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en, Table A3.5.

- On average, individuals with a master's or equivalent degree have significantly higher employment rates and earnings than those with a bachelor's or equivalent degree. However, the share of young adults (25-34 year-olds) attaining a master's or equivalent qualification varies widely across OECD countries, ranging from 1% to 39% in 2024. In Australia, 11% of 25-34 year-olds hold a master's or equivalent degree, which is below the OECD average of 16%. This represents a small increase since 2019, when the share was 10%.
- The average wage gap between individuals (25-64 year-olds) with and without upper secondary educational attainment is relatively modest across OECD countries. On average across the OECD, workers without upper secondary qualifications earn on average 17% less than those who have completed upper secondary education, while workers with tertiary attainment earn 54% more than those with upper secondary attainment. In Australia, the wage gap between workers with and without upper secondary attainment is smaller than the OECD average, at 3%. The gap between those with upper secondary and tertiary attainment is also smaller than the OECD average, at 29%. This suggests a generally more compressed wage distribution by educational attainment in Australia, which may indicate lower relative returns to education but also a lower level of income inequality compared to the OECD average.

Access to education, participation and progression

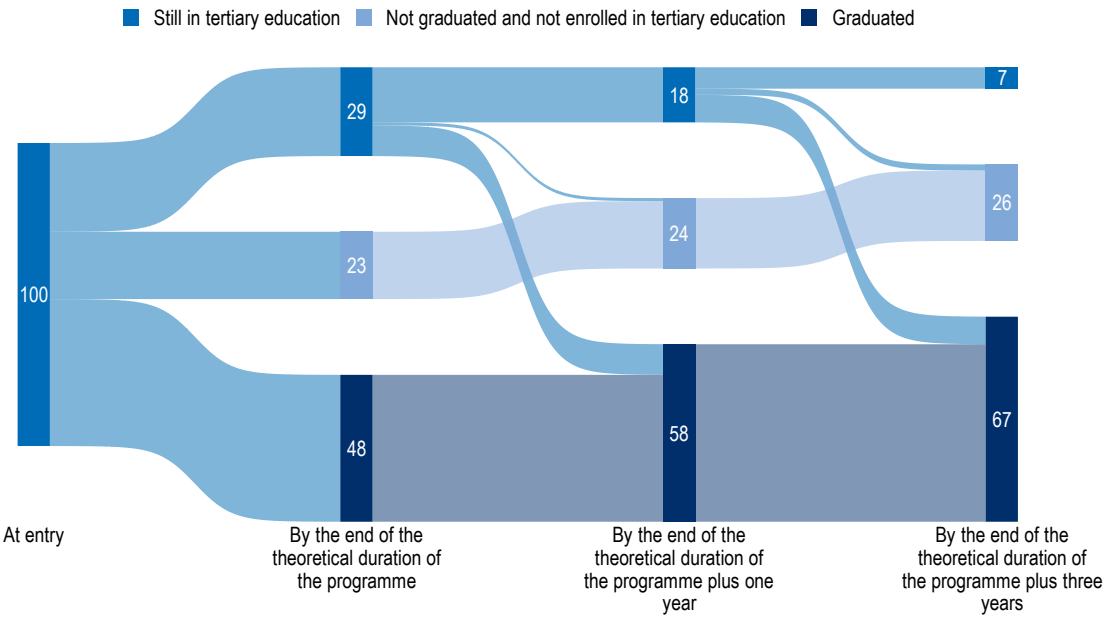
- Education systems must adapt to changes in the number of children by expanding or reducing provision accordingly. In many countries, the population of children aged 0-4 changed significantly between 2013 and 2023 and is projected to change further by 2033. Australia experienced a decline of 1% in the number of 0-4 year-olds, and is projected to see an increase of 5% between 2023 and 2033.
- The share of students in lower secondary education who are at least two years older than the expected age for their grade varies widely across OECD countries, ranging from virtually none in

some countries to over 10% in others. In Australia, the share is at the lower end of the OECD distribution in 2023, at 0.4%.

- Across the OECD, the two most popular broad fields of study are science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and business, administration, and law, each accounting for 23% of graduates from bachelor's or equivalent programmes. They are closely followed by the broad field of arts and humanities, social sciences, journalism and information, at 22% of graduates. In Australia, 20% of bachelor's degree students graduate from a STEM field, 27% from business, administration and law, and 20% from arts and humanities, social sciences, journalism and information.
- Completion rates reflect the share of new entrants to bachelor's programmes who successfully obtain a tertiary degree within specified timeframes. These rates remain low in most OECD countries. In Australia, 48% of new entrants complete their bachelor's degree within the theoretical duration of the programme. This rises to 58% one year after the expected end date, and to 67% three years after. In comparison, the OECD average completion rate is 43% within the theoretical duration, increasing to 59% after an additional year and 70% after three years (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Status of new entrants into bachelor's programmes in Australia, by timeframe

In per cent



For data, see OECD (2025) *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en, Table B5.1.

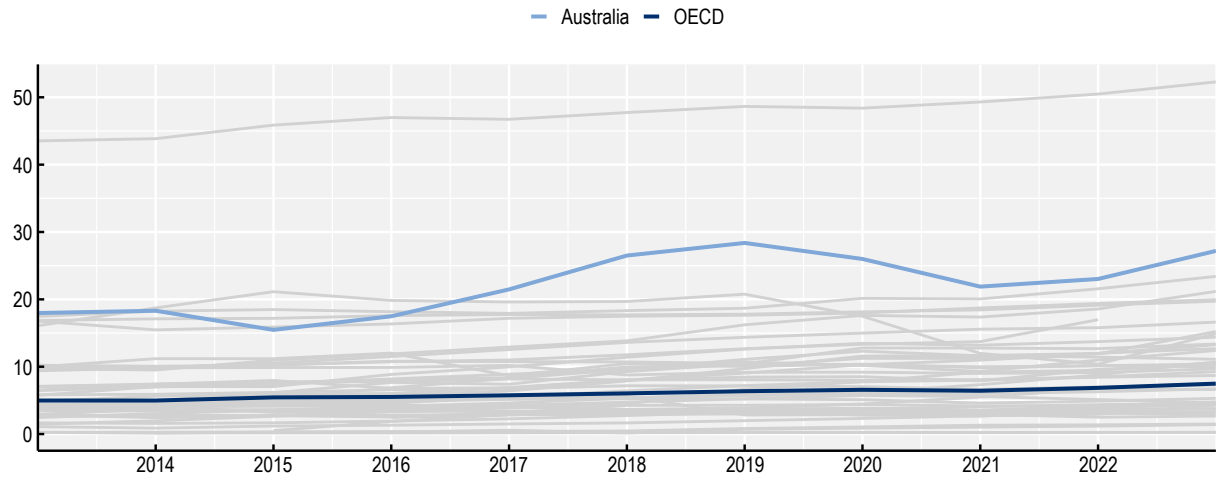
- In all countries, women starting bachelor's programmes are more likely than their male peers to successfully complete their tertiary studies within the three years after the theoretical end of their programme. In Australia, the gender gap is 7 percentage points (70% for women compared to 63% for men), which is smaller than the OECD average of 12 percentage points.
- Completion rates vary by field of study. On average across the OECD, only 58% of new entrants to bachelor's programmes in STEM fields have graduated at that level in the same field within three years after the expected end of their studies. Completion rates in the field of health and welfare

are significantly higher, at 74%. In Australia, STEM completion rates are 68%, lower than those for health and welfare, at 70%.

- Students who do not complete their tertiary education may drop out at various stages. High dropout rates in the first year can signal a mismatch between student expectations and the content or demands of their programmes, possibly reflecting a lack of career guidance for prospective students or insufficient support for new entrants. In Australia, the share of first-time entrants in bachelor's programmes who drop out after the first year is higher than the OECD average, at 15% (compared to 13%).
- The 2023 completion rate data refers to students whose programme was expected to end in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although some countries saw notable increases in completion rates during the pandemic, probably due to policies aimed at facilitating graduation, others experienced moderate declines. In Australia, completion rates of new entrants to bachelor's programmes during the pandemic increased substantially, by 15 percentage points compared to three years earlier (from 33% to 48%).
- International student mobility in tertiary education continues to rise across the OECD, with some countries experiencing substantial growth in the share of international students between 2018 and 2023. On average, 7.4% of all tertiary students across the OECD were international or foreign students, compared to 6% in 2018. Australia saw a modest increase, with the share rising from 26.5% to 27.2% (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Trends in the share of international or foreign students in tertiary education (2013 to 2023)

In per cent



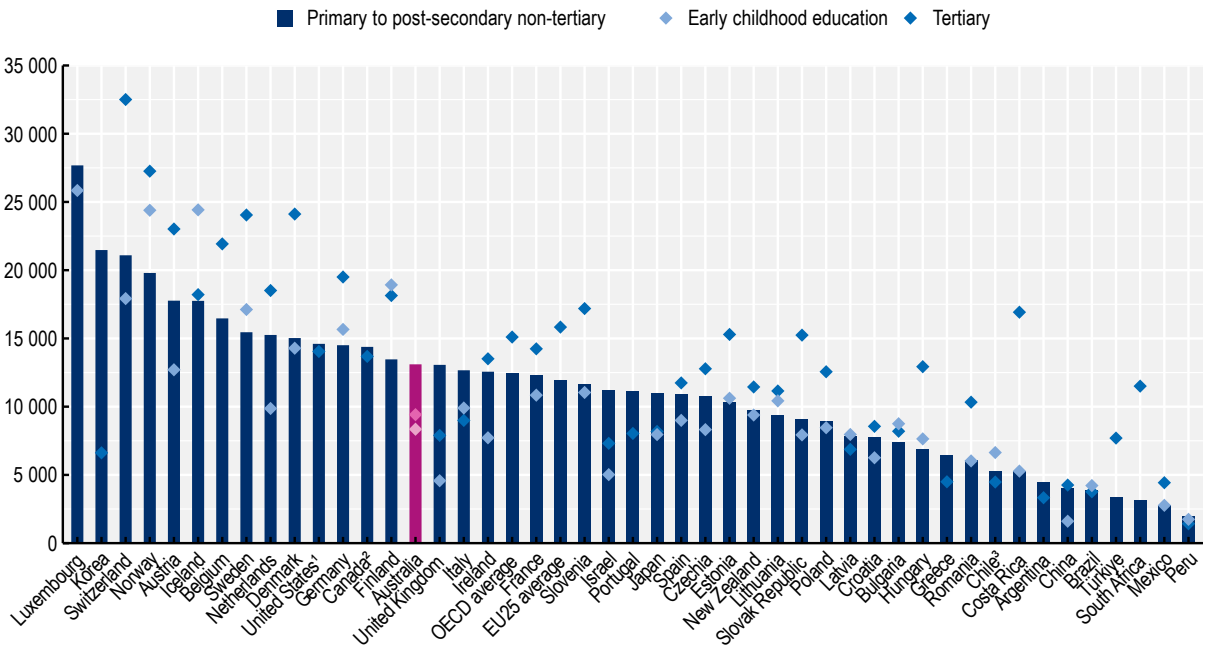
For data, see OECD (2025) *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en, Table B4.3.

Financial resources invested in education

- There are significant disparities in how much governments spend each year in education across OECD, partner and accession countries. Australia spends USD 13 102 per student from primary to post-secondary non-tertiary levels, placing it at the middle of the country range, which spans from less than USD 2 000 to more than USD 27 000 (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Government expenditure per full-time equivalent student, by level of education (2022)

In equivalent USD converted using PPPs, expenditure on educational institutions



Note: Expenditure at tertiary level includes R&D. Expenditure per student in early childhood education is based on headcounts rather than full-time equivalent students. Expenditure at tertiary level for Luxembourg (USD 54 384) is not shown in the figure.
1. Year of reference differs from 2022.
2. Primary includes pre-primary education.
3. Includes payments by households outside educational institutions.
For data, see OECD (2025) *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en, Table C1.1 and Table C1.2.

- In contrast to most other countries, government expenditure in Australia is lower at tertiary level, including research and development (R&D), than at primary to post-secondary non-tertiary levels. Government expenditure in Australia amounts to USD 9 415 per tertiary student compared to the OECD average of USD 15 102.
- A large part of the disparity in expenditure per student across OECD, partner and accession countries reflects differences in national income levels. When expenditure is measured as a share of GDP, cross-country differences tend to be smaller, ranging from 2.5% of GDP to 6.9%. In Australia, education investment in primary to tertiary education stands at 5.4% of GDP, which is above the OECD average of 4.7% by this measure.
- Governments are the primary source of education funding in all OECD countries, especially for the levels covered by compulsory education. In Australia, governments provide 85.3% of total funding for primary, secondary, and post-secondary non-tertiary education (before transfers to the private sector), which is below the OECD average of 90.1%. At the pre-primary and tertiary levels, private funding often plays a larger role. In Australia, 69.7% of pre-primary education funding (after transfers) and 55.4% of tertiary education funding (before transfers) come from public sources, compared to OECD averages of 85.6% and 71.9%, respectively.
- Some countries impose significantly higher tuition fees on foreign students at master's level in public institutions, including Australia. In Australia, average annual tuition fees for foreign students

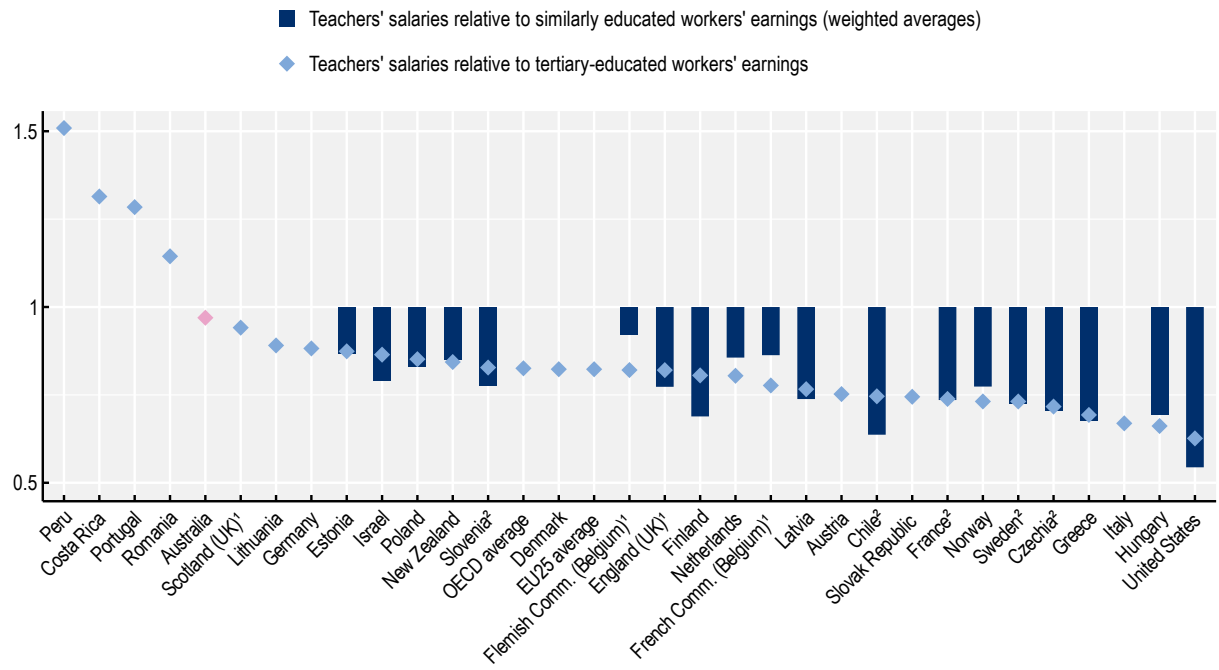
at master's level are USD 20 880 on average, which is well above the fees charged to national students (USD 9 496).

Teachers, the learning environment and the organisation of schools

- Attracting second-career teachers can help alleviate teacher shortages while bringing individuals with a broader range of experience into the profession. To support this, 16 out of 28 countries with available data (including Australia) offer dedicated alternative pathways into teaching for individuals changing careers.
- Competitive salaries can make the teaching profession more attractive, particularly since teachers in many countries earn less than other tertiary-educated workers. In Australia, the actual salaries of primary teachers are 3% lower than those of tertiary-educated, full-time, full year workers, compared to an average of 17% lower across the OECD. However, increasing teacher salaries can be financially challenging, as staff costs make up the largest share of education expenditure (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Actual salaries of primary teachers relative to earnings of tertiary-educated workers (2024)

Ratio of salaries to the earnings of full-time, full-year workers aged 25-64



Note: Data refer to the ratio of annual average salaries (including bonuses and allowances) of teachers and school heads in public institutions relative to the earnings of workers with similar educational attainment (weighted average) and to the earnings of full-time, full-year workers with tertiary education. Earnings of workers with similar educational attainment to teachers are weighted by the distribution of teachers (or school heads) by qualification level (see Tables X2.10 and X2.11). As values close to one may be difficult to identify in the figure, please refer to the source table.

1. Data on earnings for full-time, full-year workers with tertiary education refer to the whole country.
2. Year of reference for salaries of teachers differs from 2024.

For data, see OECD (2025) *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators*, https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en, Table D3.2.

- Since 2015, actual average salaries of primary teachers have increased in real terms by 14.6% on average across the OECD. In Australia, they increased by 5.2% in 2024.
- The amount of compulsory instruction time affects teacher salary costs as it influences the number of teachers needed, combined with other factors such as class size and teaching time of teachers. In Australia, students receive 1 000 hours of compulsory instruction per year in primary education and 1 000 hours in lower secondary education. This is above the OECD average of 804 hours in primary and 909 hours in lower secondary education.
- School holidays in primary education last 12 weeks per year in Australia (all breaks combined), compared to 13.5 weeks across the OECD.
- Across the OECD, the average class size at primary level has not changed since 2013, at 20.6 students. In Australia, the average class size in primary education in 2023 was 23.1 students, down by 0.7 since 2013.
- Countries use a range of admission systems to tertiary public education institutions. These vary as to whether admission is open or selective, and whether applications are submitted directly to institutions or to a central body. In Australia, admission is selective. Applicants submit their applications directly to institutions or to a central body, depending on the programme.

More information

For more information on Education at a Glance 2025 and to access the full set of indicators, see: https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en.

For more information on the methodology used during the data collection for each indicator, the references to the sources and the specific notes for each country, see Education at a Glance 2025: Sources, Methodologies and Technical Notes, https://doi.org/10.1787/fcfaf2d1-en.

For general information on the methodology, please refer to the OECD Handbook for Internationally Comparative Education Statistics 2018, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264304444-en.

Updated data can be found on line at http://data-explorer.oecd.org/ and by following the StatLinks in the publication.

Explore, compare and visualise more data and analysis using the Education GPS: https://gpseducation.oecd.org/.

Questions can be directed to the Education at a Glance team at the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills: EDU.EAG@oecd.org.