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**A selection of findings from the Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2022 student data.**

### Student enrolments decreased by 3.2 per cent from 2021 to 2022

Figure 1: Domestic and overseas students, 2013 - 2022

[Data can be found in the [2022 student summary time series](https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/2022-student-summary-time-series)]

The number of students enrolled in Higher Education has been in a state of flux in recent years due to instability caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Closed borders significantly reduced the number of international students during 2020 and 2021. The 2022 data shows the opening of borders resulted in a strong return of commencing overseas students as well as overseas students overall. Conversely, higher levels of unemployment and underemployment coupled with limited social activities resulted in greatly increased domestic student enrolments during the early pandemic years (2020 and 2021). In 2022, both commencing and total domestic student numbers decreased following the pandemic related peak. Given the volatility, caution should be used when interpreting short term trends.

* The total number of students enrolled at Higher Education providers has decreased by 3.2 per cent from 1,602,573 in 2021 to 1,555,411 in 2022.
  + This is driven by a decrease in domestic students of 5.1 per cent.
  + Overseas students increased by 1.9 per cent in 2022 but were still 14.0 per cent below what they were in 2019.
* The number of commencing domestic students decreased by 10.4 per cent (with an 8.2 per cent decrease in undergraduates and a 14.6 per cent decrease in other students) between 2021 and 2022.  The number of commencing domestic students is similar to the number observed before they peaked during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021.
* Commonwealth supported commencing enrolments decreased by 10.1 per cent, in line with the decrease in commencing domestic students. Commencing commonwealth supported enrolments in 2022 were the lowest they have been since 2013.

### Growth in domestic undergraduate students is declining

Figure 2: Number and annual growth of commencing domestic undergraduate students.

[Data can be found in the [2022 student summary time series](https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/2022-student-summary-time-series)]

* The number of commencing domestic undergraduate students, the main feeder group to higher education, decreased by 8.2 per cent from 290,902 in 2021 to 267,107 in 2022.
* This is the lowest number of commencing domestic undergraduate students since 2013 and is a 5.5 per cent decrease since 2018 (5-year trend).
* The decline in commencing domestic undergraduate students in 2022 is probably reflective of increasing cost of living pressures and a strong labour market attracting potential students to jobs. There is also a concurrent reduction in apparent year 12 retention[[1]](#footnote-1) meaning the eligible population of school leavers may be lower than otherwise expected.

Figure 3: Commencing domestic students by course type, 2013-2022

[Data can be found in the [2022 student summary time series](https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/2022-student-summary-time-series)]

* Higher levels of unemployment and underemployment coupled with limited social activities resulted in an increase of domestic students choosing to enrol in higher education during the early pandemic years (2020 and 2021).
* In 2022, both undergraduate and postgraduate students followed a similar trend and decreased in 2022 after the pandemic-related enrolment peak in 2020 and 2021.
* The proportion of commencing domestic students by course type has remained stable over the past 10 years. Undergraduate courses make up 67 per cent of all commencing domestic enrolments in 2022.

### Enrolments in all fields of study decrease for commencing domestic students

Table 4a: Number of commencing domestic students for select fields of education, 2018-2022

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2018** | **2021** | **2022** | **% change 2021 to 2022** |
| **Natural & Physical Sciences** | 36,752 | 39,324 | 34,798 | -11.5% |
| **Information Technology** | 14,851 | 22,552 | 20,127 | -10.8% |
| **Engineering & Related Technologies** | 18,855 | 21,353 | 20,719 | -3.0% |
| **Architecture and Building** | 9,941 | 11,392 | 10,825 | -5.0% |
| **Agriculture, Environmental & Related Studies** | 4,662 | 6,028 | 5,993 | -0.6% |
| **Health** | 82,999 | 96,169 | 87,577 | -8.9% |
| ***Nursing*** | *21,887* | *21,850* | *19,611* | *-10.2%* |
| **Education** | 41,864 | 51,561 | 44,250 | -14.2% |
| ***Initial Teacher Education*** | *25,799* | *29,797* | *26,201* | -12.1% |
| **Management & Commerce** | 63,977 | 60,744 | 55,517 | -8.6% |
| **Society & Culture** | 109,084 | 116,823 | 103,382 | -11.5% |
| **Creative Arts** | 31,827 | 29,959 | 26,002 | -13.2% |
| **Food, Hospitality & Personal Services** | 1,899 | 78 | 73 | -6.4% |
| **Mixed Field Programmes** | 8,956 | 7,732 | 6,235 | -19.4% |
| **Non-award courses** | 5,943 | 6,238 | 5,665 | -9.2% |
| **TOTAL - All Commencing Domestic Students** | 409,370 | 446,836 | 400,341 | -10.4% |

[Extended data can be found in the [2022 student summary time series](https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/2022-student-summary-time-series)]

* In line with the overall trend for domestic students, there were decreases in all fields of education for commencing domestic students from 2021 to 2022.
* Over the longer term, enrolments of commencing domestic students in Information Technology have increased 26.2 per cent since 2018.
* Commencing domestic students decreased in Nursing and Initial Teacher Education courses.

### Enrolments of First Nations students fall for the first time in 2022

Figure 5: All commencing onshore domestic students by equity group[[2]](#footnote-2), 2016 - 2022[[3]](#footnote-3)

[Data can be found in the [2022 section 11 Equity groups](https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/2022-section-11-equity-groups)]

Table 5a Commencing onshore domestic students by Equity group, 2021-2022

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2021** | **2022** | **% change 2021 to 2022** |
| First Nations | 10,506 | 9,668 | -8.0% |
| First Address Low SES by SA1 (SEIFA21) | 75,876 | 67,018 | -11.7% |
| First Address Regional and Remote (ASGS21) | 87,351 | 80,285 | -8.1% |
| Non English speaking background | 16,219 | 14,112 | -13.0% |
| Students with a disability | 39,829 | 40,381 | 1.4% |
| Women in Non-Traditional Area | 66,643 | 61,028 | -8.4% |
| **Total - All commencing onshore domestic students[[4]](#footnote-4)** | **443,980** | **397,626** | -10.4% |

* The number of commencing domestic students with a disability increased by 1.4 per cent from 2021 to 2022. This may be the ongoing impact of a definitional change in disability rolled out in 2020 to align with Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) definitions. The expanded collection now includes intellectual, mental, acquired brain injury and neurological disabilities.
* The number of commencing students from all other equity groups decreased from 2021 to 2022, mirroring the trend for all commencing domestic students.
  + Commencing student numbers from low socio-economic areas[[5]](#footnote-5) (low SES) and regional[[6]](#footnote-6) and remote areas are the lowest number in this series[[7]](#footnote-7).
  + Commencing domestic students from a non-English speaking background are the lowest number in 10 years.
* For the first time since the series began in 2006, the number of First Nations students has decreased.
  + Total First Nations students decreased by 3 per cent from 23,967 in 2021 to 23,249 in 2022.
  + Commencing First Nations students decreased 8.0 per cent from 2021 to 2022.

### The proportion of students from low socio-economic areas decreased

Figure 6: Proportion of all onshore domestic students[[8]](#footnote-8), 2016-2022

[Data can be found in [2022 section 11 Equity groups](https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/2022-section-11-equity-groups)]

* The proportion of commencing and all students from low socio-economic areas decreased from 2021 to 2022, indicating this cohort were over-represented in the falling domestic enrolments. In other words, students from low socio-economic areas decreased more than students from medium or high socio-economic areas. It is possible that the strong labour market in 2022, in conjunction with increasing costs of living, had a greater influence on decision-making about higher education for students from low socio-economic backgrounds than for students from medium or high socio-economic backgrounds.
  + The proportion of commencing low SES students decreased from 17.1 per cent to 16.9 per cent.
  + The proportion of low SES students overall decreased from 16.8 per cent to 16.0 per cent.
* The proportion of students with a disability continued to grow after the definition was broadened in 2020.
* The proportion of students who identify as First Nations remained constant at 2.1 per cent.
* The proportion of students from regional and remote areas remained constant at 19.2 per cent.

### The 2021 adjusted attrition rate increased after low rates observed during the pandemic

Figure 7: Adjusted attrition rate for commencing domestic bachelor students, selected Table A and B institutions 2012-2021

[Data can be found in the [2022 Section 15 Attrition, success and retention](https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/2022-section-15-attrition-success-and-retention)]

* The adjusted attrition rate[[9]](#footnote-9) attempts to capture the proportion of domestic bachelor students who discontinue study after the initial year.
* The adjusted attrition rate in 2021 increased to 14.73 per cent, an increase of 2 percentage points from 2020.
* The majority of Table A and B higher education institutions had increased attrition rates in 2021 compared to 2020.
* The University of New South Wales, the University of Melbourne and Monash University remain the top 3 performing universities in terms of attrition rates, generally around 5 per cent or lower.
* The bottom 3 performing higher education institutions also remained unchanged from 2020, Southern Cross University, The University of New England and CQUniversity. These universities have attrition rates 1.5 times more than the average.
* Attrition rates at non-university higher education institutions continue to be volatile due to the small size of these institutes.

### The six-year completion rate is the lowest on record in 2022

Figure 8: Completion and engagement rates for Table A and B institutions, commencing domestic bachelor students, 2005 to 2019 cohorts.

[Data can be found in the [completion rates of Higher Education students – cohort analysis 2005-2022](https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/completion-rates-higher-education-students-cohort-analysis-20052022)]

* The department tracks outcomes for higher education student cohorts over time. The completion[[10]](#footnote-10) rates show the percentage of students who have completed their study 4 or 6 years after they commenced their course. Engagement rates show the percentage of students who have completed or are still enrolled 4 or 6 years after they commenced their course.
* The six-year completion rate for commencing domestic bachelor students at Table A and B institutions decreased between the 2016 commencing cohort (62.6 per cent) and the 2017 commencing cohort (61.8 per cent). This is the lowest recorded six-year completion rate.
* Data shows students have been studying fewer units on average over the past 5 years, in particular the proportion of students studying 4 units or less has increased from 44 per cent in 2018 to 47 per cent in 2022. This slows completion rates.
* The proportion of students engaged in higher education (students who have either completed or are still enrolled) after six years decreased from 75.9 per cent for the 2016 commencing cohort to 74.6 per cent for the 2017 commencing cohort.
* The four-year completion rate for commencing domestic bachelor students at Table A and B institutions decreased by 0.1 percentage points from 41.0 per cent for the 2018 commencing cohort to 40.9 per cent for the 2019 commencing cohort. The latest four-year completion rate is the lowest recorded in the time series which has been trending down since 2005.
* The proportion of students engaged in higher education (students who have either completed or are still enrolled) after four years has also decreased, from 78.9 per cent for the 2018 commencing cohort to 78.3 per cent for the 2019 commencing cohort.

1. Source: [Schools, 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics (abs.gov.au)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/schools/latest-release#:~:text=Retention%20rates-,In%202022%3A,than%20for%20males%20(76.3%25).) and [Apparent retention (acara.edu.au)](https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/apparent-retention) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Every 5 years the ABS updates the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) and re-calculates the boundaries for regional and remote areas as well an area’s socio-economic index (SEIFA). The time series for regional and remote and low socio-economic status (low SES) are presented for two classifications. 2016 – 2020 data are calculated using the 2016 ASGS and 2016 SEIFA, data for 2021 are presented for both 2016 and 2021 ASGS and SEIFA, and 2022 data are presented for only 2021 ASGS and SEIFA. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The first address series began in 2016, so data has been presented for 2016 – 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Equity data excludes domestic students where the permanent home address is overseas. Totals will be slightly different to other domestic tables which include offshore domestic students. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Low socio-economic status is based on the first address recorded for the student. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Regional and remote status is based on the first postcode recorded for the student. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The first address series begun in 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Every 5 years the ABS updates the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) and re-calculates the boundaries for regional and remote areas as well an area’s socio-economic index (SEIFA). The time series for regional and remote and low socio-economic status (low SES) are presented for two classifications. 2016 – 2020 data are calculated using the 2016 ASGS and 2016 SEIFA, data for 2021 are presented for both 2016 and 2021 ASGS and SEIFA, and 2022 data are presented for only 2021 ASGS and SEIFA. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The adjusted attrition rate for year(x) is the proportion of students who commenced a course in year(x) who neither complete in year(x) or year(x + 1) nor return in year(x + 1). If a student moves from one institution to another in the following year, they are counted as retained in the adjusted attrition rate calculation. For the adjusted attrition rate, it is only those students who left the higher education system entirely (that is, they were no longer at any institution) that are counted as not continuing. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Completion rates of cohorts of students are measured using the Commonwealth Higher Education Student Support Number (CHESSN) to track students over time. Empirically, the completion rate of a cohort of students is quite closely related to their attrition rate in the first year of study. The completion rate, since it measures the outcomes of a cohort of students completing their course of study, lags some years behind the attrition rate. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)