

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

A review of trends, targets and
influencing factors

by Sue Kilpatrick,
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Executive summary

Post-compulsory education and training participation builds the stock of skills in the economy and is an important determinant of future individual and State/national economic and social wellbeing.

Australian youth participation in education (school, VET and higher education) has trended upward since 1993. Tasmanian participation rates have generally followed the national pattern, though at a lower level.

The difference between Tasmania and other States is particularly marked for the 20–24 age group.

Tasmanian participation in education by both the 15-19 and 20-24 year age groups ranks near the bottom of OECD country participation rates.

The Tasmanian school participation rate has increased relative to the national average over the last decade. It has been above the national average since 1997.

Tasmanian VET participation rates are below the national average.

Tasmanian higher education participation rates have been consistently at or near the bottom of State rates since 1993.

Over recent years the proportion of teenagers not in full time education or training has tended to be higher than the national average. Almost 10% of the Tasmanian 15-19 age cohort is in neither full-time education nor employment.

Factors affecting education participation rates include:

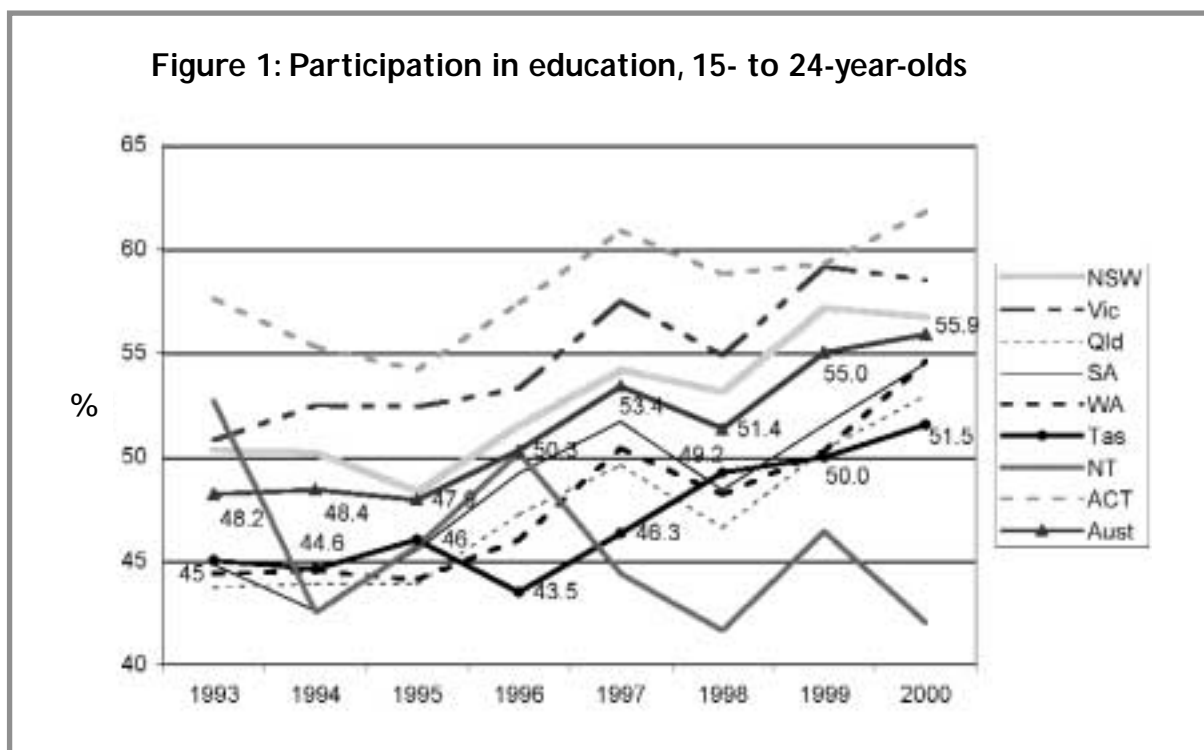
- ◆ socio-economic profile of the population,
- ◆ young people's, families' and communities' valuing of education,
- ◆ curriculum and nature of available education and training,
- ◆ educational and youth employment and welfare policy settings,
- ◆ financial incentives and barriers,
- ◆ level of economic activity,
- ◆ structure of the economy in terms of industry and occupation, and
- ◆ degree of rurality of the region or State.

Youth participation in education

This paper has been prepared as a summary of current information on educational participation and retention in Tasmania relative to other Australian States and Territories, and to countries overseas. The trends and statistics presented provide background and benchmarks against which to consider the education/training participation targets set by Tasmania *Together*, the long-term strategic plan for Tasmania. Targets or benchmarks are important because they give the community something to aim for and are a way of measuring progress. The paper also summarises the many factors which influence participation outcomes, and which need to be taken into account in designing programs to improve these outcomes. A much longer resource document discussing the issues has also been prepared for further reference.

State comparison

Australian youth participation in education (school, VET and higher education) has trended upward since 1993. Tasmanian participation rates have generally followed the national pattern, though at a lower level. Tasmania participation rates have been consistently lower than the ACT, Victoria and New South Wales and the national average (Figure 1).



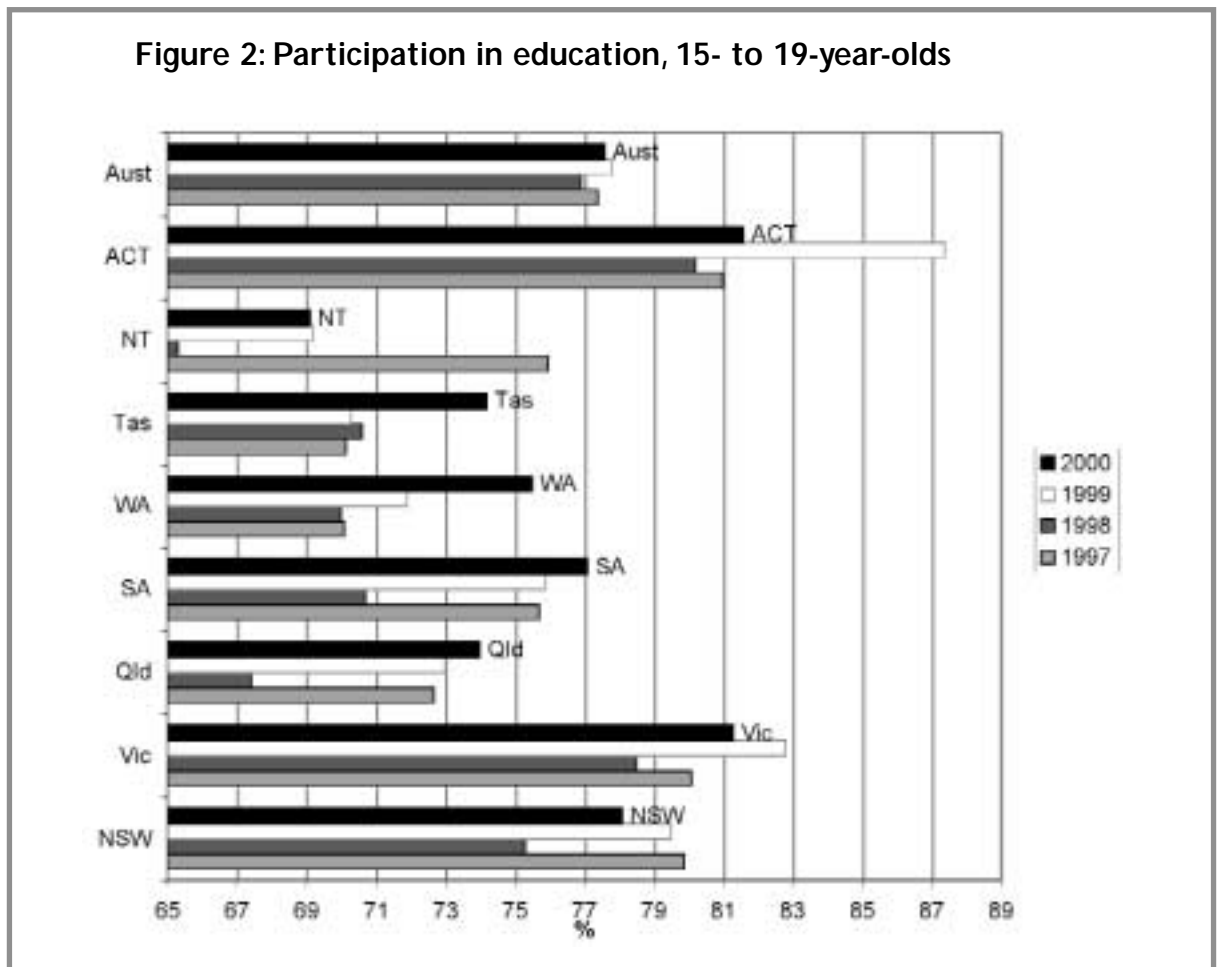
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Australian Social Trends, 1994-2001. Estimates for the NT except schools data and VET clients refer to mainly urban areas only. State higher education data exclude the Australian Catholic University which has campuses in more than one State. This applies to all figures in this paper sourced from Australian Social Trends.

Data is from the *Transition from Education to Work* surveys. The relatively small sample size for Tasmania could be expected to contribute to more variation in Tasmanian estimates than those for larger states.

While educational participation by Tasmanian 15-to 19-year-olds in recent years has been lower than that in most other States, the difference between Tasmania and other States is particularly marked for the 20–24 age group (Figures 2 and 3).

Post-compulsory education and training participation builds the stock of skills in the economy and is an important determinant of future individual and State/national economic and social well-being (Cullen 1998).

Research has identified level of initial education as an important influence on participation in post-secondary education. Roussel (2000) found that participation in some form of education or training rose from 82% for individuals with a Year 10 qualification to 97% for those with a post-graduate degree. Other research highlights the labour market disadvantage of early school leavers (Curtain 1998; Ainley, Malley &

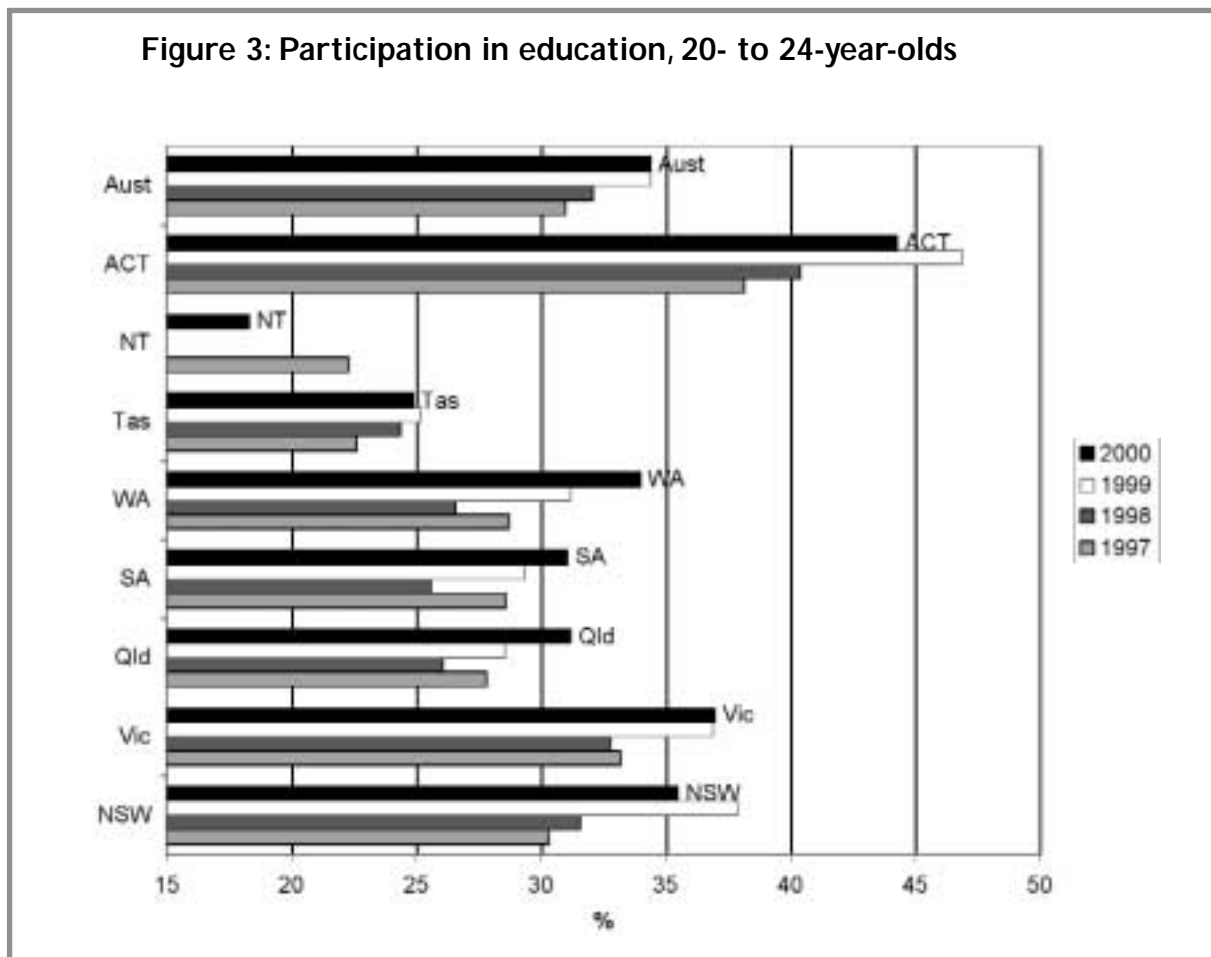


Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Australian Social Trends 1998, 1999, 2000 (various dates) and Participation in Education 1997 6272.0 (Sept figs)

Lamb 1997; McKenzie 2000). OECD research (1998) has identified dislike of school as an important reason for early leaving in Australia and a more recent survey (OECD 2000) recommended reform of curriculum to make schooling more relevant and useful to potential early leavers.

Tasmania *Together* sets a target for participation in full- and part-time education by 20-to 24-year-olds of progress toward the national average, with the average to be reached by 2015. 1997 rates quoted in Tasmania *Together* goal 4 are 60% for Tasmania and 75% nationally, which are stated to be based on unpublished data from the ABS *Transition from Education to Work* survey. The figure quoted appears to be the labour force participation rate (nationally 75.9% in 2000, see Table 6 of the 2000 issue of *Transition from Education to Work*), rather than the educational participation rate for this aged group.

Figure 3: Participation in education, 20- to 24-year-olds



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Australian Social Trends 1998, 1999, 2000 (various dates) and Participation in Education 1997 6272.0 (Sept figs)

International comparison

Tasmanian participation in education by both the 15–19 and 20–24 age groups ranks near the bottom of OECD country participation rates (Table 1).

A number of factors identified in the literature as affecting education participation rates should be taken into account when making international and interstate comparisons. These include the socioeconomic profile of the population, educational and youth employment and welfare policy settings, level of economic activity, structure of the economy in terms of industry and occupation, and rurality. For example, aggregate national figures mask considerable regional variations, as can be seen from the State-by-State data in Figures 1 to 3. Similarly, data from larger States such as NSW mask regional variations.

Table 1: Per cent in education in 1999			
<i>15–19-year-olds</i>	%	<i>20–24-year-olds</i>	%
Mexico	49.1	Mexico	18.8
Czech Republic	64.3	Czech Republic	19.6
Tasmania	70.3	Tasmania	25.2
Portugal	71.9	Hungary	29.7
Spain	73.6	Greece	31.4
Italy	76.9	United States ¹	33.0
Australia	78.2	Poland	33.1
Hungary	80.9	Portugal	33.6
Netherlands	81.3	Germany	34.3
Country mean	81.3	Australia	34.9
United States ¹	82.2	Italy	35.6
Greece	82.4	Netherlands	35.7
Canada	82.9	Switzerland	35.8
Switzerland	84.4	Country mean	37.9
Denmark	85.8	Canada	40.9
Finland	86.6	Sweden	43.6
Sweden	88.9	Spain	44.2
Luxembourg	89.2	Belgium	47.1
Belgium	89.3	Luxembourg	47.2
Germany	89.5	Finland	50.2
Poland	93.1	France	53.1
France	95.7	Denmark	55.8
¹ 1998 figure			

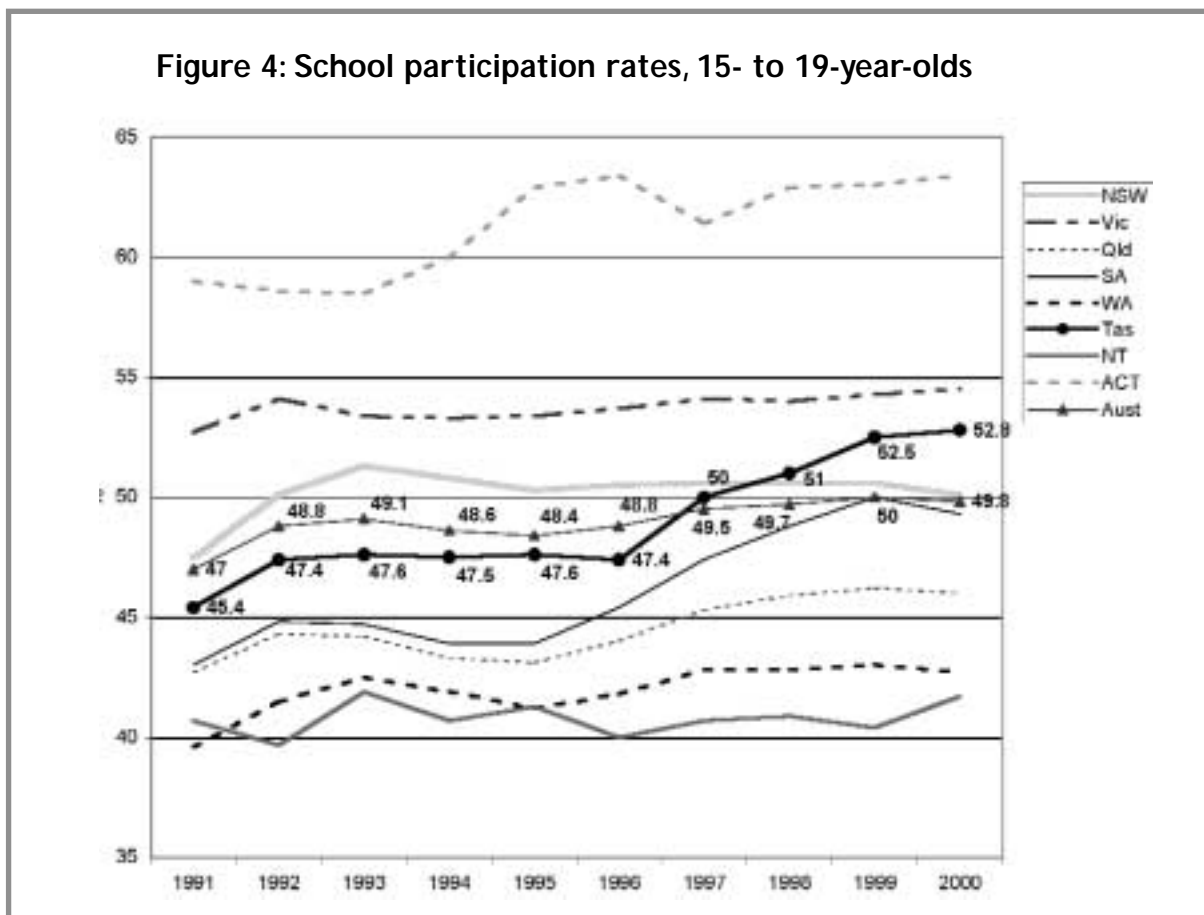
Source: OECD Education and work status of the youth population 1999, Table E3.1. Tasmania figures Australian Bureau of Statistics Australian Social Trends 1999.

School participation

Figure 4 shows the Tasmanian school participation rate has increased relative to the national average over the decade. It has been above the national average since 1997.

Policy has an impact on school participation rates. For example, direct retention from Year 10 to Year 11 in the government sector in Tasmania increased by 17% from 1988/89 to 1990/91 following the introduction of the TCE in 1990 (Department of Education, Tasmania 1999). Factors influencing educational participation over time such as the level of economic activity and state of the youth job market affect school participation rates (see Figure 12).

The school participation rate is the number of students in school as a percentage of the age cohort. This differs from the apparent retention rate, which is used in Tasmania *Together* goals and benchmarks. The apparent retention rate is the percentage of students of a given cohort group who continued to a particular level/year of education. The apparent retention rate is affected more than the school participation rate by policies such as enrolment ages and factors such as interstate migration and is therefore less useful for comparative purposes.

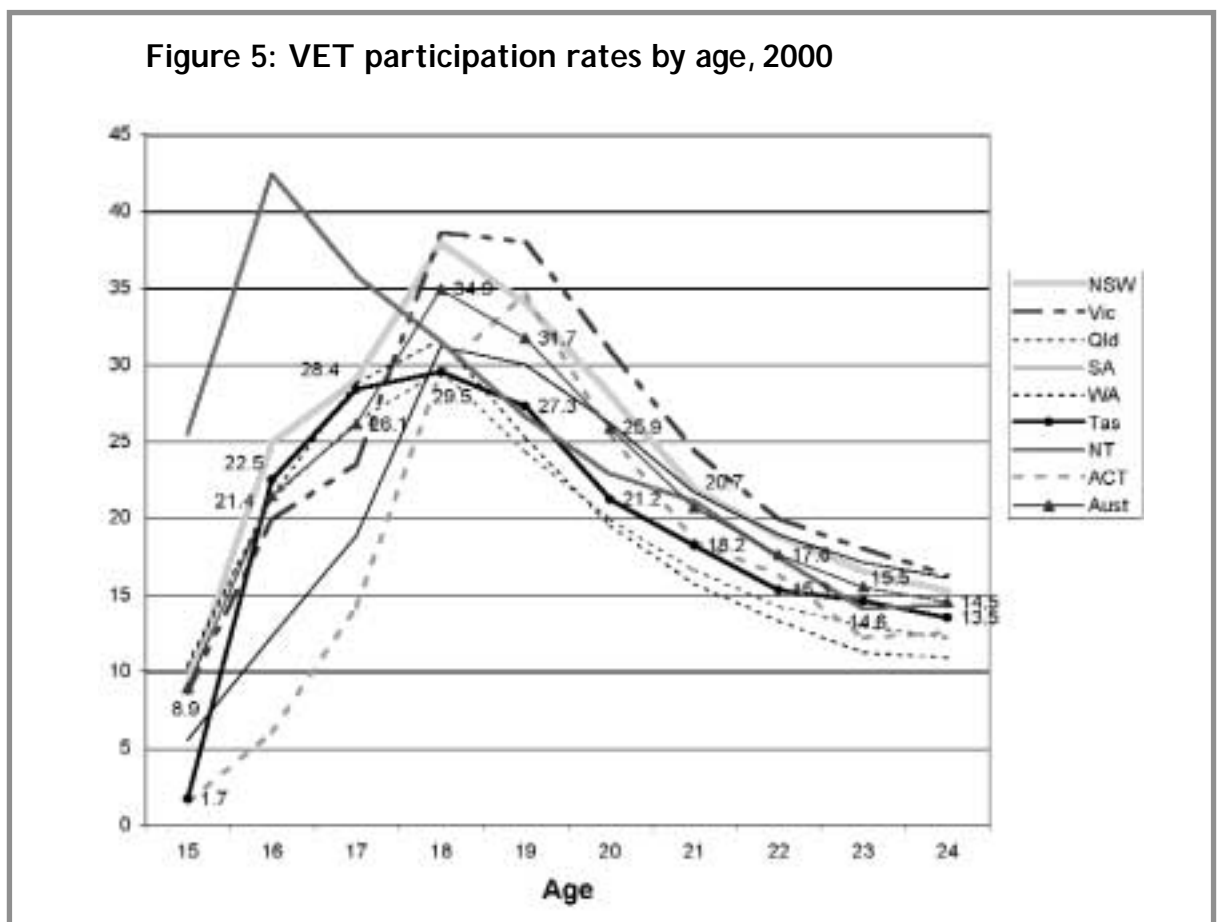


Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics Schools 4221.0 1992-2000. Full time students only.

VET participation

Figure 5 shows Tasmanian VET age participation rates tend to be below the national average (see also Figures 6 and 7). Participation rates for both age groups have risen rapidly in recent years in all States, although rates for 20- to 24-year-olds in the higher participation rate States of Victoria and Western Australia may be plateauing (see Figure 7)

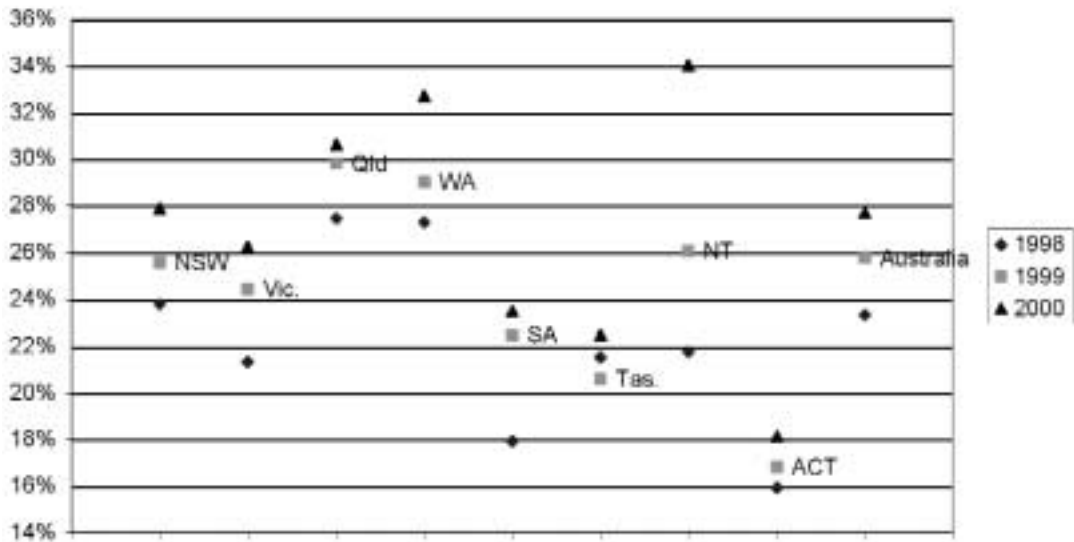
The Post-Compulsory Education and Training in Tasmania (POCOT) Draft Report (Department of Education, Tasmania 1999) recommended adoption of the proposed national target of 40% of Year 11 and 12 students to be involved in VET by 2004. In 1997 the participation rate was 13.5%.



Source 2000 ANTA Annual National Report, Volume 3.

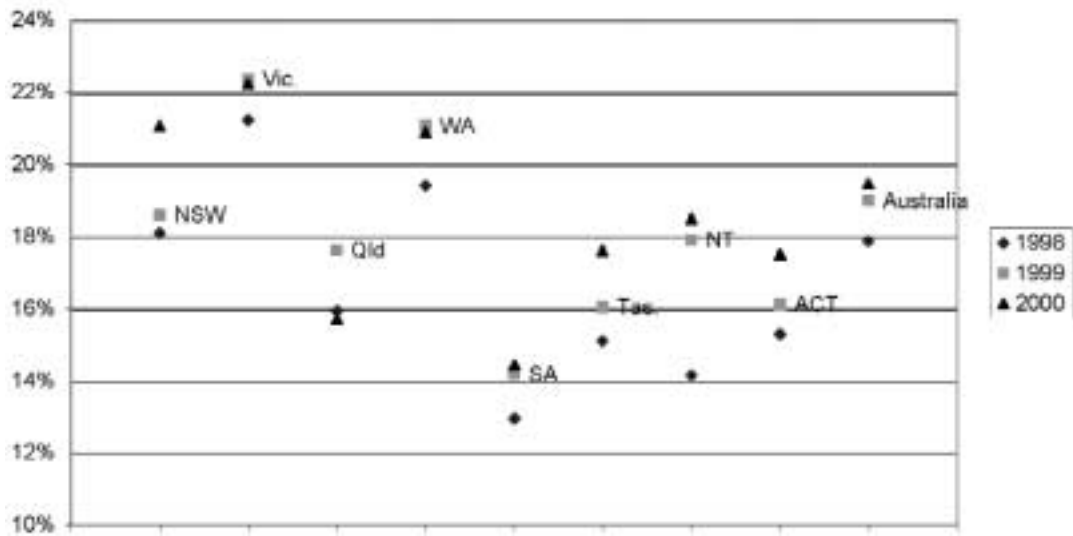
Note that there are discrepancies in the scope of data collection between States and Territories, especially in relation to the inclusion of VET in schools participants. The net effect of these discrepancies is to under report Tasmanian and ACT participation. For example, school-based apprenticeships are excluded from the Tasmanian collection.

Figure 6: VET participation rates, 15- to 19-year-olds



Source: NCVER participation by age as at 30 June. ABS Estimated Resident Population by Age and Sex 3201.01-3201.09

Figure 7: VET participation rates, 20- to 24-year-olds



Source: NCVER participation by age as at 30 June. ABS Estimated Resident Population by Age and Sex 3201.01-3201.09

Higher education participation

Tasmanian higher education participation rates have been consistently at or near the bottom of State rates since 1993 (Figure 8).

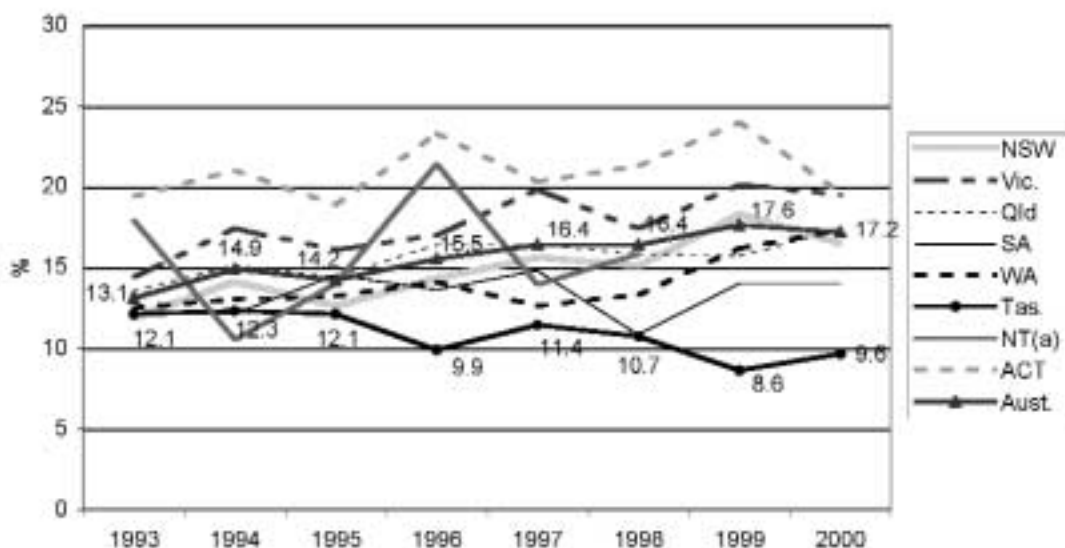
“In 1997, the participation rate of 10% in higher education in the Australian Capital Territory was equal to the participation rate in all tertiary education [VET plus higher education] in Tasmania” (ABS 1998).

More detailed examination of the 2000 higher education enrolments shows that Tasmania has a relatively low proportion of the 15–19 age cohort in higher education compared to other States and the national average (see Figure 9). Participation by 20- to 24-year-olds is higher than Queensland and Western Australia and similar to South Australia.

Further investigation shows that Tasmania is a net exporter of higher education students – 18.3% of all students enrolled in award courses with declared Tasmanian home addresses were enrolled interstate in 1999 (Hogan & Lamb 2000).

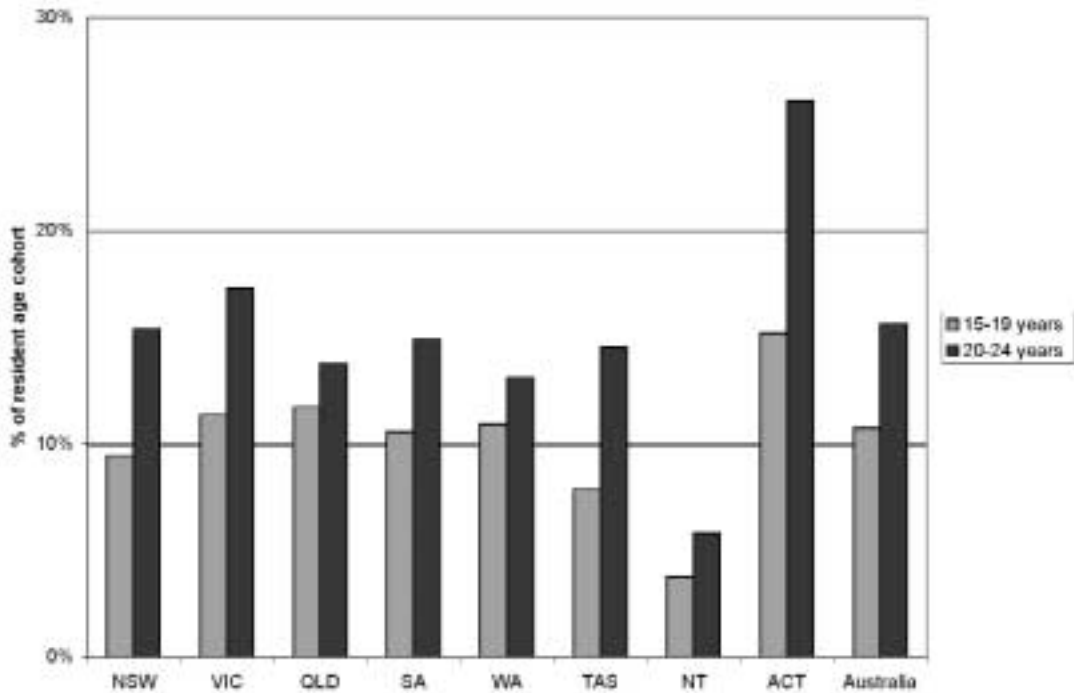
Tasmania *Together* sets a non-age-specific target of 15% participation in VET and higher education by 2010.

Figure 8: Participation in higher education by 15- to 24-year-olds



Includes overseas students
 (a) some NT data missing
 Source: Australian Social Trends 1998, 1999, 2000.

Figure 9: Higher education participation, 2000



Australian students (i.e. excluding overseas students) as percentage of resident age cohort.

Source: DETYA statistics and Australian Bureau of Statistics Population Estimates, age as at 30 June (DETYA statistics age adjusted).

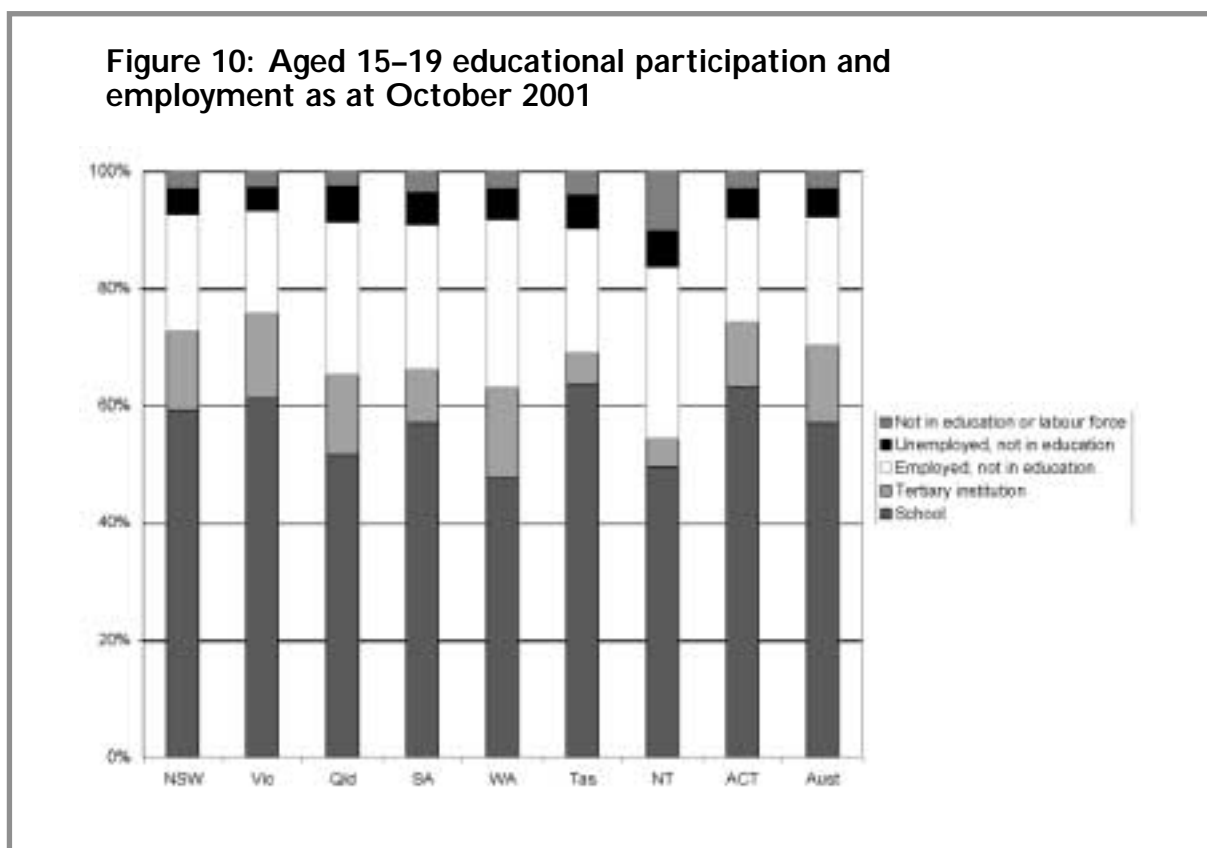
Participation in education and employment – the overall picture

Figure 10 shows composite figures for Australian youth aged 15–19 years in terms of education, employment and unemployment, by State or Territory.

A smaller proportion of Tasmanian 15- to 19-year-olds in October 2001 was employed and not in education than in all other States except Victoria and New South Wales. This is likely to be a reflection of the labour market in general, and opportunities for youth employment in particular.

There is no similar published or publicly available breakdown for 20- to 24-year-olds by State.

Figure 10 again shows Tasmania's high school participation rate and low VET and higher education (tertiary) participation rate.

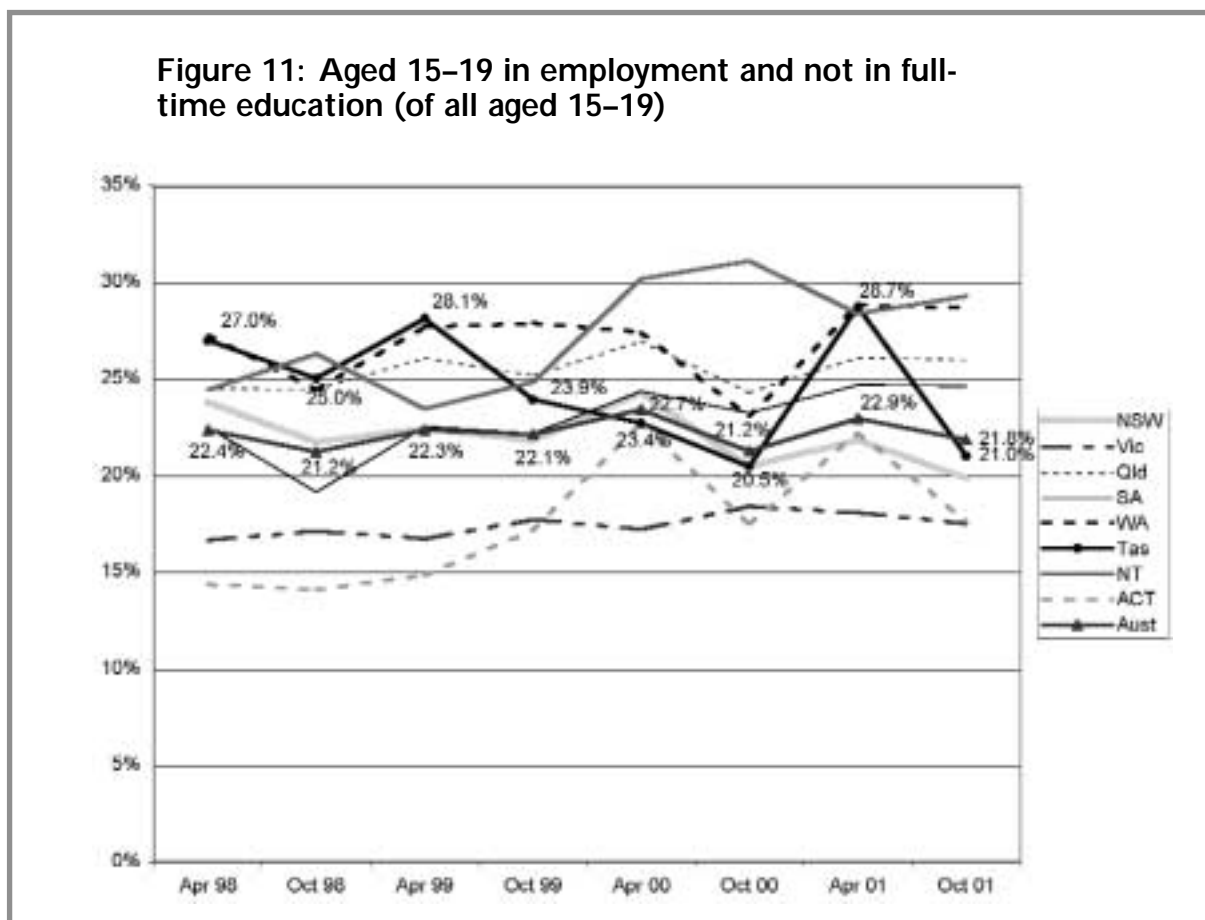


Students classified as attending school or a tertiary institution may also be employed.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics :Labour Force, Teenage Employment and Unemployment, Australia, Preliminary Data Report 6202.0.40.001, Oct 2001.

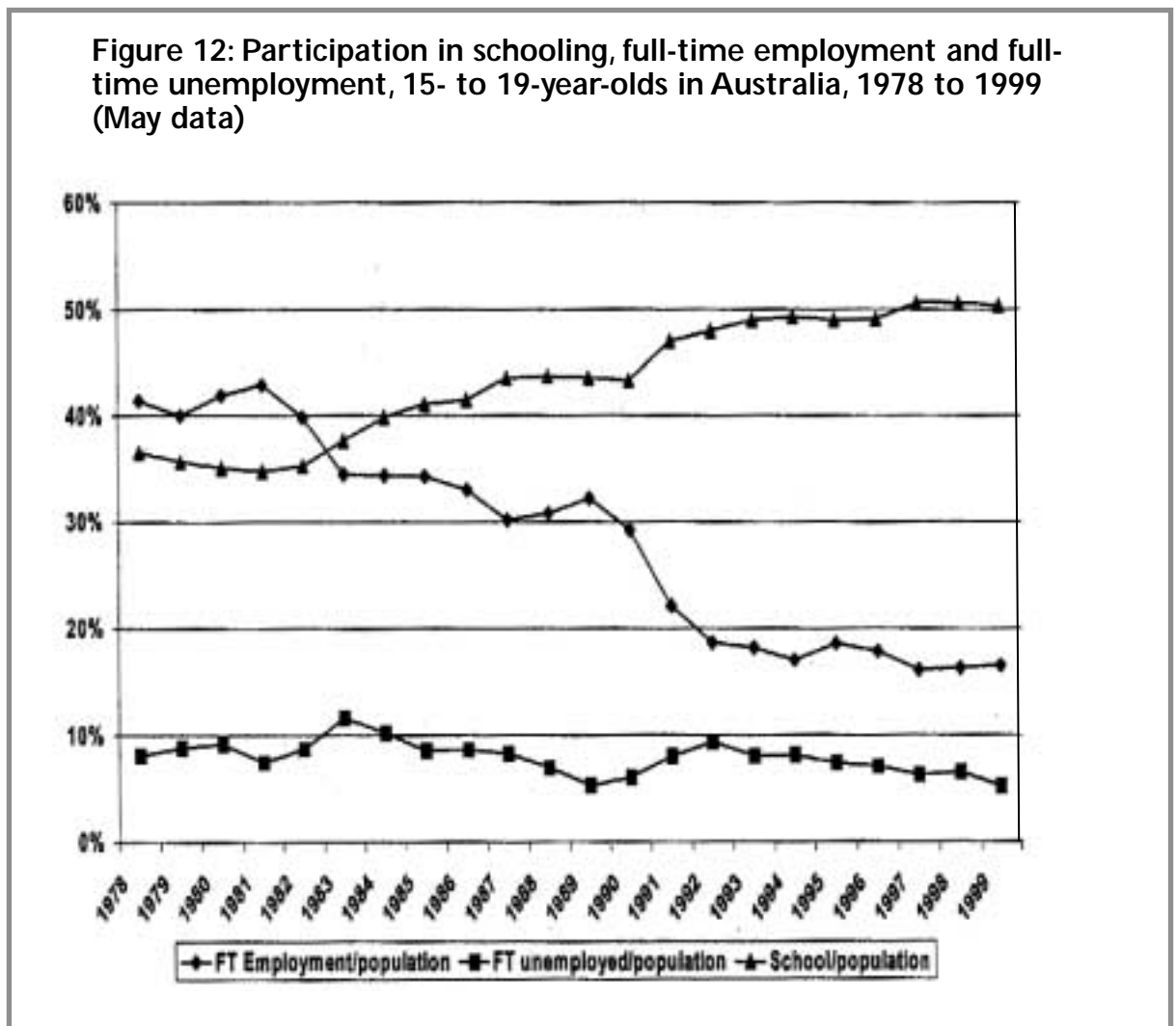
Participation in employment only

Figure 11 shows that over recent years the proportion of Tasmanian teenagers in employment and not in full-time education or training has tended to be higher than the national average, and consistently higher than Victoria in particular.



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics: Labour Force, Teenage Employment and Unemployment, Australia, Preliminary Data Report 6202.0.40.001, April and October issues 1998–2001.

Figure 12 shows participation in schooling, full-time employment and full-time unemployment for 15- to 19-year-olds in Australia between 1978 and 1999 (May data). The most significant change in the teenage labour market during the last two decades has been the decline in the number of full time job opportunities. Many commentators observe that this has helped fuel the marked increases in school retention and levels of participation in higher education (e.g. Wooden 1998). Others believe the growth in educational participation results from several trends – the expansion of the number of places available, the substantial increase in the number of young people completing Year 12 and qualifying for entry to university and other forms of further education and the downturn in labour market opportunities (Lamb, Long & Malley 1998).



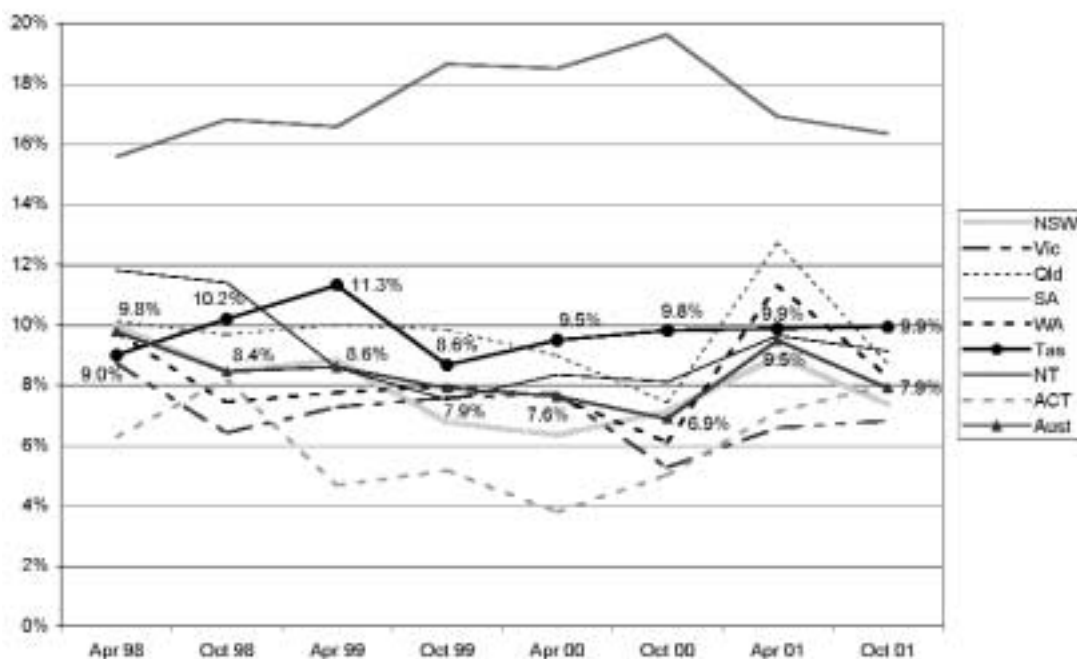
Source: ABS Labour Force Surveys (Cat. no. 6203.0) (various dates) from DETYA (2000, p.7).
 Note 'FT' denotes full-time.

Non-participation in education or employment

The net result of educational participation and employment is a relatively high proportion of Tasmanian 15-19 year olds in neither education nor work (see Figure 13).

Less than 10% of the Tasmanian 15-19 age cohort is in neither full-time education nor (any) employment. Tasmanian figures are higher than the national average and appear to be less volatile to the economic cycle than other States. Over the period since 1998 shown in Figure 13 the Tasmanian figures have been lower than the *Tasmania Together* target of 18% by 2005. This target appears to have been based on the proportion of those not in full-time education who are unemployed, which was 21.8% in October 2001, rather than the proportion of all 15-19 year olds not employed or in education, which is much lower (9.9%).

Figure 13: Aged 15–19 not in full-time education and not employed (of all aged 15–19)



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics: Labour Force, Teenage Employment and Unemployment, Australia, Preliminary Data Report 6202.0.40.001, April and October issues 1998-2001

International comparison

The Tasmanian figure puts it at the average of OECD countries in an international comparison of young people not in education or employment in 1999 (see Table 2). The proportion of Tasmanian 15- to 19-year-olds in neither education nor employment was 8.6% in October 1999, equal to the OECD country mean and higher than the Australian mean of 7.4%. However, the economic outlook in Australia is better than that in some of the comparison countries.

Table 2: International comparison of young people not in education or employment in 1999			
<i>% of 15-19 age group</i>		<i>% of 20-24 age group</i>	
France	3.3	Denmark	7.6
Denmark	3.4	Netherlands	8.0
Netherlands	3.8	Switzerland	8.4
Germany	4.5	Luxembourg	9.6
Poland	4.6	Sweden	11.4
Sweden	4.8	Canada	11.7
Luxembourg	5.0	Portugal	12.3
Switzerland	6.0	United States ¹	14.4
Canada	6.9	Australia	14.5
Belgium	7.0	Belgium	15.9
United States ¹	7.3	Germany	16.7
Australia	7.4	Country mean	16.7
Portugal	8.4	Finland	16.9
Country mean	8.6	France	17.5
Tasmania Oct 99	8.6	Spain	18.8
Finland	8.7	Czech Republic	20.6
Greece	10.1	Hungary	21.4
Hungary	10.2	Greece	25.7
Spain	13.8	Mexico	26.2
Italy	14.8	Poland	27.2
Mexico	17.9	Italy	29.9
Czech Republic	20.9		

¹1998 figure

Source: OECD Education and work status of the youth population 1999, Table E3.1.

Summary of factors affecting participation in education and training

A basic and underlying factor appears to be successful completion of lower levels of schooling. Low achievers at school are far more likely to attempt to enter the labour force on leaving school without undertaking any further formal education or training (Lamb, Long & Malley 1998). Students of higher ability, in terms of their performance on numeracy and reading achievement tests at the age of 14, are more likely to complete Year 12 than those of low ability (Misko 1999). Other research has shown the decline in school completion has been strongest in areas and among groups where failure in key subject areas has grown (Teese 1996). Factors associated with social background and social capital are influential in the decision to complete or not complete school (Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman 2002) and include parental occupation, parental education level, gender, NESB (including indigenous) and home location (Ainley 1998). Student and parental aspirations and values are especially important (Abbott-Chapman, Easthope & O'Connor 1997; Ainley, Malley & Lamb 1997; Miller & Volker 1989; OECD 1997; Lynch & O'Riordan 1998; Archer & Hutchings 2000; Gorard, Rees & Fevre 1999; Darby 2000). The socioeconomic profile of Tasmania tends to be lower than that of the nation as a whole, which partly explains Tasmania's lower post-school educational participation rates.

On the positive side, McClelland, MacDonald and Macdonald (1998) believe a number of studies have shown that school-based early intervention programs can play a part in assisting young homeless people to complete their education, and Ainley, Malley and Lamb (1997) believe there is some evidence that where reforms to curricula, assessment and teaching were most far-reaching, there was the most rapid rise in school retention during the 1980s and early 1990s. However, Abbott-Chapman and Kilpatrick (2001) have revealed some reluctance among teachers to promote VET programs in Tasmanian schools.

Government policies and changes to these policies have enormous potential to affect education and training participation rates. Recently through the introduction of the Common Youth Allowance in July 1998, attempts have been made to encourage 16- to 17-year-olds to see that their long-term futures are reliant on their continuing in full time education and training (McClelland, MacDonald & Macdonald 1998). However, the success of this policy will be limited if the students do not like school as suggested by recent surveys (OECD 1998). Clearly, concurrent changes to school programs are also needed. Steps have also been taken to improve the education-to-work transition by strengthening or creating pathways that connect schooling and work for the majority of young people who neither enter university nor obtain an apprenticeship after leaving school (McKenzie 2000).

The structure of the economy in terms of industry and occupation has an impact on required qualification levels and so educational participation. The MONASH Forecasting model (Centre for Policy Studies 2001) uses economic structure and expected economic growth to predict that Tasmanian levels of educational attainment will rise by less than the Australian average for all levels of attainment between 1999-2000 and 2007-08. The Tasmanian skilled vocational growth rate will be negative 0.06% compared to the national average of 0.83%, and the number of people in Tasmania with Bachelor degrees is expected to rise by 1.53% compared to 2.68% for Australia as a whole.

A significant change in the teenage and young adult labour market during the last decade has been the decline in the number of full-time job opportunities. This has impacted on rates of education and training participation, and some say fuelled the marked increases that have occurred (e.g. Wooden 1998).

Demographic change in Tasmania is a key factor that will affect participation rates. By 2011 Tasmania will be the State/Territory with the oldest population and the first to enter natural decline (Jackson 2001).

Jackson predicts that university and TAFE participation rates will be affected by the decrease in the labour force entry-exit ratio (or the decrease in the number of young people reaching the age of labour force entry to those approaching retirement and leaving). She suggests that this will increase the demand for the labour of young people. Such a situation could see a reduction rather than an increase in post-compulsory education and training participation.

The degree of rurality of a region has an impact on post-compulsory educational aspiration and, consequently, on participation (Kilpatrick & Abbott-Chapman 2002). Young people living in rural parts of Australia are less likely to complete Year 12 and more likely to participate in apprenticeships than their urban-based counterparts (Lamb, Long & Malley, 1998).

Bureau of Rural Sciences (1999), for example, shows that in 1996 Tasmania's educational participation rate for 16-year-olds was similar to more remote regions in Australia. Map 69 in that publication shows that the north-west coast, north-east, east coast and midlands, with the exception of the area around Launceston, had a school participation rate for 16-year-olds in 1996 that was 20% or more below the Australian non-metropolitan average. The area around Launceston, the west coast and Meander Valley's participation rate was 10–20% below the Australian non-metropolitan average. In contrast, all of Victoria and most of New South Wales and South Australia's populated areas were above the non-metropolitan average.

Educational targets

The Tasmania *Together* targets for educational participation by 15- to 19 and 20- to 24-year olds and current participation rates are set out in Table 3 below. Related Tasmania *Together* targets that do not specify participation rates for the 15–24 age group appear in Table 4.

Table 3: Tasmania <i>Together</i> educational participation target	
<i>Tasmania Together educational participation target</i>	<i>Most recent figure</i>
Proportion of 20- to 24-year-olds participating in education and training to equal the national average by 2015, and Tasmania to be the best performing state by 2020.	Tasmania 24.9% National average 34.4% Best performers: Victoria 37.0%, ACT 44.3% (All figures for 2000, see Figure 3)
Reduce by three quarters the proportion of young people not working or studying. 15-19 yr olds not employed or in education 18% by 2005, 15% 2010, 10% 2015, 5% 2020.	Tasmania 9.9% (Oct. 2001, see Figure 13)

Table 4: Tasmania <i>Together</i> target
School retention rate Years 7–12: 75% by 2005, 80% 2010, 90% 2015, 95% by 2020.
Years 10–12 retention rate 80% by 2005, best in Australia by 2010.
Participation in VET and university 15% by 2010 (no age groups specified).

There are only three examples, apart from the Tasmania *Together* targets, of educational participation or completion targets in Australian jurisdictions since the beginning of the 1990s.

- ◆ Victoria has set a target of completion of Year 12 or equivalent (skilled vocational or higher) by 90% of young people by 2010 (no age specified) (Curtain 2001).
- ◆ By 2010 Queensland aims to have the proportion of young people completing Year 12 or equivalent to match that projected by leading OECD countries, or 88% (Department of Education Queensland 2000).

Finn (1991) set targets for Australia to be reached by 2001 of:

- ◆ 95% of 19-year-olds participating in Year 12 OR completed Year 12 OR completed Year 10 or 11 and participating in or completed some formally recognised education and training, and
- ◆ 60% of 22-year-olds participating in education and training leading to AQF 3 or above.

As of May 2000 only 85.6% of 19-year-olds were participating in Year 12, had completed Year 12 or completed Year 10 or 11 and were participating in or had completed some formally recognised education or training. On current trends this first Finn target will not be met until 2007 (Curtain 2001, pp.15-16). The second Finn target has been reached – with May 2000 data showing 67.7% of 22-year-olds (target 60%) participating in education and training leading to a qualification of AQF 3 or above. Curtain (2001 p.16) rates the Finn targets as “now seriously out of date” and representing a level of education attainment that is far behind the threshold education benchmark of upper secondary school completion or the equivalent set by leading OECD countries.

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