

Education trends in Australia

The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSTEM) at the University of Canberra and AMP have published a report on the state of education in Australia. Using ABS statistics, Government reports and other data, this report presents a snapshot of Australian educational trends.

The full report and executive summary can be downloaded from the NATSEM website. Below is a dot-point summary of part of the report that may be relevant and interesting to educators at girls' schools.

- The number of people with a university-level degree has increased significantly over time, increasing from 17 % to 23.7 % over the past decade, with over 3.5 million Australians currently holding a Bachelor Degree or higher (p. 14).
- Women, in particular, are far more likely to gain a Bachelor Degree than men – a trend that is seen across all age groups and a gap that continues to widen with about 300,000 more women with this qualification than men. These differences are particularly noticeable in the younger age groups, with many more women obtaining a Bachelor Degree than men. This pattern is not only likely to be influenced by changes in social paradigms, but also educational standards, with fields such as nursing moving into the higher tertiary sector (p. 14).
- Significant gender divisions in enrolment rates for non-school qualifications are evident in the Australian tertiary education system and throughout the world. These differences often give rise to occupational and industrial segregation, which can in turn contribute to gender pay gaps (p. 14).
- There are stark gender differences, with information technology, engineering, architecture and building courses all heavily skewed toward male student enrolments. Between 78 and 91% of all students in these courses are men. Women, on the other hand, are much more likely to be enrolled in fields of study such as health, education, society and culture, hospitality and creative arts, with between 63 and 79% of all enrolments women. (p. 14).
- Proportions of people enrolled in non-school qualification by field of study and gender, (2011):
 - Natural and physical sciences: 41% Male 59% Female
 - Information technology: 78% Male 23% Female
 - Engineering and related technologies: 91% Male 9% Female
 - Architecture and building: 79% Male 21% Female
 - Agriculture, environmental and related studies: 47% Male 52% Female
 - Health: 27% Male 73% Female
 - Education: 21% Male 79% Female
 - Management and commerce: 45% Male 55% Female
 - Society and culture: 29% Male 71% Female
 - Creative arts: 35% Male 65% Female
 - Food, hospitality and personal services: 37% Male 63% Female

- There remain substantial differences in terms of access to higher education – particularly university education, with those from lower socio-economic backgrounds unlikely to attain higher education (p. 16). Of all university students, only 15 per cent are from a low socio-economic background (p. 22).
- Over the past decade, student enrolments in Catholic and independent schools have grown at a faster rate than government school enrolments and now account for 22 and 18 % respectively of secondary school enrolments (p. 21).
- School enrolment by type of school and level (2011):
 - Primary: Government 68.9 % Catholic 19.4% Independent 11.7%
 - Secondary: Government 60.3% Catholic 22.0% Independent 17.7%
- Spending on education is one of the top 15 expenditure items for Australian families, with total household expenditure on education increasing from around 2 to 4 % of all household budgets (p. 27).
- A postgraduate woman aged 25 years can expect to earn \$2.49 million, just two-thirds of her male counterpart's lifetime earnings (\$3.78 million). More striking is the fact that women with post-graduate qualifications would earn only as much on average over their lifetime as men with a certificate or Year 12 (p. 30).
- While level of education is an important factor in a person's lifetime earnings prospects, men and women tend to have different outcomes. Employment and earnings patterns of women are often disrupted through childbirth, childcare and other caring responsibilities, and women are more likely to work part rather than full-time. These differences are eventually reflected in lifetime earnings prospects (p. 30).
- The returns to education are high – with those completing Bachelor Degrees earning \$1.2 million more over the course of their working lives than someone who left school by Year 11 (p. 38).
- Gender stereotypes remain strongly embedded in our young adults' choice of fields of education and impact substantially on future work and life opportunities. These skill imbalances follow through into adult work choices and reinforce existing gender pay gaps. Breaking gender stereotypes in education, and moving towards equality of opportunity, becomes a question for us all – governments, parents, schools and business (p. 38).

Cassells, R., Duncan, A., Abello, A., D'Souza, G., & Nepal, B. (2012) *Smart Australians: Education and Innovation in Australia*, AMP.NATSEM Income and Wealth Report, Issue 32, October 2012, Melbourne, AMP. Retrieved 24 October, 2012 from: <http://www.natsem.canberra.edu.au/publications/>