

2024 NSW Post-School Destinations and Experiences Survey

Annual Report

Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation



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- engaging nationally on education research and data strategy issues
- trialling innovative initiatives aimed at improving student outcomes.

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We acknowledge the homelands of all Aboriginal people and pay our respect to Country.

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- the CESE design team for their hard work in preparing the annual report and other deliverables for publication.

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Introduction

The NSW Department of Education ('the department') considers school-to-work transition as one of the most important transitional experiences, particularly with respect to future employment outcomes. The department provides a range of programs and initiatives to ensure young people are prepared for higher education, training and work.

Almost all secondary schools provide work-readiness training and opportunities for students to participate in work experience.

The annual NSW Post-School Destinations and Experiences Survey ('destinations survey' or 'the survey') collects information about where school leavers from NSW Government, Catholic or independent schools are, in the year after leaving or completing school. The destinations survey has been conducted since 2014 and unpacks information on educational pathways, attainments and destinations of school leavers, and informs policymaking related to students' post-school education, training and employment. Results from the destinations survey are also used to support program evaluation relating to post-school destinations of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students.

Results are also used to inform focus area 6 ('Provide meaningful post-school pathways') of Our Plan for NSW Public Education and the related pathways success measure to 'increase the uptake of university, training or work for school leavers from 88.1% in 2023 to 92% in 2027'.¹

The data collected through this survey is essential for policy development, changes, and fulfilling our Australian Government obligations to report on the destinations of early school leavers and Year 12 completers.

This report describes the findings from the 2024 survey which was conducted between July and November 2024. NSW school leavers who completed Year 12 in 2023 (Year 12 completers) or who left school in 2023 while they were in Year 10, 11 or 12 (early school leavers) were invited to participate in the survey.

¹ More information on the pillars and success measures can be found on the department webpage [Our Plan for NSW Public Education](#).

There were 10 main school destinations that relate to further education and current employment:

- bachelor's degree
- vocational education and training (VET) certificate IV+
- VET certificate III
- VET certificate I–II
- apprenticeship
- traineeship
- full-time work
- part-time work
- looking for work
- not in the labour force, further education or training (NILFET).²

2 This classification system is hierarchical and prioritises education-related post-school destinations over participation in paid employment (unless employed as an apprentice or trainee). As such, it represents a young person's main destination since leaving school. For an explanation of the difference between an apprenticeship and a traineeship, refer to [Benefits of apprenticeships and traineeships](#) on the department's website. 'Not in the labour force' means that a person is not working and not looking for work. Additionally, Table 7 In the technical report expands on the detailed logics that feed into each category.

Summary

The 2024 NSW Post-School Destinations and Experiences Survey highlights important patterns and shifts in the post-school pathways of both Year 12 completers and early school leavers. The data reveals changes in education, training and employment participation, common fields of study and common employment roles. Additionally, the survey provides insight into the reasons behind leaving school early, offering valuable information to support targeted interventions and policy development.

Key findings from the 2024 survey

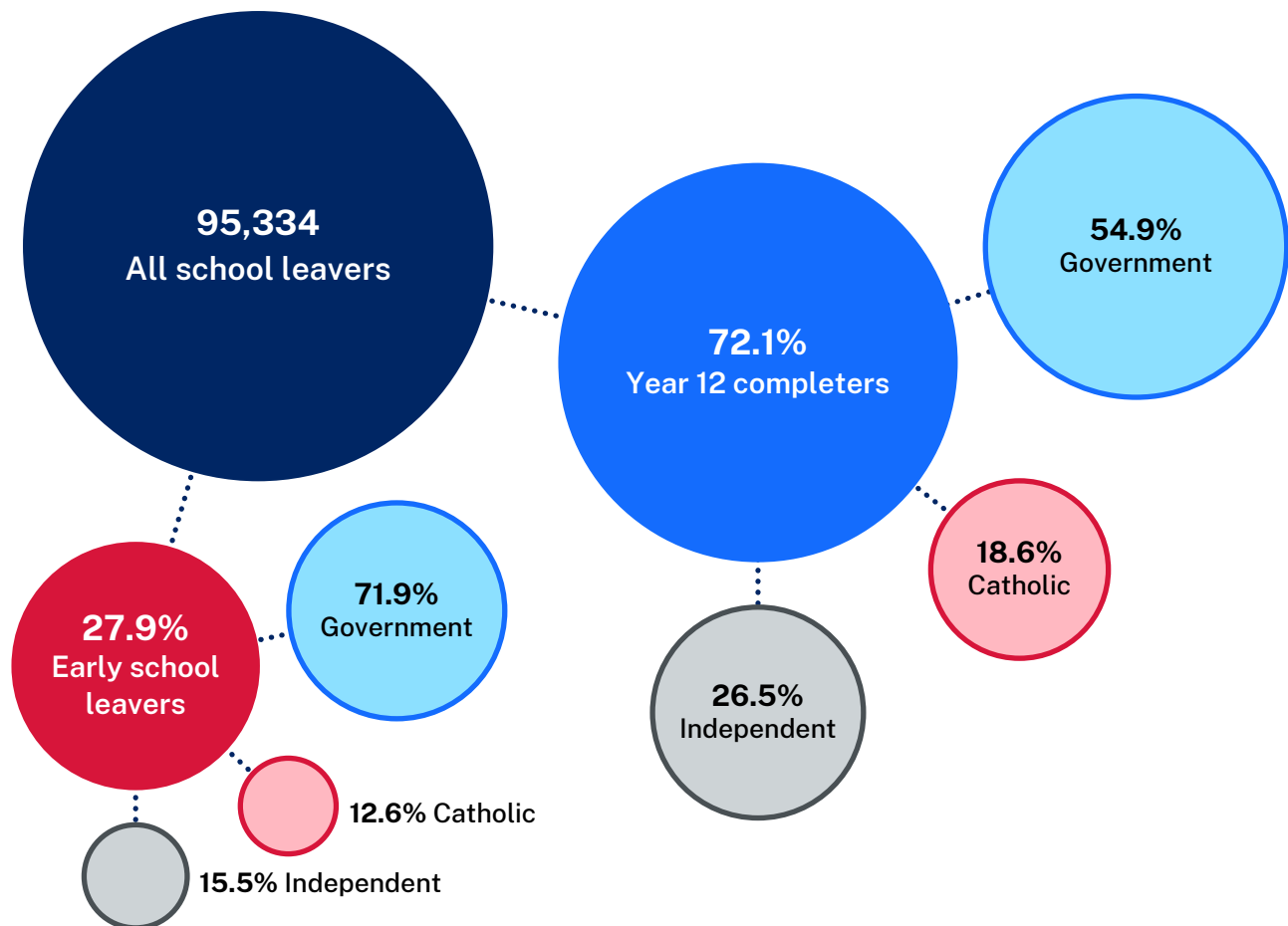
- The estimated percentage of all school leavers in education, training or employment fell 1.3 percentage points (pp) to 89.6% in 2024, representing a system-wide decrease for the second year in a row.
 - Consistent with prior years, the top post-school destination in 2024 for Year 12 completers was bachelor's degree (52.6%), while for early school leavers it was apprenticeships (33.3%).
 - Among Year 12 completers, full-time work participation declined by 0.9 pp, while those not in the labour force, education or training (NILFET) increased by 0.7 pp. Other pathways remained stable.
 - Early school leavers saw a 1.3 pp decrease in studying VET certificate IV or higher and a 1.9 pp drop in full-time work. Part-time work increased by 1.6 pp and NILFET rose by 1.1 pp. Other pathways were unchanged.
- Health was the most common study area in 2024 for bachelor's degree students (22.3%) and VET certificate students (16.6%), continuing previous trends.
- Among apprenticeships, the most common employment area was electrical trade, accounting for 17.7% of all apprentices, and overtaking carpenters and joiners, which fell by 2.8 percentage points to 17.5%.
- Child carers accounted for nearly 3 in every 10 traineeships in 2024.
- Sales assistants (14.8%) was the most common employment area among all school leavers who had a main post-school destination of paid work.
- Around half of early school leavers cite school-related reasons – such as negative environment, dislike of school or teachers, boredom, bullying or disciplinary issues – as their main cause for leaving before completing Year 12.
 - Close to 1 in 3 early school leavers specified reasons related to work training or further study as their main reason for leaving school early.

Who were our NSW school leavers in 2024?

Our NSW school leavers were Year 10, 11 or 12 NSW Government, Catholic or independent school students who left school in 2023. These students may have left before or after completing Year 12. Students who left in Year 10, 11 or 12 before they fulfilled the full pattern of study necessary for the HSC award were categorised as early school leavers. Students who completed Year 12 and were either awarded an HSC or fulfilled all requirements except the HSC minimum standard at the time of leaving school were classified as Year 12 completers.

Figure 1

Sample frame of 2024 NSW Post-School Destinations and Experiences Survey

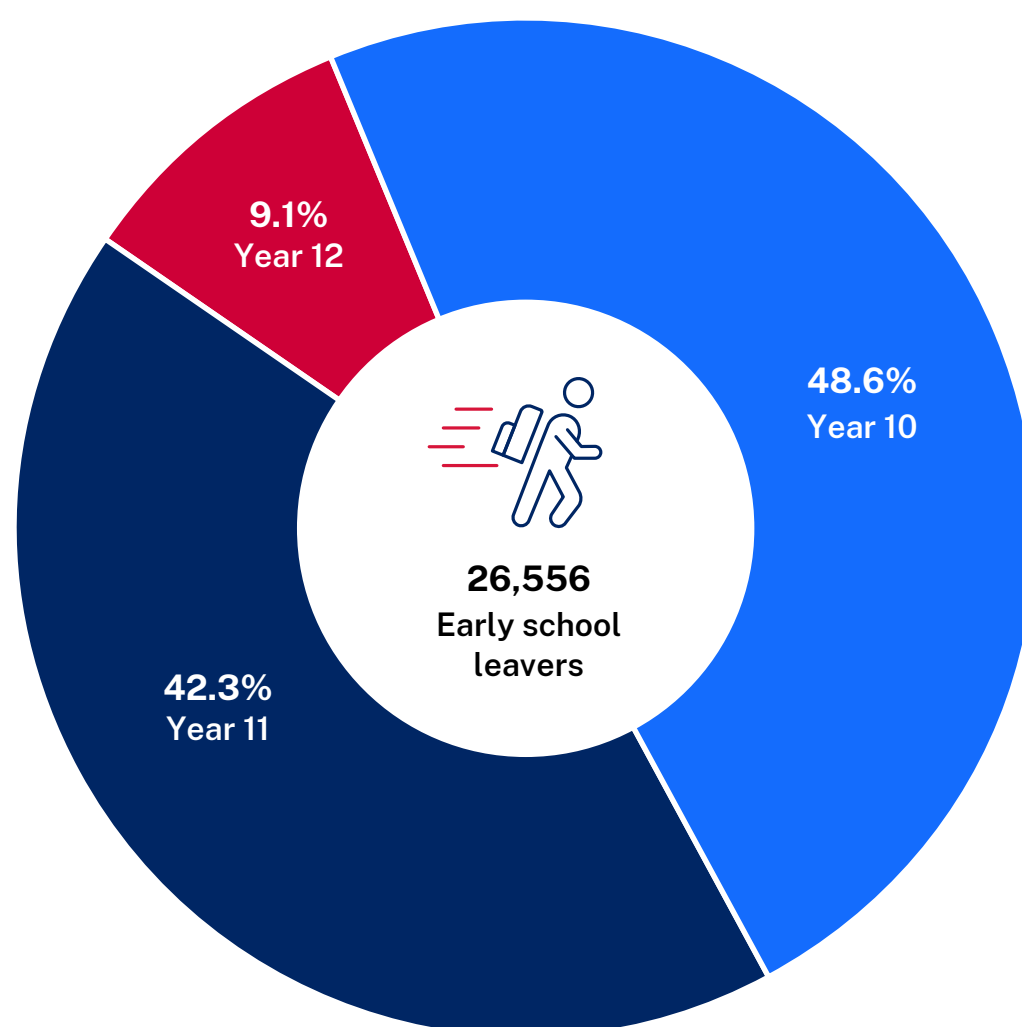


In 2024, all students who left school in 2023 were invited to complete the survey. This report focuses specifically on the educational pathways, attainment and destinations of Year 12 completers and early school leavers in the year after they leave or complete school. A total of 68,778 Year 12 completers and 26,556 early school leavers were invited to take part in the 2024 survey. Responses were received from 30,752 Year 12 completers and 6,483 early school leavers. Compared to 2023, the sample yield in 2024 was about the same for Year 12 completers (47.0% in 2023 and 46.8% in 2024) and slightly better for early school leavers (25.6% in 2023 and 28.4% in 2024).³

It was estimated that close to half (48.6%) of early school leavers were in Year 10 for their final year of study (refer to Figure 2).

Figure 2

Percentage of early school leavers whose final year at school was Year 10, 11 or 12



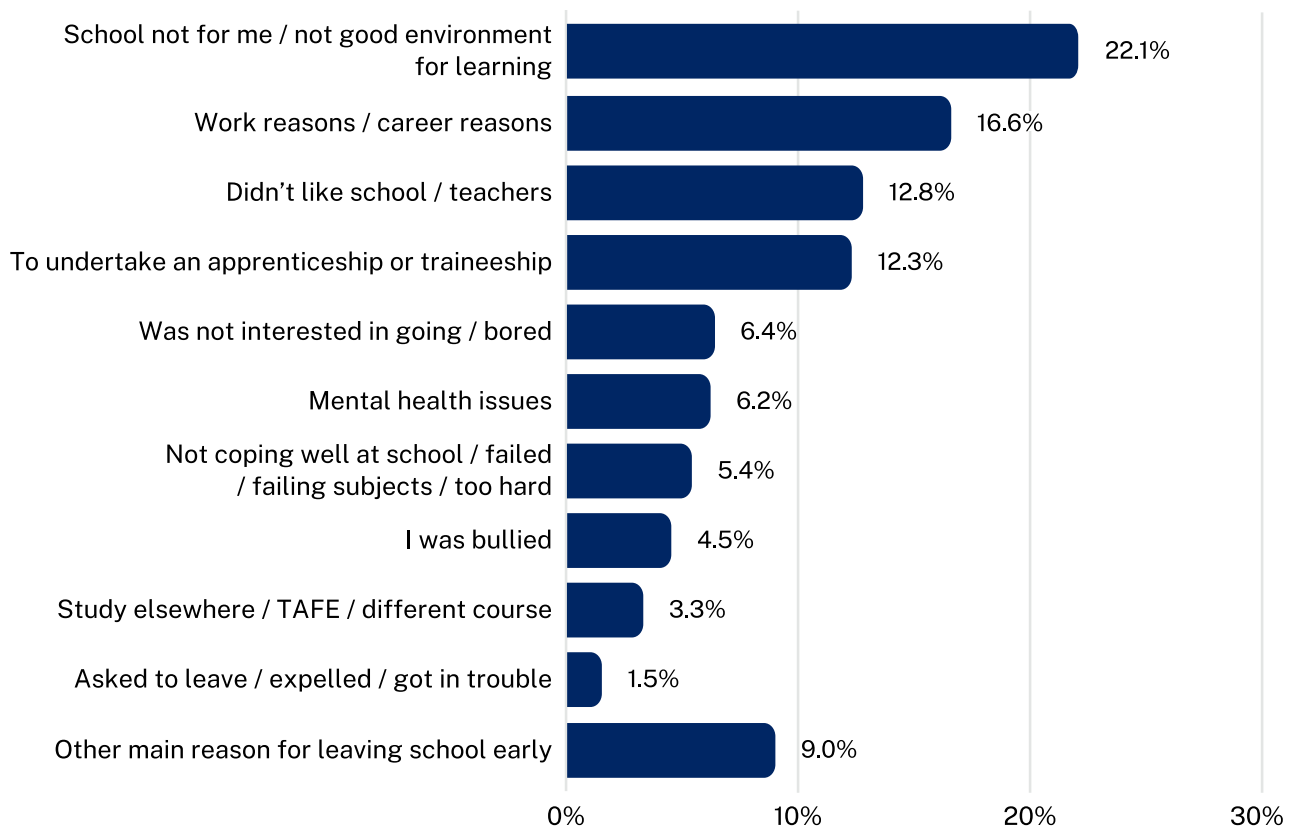
³ Sample yield uses the sample initiated rather than the total population for each leaver type as the base. A detailed outline of the survey method, including eligibility guidelines, response rates and the selection process, can be found in the technical report.

Around half of early school leavers (52.7%) who exited before completing Year 12 cited reasons directly associated with the school environment as their main reason for leaving. When grouped together, responses such as ‘school not for me / not good environment for learning’ (22.1%), ‘didn’t like school / teachers’ (12.8%), ‘was not interested in going / bored’ (6.4%) , ‘not coping well at school / failed / failing subjects / too hard’ (5.4%), ‘I was bullied’ (4.5%), and ‘asked to leave / expelled / got in trouble’ (1.5%) account for early leavers attributing their decision to school-related factors.

Close to 1 in 3 (32.2%) early school leavers specified work (‘work reasons / career reasons’), training (‘to undertake an apprenticeship or traineeship’) or further study (‘study elsewhere / TAFE / different course’) as their main reason for leaving school early (refer to Figure 3).

Figure 3

Top 11 main reasons early school leavers left before completing Year 12



Note: This breakdown includes NESA-identified Year 12 completers who self-identified as early school leavers.

What were the destinations of NSW school leavers in 2024?

Of 95,334 NSW school leavers, about 9 in 10 were estimated to be in education, training or employment in 2024.⁴ Close to two-thirds of this category were estimated to be in education or training, of which the most common destination was enrolment in a bachelor's degree (38.3%). Apprenticeship (13.0%) and VET certificate (9.6%) were the second and third most popular education-or-training-related destinations, followed by traineeships (4.8%). Just under one-quarter of school leavers were in paid work only in 2024, with 15.8% in part-time employment and 8.0% in full-time employment.

It was estimated that about 1 in 10 school leavers were not in employment, education or training (NEET), with 6.8% looking for work and 3.5% categorised as not in the labour force, education or training (NILFET).⁵

For early school leavers, the decrease in overall pathways attainment (being in education, training or employment) between 2023 and 2024 was driven by a decline in the percentage studying VET certificate IV or above (down 1.3 pp) and a reduction in those employed full-time (down 1.9 pp). In contrast, there was an increase in early leavers engaged in part-time work (up 1.6 pp) and those classified as NILFET (up 1.1 pp). The other 6 main destination categories for early leavers remained consistent with 2023.

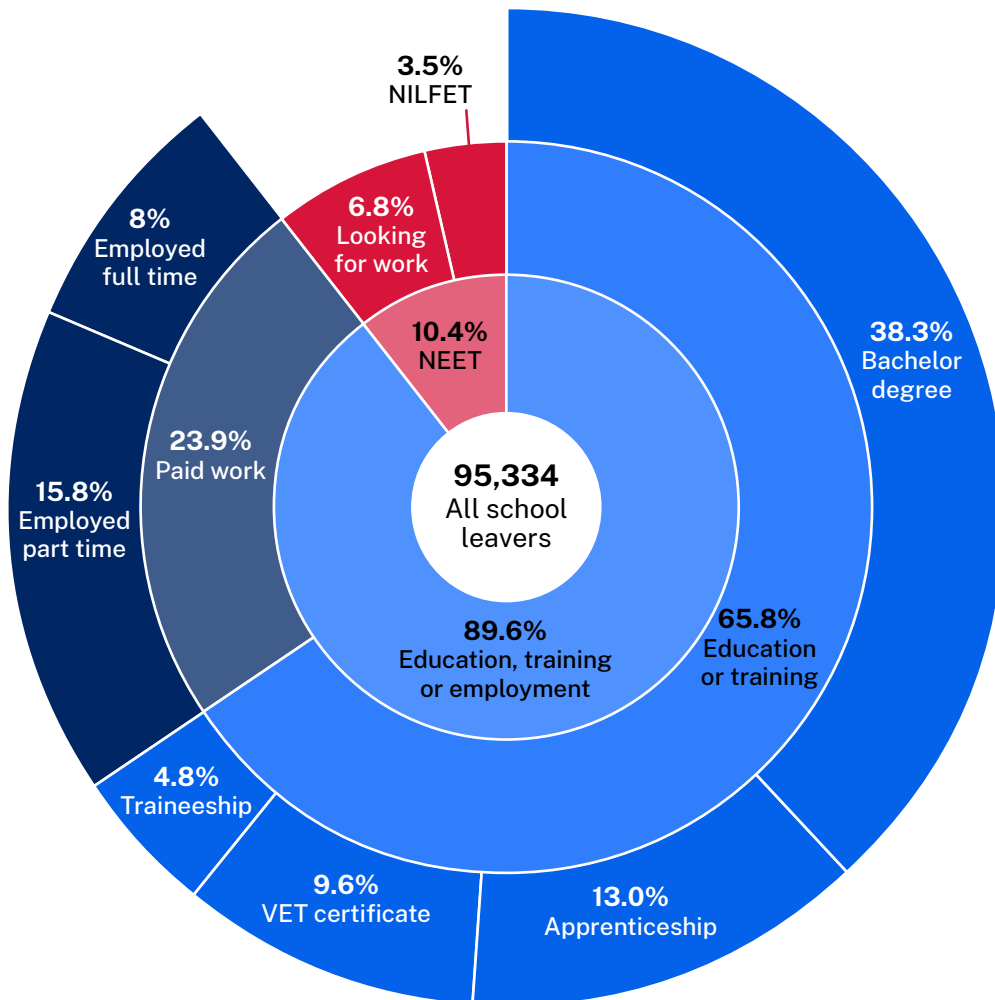
For Year 12 completers, full-time work participation declined by 0.9 pp, while those who were NILFET increased by 0.7 pp. The other destination categories were consistent with 2023.

4 Refer to the [2024 NSW Post-School Destinations and Experiences Survey technical report](#) for more information on estimates.

5 NEET is used to classify any leavers who are not in education, employment or training and includes both those with a main destination of looking for work and those not in the labour force, education or training (NILFET).

Figure 4

Estimated percentage of NSW school leavers in education, training or employment in the year after leaving or completing school, 2024



Historical destinations of NSW school leavers

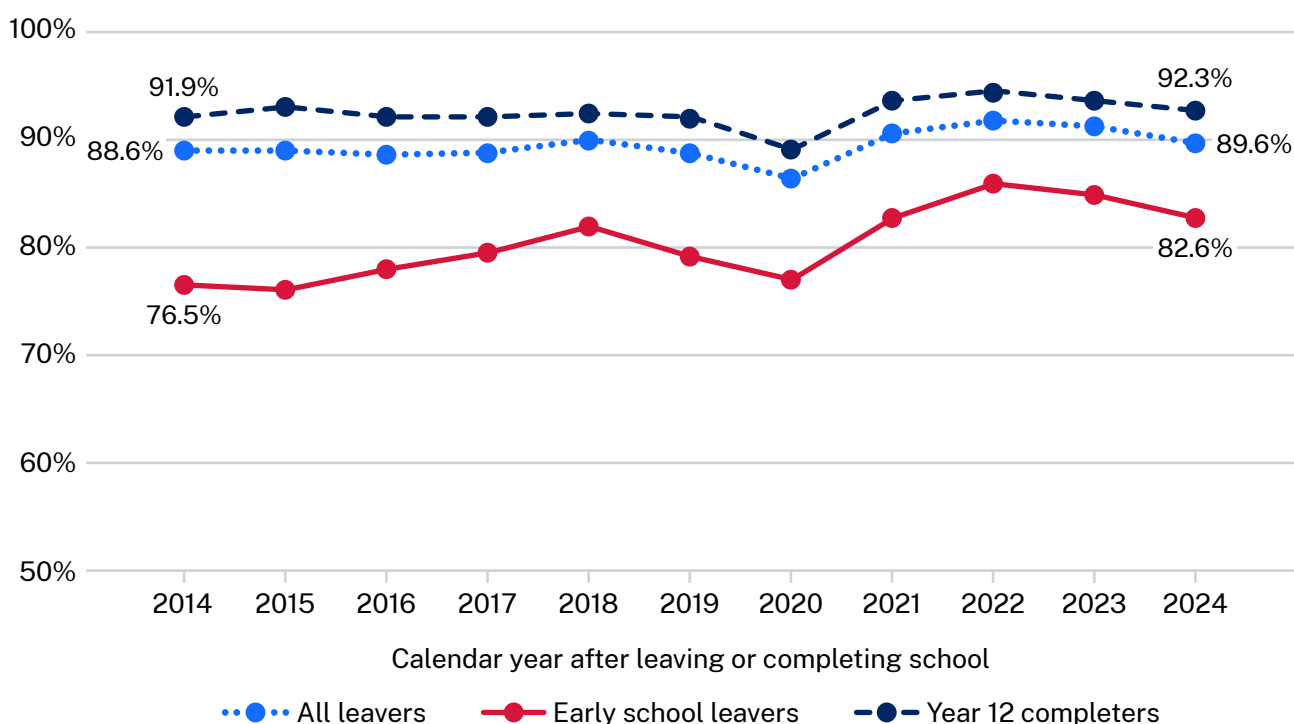
For both leaver types, 2024 saw a continuing decline in the percentage of school leavers in education, training or employment since 2022, with 89.6% of all leavers, 92.3% of Year 12 completers and 82.6% of early school leavers in education, training or employment (refer to Figure 5). Compared to 2023, the percentages of Year 12 completers and early school leavers in education, training or employment have dropped 1.1 pp and 2.0 pp respectively.

For Year 12 completers the percentage in education, training or employment was relatively stable between 2014 and 2019 (at around 92%). This dropped by 2.7 pp in 2020 due to COVID-19 but then rose again (up 5.2 pp over 2 years) to its highest point since survey commencement in 2022. It has dropped again since 2022 (down 1.8 pp over 2 years). For early school leavers there were similar troughs and peaks in 2020 and 2022 respectively but with stronger evidence of an overall upward trend since the survey started in 2014 (average yearly growth of 0.8 pp).

The historical trends and percentages for all leavers and Year 12 completers in education, training and/or employment are similar because the majority of all school leavers for each year were Year 12 completers. For the 2024 survey, 72.1% of all school leavers completed Year 12 (refer to Figure 1).

Figure 5

Estimated percentage of NSW school leavers in education, training or employment in the year after leaving or completing school, 2014 to 2024



Between 2014 and 2024, the main post-school destinations differed slightly between early school leavers and Year 12 completers (refer to Figure 6). A higher percentage of Year 12 completers were in education or training than early school leavers and a higher percentage of early school leavers were looking for work than Year 12 completers, with both leaver types having similar percentages in employment only over time.

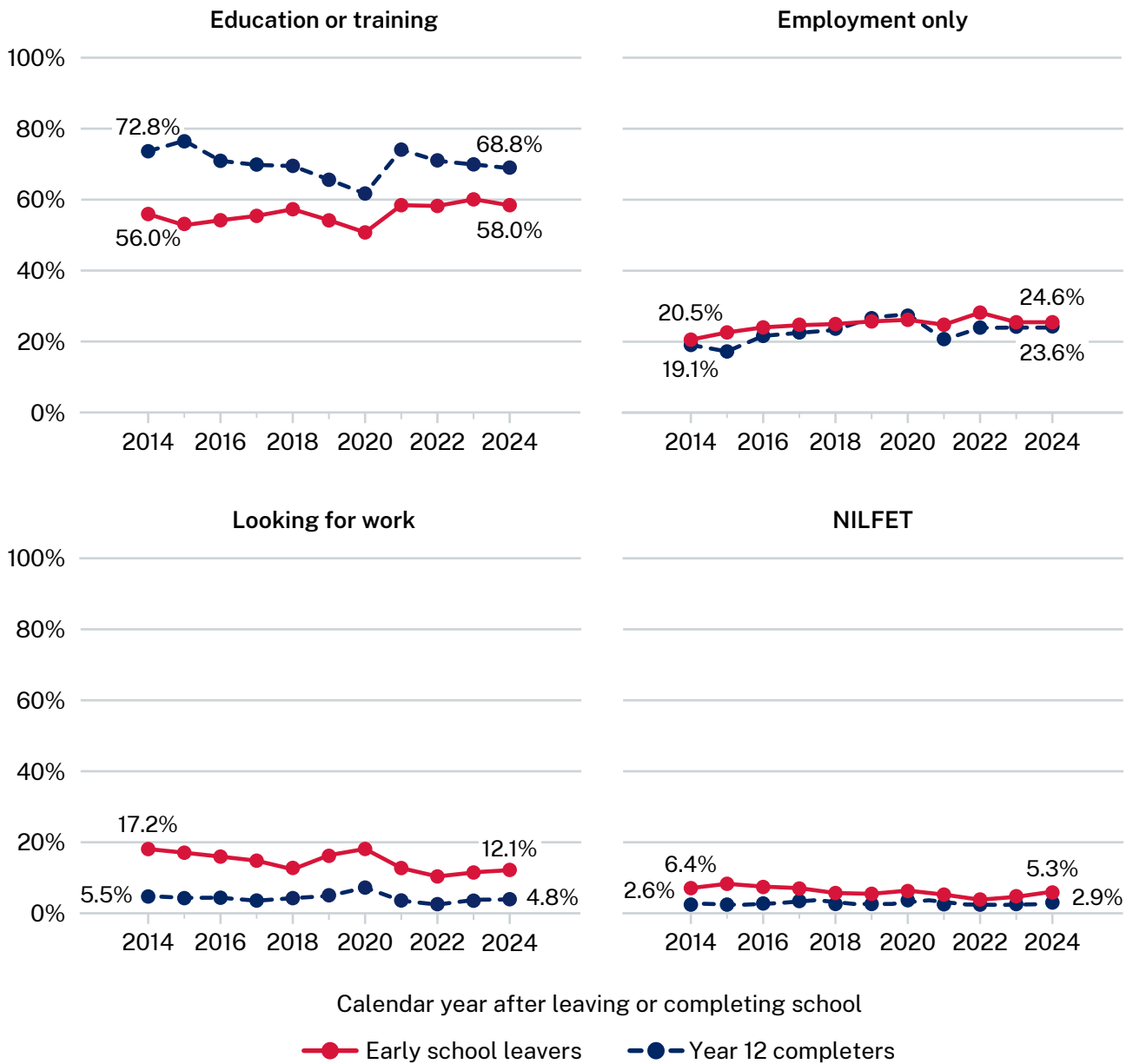
Among early school leavers, about 3 in 5 (58.0%) were undertaking some form of education or training in 2024, while for Year 12 completers this was higher (68.8%). The percentage of early school leavers and Year 12 completers in education or training was stable between 2014 and 2020 with a decline in 2020 followed by an increase in 2021. Between 2022 and 2024 there has been a slight decrease in the percentage of Year 12 completers in education or training (-1.6 pp) and the percentage of early leavers in education or training has remained stable at roughly 59%.

Between 2014 and 2022 there was a gradual decline in the percentage of early school leavers and Year 12 completers who were looking for work or NILFET. However, this has been gradually increasing since 2023. For Year 12 completers the percentage looking for work rose from 4.3% in 2023 to 4.8% in 2024 and the percentage who were NILFET rose from 2.2% to 2.9%. For early school leavers the percentage looking for work rose from 11.2% in 2023 to 12.1% in 2024 while the percentage who were NILFET rose from 4.2% to 5.3%.

Conversely, there has been an increase in the percentage of early school leavers in employment-only destinations since 2014. Although the percentage of early school leavers in employment-only destinations in 2024 (24.6%) fell from the high recorded in 2022 (27.4%), it has increased by 4.2 pp since 2014. Similarly, there has been an increase in the percentage of Year 12 completers in employment-only destinations since 2014. The percentage of Year 12 completers in employment-only destinations was steady at 23.6% in 2024 compared to the previous year but has risen by 4.5 pp since 2014.

Figure 6

Estimated percentage of NSW school leavers in education or training, employment only, looking for work or NILFET, in the year after leaving or completing school, 2014 to 2024

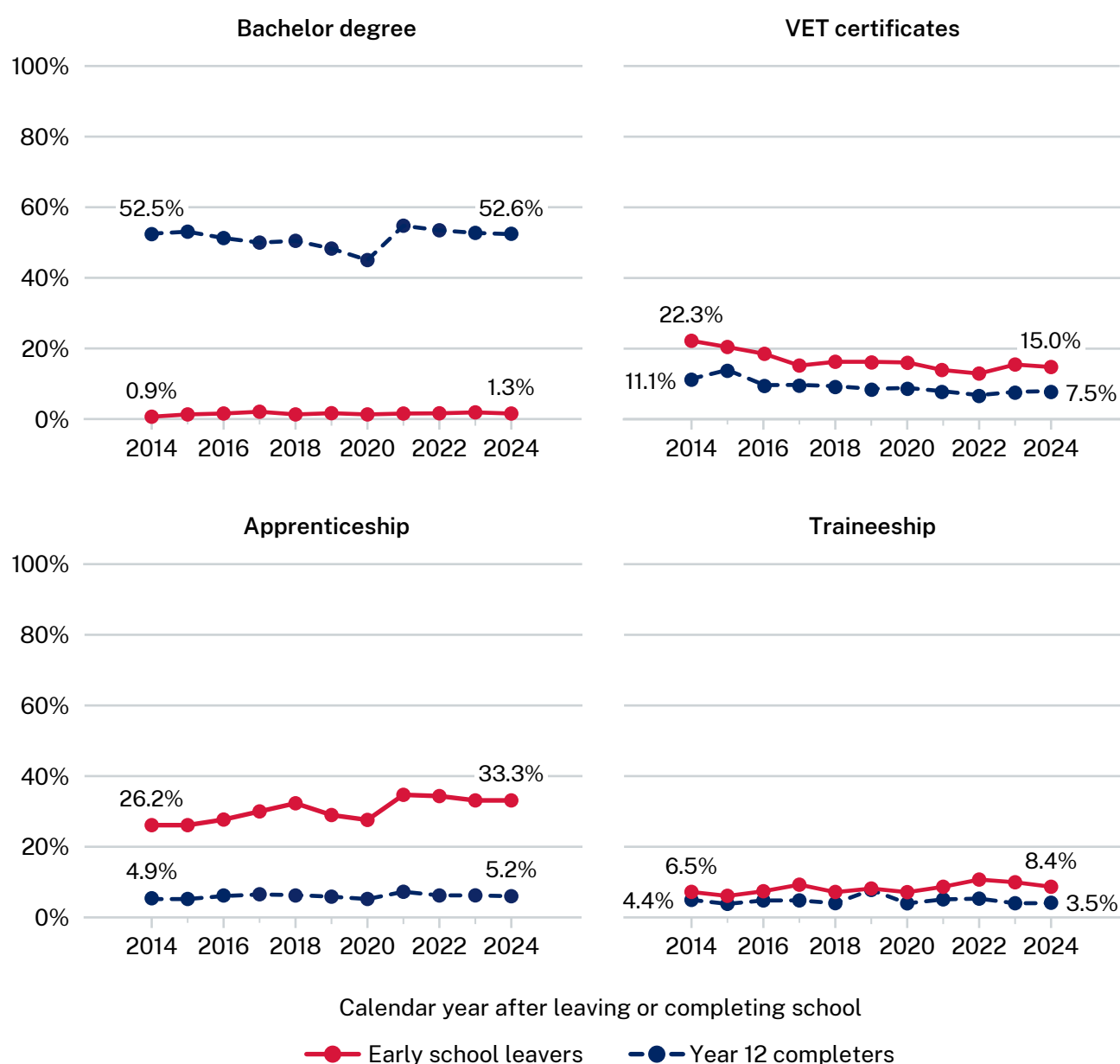


School leavers in education or training

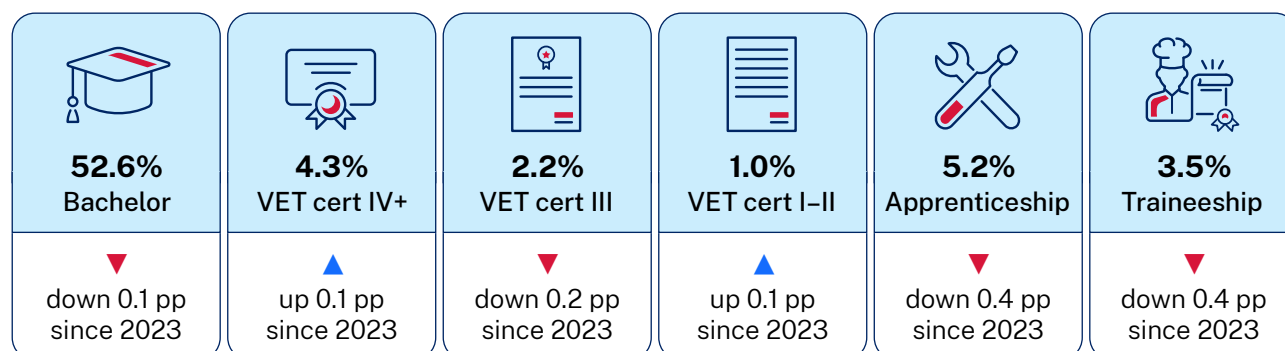
Education and training destinations of NSW school leavers differed by leaver type, with a higher percentage of Year 12 completers moving on to a bachelor's degree and a higher percentage of early school leavers moving on to VET certificates or apprenticeships. For both leaver types, participation in VET certificate courses that do not form part of an apprenticeship or traineeship has changed at an average rate of -0.5 pp per year for early school leavers and -0.4 pp for Year 12 completers from 2014 to 2024. Between 2023 and 2024 there was a decrease in the uptake of VET for early school leavers (-0.8 pp) that was consistent with the downward trend since 2014. For Year 12 completers there was a similar uptake in 2023 and 2024 (0.1 pp).

Figure 7

Estimated percentage of NSW school leavers in education or training, in the year after leaving or completing school, 2014 to 2024



Year 12 completers in education or training

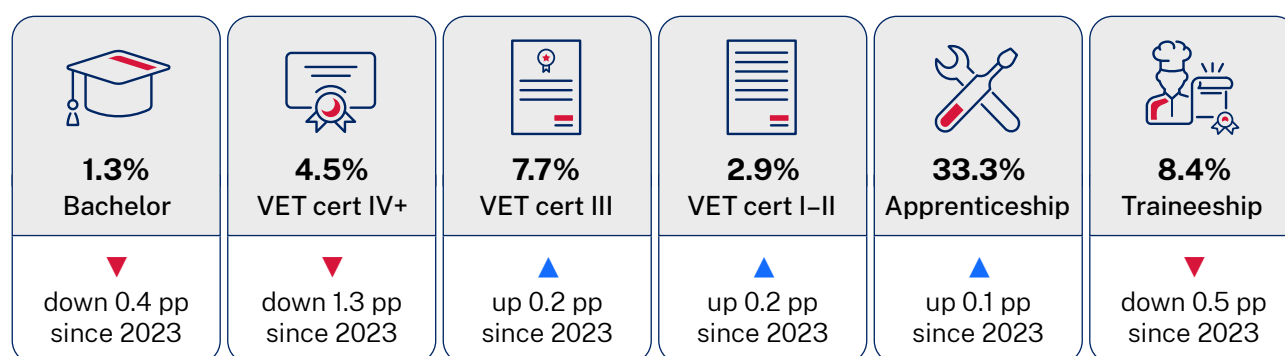


Bachelor's degrees continue to be the most common destination among Year 12 completers. Percentages for each of the main destination categories were similar to 2023 with apprenticeships and traineeships seeing the biggest decrease (–0.4 pp each). Of the Year 12 completers undertaking a bachelor's degree at a university in 2024, 26.4% undertook a double degree.

Of the Year 12 completers who were enrolled to study in 2024 (both current and deferred):

- 80.3% were enrolled at university, 13.9% were enrolled through TAFE or a government VET provider and 4.5% were enrolled through a private training college or other education provider
- 86.4% were enrolled to study full-time and 11.4% were enrolled to study part-time.

Early school leavers in education or training



The most common destination among early school leavers was apprenticeships (33.3 pp in 2024), increasing by an average rate of 0.8 pp per year between 2014 and 2024, with the highest growth between 2014 and 2021. The percentage of early school leavers studying VET certificate IV+ saw the biggest decrease compared to 2023 (–1.3 pp).

Of the early school leavers who were enrolled to study in 2024, 79.5% enrolled through TAFE or a government VET provider and 12.0% were enrolled through a private training college or adult and community education provider.

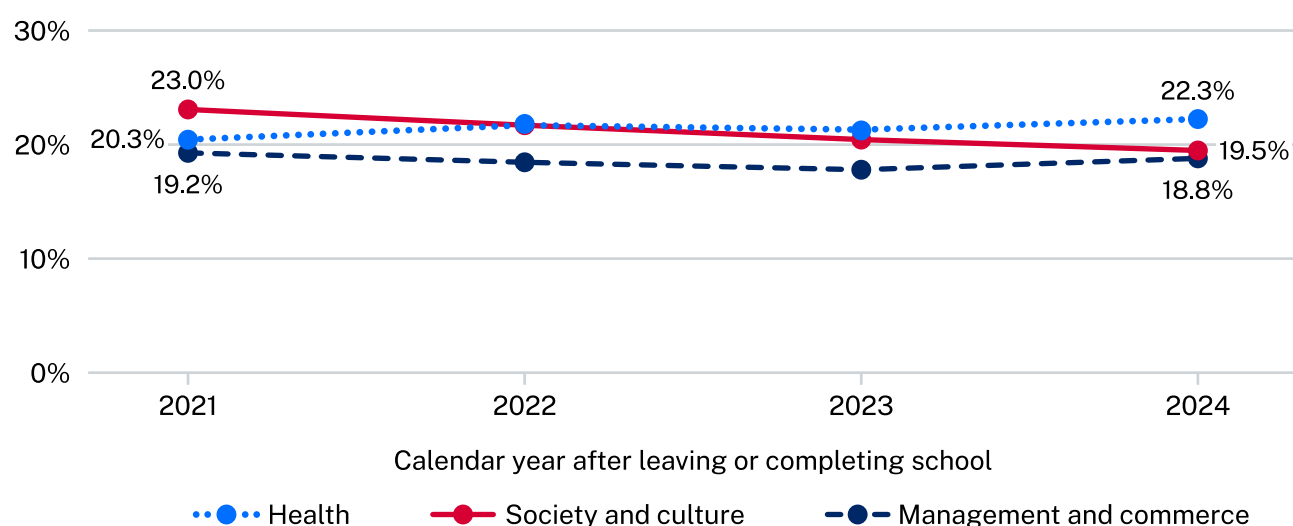
Education areas for bachelor and VET students⁶

The 3 most common education areas for all leavers with a main destination of bachelor's degree or higher were health, society and culture, and management and commerce.⁷ Since 2021, the uptake of society and culture has seen a downward trend while health has increased (moving from second-most common subject area to first place between 2021 and 2022).

In 2024, the top 2 narrow fields of education (first area of study) for bachelor students studying health were nursing (24.5%) and medical studies (19.7%). For society and culture the top 2 narrow fields were law (29.7%) and political science and policy studies (6.4%). For management and commerce the top 2 narrow fields were business and management (31.4%) and banking, finance and related fields (18.9%).

Figure 8

Top 3 education areas for all leavers whose main destination was bachelor's degree, 2021 to 2024



The 3 most common areas of education for all leavers with a main destination of VET certificate were health, the creative arts, and society and culture. Food hospitality and personal services (which include beauty therapy and hairdressing) were the second-most common education areas for early leavers while management and commerce was the third-most common area for Year 12 completers. The percentage of Year 12 completer VET students studying health dropped between 2021 and 2022 (-2.7 pp) and the percentage of all leavers studying society and culture dropped between 2022 and 2023 (-2.3 pp). Despite these changes, overall trends in education areas for school leavers participating in VET certificate courses that do not form part of an apprenticeship or traineeship have remained relatively stable since 2021.

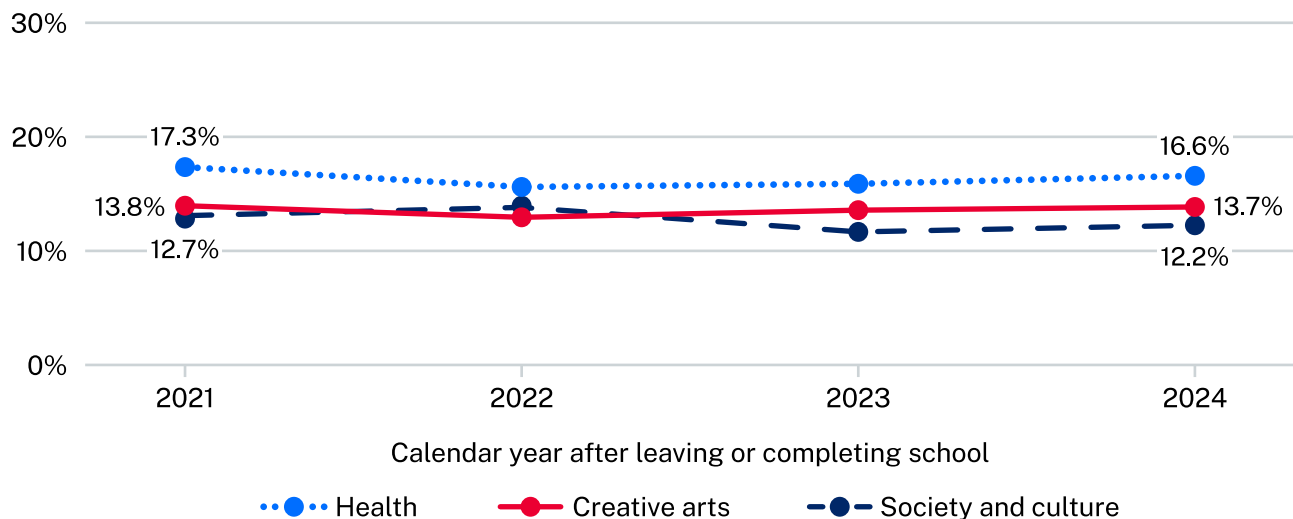
⁶ Education includes the main destinations of bachelor's degree, VET certificate IV+, VET certificate III and VET certificate I-II.

⁷ Education trends correspond to broad fields of education in the Australian Standard Classification of Education (ASCED), 2001. Contrary to earlier reports, only leavers who said they were currently studying a bachelor or VET level course that did not form part of an apprenticeship or traineeship were included in the base for reporting.

Narrow fields of education (linked to first area of study) differed by leaver type. For example, the most common narrow fields in the creative arts were performing arts (26.6%) for Year 12 completers and graphic and design studies (32.4%) for early school leavers. For health, the most common narrow fields were nursing (36.8%) for Year 12 completers and veterinary studies (28.9%) for early school leavers.

Figure 9

Top 3 education areas for all leavers whose main destination was either VET certificate I–II, VET certificate III or VET certificate IV+, 2021 to 2024



Employment areas for apprentices and trainees

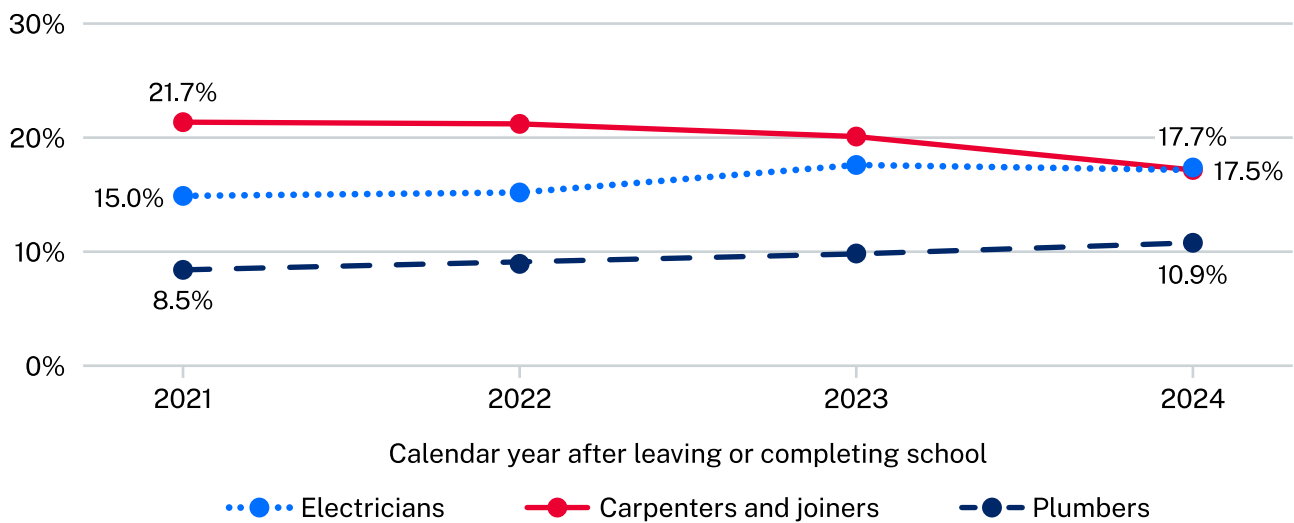
In 2024, the top 3 employment areas for apprentices were electricians, carpenters and joiners, and plumbers.⁸ Between 2021 and 2024 there was an upward trend in the uptake of apprenticeships for electricians and a downward trend for carpenters and joiners. These trends were present for both leaver types but were most noticeable for Year 12 completers.

Plumbing was the third-most common apprenticeship area overall and has shown a steady upward trend between 2021 and 2024. For Year 12 completers, the third-most common apprenticeship employment area was sheetmetal trades workers, while for early school leavers it was motor mechanics. The percentage of Year 12 completers undertaking apprenticeships as sheetmetal trades workers increased by 2.5 pp between 2021 and 2022 but has remained relatively stable since then (roughly 10%). Meanwhile, the percentage of early school leavers taking up apprenticeships as motor mechanics has remained stable (roughly 13%) since 2021.

⁸ Employment areas are defined by the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) unit level groups. Refer to the [ANZSCO release](#) for more information.

Figure 10

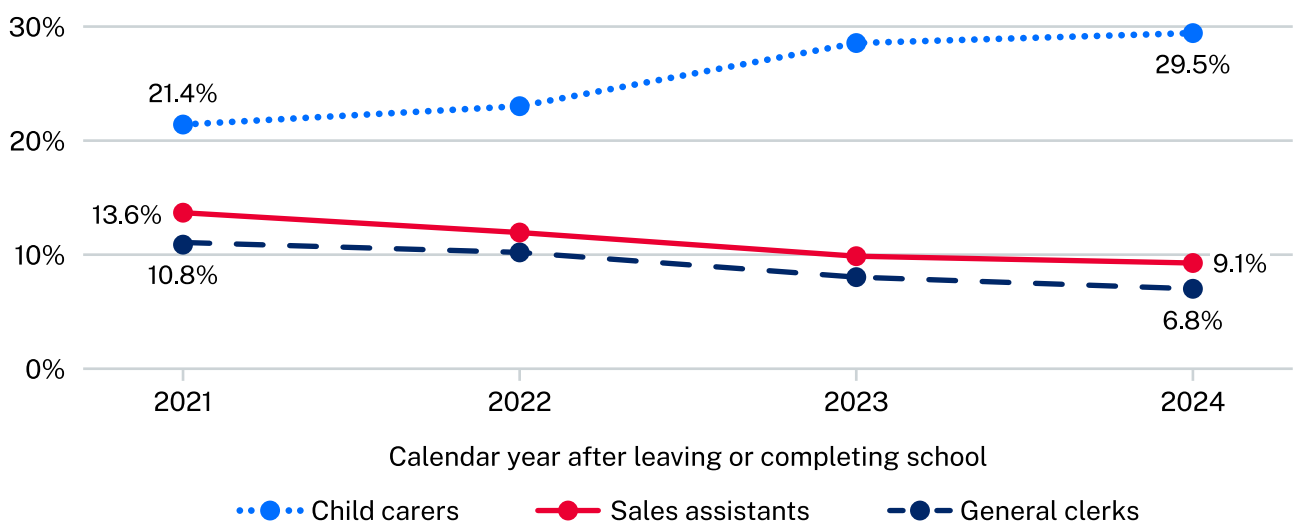
Top 3 employment areas for all leavers whose main destination was apprenticeships, 2021 to 2024



The main employment areas for trainees in 2024 were child carers, sales assistants (retail operations) and general clerks (office administrators). Childcare saw a strong upward trend between 2021 and 2024 with the biggest jump between 2022 and 2023. Traineeships as sales assistants and general clerks have both seen a downward trend. Sales assistants were the second-most common employment area for early leavers doing a traineeship and the third-most common for Year 12 completers (after general clerks).

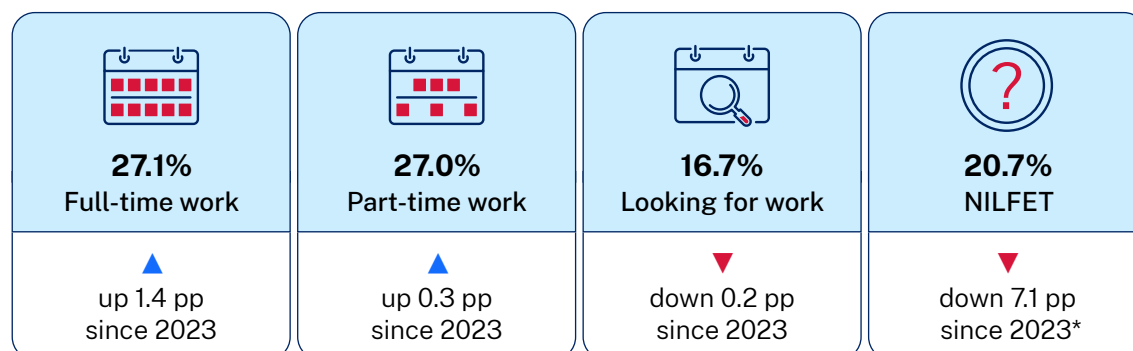
Figure 11

Top 3 employment areas for all leavers whose main destination was traineeships, 2021 to 2024



Year 12 completers who deferred further education

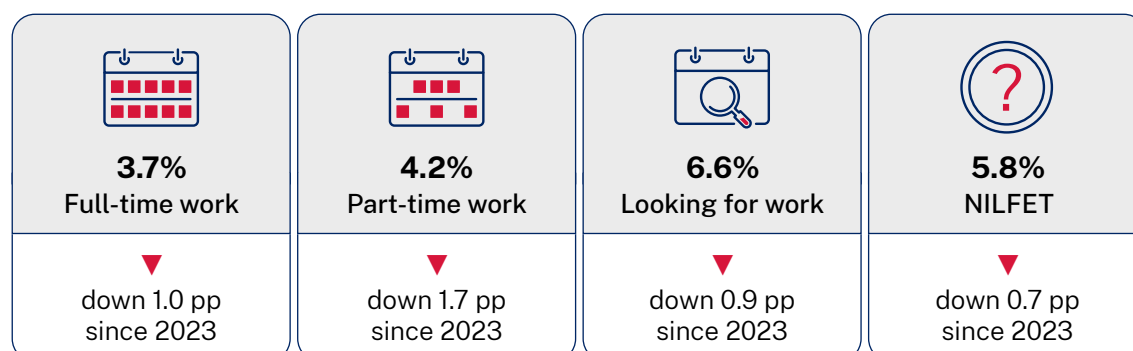
About 1 in 5 (20.7%) Year 12 completers who were NILFET indicated they were enrolled in a course of study but had deferred it in 2024. This rate has dropped 7.1 pp from 2023. Just over 1 in 4 leavers who had a main destination of full-time or part-time work also said they were enrolled in a course of study but had deferred it in 2024.



* indicates statistically significant change (refer to [technical report](#) for details)

Early school leavers who deferred further education

Lower rates of course deferment were found for early school leavers who had a main destination of full-time work, part-time work, looking for work or NILFET compared to Year 12 completers. Only about 1 in every 25 early school leavers who had paid work as their main destination reported that they were enrolled in a course of study but had deferred it in 2024.

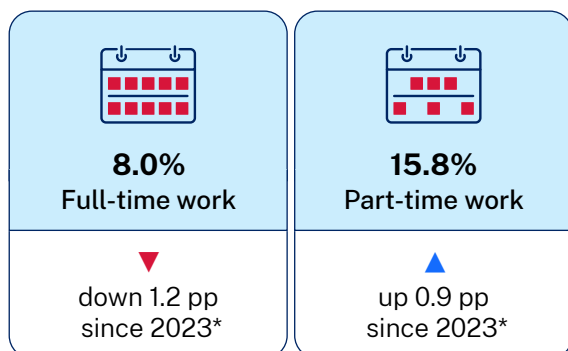
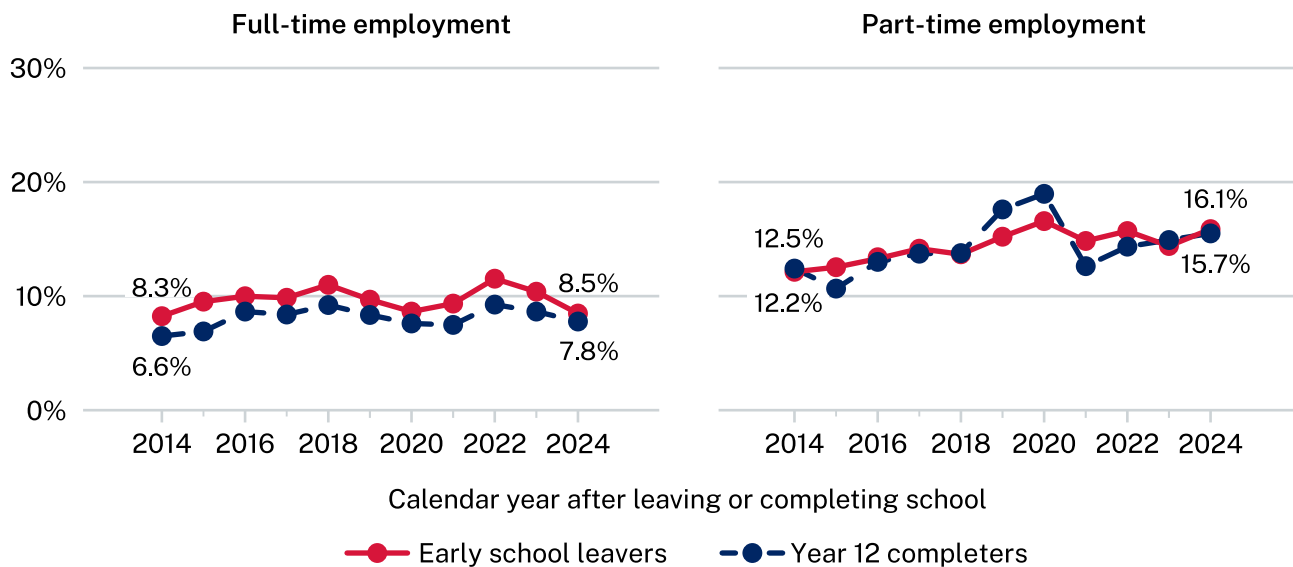


School leavers in employment only

A similar percentage of school leavers from both leaver types were in full-time or part-time employment only after leaving school, with just under one-quarter of Year 12 completers (23.6%) and early school leavers (24.6%) in 2024 being employed and not in education or training. The percentage of all school leavers in full-time employment decreased by 1.2 pp to 8.0% in 2024. In comparison, the percentage in part-time employment increased by 0.9 pp to 15.8%. In 2024, 53.9% of Year 12 completers and 58.6% of early school leavers whose main destination was part-time work would have preferred to be working more hours.

Figure 12

Estimated percentage of NSW school leavers in full-time or part-time employment only in the year after leaving or completing school, 2014 to 2024



* indicates statistically significant change (refer to [technical report](#) for details)

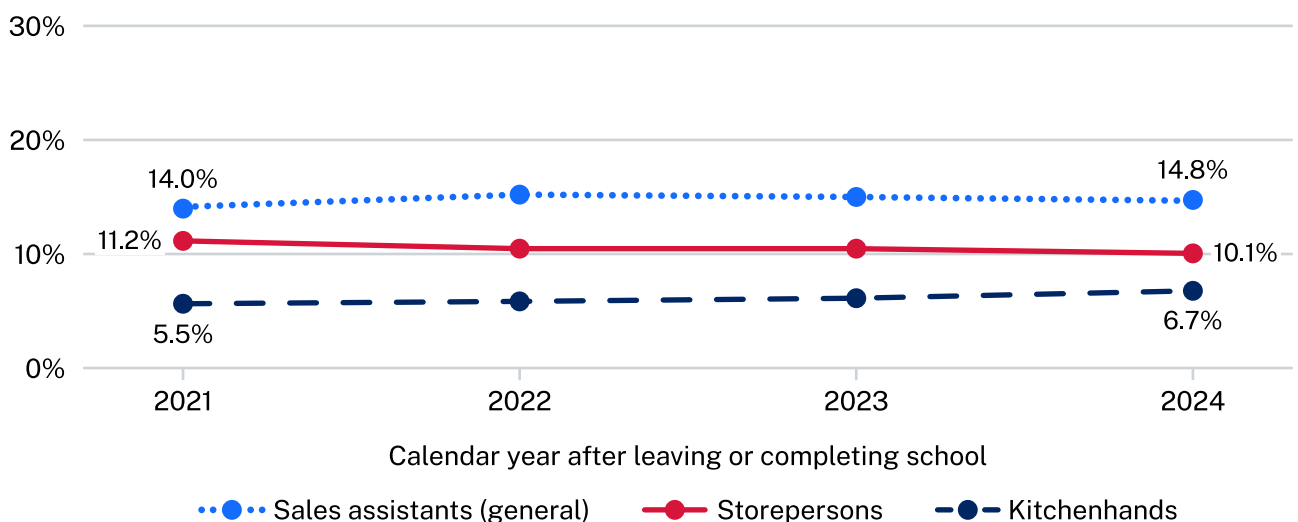
Employment areas for those in paid work only

The main employment areas in 2024 for all leavers whose main destination was paid work were sales assistants, storepersons and kitchenhands. Across leaver types, trends in these employment areas have remained relatively stable between 2021 and 2024.

Between 2021 and 2022 the percentage of Year 12 completers taking up full-time or part-time paid work as bar attendants and baristas saw a jump of 1.9 pp and has remained relatively stable since (roughly 8%). Similarly, the percentage of early school leavers in paid work as sales assistants also increased by 2.8 pp between 2021 and 2022 but remained steady afterwards (around 15%). The percentage of early school leavers in paid work as kitchenhands has steadily increased from 7.0% in 2021 to 9.6% in 2024.

Figure 13

Top 3 employment areas for all leavers whose main destination was paid work, 2021 to 2024



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