RESEARCH REPORT

NCVER

Treading water: effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth transitions

Cameron Forrest

National Centre for Vocational Education Research

INFORMING + INFLUENCING
THE AUSTRALIAN VET SECTOR

Publisher's note

The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of NCVER and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government, or state and territory governments. Any interpretation of data is the responsibility of the author/project team.

To find other material of interest, search VOCEDplus (the UNESCO/NCVER international database <http://www.voced.edu.au>) using the following keywords: apprentice; apprenticeship; client satisfaction; completion; dropout; employers; employment outcomes; government role; industry; off the job training; outcomes of education and training; participation; skill development; trend; vocational education and training; work based learning.

This document should be attributed as Forrest, C 2022, *Treading water: effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth transitions*, NCVER, Adelaide.

This work has been produced by NCVER on behalf of the Australian Government and state and territory governments, with funding provided through the Australian Government Department of Education.

COVER IMAGE: GETTY IMAGES

ISBN 978-1-922801-03-6
TD/TNC 149.11

Published by NCVER, ABN 87 007 967 311

Level 5, 60 Light Square, Adelaide SA 5000
PO Box 8288 Station Arcade, Adelaide SA 5000, Australia

Phone +61 8 8230 8400 **Email** ncver@ncver.edu.au
Web <https://www.ncver.edu.au> <https://www.lsay.edu.au>
Follow us: <https://twitter.com/ncver> <https://www.linkedin.com/company/ncver>

Contents

Summary of key findings 4

Introduction and literature review 6

Engagement in education, employment or training 15

Education 17

- Higher education 17
- Vocational education and training 18
- Not studying towards a qualification 19

Work 21

- Employment 21
- Receipt of JobKeeper 22
- Underemployment 23
- Permanent/ongoing employment 23
- Hours worked 24
- Apprenticeships 26

Living circumstances 28

- Living in the family home 28

Wellbeing 30

- Mental health and life satisfaction 30

Discussion 33

References 35

Appendix A: Timeline of selected events of COVID-19 in Australia, 2020 38

Appendix B: Expanded estimates and confidence intervals 42

Summary of key findings

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed severe challenges to health systems and economies around the world. While Australia has fared better than many countries in limiting collective and individual hardship, the impact of personal losses and lockdowns, along with a drastically changed global environment, has had a toll on young Australians especially. As with all economic downturns, young people have been particularly exposed to unemployment, lost earnings and reduced opportunities for education and social wellbeing.

The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) provide insight into the lived experiences of young Australians during the COVID-19 pandemic. The most recent LSAY cohort were about 20 years old in 2020, during the first wave of the pandemic in Australia. In this report, we explore changes in education, employment, financial circumstances, social circumstances, and wellbeing between 2019 and 2020 (that is, ages 19 to 20 for this cohort). To assess the possible effects of the pandemic against an historical context, we compare the 2019—20 transition with three previous LSAY cohorts: those who were aged 19 and 20 in 2013—14, in 2010—11, and in 2007—08.[1]

Based on historical data, the transition from age 19 to 20 would typically see: no significant change in the aggregated rates of participation in higher education; decreases in participation in vocational education and training (VET), including study towards an apprenticeship or traineeship; decreases in proportions living in the family home (as opposed to, for example, renting or buying their own home); an increase in aggregated employment rates; an increase in average weekly hours worked; a decrease in unemployment; and an increase in permanent or ongoing employment. Departures from these 'typical' trends for the 2019—20 group may indicate effects of the pandemic.

In general, the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have prevented many young Australians from making the same transitions as previous cohorts at the same age. Between 2019 and 2020, there was:

- A significant increase, of 3.2 percentage points, in the proportion of young people who were engaged in higher education, which was not observed at the equivalent ages for previous cohorts. Research suggests that young people may 'retreat' to higher education in times of economic uncertainty, offsetting short-term losses of earnings with increased longer-term earning potential.
- No significant change in the employment rates of young people, when a small increase would have otherwise been expected. That no decrease was recorded, despite widespread restrictions, may be attributable to the JobKeeper payment, which kept employees connected with their employers via wage subsidies. In 2020, 23.7% of 20-year-olds reported they were in receipt of JobKeeper, representing 29.9% of those employed.
- No significant change in the proportions of young people who were in permanent or ongoing employment, when an increase of between 4.4 and 5.4 percentage points would have otherwise been expected. This may suggest that the labour market uncertainty resulting from the pandemic prevented young Australians from transitioning to more secure roles.
- A significant increase of 3.6 percentage points in the youth underemployment rate, compared with a decrease of 3.0 percentage points at the same ages for the previous cohort (2013—14). This suggests

1 Data for 2016—17 are absent because there was no LSAY cohort at that time.

that the primary effect of the pandemic on youth employment was that young people were unable to work as many hours as they preferred.

Also, of note from the 2020 data were that:

- The pandemic appears to have had a pronounced effect on young people's mental health. In 2020, 23.3% of 20-year-olds met the criteria for probable serious mental illness, compared with 7.1% of 20-year-olds in 2014. Being female (29.4%), unemployed (45.8%), in no type of study (28.4%) and reporting no available forms of social support (51.0%) were associated with probable mental illness.
- Almost nine per cent (8.9%) of 20-year-olds reported having to move in with their parents or other relatives due to the government restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic; 5.4% reported having to move elsewhere, such as in with friends or a partner.

Introduction and literature review

The first case of COVID-19 in Australia was reported on 25 January 2020, with the first wave of infections resulting in peak case numbers in late March 2020, prompting a suite of national restrictions on work, study and training. This was followed by a relatively brief period of low infections, before the onset of a second wave in late June 2020, primarily concentrated in Victoria, and resulting in peak infection rates in early August 2020. Restrictions associated with this second wave continued until late October 2020, with sporadic outbreaks through to December 2020, which were smaller in scale and largely contained without the imposition of additional restrictions.

Using data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY), this report examines the lived experiences of Australians aged about 20 years in 2020, during the peak and aftermath of the second wave of infections. Notwithstanding the variations between states and territories, which are likely to be obscured by reporting on Australia-wide trends, the LSAY data for 2020 are well positioned to capture the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on Australian youth (also noting that, at the time of writing, the pandemic is ongoing and additional waves of infections occurred in Australia during 2021 and 2022).

In this section, we summarise the key events, relevant policy announcements and the extant literature on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people in Australia. The various sub-sections have been organised according to the topic areas covered by the LSAY questionnaire, the data for which are explored in the sections that follow.

Key events and relevant policy announcements

A timeline of key events during the first and second waves of infections in Australia during 2020 is provided in appendix A. The events and policy announcements of most relevance for this report are summarised in this chapter. On 20 March 2020, during the first wave of the pandemic in Australia, restrictions were placed on mass gatherings and visits to aged care facilities. International borders were closed, except for Australian citizens, residents and immediate family members. From 23 March, pubs, licensed clubs and hotels (excluding accommodation), places of worship, gyms, indoor sporting venues, cinemas and casinos were closed. From 25 March, tighter restrictions were placed on weddings, funerals, fitness classes, beauty salons, arcades and play centres. Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory announced border closures, with 14-day self-isolation periods for travellers. This was extended to all Australians returning from overseas on 29 March.

From 30 March, public gatherings (excluding household members) were reduced nationally to a maximum of two people. Stay-at-home directions were implemented, with the only essential reasons for leaving home being to: shop essentials, receive medical care, exercise, or to travel for work or education. In total, the 'national lockdown', which commenced on 23 March, lasted for six weeks (ABS 2021a).

The success of these restrictions was reflected in reduced daily new infection rates, such that the first wave effectively had ended by late April. The second wave of infections commenced in June, with the Victorian Government announcing a re-tightening of restrictions on household gatherings on 20 June. Additional restrictions were implemented for Melbourne from 2 August, approximately coinciding with peaks in new daily infections and national unemployment.

The second wave lasted until late October, when Victoria recorded zero new daily cases and zero deaths for the first time since 9 June. Restrictions were progressively eased from 27 October, and relatively low infection rates occurred nationally for the remainder of 2020, with the exception of a short lockdown in South Australia in November.

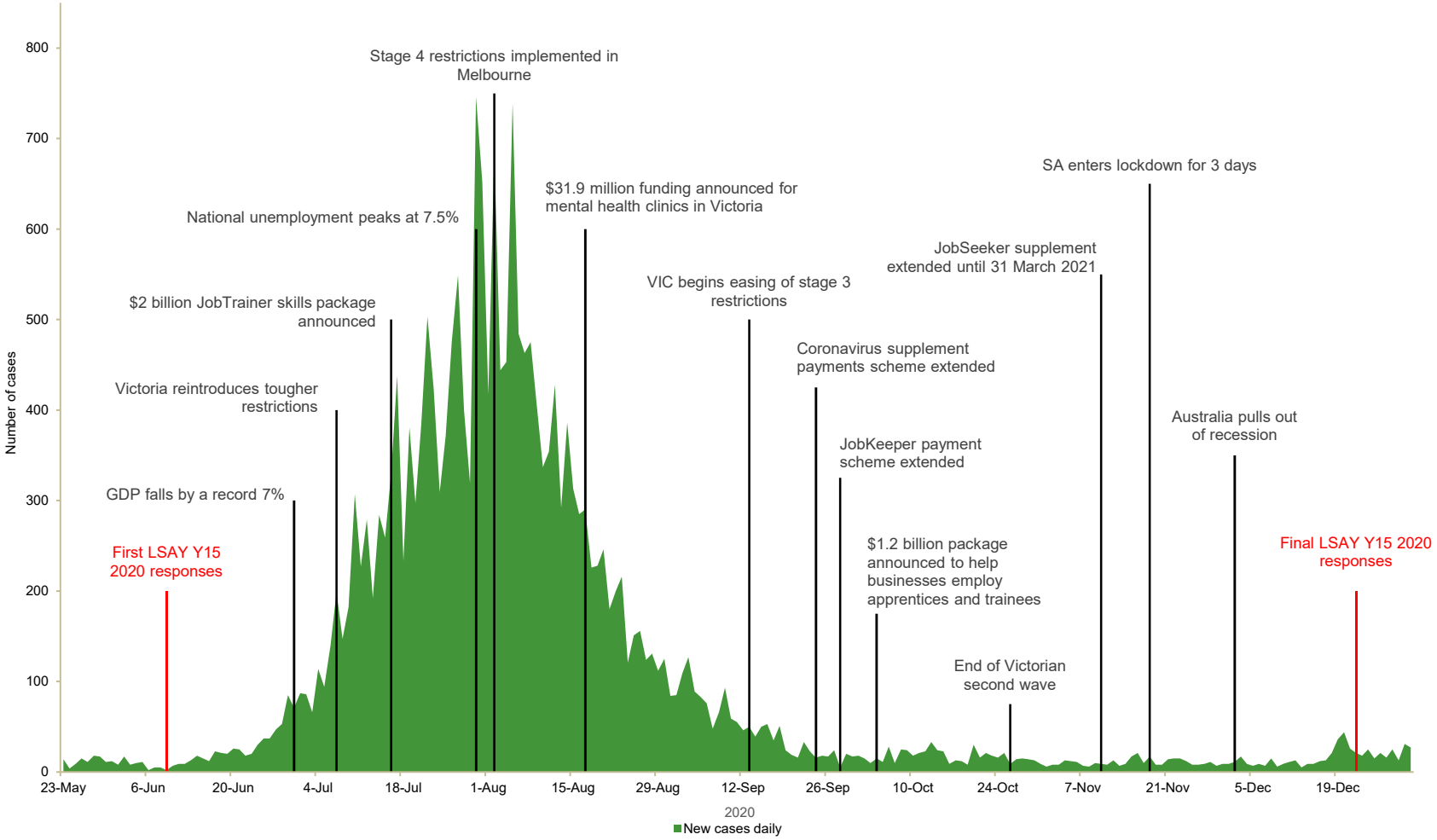
Table 1 summarises the LSAY 2020 fieldwork period according to the numbers of responses received between June and December. Nearly 80% of all responses were received in July or August, and nearly 90% of responses were received by the end of September. This point in time approximately coincides with the peak in Australia-wide COVID-19 infections for 2020, as displayed in figure 1.

Table 1 Summary of LSAY responses for Y15 2020 fieldwork

2020	Responses	Per cent of total	Cumulative per cent
June	132	3.9	3.9
July	1 935	56.8	60.7
August	753	22.1	82.8
September	203	6.0	88.7
October	121	3.6	92.3
November	118	3.5	95.7
December	146	4.3	100.0
Total	**3 408**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Note: Percentages may not sum due to rounding.

Figure 1 **Timeline of COVID-19 pandemic in Australia 2020, relative to fieldwork period for LSAY**



Sources: New cases daily: <covid19data.com.au>;
<https://australia.gov.au/news-and-updates> (Australian Government);
<https://www.abs.gov.au/articles> (Australian Bureau of Statistics).

Higher education

In economic downturns, education participation among young people generally increases due to reduced opportunity cost. Ordinarily, the decision to pursue higher education (HE) rather than employment is associated with reduced short-term earnings and career opportunities, in exchange for increased long-term earnings potential. During downturns, when labour market conditions are adverse for young people in particular, this trade-off weighs more heavily in favour of pursuing higher education. Research using data from the Australian Youth Survey, a precursor to LSAY, found that a 1-point increase in the adult unemployment rate was associated with a 1.3-point increase in full-time post-school education participation in young people aged 18 to 26 (Vu, Gørgens & Bray 2012). This has been conceptualised as a 'retreat' from poorer labour market conditions in a bid to improve future prospects through skills training and qualifications and can take the form of prolonging tertiary study or undertaking additional study. However, following graduation, students then face greater competition from school leavers for limited job opportunities (Borland 2020).

The higher education sector experienced significant disruptions as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. Most institutions were forced to move to online delivery, usually beyond what was already in place prior to the pandemic, and experienced particular difficulties in replacing the 'hands-on' and practical components of curricula (Pather et al. 2020). Students and teachers were generally given short timeframes to move to online delivery, and placed far greater reliance on emails.

Travel restrictions prevented many international and interstate students from beginning semester one in March 2020, and universities rapidly deployed online substitutes for face-to-face teaching and assessment (Dodd et al. 2021). An analysis of student experience surveys for semester one, 2020, from 118 Australian higher education providers found that the most commonly experienced difficulties were: IT problems (41%); inadequate academic interaction (34%); assessment types and arrangements (30%); lack of engagement (29%); and insufficient peer interaction (29%; TEQSA 2020).

A dedicated study of Australian university students between May and June 2020 found that 86.8% reported COVID-19 having had a 'huge' impact on their studies during the previous two weeks (Dodd et al. 2021). The most commonly reported negative effects were: difficulties interacting with other students (84.6%) and teachers (74.6%); and difficulties learning online compared with face-to-face (74.7%). Being 23 years old or younger, male, of lower social status, or from a language other than English background resulted in a greater likelihood of experiencing negative impacts.

Vocational education and training

The vocational education and training (VET) sector likewise experienced significant disruption throughout 2020 due to pandemic-related restrictions, most significantly in the form of rushed transitions to digital delivery. Online delivery of VET has been associated with lower qualification completion rates and higher subject withdrawal rates (Griffin & Mihelic 2019). Prior to the pandemic, only 19% of the 1200 courses delivered in TAFE (technical and further education) institutes in Australia had some form of digital delivery (TAFE Directors Australia 2020). Between 2019 and 2020, the number of VET subjects delivered online increased by about 24% (Hume & Griffin 2021). One institution reported having to build their digital delivery from scratch, while many others were forced to condense multi-year plans into a few weeks (TAFE Directors Australia 2020).

In 2020, the number of Australian residents aged 15 to 64 years who participated in any VET activity fell by an estimated 5.8%, compared with 2019 (NCVER 2021). This decline in participation was 6.6% for Australians aged 20 to 24 years, including those represented by LSAY data.

The proportion of VET students aged 18 years and above who completed a qualification in 2019 and who were employed at the end of May 2020 was 5% lower than the corresponding period for the previous year (White 2021). Of those who were employed after training, 6.7% were temporarily stood down due to COVID-19, and the work hours of 34.4% had been reduced since the start of the pandemic, although impacts varied by industry. Females aged 18—24 years represented the highest proportions of those temporarily stood down from employment or experiencing a decrease in working hours. The sectors most impacted by pandemic-related restrictions were the arts and recreation services, and accommodation and food services sectors; financial and insurance services, and mining employees were impacted the least (White 2021).

On 16 July 2020, the $2 billion JobTrainer program was announced by the Australian Government and state and territory governments. Providing an additional 340 700 training places, it was designed to help school leavers and job seekers to access courses to develop new skills in sectors with job opportunities and identified skills needs. Other policy announcements during 2020 with the most significant ramifications for the VET sector focused mainly on apprenticeships and traineeships, and are discussed in the sub-section which follows.

Apprenticeships and traineeships

The Australian apprenticeships and traineeships system is closely tied to broader labour market conditions, making apprentices and trainees especially vulnerable to uncertain economic conditions (Atkinson & Stanwick 2016). Declines in contract commencements are associated with economic uncertainty, in part due to the commitment imposed by three- or four-year contracts between the employer and the apprentice or trainee (Karmel & Misko 2009). Given that work-based education is one of the defining characteristics of apprenticeships and traineeships, apprentices and trainees were particularly affected by pandemic-related restrictions (Hall 2021), especially because digital learning alternatives are not appropriate for many of the practical aspects of vocational training (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; OECD 2021). The pandemic resulted in a significant rise in suspensions of the on-the-job training components of apprenticeships and traineeships, making it impossible to assess what students had learned (Bowman & Callan 2021).

Previous research has shown that apprenticeships remain an important pathway for young people to transition successfully from school to the workforce (Ranasinghe et al. 2019). Past economic downturns revealed a strong relationship between unemployment rates and apprenticeships. In the two recessions prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, a 5-point increase in the unemployment rate resulted in a 30% decrease in apprenticeship and traineeship commencements (Hurley 2020).

By comparison with 2019, suspensions in apprentice and trainee contracts increased by over 650% in March and April 2020, and by nearly 300% in May (Hall 2021). Likewise, new contract commencements witnessed significant declines in April and May, but these rebounded in October, due in part to national wage subsidies (described below). The industries hardest hit by suspensions included arts and recreation services; accommodation and food services; transport, postal and warehousing; retail trade; and agriculture, forestry and fishing (Hall 2021).

Several relevant policy announcements during 2020 have implications for understanding the effects of the pandemic on apprenticeships and traineeships. On 12 March 2020, the Australian Government announced the Supporting Apprentices and Trainees wage subsidy, representing $1.3 billion in new funding to assist small businesses to support the jobs of around 117 000 apprentices and trainees. Eligible employers could apply for a wage subsidy of 50% of the apprentice's or trainee's wage for up to nine months from 1 January 2020 to 30 September 2020. On 16 July, this subsidy was extended to 31 March 2021 and expanded to include medium-sized businesses with 200 employees or fewer.

Finally, on 4 October, the Boosting Apprenticeship Commencements wage subsidy was announced; its aim was to support employers and group training organisations to take on new apprentices and trainees. Under the initiative, eligible businesses would receive a subsidy of 50% of wages paid to a new apprentice between 5 October 2020 and 30 September 2021, to a maximum of $7000 per quarter.

Employment

The effects of pandemic-related lockdowns have exacerbated existing economic issues, particularly for young Australians. Economic downturns inevitably impact on youth unemployment more than for older workers (Anlezark 2011). In the wake of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2007—09, the periods of unemployment for young Australians have lasted longer, while the proportions of young people in part-time work have increased (ABS; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020a). In 2019, the year before COVID-19 arrived in Australia, nearly one in five unemployed 15- to 24-year-olds had been out of work for 52 weeks or more (Brotherhood of St Laurence 2020). In December 2019, one month before the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Australia, youth unemployment was about three times higher than the unemployment rate among 25- to 64-year-olds (ABS 2020a).

The lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are anticipated to be similar to those experienced after the GFC, with young people facing greater unemployment during the recession itself, followed by delayed entry into the workforce, longer periods of unemployment and fewer opportunities relevant to their skills and training (Waugh & Circelli 2021). This in turn affects earnings and finances, as well as having consequences for health and wellbeing (Brotherhood of St Laurence 2020). Young people who are female, Indigenous, with disabilities or from migrant or refugee backgrounds, as well as those from regional or remote areas, are particularly vulnerable (Waugh & Circelli 2021). This vulnerability stems in part from their over-representation in sectors disproportionately affected by lockdowns, such as retail and hospitality (Atkins et al. 2020), along with higher expectations to perform caring duties within families or communities at the expense of personal opportunities. Young people with disabilities, or who come from languages-other-than-English (LOTE) speaking backgrounds, or who are from regional or remote areas, are also disadvantaged by the so-called 'digital divide', experiencing increased difficulties transferring to the online delivery of education programs and working from home arrangements. Although it will not have had a major impact on the age groups represented by LSAY data (that is, 20-year-olds), school closures and increased child care responsibilities throughout the pandemic have had additional negative effects on the total hours worked in Australia (National Skills Commission 2020).

Previous studies using LSAY data suggest that young people experience 'scarring effects' from long-term unemployment, whereby prior unemployment increases the likelihood of future unemployment (Buddelmeyer & Hérault 2010; Stanwick, Ackehurst & Frazer 2017). These effects tend to be more pronounced for women, possibly due to their likelihood to have a series of jobs of shorter duration and more caring responsibilities.

Several major policy enactments in 2020 could be reflected in the LSAY data. On 31 March, the $130 billion JobKeeper payment, designed to keep Australians in jobs and to support businesses affected by the pandemic, was announced. In the first phase, which lasted until 27 September 2020, eligible businesses and not-for-profits were able to receive $1500 before tax per fortnight per employee to cover the cost of wages. From 28 September 2020 to 3 January 2021, the payment was reduced to $1200 per fortnight for employees who worked 20 hours or more a week on average during the reference period, and $750 for employees who worked fewer than 20 hours per week. From 4 January to 28 March 2021, the payment was reduced again to $1000 and $650, respectively. During these 'extension' phases, changes were also implemented to the turnover test for businesses to reassess their eligibility. One

analysis suggests that the JobKeeper payment reduced total employment losses by at least 700 000 between April and July 2020 (Bishop & Day 2020).

The second policy initiative was related to the Coronavirus Supplement payment scheme, which commenced on 27 April. This was paid to eligible income support recipients, including job seekers, at a rate of $550 per fortnight in addition to their usual payments. Lasting until 24 September, it was then reduced to $250 per fortnight until 31 December. At the same time, the eligibility criteria for the existing JobSeeker payment and Youth Allowance were amended to ensure access for groups who were affected by the pandemic, including those who had been stood down from their jobs, sole traders, casual workers, contractors, and those who needed to care for someone affected by coronavirus. Assets tests, preclusion periods, several waiting periods and claim processes were also waived. The costs of these measures were estimated at the time of announcement to be $14.1 billion.

In the third initiative, which began from 23 April, job seekers were exempt from reporting their mutual obligation requirements, such that they were no longer subject to suspensions, demerits, or financial penalties if they did not complete and report their job searches; if they rejected an offer of suitable paid work; or if they failed to attend an appointment with an employment services provider. Initially intended to last until 22 May, this exemption was extended on 18 May, and mutual obligation reporting requirements recommenced in a limited capacity from 9 June.

Finally, on 3 August, a pandemic leave disaster payment was announced by the Australian Government for those in Victoria who were forced to isolate due to COVID-19 but did not have sick leave available. The value of this payment was $1500 per fortnight. The payment was extended to Tasmanians on 26 August, people living in Victorian border communities on 28 August, Western Australians on 16 September, New South Welshmen on 21 September, and Queenslanders and South Australians on 23 October.

Table 2 depicts the broader labour market circumstances for 15 to 24-year-olds during the LSAY fieldwork period. From June to December, when the strictest lockdowns were in effect in line with peaks in case numbers, youth unemployment rates were up to 4.5 percentage points higher, and underemployment rates up to 2.0 percentage points higher, than for the equivalent periods in 2019. The number of hours worked by 15 to 24-year-olds was lowest in June, representing a decline of 12.3 percentage points from the previous year. Likewise, in seasonally adjusted terms, the participation rate was also at its lowest in June, 4.6 percentage points lower than in June 2019. The youth underemployment rate peaked at 20.1% in August, 1.6 percentage points higher than in August 2019. Although the underemployment and participation rate trends had reversed by November, the youth unemployment rate remained consistently higher, and monthly hours worked were consistently lower than for 2019 throughout the remainder of the year.

Table 2 Seasonally adjusted labour force estimates for 15 to 24-year-olds, June–December 2020

2020	Unemployment rate (%)	Underemployment rate (%)	Participation rate (%)	Monthly hours worked in all jobs (millions)
June	16.3 (+4.3)	19.6 (+2.0)	63.4 (-4.6)	453.1 (-12.3%)
July	16.4 (+4.5)	19.4 (+1.3)	66.1 (-2.1)	465.9 (-10.8%)
August	13.9 (+2.1)	20.1 (+1.6)	66.2 (-1.9)	460.5 (-9.0%)
September	14.5 (+2.8)	19.1 (+1.2)	65.8 (-1.7)	462.5 (-8.5%)
October	15.5 (+3.0)	17.9 (+0.1)	68.0 (-0.1)	464.7 (-8.5%)
November	15.7 (+4.1)	16.6 (-0.4)	69.7 (+1.8)	479.4 (-6.9%)
December	14.0 (+2.4)	16.0 (-1.2)	68.5 (+0.0)	508.2 (-6.4%)

Note: Change statistics are from the equivalent month of the previous year (2019).
Source: ABS (2020a, seasonally adjusted data).

Mental health and wellbeing

Virtually all studies into the mental health of Australians during the COVID-19 pandemic have shown the significant adverse effects of lockdowns and associated restrictions. A survey of more than 13 000 Australian adults during the first month of COVID-19 restrictions, in April 2020, found that 27.6% of respondents met the criteria for clinically significant symptoms of depression, 21.0% met criteria for anxiety, and 14.6% reported thoughts of self-harm or being better off dead (Fisher et al. 2020). These symptoms were higher among those who had lost their jobs, those who were worried about contracting COVID-19, and those for whom restrictions had a higher impact on daily life. Gurvich et al. (2021) conducted a survey of 1495 adults between April and May 2020, finding that 47% were experiencing some degree of psychological distress.

A third survey, conducted by Rossell et al. (2021), identified that being aged 18—24 years was a significant predictor of having negative emotions related to the pandemic, alongside being female, being single and living in states and territories with fewer cases of COVID-19 (Qld, ACT, SA, WA, Tas., NT). Other contributors to anxiety and stress during pandemics include loss of personal autonomy, loss of social connectedness, indirect exposure to effects of the pandemic through media reporting, and the perception of risk to self and loved ones (Berger & Reupert 2020).

A consistent finding has been that females had higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress in response to the pandemic than males. It is well documented that women endure additional burdens during disease outbreaks, relating to both paid and unpaid work alongside their existing workloads and responsibilities (McLaren et al. 2020). University students have been previously identified as a high-risk group for psychological distress (Browne, Munro & Cass 2017), which has additional implications for the LSAY cohort, given their life stage and relatively high representation in higher education.

Several significant policy announcements have been made in response to the expected deterioration in mental health throughout the pandemic. On 29 March 2020, a $1.1 billion safety net package was announced by the Australian Government to expand mental health and tele-health services, increase domestic violence services, and provide emergency food relief. An Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package was announced on 2 April to offer families relief from fees and to support the continued operation of childcare centres. A national free childcare package was announced on 6 April and lasted until 12 July.

On 15 May, $48.1 million in new funding was announced for the National Mental Health and Wellbeing Pandemic Response Plan, to make support services available in homes, workplaces, aged care, schools, and other community sites. On 2 August, the Australian Government announced the provision of 10 additional subsidised psychological therapy sessions for people subjected to additional restrictions in those areas impacted by the second wave of infections. On 5 August, a $33 million support package was announced to help Victorian childcare services remain open. On 17 August, the Australian Government declared the provision of an additional $31.9 million to create 15 mental health clinics across Victoria. Finally, on 1 November, a new COVID-19 mental health campaign, ‘How’s your head today?’, commenced nationally.

Summary

Noting the variations between states and territories that are likely to be obscured by reporting on Australia-wide trends, the LSAY data for 2020 are well positioned to capture the lived experiences of Australian youth during the worst of the initial waves of the COVID-19 pandemic.

From the outset it is important to state that the extent to which observed effects, or lack thereof, can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions cannot be determined through LSAY

data alone, given that there is no 'control' group against which the cohort can be compared. To partially remedy this, this report compares the LSAY cohort in 2020 (Y15) with three previous LSAY cohorts: Y03, which commenced in 2003 and concluded in 2013; Y06, which commenced in 2006 and concluded in 2016; and Y09, which commenced in 2009 and concluded in 2019. There is a greater gap between the Y15 and Y09 cohorts (that is, six years rather than three years between the other cohorts) because there was no Y12 cohort. Comparisons between cohorts allow us to identify whether changes in the LSAY data between 2019 and 2020 are in line with historical effects, or whether anomalies exist that may be attributable to the pandemic. Accordingly, where possible, comparisons between cohorts have been made with the equivalent survey waves and age groups. The Y15 cohort were on average 20 years old in 2020; this corresponds to 2008 for the Y03 cohort, 2011 for the Y06 cohort, and 2014 for the Y09 cohort. Table 3 summarises the four LSAY cohorts used throughout this paper.

Table 3 Summary of LSAY Y03, Y09 and Y15 cohorts at ages 19 and 20 years

	Y03	**Y06**	**Y09**	**Y15**
Year of commencement	2003	2006	2009	2015
Age 19 year	**2007**	**2010**	**2013**	**2019**
Age 19 sample size	6 658	6 316	5 787	3 380
Age 20 year	**2008**	**2011**	**2014**	**2020**
Age 20 sample size	6 074	5 420	5 082	3 408

In the sections which follow, chi-square tests have been used to identify statistical significance of changes over time. Appendix B also includes weighted estimates with associated confidence intervals.

The analyses presented in this report use aggregated data, which provide a 'snapshot' view of the LSAY sample at the time individuals responded to their yearly surveys. While aggregated data provide a useful summary of general patterns and trends, they also obscure the complexities of youth transitions. For example, employment rates remaining at 80% between two survey waves does not mean that 80% of respondents had no change in their employment circumstances. Surmising effects of the pandemic at an aggregate level does not account for possible effects at the individual and sub-group levels.

Engagement in education, employment or training

Throughout this report, the analyses are presented as a comparison of the changes experienced by respondents from when they were aged 19 years to when they were aged 20 and the changes similarly reported by the Y15 cohort (2019—20) and previous cohorts (2007—08, 2010—11 and 2013—14). This provides an historical context for determining typical or 'expected' changes, if any, thus enabling the possible effects of the pandemic to be identified.

Before looking at education and employment circumstances separately, it is worth examining the extent to which 20-year-olds in 2020 were engaged in some form of education, employment or training (EEET). The antithesis of this state — not being in education, employment, or training (NEET) — is typically regarded as a risk factor for adverse labour market outcomes later in life (Stanwick, Ackehurst & Frazer 2017). According to ABS data, as of May 2020, 70.7% of Australians aged 18—24 were 'fully engaged' in work or study; that is, working full-time, studying full-time, or both working and studying (ABS 2020b).

As shown in figure 2, 91.2% of LSAY respondents in 2020 were engaged in some form of education, employment or training at the time of their surveys. This figure was 3.0 percentage points lower than for 20-year-olds in 2014, and represented a significant decline (see table 4). However, the EEET rate for 19-year-olds in 2019 was also lower than for previous cohorts, and by a comparable margin. This suggests that the lower 2020 rate is probably attributable to broader socioeconomic trends rather than any specific effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Likewise, the non-significant change in EEET rates between 2019 and 2020 is in line with the experiences of 19- and 20-year-olds in the Y03 and Y06 cohorts, which suggests that it is not an historical anomaly (noting, however, that the aggregated figures do not account for possible changes at the sub-group level).

Figure 2 Proportions of Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 LSAY cohorts in education, employment or training at time of survey, ages 19 and 20 years

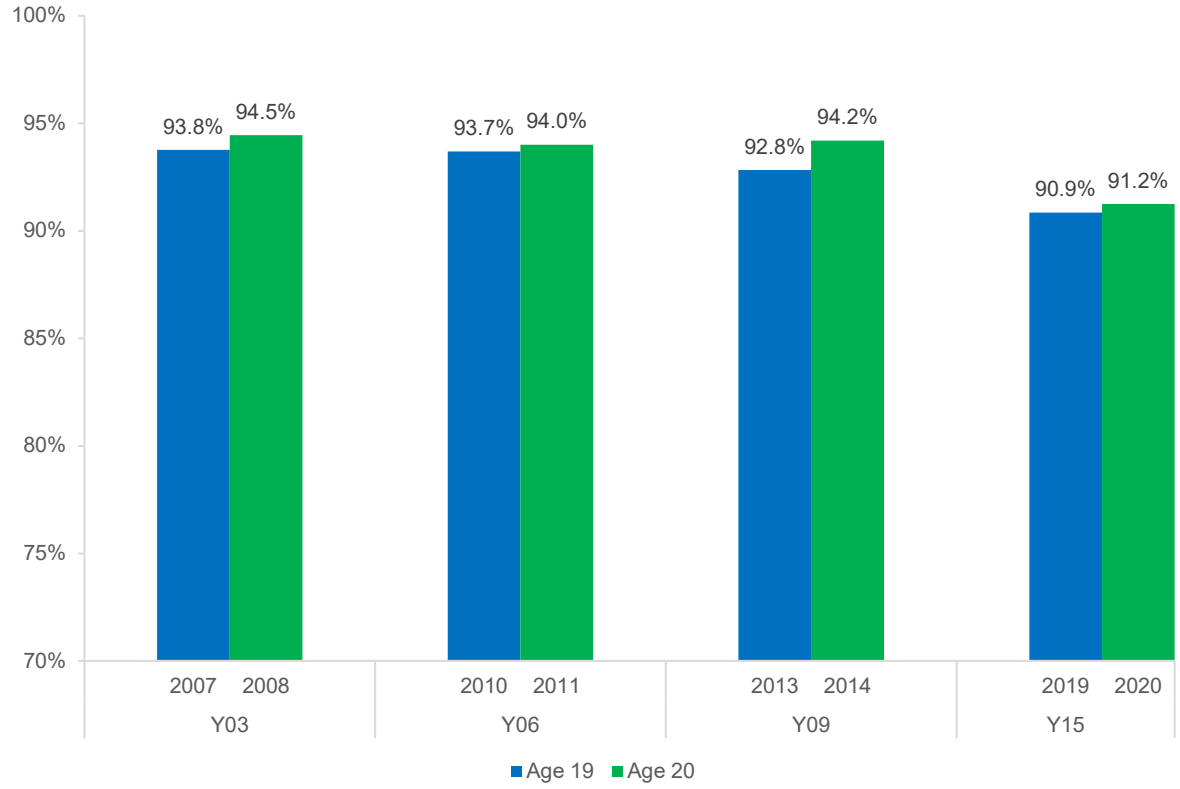


Table 4 Changes in proportions of Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 LSAY cohorts in education, employment or training at time of survey, age 20 years

Cohort	Change from age 19, same cohort (%)	p < .05	Change from age 20, previous cohort (%)	p < .05
Y03	+0.7		N/A	
Y06	+0.3		-0.4	
Y09	+1.4	✓	+0.2	
Y15	+0.4		-3.0	✓

The sections that follow break down these findings into their constituent components, examining the possible effects of the pandemic on education and employment separately.

Education

As of May 2020, an estimated 49.7% of all Australians aged 18–24 years were enrolled in some form of study, with 43.5% enrolled in a non-school qualification at certificate III level or above (ABS 2020b).

Higher education

The year 2020 saw a significant increase in the proportion of the Y15 cohort who reported studying towards a bachelor's degree or higher, up 3.2 percentage points to 46.5%. As shown in figure 3 and table 5, this is the only instance of a significant increase from the age of 19 to 20 years observed across the four cohorts.

Figure 3 Proportions of Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 LSAY cohorts studying towards a bachelor's degree or higher at time of survey, ages 19 and 20 years

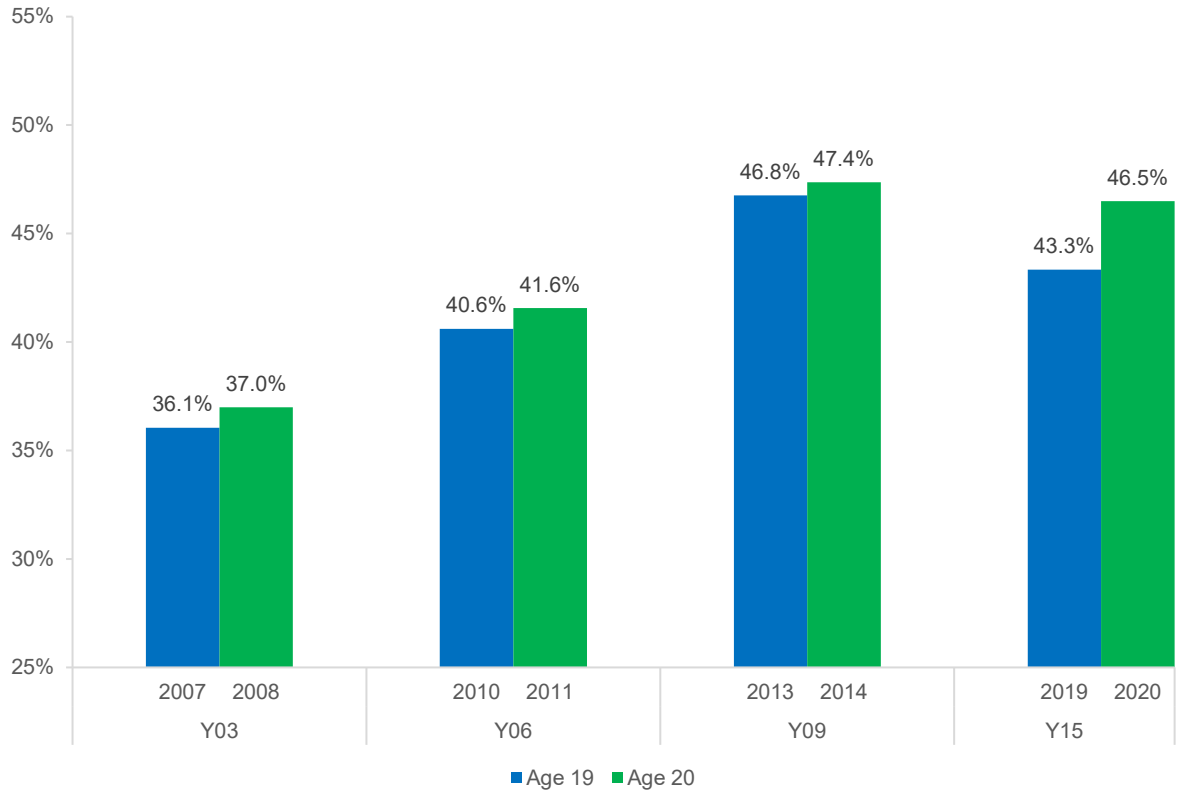


Table 5 Changes in proportions of Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 LSAY cohorts studying towards a bachelor's degree or higher at time of survey, age 20 years

Cohort	Change from age 19, same cohort (%)	p < .05	Change from age 20, previous cohort (%)	p < .05
Y03	+0.9		N/A	
Y06	+1.0		+4.6	✓
Y09	+0.6		+5.8	✓
Y15	+3.2	✓	-0.9	

Although the 2020 proportion did not differ significantly from the Y09 cohort at the same age (that is, 2014, 46.5% vs 47.4%), it is important to note that from 2010 to 2017, a 'demand driven system' for university enrolments was in place, such that the Australian Government removed caps on support for

most domestic undergraduate students (see Productivity Commission 2019).[2] The figures for the Y09 cohort are therefore probably unsuitable as a basis for comparison for understanding the possible effects of the pandemic.

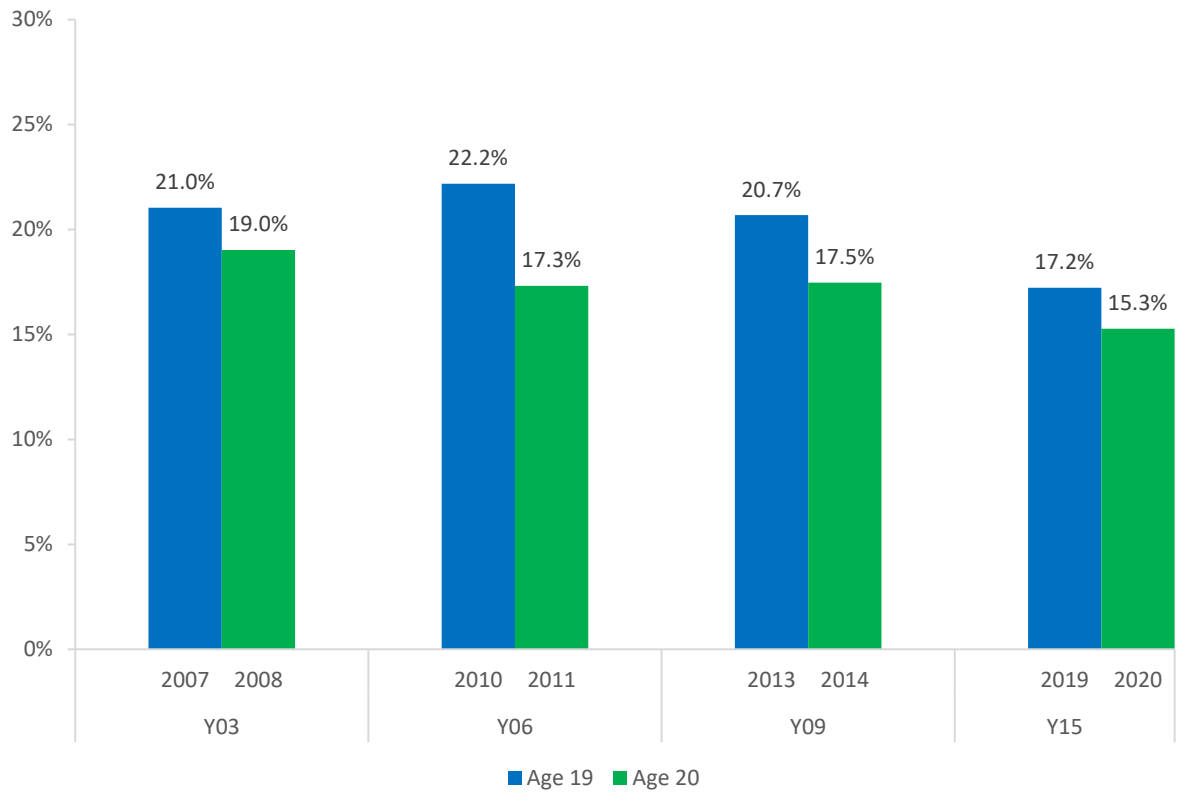
For those in higher education at the time of their LSAY interviews, there was also a substantial decrease in the average number of hours spent on campus, from 16.8 hours in 2019 to 4.6 hours in 2020. This is not surprising in the face of restrictions, rapid shifts to online learning and community fears regarding COVID-19 infection.

Vocational education and training

In 2020, 15.3% of 20-year-olds reported that they were studying towards a certificate or diploma at the time of their surveys. This represented a statistically significant decline of 2.0 percentage points from 2019, as well as a 2.2-percentage-point decline from 20-year-olds in 2014.

As shown in figure 4 and table 6, the magnitude of the age 19 to age 20 years decline is the same as that observed for the Y03 cohort (-2.0%), and smaller than those observed for the Y06 (-4.9%) and Y09 (-3.2%) cohorts. This, combined with lower proportions of VET for the Y15 cohort at age 19, does not point towards any historically unusual effects of the pandemic.

Figure 4 Proportions of Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 LSAY cohorts studying towards a certificate or diploma at time of survey, ages 19 and 20 years



s In the 2018 and 2019 academic years, a funding cap was reintroduced, which maintained the 2017 funding level; see Productivity Commission (2019).

Table 6 **Changes in proportions of Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 LSAY cohorts studying towards a certificate or diploma at time of survey, age 20 years**

Cohort	Change from age 19, same cohort (%)	p < .05	Change from age 20, previous cohort (%)	p < .05
Y03	-2.0	✓	N/A	
Y06	-4.9	✓	-1.7	✓
Y09	-3.2	✓	+0.2	
Y15	-2.0	✓	-2.2	✓

Not studying towards a qualification

Of 20-year-olds, 38.2% reported that they were not studying towards a qualification in 2020. This represented a non-significant change from 2019, but a significant increase of 3.1 percentage points from 20-year-olds in the Y09 cohort.

The non-significant change between the ages of 19 and 20 years is in line with the findings for the Y03 cohort, who also experienced an economic downturn at these ages in the form of the GFC. This is consistent with previous suggestions that young people respond to economic uncertainty by pursuing or remaining in education (for example, Vu, Gørgens & Bray 2012).

Figure 5 **Proportions of Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 LSAY cohorts not studying towards a qualification at time of survey, ages 19 and 20 years**

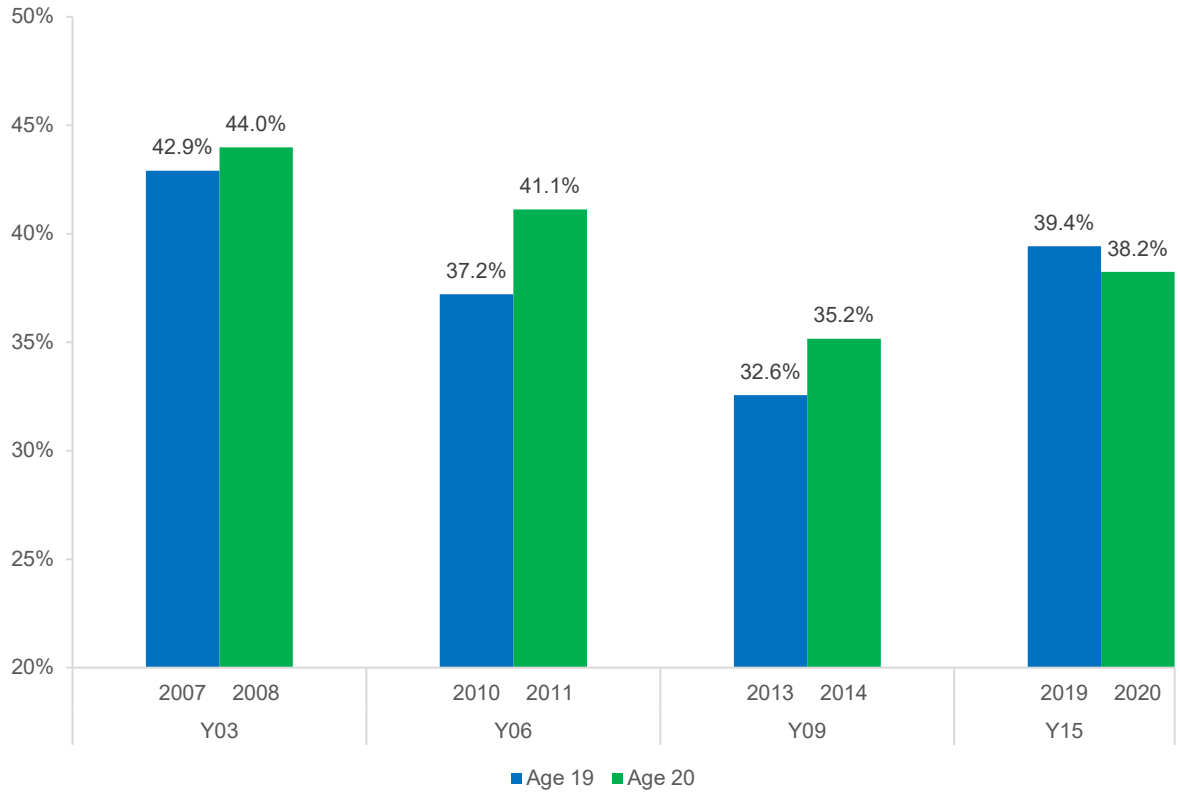


Table 7 Changes in proportions of Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 LSAY cohorts not studying towards a qualification at time of survey, age 20 years

Cohort	Change from age 19, same cohort (%)	P < .05	Change from age 20, previous cohort (%)	P < .05
Y03	+1.1		N/A	
Y06	+3.9	✓	-2.9	✓
Y09	+2.6	✓	-6.0	✓
Y15	-1.2		+3.1	✓

In summary, according to LSAY data, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions on the aggregated education-related circumstances of young people appear to have been limited. A greater percentage of students were studying in 2020 than would have been expected from historical patterns, and examining data within education sectors suggests that this was due to increased proportions of higher education students, although the increase was relatively modest. The consistency of this finding with those for the Y03 cohort — who were aged 20 in 2008, when the GFC affected the Australian economy — as well as those from previous economic downturns, suggests that the uncertainty created by the pandemic led to some students remaining in higher education when they would have otherwise departed.

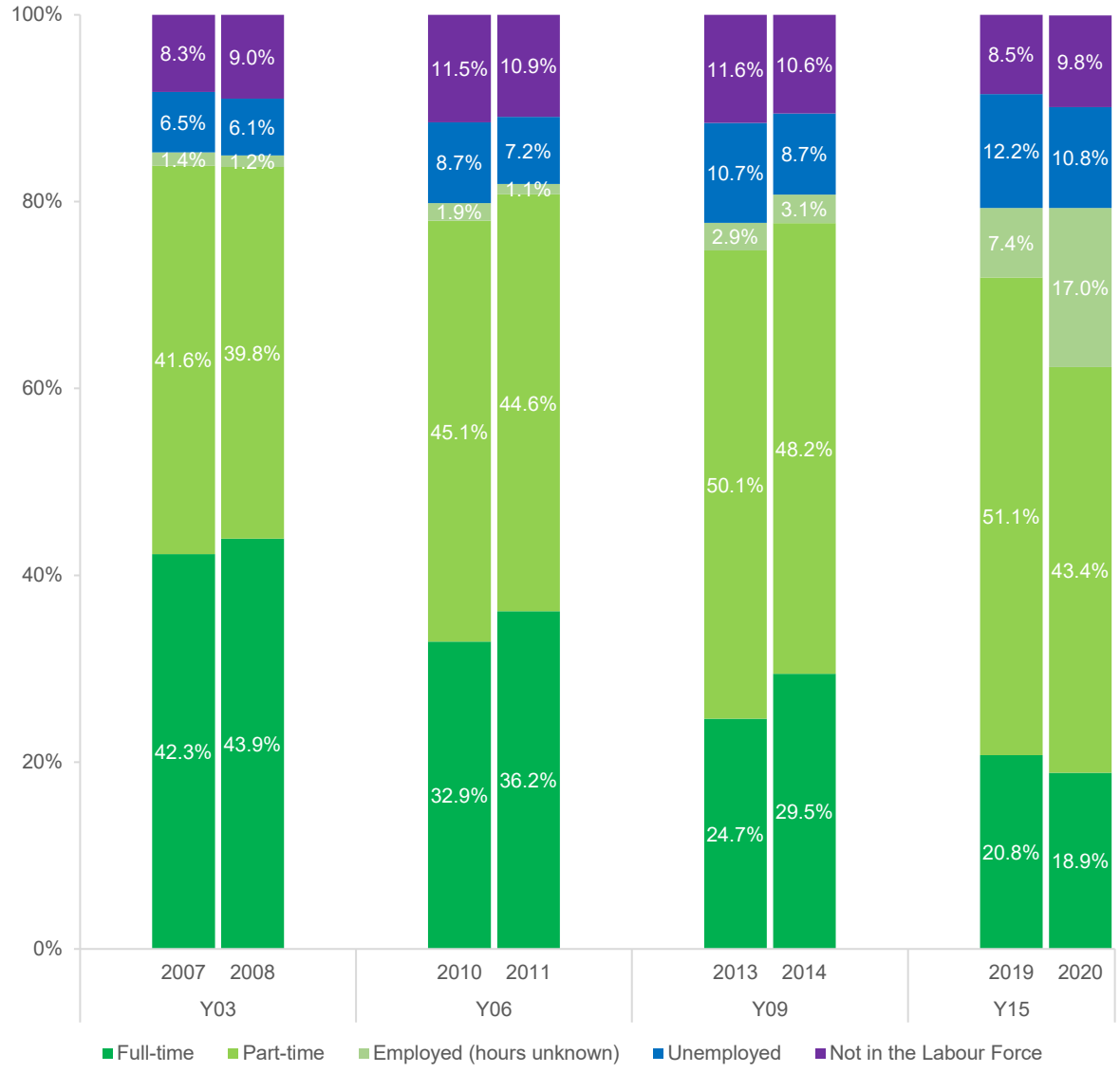
Work

Employment

At the time of their LSAY interviews, 79.4% of 20-year-olds reported being employed in 2020. This figure represented a non-significant change both from 2019, and from 20-year-olds in 2014.

On a superficial level, whether the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions can be claimed to have affected the typical trajectory of employment rates depends on which historical cohort is used as the basis for comparison. The Y06 and Y09 cohorts experienced statistically significant increases of 2.1 and 3.0 percentage points respectively between the ages of 19 and 20. The Y03 cohort, however, saw a non-significant change between these ages.

Figure 6 Employment status of Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 LSAY cohorts at time of survey, ages 19 and 20 years



Note: Increased proportions of hours unknown for Y15 reflect changes to the LSAY questionnaire, including to account for effects of COVID-19 (2020). Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

As both the Y03 and Y15 cohorts experienced significant global economic downturns at these times, this may suggest that the Y06 and Y09 findings represent 'normal' experiences, and that the pandemic has served to prevent the small increase in youth employment rates that would have otherwise occurred.

Table 8 Changes in proportions of Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 LSAY cohorts employed at time of survey, age 20 years

Cohort	Change from age 19, same cohort (%)	p < .05	Change from age 20, previous cohort (%)	p < .05
Y03	-0.3		N/A	
Y06	+2.1	✓	-3.0	✓
Y09	+3.0	✓	-1.1	
Y15	+0.0		-1.4	

If the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions can be said to have had any effect on the aggregated employment circumstances of young Australians, it has been to keep employment and unemployment rates constant. This is at a time when historical trends suggest that there would have otherwise been a small increase and a small decrease, respectively. However, supplementary LSAY data provide stronger evidence for the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market experiences of young Australians, beyond aggregated employment rates.

Receipt of JobKeeper

The Australian Government's JobKeeper payment was introduced on 30 March 2020. During the first phase, which lasted until 27 September 2020, eligible businesses and not-for-profits received $1500 before tax per fortnight per employee to cover the cost of wages. This amount was reduced to $1200 from 28 September 2020 to 3 January 2021 for employees who worked 20 hours a week or more during the reference period, or $750 for employees who worked fewer than 20 hours a week on average. An additional reduction was implemented between 4 January 2021 and 28 March 2021 but is not relevant to the Y15 survey data for 2020.

Table 9 summarises the employment circumstances for 20-year-olds in LSAY in 2020. Of the 79.4% of the sample who were employed at the time of their surveys, 20.9% (or 16.5% of the total sample) were receiving JobKeeper. Of those receiving JobKeeper, 13.5% (2.2% of the total sample) were working zero hours.

Table 9 Breakdown of employment circumstances for Y15 LSAY cohort, 2020 (age 20 years)

	%
Employed	**79.4**
Receiving JobKeeper	16.5
Working 0 hours	2.2
Working > 0 hours	12.3
Hours unknown	2.1
Not receiving JobKeeper	59.6
JobKeeper status unknown	3.2
Unemployed	**10.8**
Not in the labour force	**9.8**

These high figures are likely to be attributable to the over-representation of young Australians in the sectors disproportionately affected by COVID-19-related restrictions: almost 50% of employee

compensation in the second quarter of 2020 in the accommodation and food services, and arts and recreation services industries were accounted for by the JobKeeper payment (Borland & Hunt 2021).

Underemployment

Figure 7 and table 10 represent the proportions of 19- and 20-year-olds who reported being underemployed at the time of their LSAY surveys. In accordance with ABS classifications, underemployment is defined as having a job, working fewer than 35 hours per week, and desiring to work for more hours. Underemployment data are not available for the Y03 and Y06 cohorts, as they were not asked whether they would prefer to work more hours at the ages of 19 and 20.

Although rates of underemployment were higher for the Y15 cohort, it is also noteworthy that there was a significant increase, of 3.6 percentage points, between the ages of 19 and 20. Conversely, there was a significant decrease, of 3.0 percentage points, between the same ages for the Y09 cohort.

Figure 7 Proportions of Y09 and Y15 LSAY cohorts underemployed at time of survey, ages 19 and 20 years

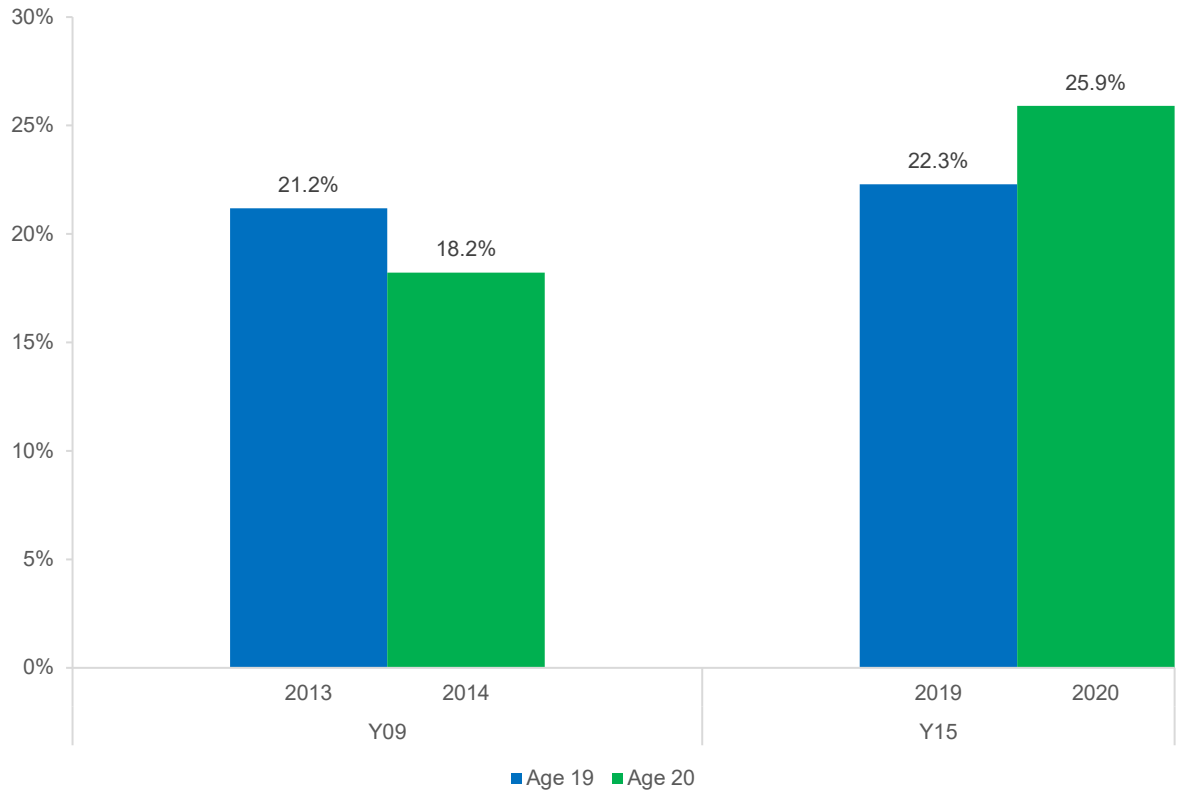


Table 10 Changes in proportions of Y09 and Y15 LSAY cohorts underemployed at time of survey, age 20 years

Cohort	Change from age 19, same cohort (%)	p < .05	Change from age 20, previous cohort (%)	p < .05
Y09	-3.0	✓	N/A	
Y15	+3.6	✓	+7.7	✓

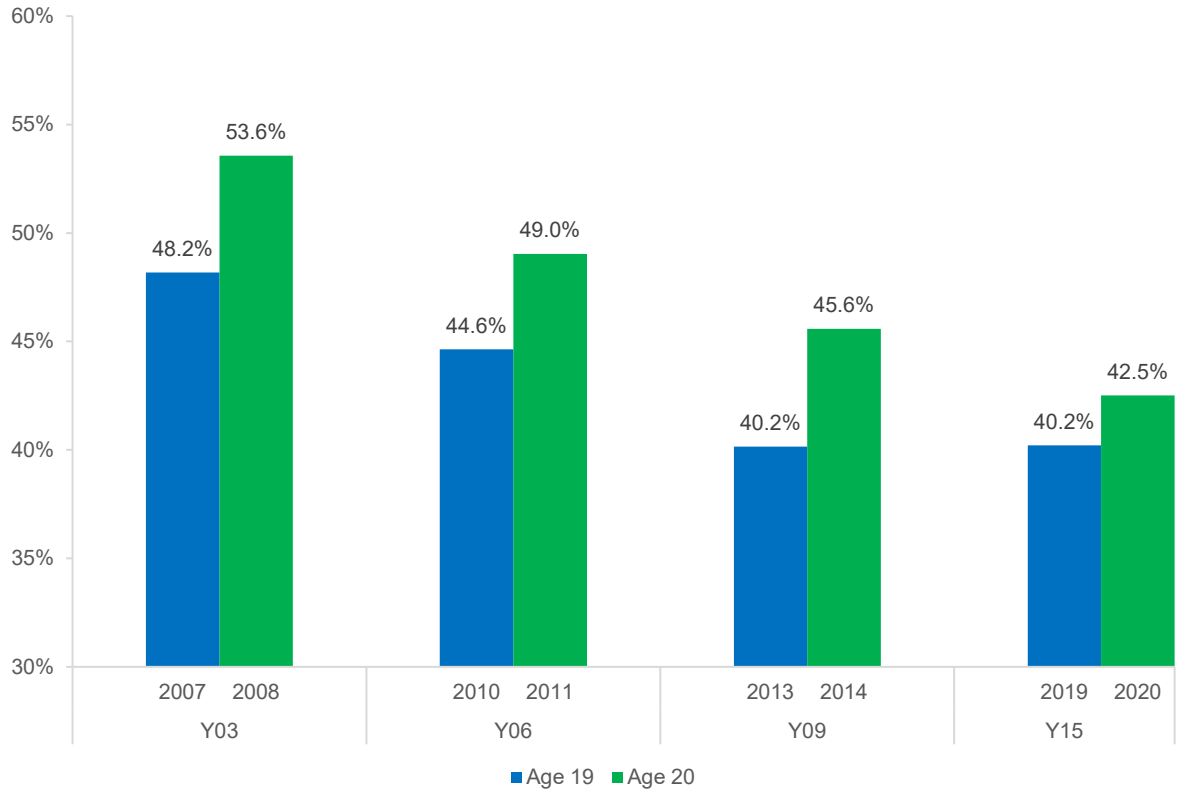
Permanent/ongoing employment

Figure 8 and table 11 indicate the proportions of 19 and 20-year-olds who were in permanent or ongoing employment at the time of their surveys across the four cohorts. The Y03, Y06 and Y09 cohorts all

experienced significant increases in rates of permanent employment between the ages of 19 and 20, of between 4.4 and 5.4 percentage points. Conversely, the Y15 cohort did not experience a significant change.

This may account for some of the increased levels of underemployment observed at the age of 20 for the Y15 cohort; one of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions may have been lower rates of transition from insecure roles to permanent and ongoing employment, by comparison with historical trends.

Figure 8 Proportions of Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 LSAY cohorts in permanent/ongoing employment at time of survey, ages 19 and 20 years



Note: Excludes respondents for whom labour force status and/or permanency status were unknown.

Table 11 Changes in proportions of Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 LSAY cohorts in permanent/ongoing employment at time of survey, age 20 years

Cohort	Change from age 19, same cohort (%)	p < .05	Change from age 20, previous cohort (%)	p < .05
Y03	+5.4	✓	N/A	
Y06	+4.4	✓	-4.5	✓
Y09	+5.4	✓	-3.5	✓
Y15	+2.3		-3.1	✓

Note: Excludes respondents for whom labour force status and/or permanency status were unknown.

Hours worked

The impacts of pandemic-related restrictions on young people's employment circumstances are more evident through effects on the hours they reported working on average each week. The ABS has suggested that hours worked 'provide a more comprehensive indication of the extent of labour market

impacts over the pandemic than employment, given some employed people temporarily have reduced hours or no work, without necessarily losing their jobs' (ABS 2021b).

Figure 9 and table 12 display the data from the four cohorts. The Y03 cohort did not experience a significant change between 19- and 20-year-olds, although this may be due to this cohort having consistently higher average working hours than the other cohorts. The Y06 and Y09 cohorts experienced significant increases of 1.0 and 1.7 hours per week, respectively. The Y15 cohort, however, experienced a significant decrease of 2.1 hours per week, or 9.2% from their 2019 average.

Figure 9 Average weekly hours worked for Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 LSAY cohorts at time of survey, ages 19 and 20 years

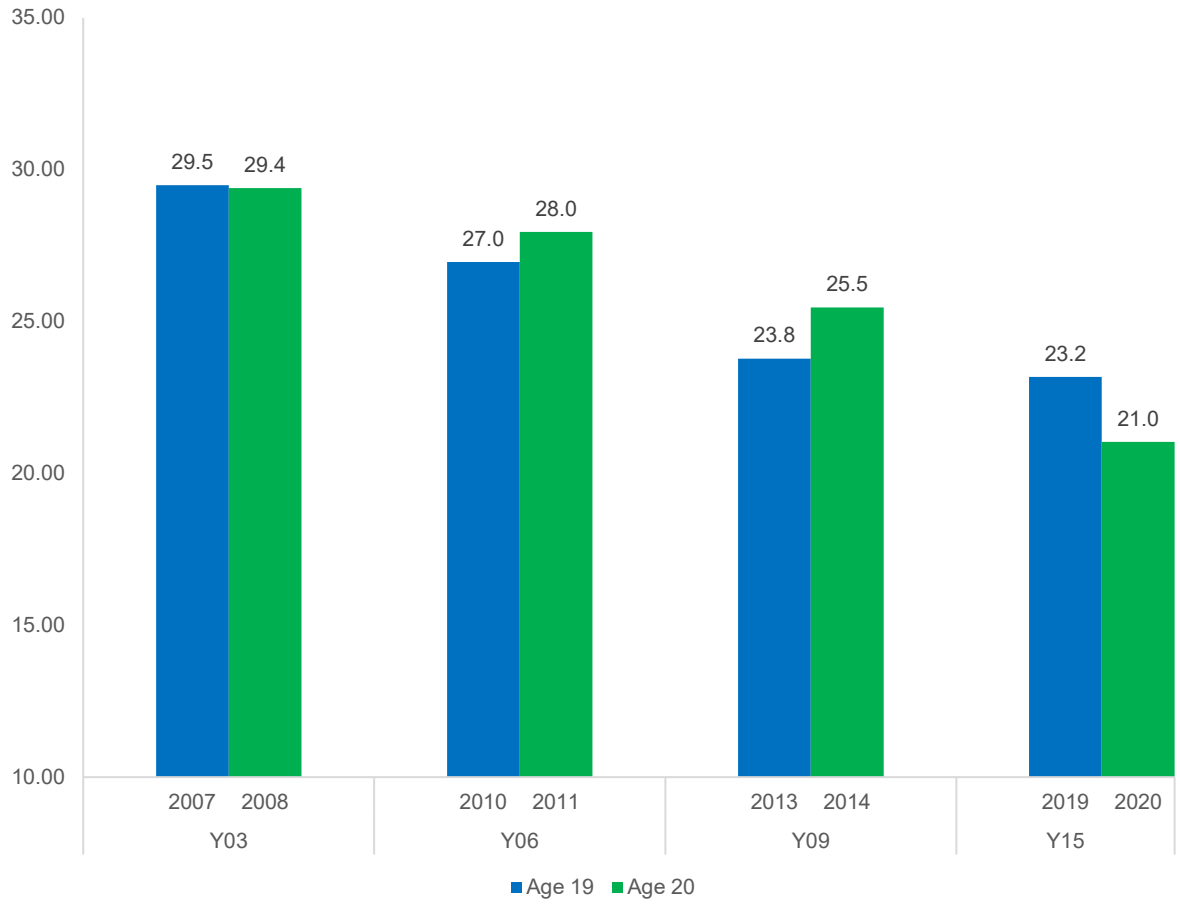


Table 12 Changes in average weekly hours worked for Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 LSAY cohorts at time of survey, age 20 years

Cohort	Change from age 19, same cohort (hours)	p < .05	Change from age 20, previous cohort (hours)	p < .05
Y03	-0.1		N/A	
Y06	+1.0	✓	-1.4	✓
Y09	+1.7	✓	-2.5	✓
Y15	-2.1	✓	-4.4	✓

In addition to total business closures due to the COVID-19-related restrictions, businesses often reduce hours worked in response to labour market shocks in order to keep workers in their jobs, especially if the expected duration of the downturn is uncertain (National Skills Commission 2020). In combination with the data for underemployment, this suggests that the primary impact of the pandemic for young people's employment in Australia was to limit the hours they were able to work.

Apprenticeships

The Y15 cohort did not experience a significant decrease in the proportions who were in an apprenticeship at the time of their surveys between the ages of 19 and 20. The Y03, Y06 and Y09 cohorts all experienced decreases of between 2.0 and 2.8 percentage points at the equivalent ages.

Figure 10 Proportions of Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 LSAY cohorts in apprenticeships at time of survey, ages 19 and 20 years

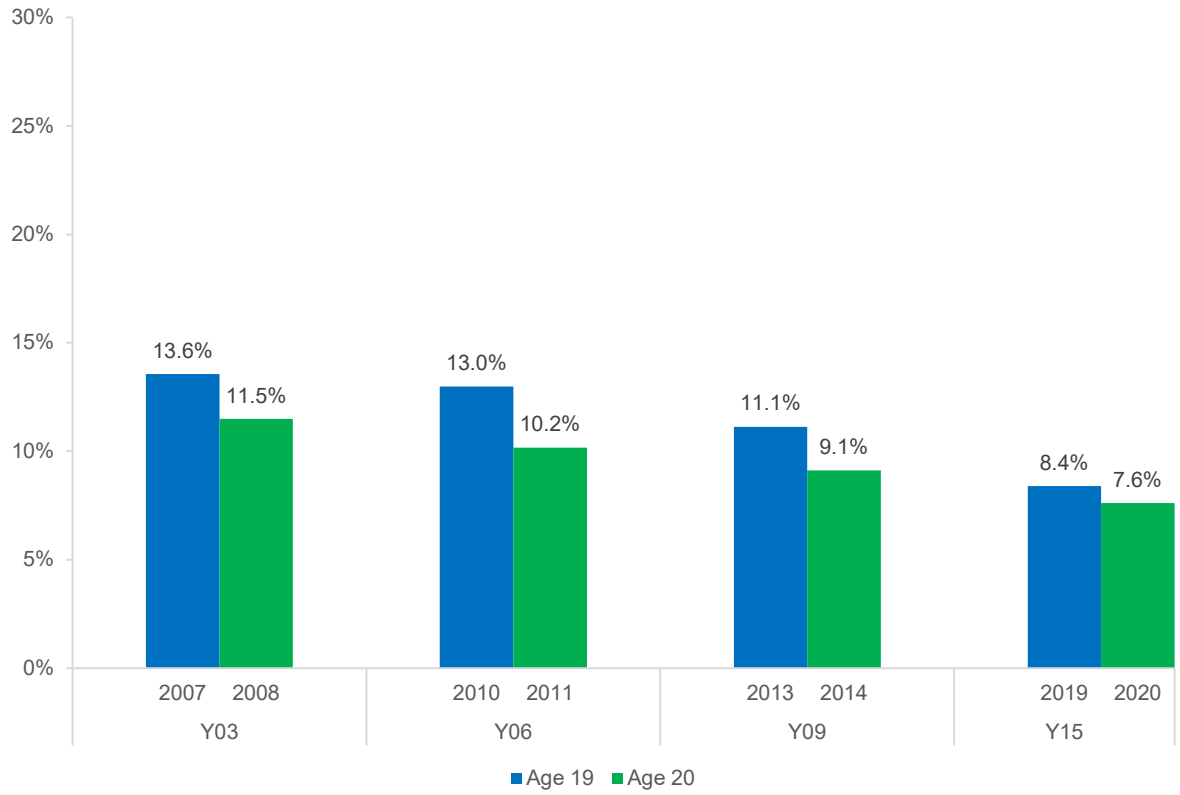


Table 13 Changes in proportions of Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 LSAY cohorts in apprenticeships at time of survey, ages 20 years

Cohort	Change from age 19, same cohort (%)	p < .05	Change from age 20, previous cohort (%)	p < .05
Y03	-2.1	✓	N/A	
Y06	-2.8	✓	-1.3	✓
Y09	-2.0	✓	-1.1	
Y15	-0.8		-1.5	✓

The complexity of the Australian apprenticeships system means that there are many possible reasons for this apparent discrepancy. The LSAY data do not, for instance, allow for a clear distinction between apprenticeships and traineeships, or between trade and non-trade apprenticeships, which have previously been noted to have behaved differently over this timeframe. For example, Stanwick, Ackehurst and Fraser (2021) have shown that, while rates of non-trade apprenticeship commencements in Australians aged under 25 years have steadily declined since 2012, rates of trade apprenticeship commencements have remained relatively stable. For the 2019–20 data, it is plausible that policies such as JobKeeper and the Supporting Apprentices and Trainees wage subsidy, as well as the comparative lack of progression pathways caused by pandemic-related restrictions, may have resulted in greater proportions of apprentices remaining attached to their employers than would have occurred otherwise. Nevertheless, only 1.8% of apprentices said that their training was on hold at the time of their interviews due to COVID-

19, and just 1.6% claimed that they had been laid off or forced to change their employer because of COVID-19. Although this may suggest that the direct effects of the pandemic on apprenticeships were relatively minimal, the aggregated figures likely obscure effects at the sub-group level. Unpacking policy impacts on training is outside the scope of this report.

Living circumstances

Living in the family home

Figure 11 shows the percentages of LSAY respondents who reported living in their family homes at the time of their surveys. Due to differences in wording, the figures for Y15 are not directly comparable with other cohorts: Y03, Y06 and Y09 assess whether respondents are specifically living with their parents, whereas Y15 broadens this to include other family members. The decrease observed between ages 19 and 20 in Y15 (81.3% in 2019 to 77.7% in 2020) is nevertheless consistent with those observed in other cohorts.

Nearly nine per cent (8.9%) of LSAY respondents in 2020 reported having to move in with their parents or other relatives due to government restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic; 5.4% reported having to move elsewhere, such as with friends or a partner.

Figure 11 Proportions of Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 LSAY cohorts living in family home at time of survey, ages 19 and 20 years

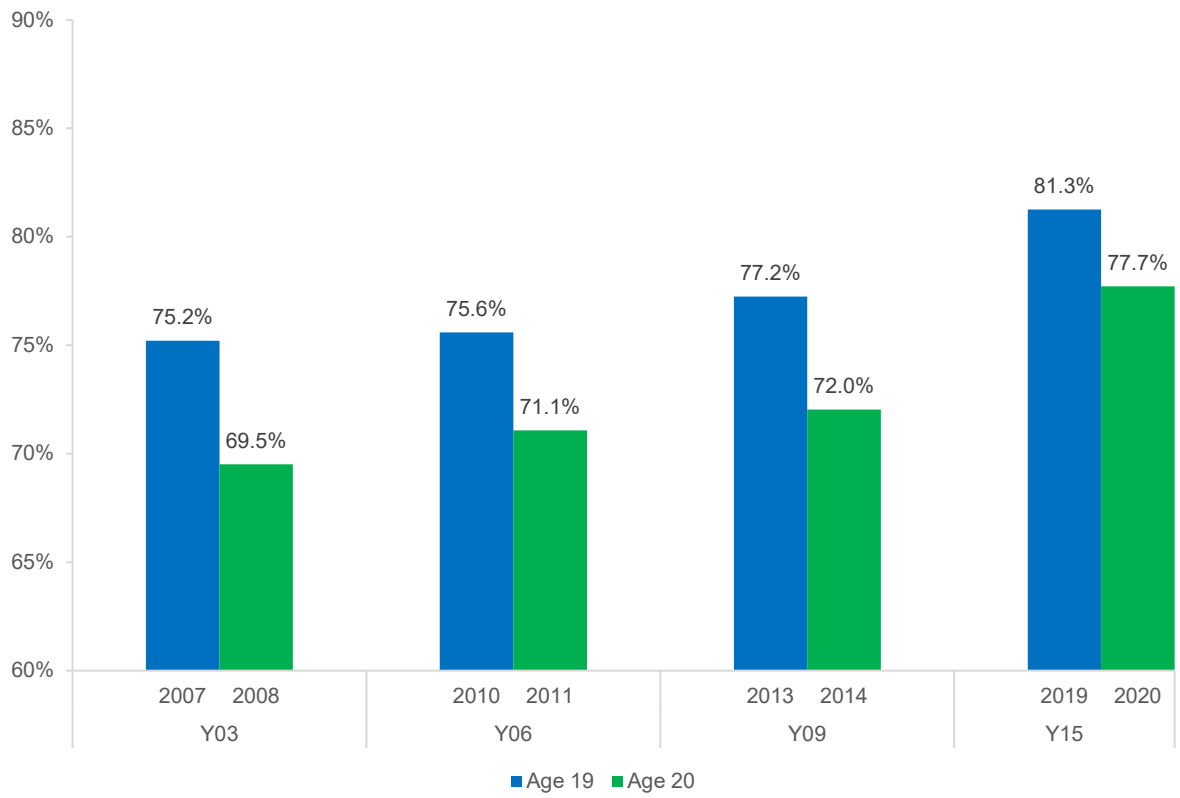


Table 14 Changes in proportions of Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 LSAY cohorts living in family home at time of survey, age 20 years

Cohort	Change from age 19, same cohort (%)	P < .05	Change from age 20, previous cohort (%)	P < .05
Y03	-5.7	✓	N/A	
Y06	-4.5	✓	+1.5	
Y09	-5.2	✓	+1.0	
Y15	-3.5	✓	+5.7[A]	✓

[A] Wording for relevant Y15 items differs from wording for previous cohorts.

Only 1.1% of all 20-year-olds who were making rent, board or mortgage repayments in 2020 said that they had to defer those repayments due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, 4.0% said they had to renegotiate their rental agreements or housing payments. However, financial difficulties related to renting or other repayments may also be reflected in the 16.5% of the sample who reported disruptions to their housing circumstances due to pandemic-related restrictions.

Wellbeing

Mental health and life satisfaction

One area in which the pandemic appears to have had a pronounced effect on young people is their mental health. Table 15 presents the outcomes of the Kessler-6 measure of general psychological distress (Kessler et al. 2003) for the Y09 and Y15 cohorts at the age of 20. Comparable data are unavailable for the Y03 and Y06 cohorts: the Kessler-6 measure was not administered at the same age.

In addition to an increase of 3.3 points in average Kessler-6 scores (from a possible 30) since 2014, the proportion of 20-year-olds meeting the criteria for probable serious mental illness increased from 7.1% in 2014 to 23.3% in 2020. This is comparable with the estimated 27.6% of Australian adults who met the criteria for clinically significant symptoms of depression during the first month of COVID-19 restrictions, in April 2020 (Fisher et al. 2020).

Table 15 Mean Kessler-6 scores and proportions of 20-year-olds meeting criteria for probable serious mental illness

	Mean K6 score	Proportion meeting criteria
Y09 (2014)	11.0	7.1%
Y15 (2020)	14.3	23.3%

Notes: Scores range from a minimum of six to a maximum of 30, with higher scores indicating higher distress. Excludes respondents who provided no answer. Probable serious mental illness is classified as a score of 19 or higher.

Table 16 Mean Kessler-6 scores and proportions of respondents meeting criteria for probable serious mental illness for 20-year-olds in 2020, by demographic

	N	Mean K6 score	Proportion meeting criteria
Gender			
Female	1922	15.5	29.4%
Male	1356	13.0	17.0%
Labour force status			
Employed	2608	13.8	19.7%
Unemployed	317	17.2	45.8%
NILF	351	14.9	27.3%
Study status			
VET	381	13.6	23.8%
Higher education	1835	14.1	19.1%
Apprentice/trainee	160	11.9	13.4%
None	1062	14.9	28.4%
Social support			
Available	3058	13.9	20.6%
Unavailable	220	18.7	51.0%

Notes: Scores range from a minimum of six to a maximum of 30, with higher scores indicating higher distress. Excludes respondents who provided no answer. Probable serious mental illness is classified as a score of 19 or higher.

Table 16 compares psychological distress scores in 2020 between genders, as well as makes comparisons by labour force status, study status and perceived social support. In line with findings from other studies conducted during the height of pandemic restrictions in Australia in 2020, female respondents had higher average Kessler-6 scores and substantially higher proportions reporting probable serious mental illness (29.4% vs 17.0% of males). Those who were employed at the time of their survey, including those in receipt of JobKeeper but working zero hours, were considerably less likely to report probable serious

mental illness compared with those not in the labour force, and particularly those who were unemployed; 45.8% of all respondents who were not working but looking for work (that is, unemployed) reported probable serious mental illness.

Being in some form of study or training appeared to be inversely associated with psychological distress. This is somewhat unexpected, given that Australian and international research suggests that tertiary students who suffer academic, financial, and social pressures experience heightened distress (Browne, Munro & Cass 2017). Of all respondents who were not in any form of study or training at the time of their interviews, 28.4% met the criteria for probable serious mental illness, compared with 23.8% of VET students, 19.1% of higher education students and 13.4% of apprentices and trainees.

A perceived lack of social support may offer one explanation for psychological distress. Of respondents to the 2020 LSAY survey, 90.6% said they could ask someone for support in time of a crisis. The most commonly reported sources of support were: family members (80.7%); friends (70.3%); partners (36.4%); work colleagues (25.8%); health, legal or financial professionals (21.5%); online social support networks (15.7%); schools or school counsellors (9.4%); community, charity or religious organisations (8.8%); neighbours (7.9%); and local council or other government services (7.3%). Of the 220 respondents who reported no form of available social support, just over half (51.0%) met the criteria for probable serious mental illness.

Table 17 Mean LSAY life satisfaction scores at ages 19 and 20 years, by cohort

	Y09 – age 19	Y09 – age 20	p < .05	Y15 – age 19	Y15 – age 20	p < .05
Your life as a whole	8.2	8.1	✓	7.3	7.2	✓
Your future	8.0	7.6	✓	7.2	6.9	✓
The work you do, at study, at home or in a job	7.4	7.4		6.9	6.7	✓
What you do in your spare time	7.8	7.6	✓	7.1	6.8	✓
How you get on with people in general	8.3	8.1	✓	7.6	7.4	✓
The money you get each week	6.7	6.6		6.2	6.4	✓
Your social life	7.7	7.5	✓	6.9	6.5	✓
Your independence – being able to do what you want	8.3	8.2	✓	7.6	7.4	✓
Your career prospects	7.8	7.5	✓	7.0	6.7	✓
Your life at home	8.2	8.1		7.6	7.5	✓
Your standard of living	8.5	8.4	✓	8.0	8.0	
Where you live	8.1	8.1		7.7	7.7	

Note: Scores range from a minimum of zero to a maximum of 10.

Specific areas in which satisfaction has deteriorated since 2014 may be gleaned by examining LSAY life-satisfaction data, presented in table 17 (see also appendix B). Across all areas, the Y15 cohort rated their satisfaction lower in absolute terms (that is, scores out of 10) than did the Y09 cohort at the ages of both 19 and 20 years. Broadly, decreases in satisfaction for these two age groups were of a similar magnitude between the two cohorts. Although the effects were small, the areas in which the Y15 cohort experienced greater decreases in satisfaction were the work they performed and their social lives, both of which are feasibly linked to lockdowns and other restrictions. It is also notable that the decrease in satisfaction with standards of living that occurred between ages 19 and 20 years for the Y09 cohort were not repeated for the Y15 cohort. Conversely, there was an increase in satisfaction between ages 19 and

20 years for the money that respondents received each week, which did not occur for the Y09 cohort, and may be partially explained by the availability of the JobKeeper payment.

Discussion

Very few aspects of the lives of young people have not been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia. While the aggregated rates of education and employment have remained relatively stable, in part due to the implementation of policies such as JobKeeper and JobTrainer, young Australians have had to endure significant reductions in their work hours, difficulties associated with transitioning to online learning and to working-from-home arrangements, along with other ongoing uncertainties. These have collectively impeded young Australians' ability to plan for the future. In many instances, these conditions have exacerbated issues existing before the pandemic, with severe implications for mental health and wellbeing.

Noting that the findings for this report are at the aggregate level, no meaningful change was observed in the proportion of young people engaged in education, employment or training between 2019 and 2020. However, this obscured the possible effects of the pandemic and associated restrictions on young Australians' circumstances. There was an increase in the proportion of young people participating in higher education, beyond what might have been expected from the trajectories of previous cohorts. This was not the case for vocational education and training, where participation was already lower in 2019 than for other cohorts at the same age, and had decreased again by 2020. Furthermore, the proportion of young people in no form of education did not increase, when a natural flow from education to employment might have been expected from the more recent cohorts. The experience of 20-year-olds in 2020 was more closely aligned with that of 20-year-olds from the Y03 cohort (that is, in 2008), who dealt with the effects of the GFC. This situation is consistent with research that suggests young people 'retreat' into education during economic downturns, due to reduced opportunity cost, and in order to increase their future earning potential (Vu, Gørgens & Bray 2012).

The employment landscape for young Australians during 2020 was likewise nuanced. While there was little change in the proportion employed overall from 2019 to 2020, there was a decrease in the average number of hours worked, and an increase in the proportion who were underemployed. The social effects of the pandemic were also reflected in the LSAY data, which were considerable in some instances. Most marked was an increase in reported mental health issues compared with 2014, and psychological distress was particularly high among females, the unemployed, those not studying and those not able to access social support.

The data represented in this report reflect the lived experiences of young Australians in 2020, during the second wave of COVID-19 infections in Australia, which was predominantly centred in Victoria. While the remainder of this section is dedicated to a discussion of these findings and the implications for policy, there have been further waves of infections since 2020 that have also resulted in lockdowns in other states, as well as additional policy announcements with implications for young Australians. These are discussed briefly, where relevant.

Australia's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic will depend on a deep understanding of the societal groups that have been worst affected, as well as those who will be affected in the future (National Skills Commission 2020). Historical evidence suggests that young Australians are likely to be disproportionately impacted, due to their higher representation in the industries worst hit by economic downturns (for example, hospitality, retail), as well as their comparative lack of experience in the labour market (Anlezark 2011). It has been posited that the long-term effects of the pandemic are likely to be similar to those following the Global Financial Crisis, including delayed entry into the workforce from education, longer periods of unemployment, and fewer opportunities relevant to young people's skills and training (Waugh & Circelli 2021). However, even a return to pre-pandemic levels of youth unemployment leaves

Australia with elevated youth unemployment and underemployment rates, which had been growing since the GFC (Waugh & Circelli 2021).

At the time of writing, the evidence for post-pandemic predictions is mixed. On the one hand, there is some cause for optimism that the worst of the economic downturn has passed: while the Australian economy went into recession in the second quarter of 2020, to the tune of a 7.2% decrease in GDP, by the first quarter of 2021 an 8.3% recovery had been recorded (Borland & Hunt 2021). Likewise, in the second half of 2020, the proportion of employers recruiting rose from 22% to 45% (National Skills Commission 2021). However, ongoing outbreaks of COVID-19 infections and the policies implemented in consequence, make interpretation difficult. For example, the closure of international borders to skilled migrants has resulted in reports of skills shortages in the labour force (Oxford Analytica 2021). With Australia's borders reopening to all fully vaccinated visa holders from 21 February 2022, it remains to be seen what impact this will have on young people's employment prospects. One lasting effect of the pandemic is likely to be the ongoing transition of many industries to working-from-home arrangements, which may have costs to employees in the form of fewer training, development and promotion opportunities (Productivity Commission 2021).

While young people's future employment prospects are concerning, it is also worth commenting on young people's education experiences during the pandemic. In addition to an increase in higher education participation between 2019 and 2020, as seen in the LSAY data, there has also been substantial investment by the state and federal governments in vocational education and training through policies such as JobTrainer and others addressing apprenticeships and other programs. While insufficient time has elapsed since the enactment of these policies to gauge their success, commencements in apprenticeships and traineeships (for example) increased Australia-wide by nearly 215 000 in the 12 months to 30 June 2021, the largest such increase since 2014 (NCVER 2022). It can be hoped that the immediate labour market consequences of the pandemic for young Australians may be offset to a degree by this investment in post-secondary education and training, resulting in increased future earnings potential (Vu, Gørgens & Bray 2012).

In line with results from other surveys, the most striking finding from the LSAY 2020 data was the effect of the pandemic on young Australians' mental health, with nearly one in four respondents meeting the criteria for probable serious mental illness. This increased to nearly 29% of female respondents and 46% of unemployed respondents. This heightened psychological distress is an area of clear concern, one that needs to be a future focus of policy development; that is, how the social and economic impacts of the pandemic on wellbeing can be mitigated. The proportion of Australians accessing Medicare for mental health services increased by 6.6% between 2009 and 2010, and 2019 and 2020 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022), and the pandemic appears to have increased the already existing pressure on mental health services (Davey 2021). The ABS National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, first conducted in 2007, was repeated between December 2020 and July 2021, with results forthcoming. This may provide further insights into the short-term effects of the pandemic on the wellbeing of young Australians and identify possible avenues for policy intervention.

This report has focused on the events of 2020 in terms of young Australians' journeys, as documented in the LSAY data. To develop a clearer picture of the sustained impact of the pandemic, it will be important to determine what the ensuing waves of the LSAY cohort Y15 say about the experiences of young people during 2021 and through to 2022. Were the effects described in this report sustained? Were they, in the longer-term, similar to those of the GFC? Or has the uniqueness of the COVID-19 pandemic, together with policy responses, resulted in more favourable outcomes for young people as they age and enter the workforce in greater numbers?

References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2020a, *Labour force, Australia*, viewed November 2021, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/latest-release>.

——2020b, *Education and work, Australia*, viewed November 2021, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/education/education-and-work-australia/may-2020>.

——2021a, *Impact of lockdowns on household consumption — insights from alternative data sources*, viewed May 2022, <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/impact-lockdowns-household-consumption-insights-alternative-data-sources>.

——2021b, *Insights into hours worked, November 2021*, viewed February 2022, <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/insights-hours-worked-november-2021>.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022, *Mental health services in Australia*, viewed February 2022, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/mental-health-services/mental-health-services-in-australia/report-contents/summary-of-mental-health-services-in-australia>.

Anlezark, A 2011, *Young people in an economic downturn*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Atkins, M, Callis, Z, Flatau, P & Kaleveld, L 2020, *COVID-19 and youth unemployment CSI response*, Centre for Social Impact, viewed November 2021, <https://www.csi.edu.au/media/uploads/csi_fact_shee_social_covid-19_youth_unemploment.pdf>.

Atkinson, G & Stanwick, J 2016, *Trends in VET: policy and participation*, NCVER, Adelaide, viewed November 2021, <http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/411170>.

Berger, E & Reupert, A 2020, 'The COVID-19 pandemic in Australia: lessons learnt', *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, vol.12, no.5, p.494.

Bishop, J & Day, I 2020, 'How many jobs did JobKeeper keep?', Reserve Bank of Australia, viewed February 2022, <https://www.rba.gov.au/publications/rdp/2020/pdf/rdp2020-07.pdf>.

Borland, J 2020, 'Hard times for the young in Australia's labour market: labour market snapshot', University of Melbourne, viewed November 2021, < https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TJ8IVzerfgGXrsrDwWJfa_GwlSVIh7cf/view>.

Borland, J & Hunt, J 2021, *Did the Australian JobKeeper program save jobs by subsidizing temporary layoffs?*, Melbourne Institute working paper no. 26/21, viewed February 2022, <https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/3965195/wp2021n26.pdf>.

Bowman, J & Callan, VJ 2021, *Engaging more employers in nationally recognised training to develop their workforce*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Brotherhood of St Laurence 2020, 'Prosperity's children: youth unemployment in Australia', Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne, viewed November 2021,

<https://library.bsl.org.au/jspui/bitstream/1/11694/1/BSL_Prosperitys_children_youth_unemployment_Dec2019.pdf>.

Browne, V, Munro, J & Cass, J 2017, 'Under the radar: the mental health of Australian university students', *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association*, vol.25, no.2.

Buddelmeyer, H & Hérault, N 2010, *The role of VET in preventing the scarring effect of youth joblessness*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Davey, M 2021, '"Like hunting for unicorns"': Australians on the search for adequate, affordable mental healthcare, *The Guardian*, 19 April 2021, viewed 18 February 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/apr/19/like-hunting-for-unicorns-australians-on-the-search-for-adequate-affordable-mental-healthcare>.

Dodd, RH, Dadazynski, K, Okan, O, McCaffery, KJ & Pickles, K 2021, 'Psychological wellbeing and academic experience of university students in Australia during COVID-19', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol.18, no.3, p.866.

Fisher, JR, Tran, TD, Hammarberg, K, Sastry, J, Nguyen, H, Rowe, H, Poppelstone, S, Stocker, R, Stubber, C & Kirkman, M 2020, 'Mental health of people in Australia in the first month of COVID-19 restrictions: a national survey', *Medical journal of Australia*, vol.213, no.10, pp.458–64.

Griffin, T & Mihelic, M 2019, *Online delivery of VET qualifications: current use and outcomes*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Gurvich, C, Thomas, N, Thomas, EH, Hudaib, AR, Sood, L, Fabiatos, K, Sutton, K, Isaacs, A, Arunogiri, S, Sharp, G & Kulkarni, J 2021, 'Coping styles and mental health in response to societal changes during the COVID-19 pandemic', *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, vol.67, no.5, pp.540—9.

Hall, M 2021, *Apprentices and trainees 2020: impacts of COVID-19 on training activity*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Hume, S & Griffin, T. 2021, *The online delivery of VET during COVID-19: part 1*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Hurley, P 2020, *The impact of coronavirus on apprentices and trainees*, Mitchell Institute for Education and Health Policy, Victoria University.

Karmel, T & Misko, J 2009, *Apprenticeships and traineeships in the downturn*, NCVER, Adelaide, viewed November 2021, <https://www.ncver.edu.au/__data/assets/file/0012/10731/apprenticeships-and-traineeships-in-downturn-2197.pdf>.

Kessler, RC, Barker, PR, Colpe, LJ, Epstein, JF, Gfroerer, JC, Hiripi, E, Howes, MJ, Normand, SL, Manderscheid, RW, Walters, EE & Zaslavsky, AM 2003, 'Screening for serious mental illness in the general population', *Archives of General Psychiatry*, vol.60, no.2, pp.184—9.

McLaren, HJ, Wong, KR, Nguyen, KN & Mahamadachchi, KND 2020, 'Covid-19 and women's triple burden: vignettes from Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Vietnam and Australia', *Social Sciences*, vol.9, no.5, p.87.

National Skills Commission 2020, *A snapshot in time: the Australian labour market and COVID-19*, viewed November 2021, < https://www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-06/NSC_a_snapshot_in_time_report.pdf>.

——2021, *Employers' insights on the Australian labour market — 2020 data report*, viewed February 2022, <https://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/GainInsights/EmployersRecruitmentInsights>.

NCVER (National Centre for Vocational Education and Training) 2021, *Total VET students and courses*, viewed November 2021, <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/collections/students-and-courses-collection/total-vet-students-and-courses>.

——2022, *Historical time series of apprenticeships and traineeships in Australia, from 1963*, viewed April 2022, < https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/all-data/historical-time-series-of-apprenticeships-and-traineeships-in-australia-from-1963-to-2021>.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) 2021, *Implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for vocational education and training*, OECD, Paris, viewed November 2021, <https://www.oecd.org/education/implications-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-for-vocational-education-and-training-55afea00-en.htm>.

Oxford Analytica 2021, 'Skills shortage may hit Australia's post-COVID growth', *Expert Briefings*, <https://doi.org/10.1108/OXAN-DB265487>.

Pather, N, Blyth, P, Chapman, JA, Dayal, MR, Flack, NA, Fogg, QA, Green, RA, Hulme, AK, Johnson, IP, Meyer, AJ & Morley, JW 2020, 'Forced disruption of anatomy education in Australia and New Zealand: an acute response to the Covid-19 pandemic', *Anatomical Sciences Education*, vol.13, no.3, pp.284—300.

Productivity Commission 2019, *The demand-driven university system: a mixed report card*, Commission Research Paper, Canberra.

——2021, *Working from home: research paper*, Canberra, viewed February 2022, <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/working-from-home/working-from-home.pdf>.

Ranasinghe, R, Chew, E, Knight, G & Siekmann, G 2019, *School-to-work pathways*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Rossell, SL, Neill, E, Phillipou, A, Tan, EJ, Toh, WL, Van Rheenen, TE & Meyer, D 2021, 'An overview of current mental health in the general population of Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic: results from the COLLATE project', *Psychiatry research*, vol.296, p.113660.

Stanwick, J, Ackehurst, M & Frazer, K 2021, *Issues in apprenticeships and traineeships — a research synthesis*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Stanwick, J, Forrest, C & Skujins, P 2017, *Who are the persistently NEET young people?*, NCVER, Adelaide.

TAFE Directors Australia 2020, *The power of TAFE: COVID and beyond*, TDA, Canberra.

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) 2020, *Foundations for good practice: the student experience of online learning in Australian higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic*, viewed November 2021, <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/student-experience-of-online-learning-in-australian-he-during-covid-19.pdf?v=1606442611>.

Vu, H, Gørgens, T & Bray, JR 2012, *How did young people fare in the 1990s economic downturn*?, NCVER, Adelaide.

Waugh, J & Circelli, M 2021, *What VET can offer to COVID-19 youth unemployment recovery*, NCVER, Adelaide.

White, I 2021, *VET student outcomes 2020: impact of COVID-19 on domestic students*, NCVER, Adelaide.

White, I & Rittie, T 2022, *Upskilling and reskilling: the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employers and their training choices*, NCVER, Adelaide.

Appendix A: Timeline of selected events of COVID-19 in Australia, 2020

25 January	First recorded cases of COVID-19 in Australia (NSW, Vic.).
29 January	First recorded case of COVID-19 in Qld.
1 February	First recorded case of COVID-19 in SA.
21 February	First recorded case of COVID-19 in WA.
1 March	Australia reports first death from COVID-19.
4 March	First recorded case of COVID-19 in NT. Australia records double-digit new daily cases of COVID-19 for the first time.
11 March	SA Government announces $350 million stimulus package to help the South Australian economy and jobs.
12 March	First recorded case of COVID-19 in ACT.
16 March	WA Government announces $607 million package to support WA households and small businesses.
17 March	NSW Government announces $2.3 billion health and economic stimulus package. Tasmanian Government announces $420 million support package.
18 March	Australia records triple-digit new daily cases of COVID-19 for the first time.
20 March	Restrictions on mass gatherings and visits to aged care facilities. International borders closed except for Australian citizens, residents and immediate family members. ACT Government announces initial $137 million economic survival package. Tasmanian Government announces border restrictions.
21 March	Victorian Government announces $1.7 billion economic survival and jobs package. NT Government announces border restrictions.
22 March	Schools begin to close nationally. SA Government announces border restrictions. WA Government announces border restrictions. $550 per fortnight Coronavirus Supplement made available to new and existing recipients of 'JobSeeker' payment for six months.
23 March	Stage 1 national restrictions implemented. Pubs, licensed clubs and hotels (excluding accommodation), places of worship, gyms, indoor sporting venues, cinemas and casinos closed nationally.
24 March	Qld Government announces $4 billion package to support health, employment, households and businesses.
25 March	Stage 2 national restrictions implemented. Tighter restrictions placed on weddings, funerals, fitness classes, beauty salons, arcades and play centres. All elective surgeries suspended, except for Category 1 and urgent Category 2 cases. Tas., NT, WA, Qld and SA announce border closures, with 14-day self-isolation periods for travellers.
28 March	First wave new daily COVID-19 cases peak at 460.
29 March	14-day self-isolation periods for travellers extended to all Australians returning from overseas. $1.1 billion national package announced for mental health, Medicare and domestic violence support.

30 March	Public gatherings, excluding household members, reduced nationally to a maximum of two people. Stay-at-home directions implemented: essential reasons for leaving home are to shop for essentials, receive medical care, exercise, or travel for work or education. Evictions put on hold for six months by states and territories. $130 billion 'JobKeeper' payment announced, with eligible businesses receiving $1500 per fortnight per employee.
31 March	JobKeeper payment scheme commences.
2 April	Early Childhood Education and Care Relief package announced. Wage subsidy for apprentices and trainees announced.
6 April	National free childcare package announced.
7 April	National Cabinet announces mandatory code of conduct for commercial tenancies, preventing the termination of leases due to non-payment of rent during the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery period, and mandating proportionate reductions in rent based on the reduction in the tenant's trade.
9 April	Australia records double-digit new daily COVID-19 cases for the first time since 17 March.
15 April	JobKeeper Payment passed as a temporary measure. Higher Education Relief Package announced to support workers who were displaced due to the COVID-19 pandemic and to provide funding certainty to higher education providers. $3 million announced to support frontline health workers with training and information on the treatment of coronavirus. National moratorium placed on rental evictions for tenants suffering significant financial hardship as a result of COVID-19.
23 April	Job seekers exempt from reporting their mutual obligation requirements until 22 May. Australia records single-digit new daily COVID-19 cases for the first time since 8 March.
27 April	Coronavirus supplement payment scheme commences, worth $550 per fortnight to eligible income support recipients in addition to their usual payments.
30 April	Youth underemployment reaches 23.6%.
1 May	National Cabinet endorses a pathway for the staged return of community and professional sport.
8 May	National three-step plan to relax coronavirus restrictions announced, with individual states and territories deciding when each step will be implemented locally.
15 May	$48.1 million in new funding announced for the National Mental Health and Wellbeing Pandemic Response Plan, to support services available in homes, workplaces, aged care, schools, and other community sites.
18 May	Exemption for job seekers from reporting mutual obligation requirements extended from 22 May to 1 June.
9 June	Mutual obligation requirements for job seekers recommence.
30 June	GDP falls by a record 7%.
4 July	Australia records triple-digit new daily COVID-19 cases for the first time since 10 April, primarily in Vic.
7 July	Onset of second wave of infections in VIC. Stage 3 stay-at-home restrictions reintroduced for metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire by Victorian Government.
12 July	National free childcare package ends.
16 July	Australian Government announces $2 billion JobTrainer skills package to retrain and upskill Australians into sectors with job opportunities as the economy recovers from COVID-19.

21 July	JobKeeper Payment extended.
30 July	National unemployment peaks at 7.5%. Peak in new daily COVID-19 cases during second wave, with 746.
2 August	Melbourne moves to stage 4 restrictions. Australian Government announces provision of 10 additional subsidised psychological therapy sessions for people subjected to additional restrictions in areas impacted by the second wave of infections.
3 August	Australian Government announces $1500 per fortnight pandemic leave disaster payment for Victorians who have to isolate due to COVID-19, but do not have sick leave available.
5 August	$33 million support package announced to help Victorian childcare services remain open.
7 August	Stricter requirements for JobKeeper Payment turnover test for businesses and employee eligibility implemented.
17 August	Australian Government announces $31.9 million to create 15 mental health clinics across Victoria.
19 August	Agreement to secure COVID-19 vaccines announced.
26 August	Pandemic leave disaster payment extended to TAS. Australian Government announces $1 billion to boost the defence industry and support businesses and jobs in the industry's supply chain.
28 August	Pandemic leave disaster payment extended to Victorian border communities.
31 August	Australia records double-digit new daily COVID-19 cases for the first time since 5 July.
7 September	Temporary insolvency and bankruptcy protections for businesses extended until 31 December.
11 September	Australian Government announces $50 million in funding to restart Australia's business events sector.
13 September	Victorian Government begins easing of stage 3 restrictions.
16 September	Pandemic leave disaster payment extended to WA.
21 September	Pandemic leave disaster payment extended to NSW.
24 September	Coronavirus supplement payment scheme reduced from $550 to $250 per fortnight.
28 September	Australia records single-digit new daily COVID-19 cases for the first time since 12 June.
30 September	GDP recovers to the tune of 3.4%.
4 October	Additional $1.2 billion announced to help Australian businesses employ 100 000 new apprentices or trainees as part of the COVID-19 economic recovery plan.
5 October	$7.5 billion in new funding announced for national transport infrastructure to boost the national economy.
9 October	Tax relief package announced as part of Economic Recovery Plan, increasing the low-income tax offset and increasing the amounts at which individuals qualify for higher tax brackets.
16 October	Travel 'bubble' commences between Australia and New Zealand.
19 October	Further easing of restrictions in VIC, including expansion of travel radius in Melbourne and unlimited duration of leaving home.
23 October	Pandemic leave disaster payment extended to Qld and SA. Framework for National Reopening announced to transition to 'COVID Normal' where safe to do so by December 2020.
1 November	New COVID-19 mental health campaign 'How's your head today?' commenced by Australian Government.

10 November	JobKeeper Payment extended to 28 March 2021.
18 November	Restrictions reintroduced in SA in response to local outbreak of infections.
22 November	Restrictions eased in SA.
27 November	Victoria records 28th consecutive day without COVID-19 infection.
29 November	'HomeBuilder' program extended to 31 March 2021, to support the construction or major rebuild of an additional 15 000 homes. Eligible owner–occupier purchasers receive a one-off payment of $15 000.
2 December	Australia emerges from recession.
19 December	Sydney's Northern Beaches briefly declared a COVID-19 hotspot.
31 December	Coronavirus supplement payment scheme ends. Insolvency and bankruptcy protections for businesses end.

Appendix B: Expanded estimates and confidence intervals

Table B1 Estimated rates of EEET at time of survey with associated confidence intervals, ages 19 and 20 years for LSAY Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 cohorts

	Y03		Y06		Y09		Y15	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
Age 19	93.76	92.88–94.63	93.69	92.92–94.46	92.83	91.69–93.96	90.85	88.64–93.07
Age 20	94.45	93.69–95.22	94.00	93.14–94.87	94.25	93.24–95.26	91.25	89.43–93.06

Table B2 Estimated percentages studying towards a certificate or diploma at time of survey with associated confidence intervals, ages 19 and 20 years for LSAY Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 cohorts

	Y03		Y06		Y09		Y15	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
Age 19	21.04	19.75–22.34	22.18	20.81–23.55	20.68	19.17–22.18	17.23	15.01–19.44
Age 20	19.03	17.69–20.36	17.32	15.96–18.68	17.47	15.80–19.13	15.27	13.34–17.21

Table B3 Estimated percentages studying towards a bachelor's degree or higher at time of survey with associated confidence intervals, ages 19 and 20 years for LSAY Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 cohorts

	Y03		Y06		Y09		Y15	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
Age 19	36.05	34.63–37.47	40.61	39.17–42.05	46.76	45.01–48.52	43.34	40.81–45.87
Age 20	36.99	35.51–38.47	41.56	39.97–43.16	47.37	45.41–49.33	46.49	43.94–49.04

Table B4 Estimated percentages not studying towards a qualification at time of survey with associated confidence intervals, ages 19 and 20 years for LSAY Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 cohorts

	Y03		Y06		Y09		Y15	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
Age 19	42.91	41.37–44.44	37.21	35.71–38.71	32.56	30.80–34.32	39.43	36.72–42.14
Age 20	43.99	42.37–45.60	41.12	39.43–42.81	35.16	33.20–37.13	38.24	35.54–40.93

Table B5 Estimated percentages employed at time of survey with associated confidence intervals, ages 19 and 20 years for LSAY Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 cohorts

	Y03		Y06		Y09		Y15	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
Age 19	85.28	84.09–86.46	79.85	78.61–81.08	77.72	76.22–79.22	79.32	76.85–81.79
Age 20	84.94	83.80–86.08	81.90	80.62–83.18	80.76	79.23–82.30	79.37	77.18–81.55

Table B6 Estimated percentages unemployed at time of survey with associated confidence intervals, ages 19 and 20 years for LSAY Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 cohorts

	Y03		Y06		Y09		Y15	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
Age 19	6.46	5.53–7.39	8.66	7.73–9.59	10.70	9.50–11.90	12.19	10.00–14.39
Age 20	6.10	5.33–6.87	7.17	6.27–8.06	8.67	7.48–9.86	10.80	8.95–12.66

Table B7 Estimated percentages not in the labour force (NILF) at time of survey with associated confidence intervals, ages 19 and 20 years for LSAY Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 cohorts

	Y03		Y06		Y09		Y15	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
Age 19	8.26	7.43–9.10	11.49	10.57–12.42	11.58	10.51–12.65	8.49	6.97–10.01
Age 20	8.96	8.06–9.87	10.93	9.93–11.94	10.57	9.48–11.66	9.83	8.42–11.25

Table B8 Estimated percentages in full-time employment at time of survey with associated confidence intervals, ages 19 and 20 years for LSAY Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 cohorts

	Y03		Y06		Y09		Y15	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
Age 19	42.25	40.72–43.77	32.89	31.42–34.36	24.66	23.07–26.24	20.76	18.42–23.09
Age 20	43.91	42.28–45.53	36.15	34.48–37.81	29.47	27.53–31.41	18.87	16.86–20.87

Table B9 Estimated percentages in part-time employment at time of survey with associated confidence intervals, ages 19 and 20 years for LSAY Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 cohorts

	Y03		Y06		Y09		Y15	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
Age 19	41.61	40.13–43.09	45.06	43.56–46.56	50.13	48.35–51.91	51.12	48.44–53.79
Age 20	39.82	38.30–41.34	44.63	42.99–46.28	48.24	46.26–50.21	43.41	40.90–45.93

Table B10 Estimated percentages underemployed at time of survey with associated confidence intervals, ages 19 and 20 years for LSAY Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 cohorts

	Y09		Y15	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
Age 19	21.19	19.41–22.97	22.29	20.11–24.47
Age 20	18.22	16.67–19.78	25.90	23.47–28.33

Table B11 Estimated percentages in permanent/ongoing employment (where employed) at time of survey with associated confidence intervals, ages 19 and 20 years for LSAY Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 cohorts

	Y03		Y06		Y09		Y15	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
Age 19	48.18	46.53–49.83	44.64	42.92–46.37	40.16	38.13–42.19	40.21	38.13–42.19
Age 20	53.57	51.81–55.32	49.04	47.15–50.94	45.59	43.31–47.88	42.51	39.65–45.37

Table B12 **Estimated percentages in casual employment (where employed) at time of survey with associated confidence intervals, ages 19 and 20 years for LSAY Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 cohorts**

	Y03		Y06		Y09		Y15	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
Age 19	51.82	50.17–53.47	55.36	53.63–57.08	59.84	57.81–61.87	59.79	56.79–62.80
Age 20	46.43	44.68–48.19	50.96	49.06–52.85	54.41	52.12–56.69	57.49	54.63–60.35

Table B13 **Estimated average weekly hours worked at time of survey with associated confidence intervals, ages 19 and 20 years for LSAY Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 cohorts**

	Y03		Y06		Y09		Y15	
	Hours	95% CI	Hours	95% CI	Hours	95% CI	Hours	95% CI
Age 19	29.49	28.98–30.00	26.97	26.42–27.51	23.78	23.13–24.43	23.18	22.30–24.06
Age 20	29.40	28.88–29.91	27.95	27.37–28.53	25.46	24.76–26.16	21.04	20.16–21.92

Table B14 **Estimated percentages in apprenticeships at time of survey with associated confidence intervals, ages 19 and 20 years for LSAY Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 cohorts**

	Y03		Y06		Y09		Y15	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
Age 19	13.56	12.42–14.70	12.98	11.85–14.11	11.13	9.89–12.37	8.39	6.56–10.23
Age 20	11.49	10.37–12.60	10.17	9.02–11.33	9.12	7.80–10.44	7.61	6.02–9.19

Table B15 **Estimated percentages living in parental home at time of survey with associated confidence intervals, ages 19 and 20 years for LSAY Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 cohorts**

	Y03		Y06		Y09		Y15	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
Age 19	75.21	73.78–76.63	75.59	74.32–76.85	77.25	75.87–78.62	81.26	79.25–83.27
Age 20	69.52	68.02–71.03	71.07	69.57–72.58	72.05	70.31–73.78	77.72	75.32–80.13

Table B16 **Estimated percentages renting at time of survey with associated confidence intervals, ages 19 and 20 years for LSAY Y03, Y06, Y09 and Y15 cohorts**

	Y03		Y06		Y09		Y15	
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI
Age 19	17.06	15.85–18.28	16.62	15.53–17.70	15.43	14.25–16.61	11.96	10.37–13.54
Age 20	22.93	21.52–24.34	22.10	20.74–23.47	21.00	19.45–22.55	15.89	14.11–17.67

Table B17 **Mean Kessler-6 scores and estimated percentages of 20-year-olds meeting criteria for probable serious mental illness at time of survey with associated confidence intervals, ages 19 and 20 years for LSAY Y09 and Y15 cohorts**

	Mean K6 score	95% CI	Proportion meeting criteria (%)	95% CI
Y09 (2014)	11.03	10.85–11.21	7.09	6.04–8.15
Y15 (2020)	14.29	13.98–14.60	23.25	20.96–25.54

Notes: Scores range from a minimum of six to a maximum of 30, with higher scores indicating higher distress. Excludes respondents who provided no answer. Probable serious mental illness is classified as a score of 19 or higher.

Table B18 **Mean Kessler-6 scores and estimated percentages of 20-year-olds meeting criteria for probable serious mental illness at time of survey by demographic with associated confidence intervals, LSAY Y15 cohort in 2020**

	Mean K6 score	95% CI	Proportion meeting criteria (%)	95% CI
Gender				
Female	15.52	15.12–15.91	29.37	26.18–32.55
Male	13.04	12.58–13.50	16.97	13.75–20.19
Labour force status				
Employed	13.82	13.51–14.14	19.65	17.36–21.95
Unemployed	17.15	15.96–18.34	45.82	36.21–55.43
NILF	14.93	13.85–16.00	27.32	19.82–34.83
Study status				
VET	13.64	12.76–14.53	23.81	17.55–30.08
Higher education	14.07	13.68–14.45	19.09	16.31–21.86
Apprentice/trainee	11.88	10.61–13.16	13.39	5.45–21.32
None	14.86	14.30–15.43	28.40	24.10–32.70
Social support				
Available	13.86	13.56–14.17	20.55	18.35–22.75
Unavailable	18.71	17.53–19.90	51.03	40.58–61.47

Notes: Scores range from a minimum of six to a maximum of 30, with higher scores indicating higher distress. Excludes respondents who provided no answer. Probable serious mental illness is classified as a score of 19 or higher.

Table B19 Mean life satisfaction scores with associated confidence intervals, ages 19 and 20 years for LSAY Y09 and Y15 cohorts

	Y09				Y15			
	Age 19		Age 20		Age 19		Age 20	
	Mean score	95% CI	Mean score	95% CI	Mean score	95% CI	Mean score	95% CI
Your life as a whole	8.25	8.18–8.31	8.07	8.00–8.14	7.34	7.18–7.50	7.16	7.05–7.27
Your future	8.02	7.96–8.08	7.64	7.57–7.72	7.19	7.04–7.33	6.90	6.77–7.03
The work you do, at study, at home or in a job	7.35	7.28–7.42	7.36	7.29–7.44	6.91	6.75–7.07	6.70	6.56–6.83
What you do in your spare time	7.76	7.69–7.84	7.58	7.50–7.65	7.07	6.92–7.23	6.85	6.73–6.97
How you get on with people in general	8.26	8.21–8.31	8.10	8.03–8.17	7.56	7.41–7.71	7.44	7.33–7.55
The money you get each week	6.71	6.62–6.80	6.64	6.55–6.74	6.20	6.04–6.37	6.40	6.26–6.53
Your social life	7.70	7.63–7.78	7.49	7.40–7.58	6.86	6.70–7.03	6.52	6.40–6.65
Your independence–being able to do what you want	8.35	8.28–8.42	8.25	8.17–8.33	7.61	7.45–7.77	7.38	7.25–7.51
Your career prospects	7.79	7.72–7.86	7.48	7.40–7.56	7.02	6.87–7.18	6.75	6.62–6.88
Your life at home	8.19	8.13–8.26	8.13	8.06–8.20	7.58	7.42–7.74	7.47	7.36–7.59
Your standard of living	8.49	8.43–8.55	8.40	8.33–8.46	8.01	7.86–8.16	7.99	7.89–8.10
Where you live	8.09	8.01–8.17	8.06	7.98–8.14	7.74	7.58–7.90	7.70	7.59–7.80

Note: Scores range from a minimum of zero to a maximum of 10.