



RESERVE BANK OF AUSTRALIA

Student Survey Research

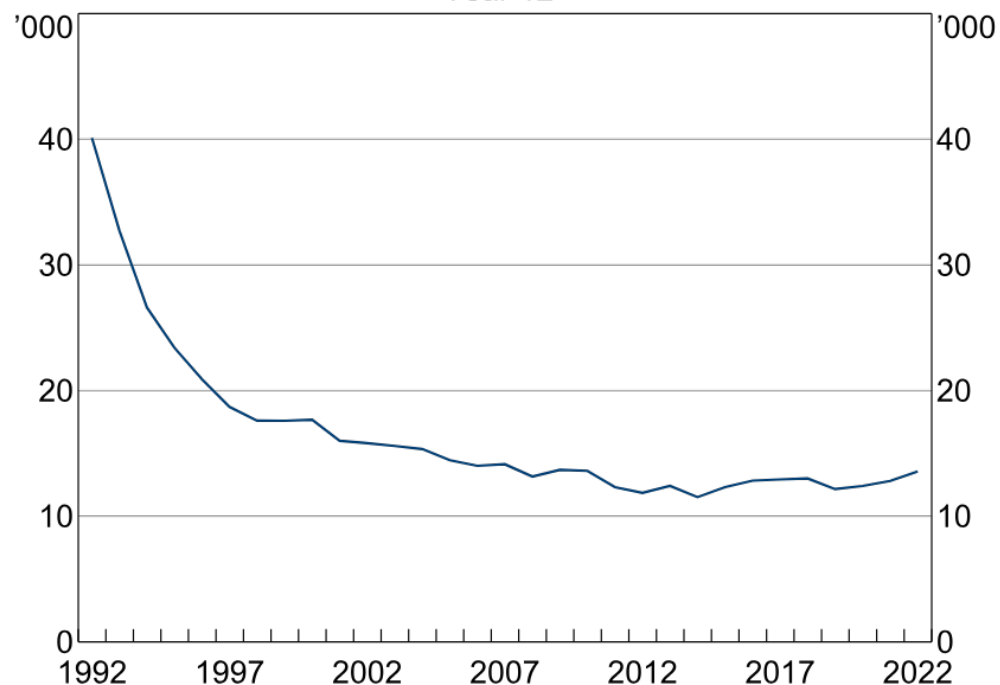
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Why does this matter?

Economics Enrolments in Australia

Year 12*

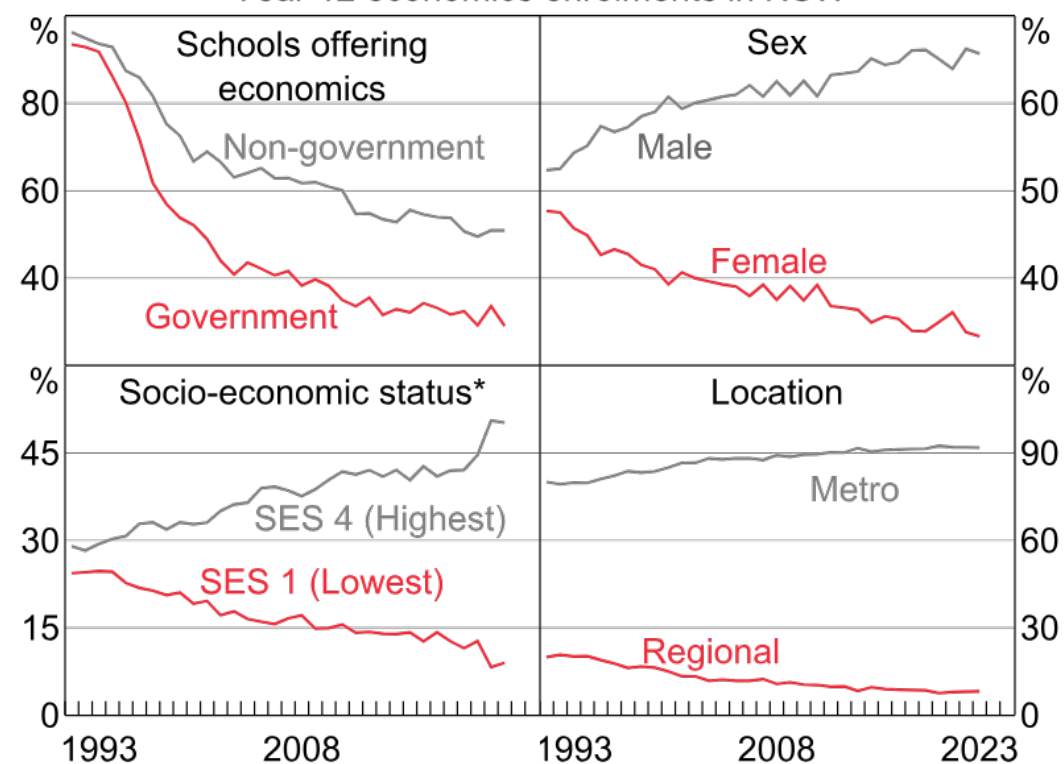


* Data from all mainland states from 1995 to 2022. Prior to this the series was spliced to New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia.

Sources: NESA; QCAA; RBA; SACE Board; SCSA; VCAA.

Indicators of Diversity

Year 12 economics enrolments in NSW



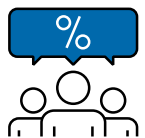
* Socio-economic status quartiles as defined by NSW Education Standards Authority.

Sources: NESA; RBA.

Outline

- Introduction: RBA's 2024 Student Survey
- Who chooses to study economics?
- What factors influence students' decisions to study (or not study) economics?

The RBA's 2024 Student Survey



The RBA conducted a **second wave** of its **high school student survey** in 2024.
First wave was in 2019.



Representative sample: **38 schools** and **4,370 students** in **NSW** completed the online survey.



Key areas:

1. Factors influencing students' **subject choices**
2. **Perceptions** of economics

What's changed since Wave 1 (2019)?

The **global pandemic** brought economics into the public spotlight

A period of **high inflation** has seen many households grapple with the cost of living

A new **mandatory economics module** in Years 7–10 Commerce in NSW syllabus

The new survey data provide updated insights on **perceptions of economics**, and new insights on the impact of **recent developments, topics of interest** and **retention** in Year 11-12 Economics.

1

Who chooses to study economics?

Who chooses to study economics in NSW?



Which schools teach economics?

- Higher socio-economics status*
- Metropolitan
- All-boys* and all-girls
- Government selective* and non-government
- High share of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) students*



Who studies economics?

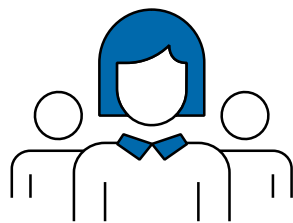
- Male*
- Bilingual
- Not Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

* Indicates statistical significance at the 5 per cent level after controlling for other factors

2

What factors influence students' decisions to study (or not study) economics?

There are both demand-side and supply-side factors influencing a student's choice to study economics



Student 'demand side'

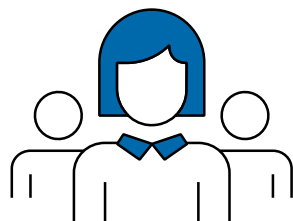
- How students perceive economics
- Interest in syllabus topics
- Relative benefit of choosing economics over another subject



School 'supply side'

- Availability of economics as a subject
- Experience/confidence of economics teachers

Our research focuses on the **demand**-side factors



Student 'demand side'

- How students perceive economics
- Interest in syllabus topics
- Relative benefit of choosing economics over another subject

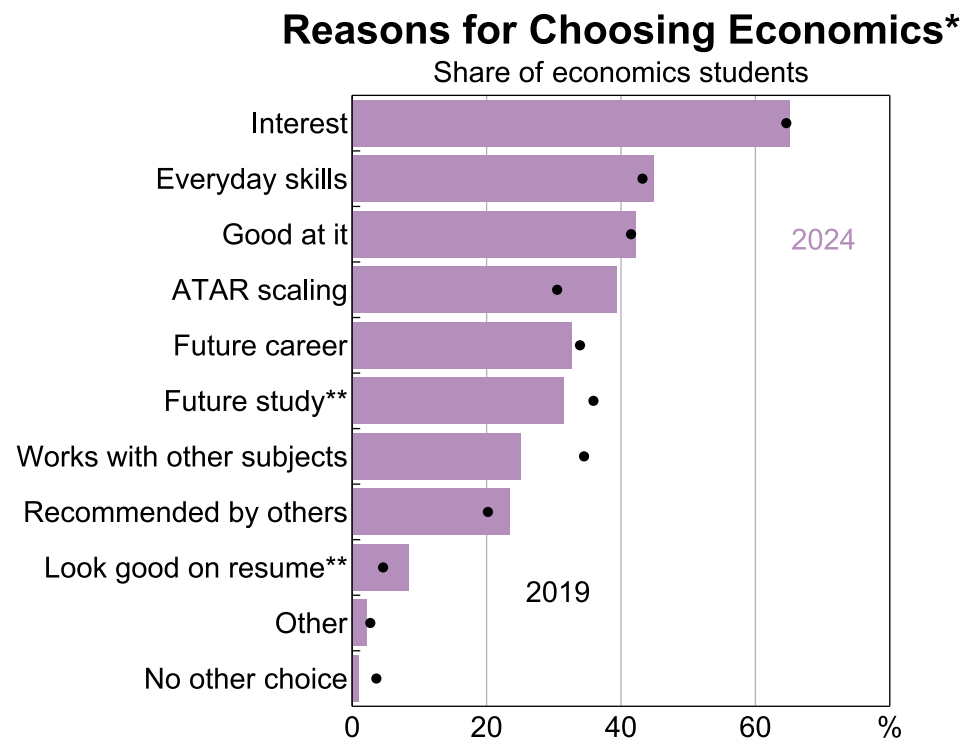


School 'supply side'

- Availability of economics as a subject
- Experience/confidence of economics teachers

Why do students choose economics?

Personal interest and life-skills development continue to be the main reasons for studying economics, while its relevance to future study has become less important



* Students were able to choose multiple responses.

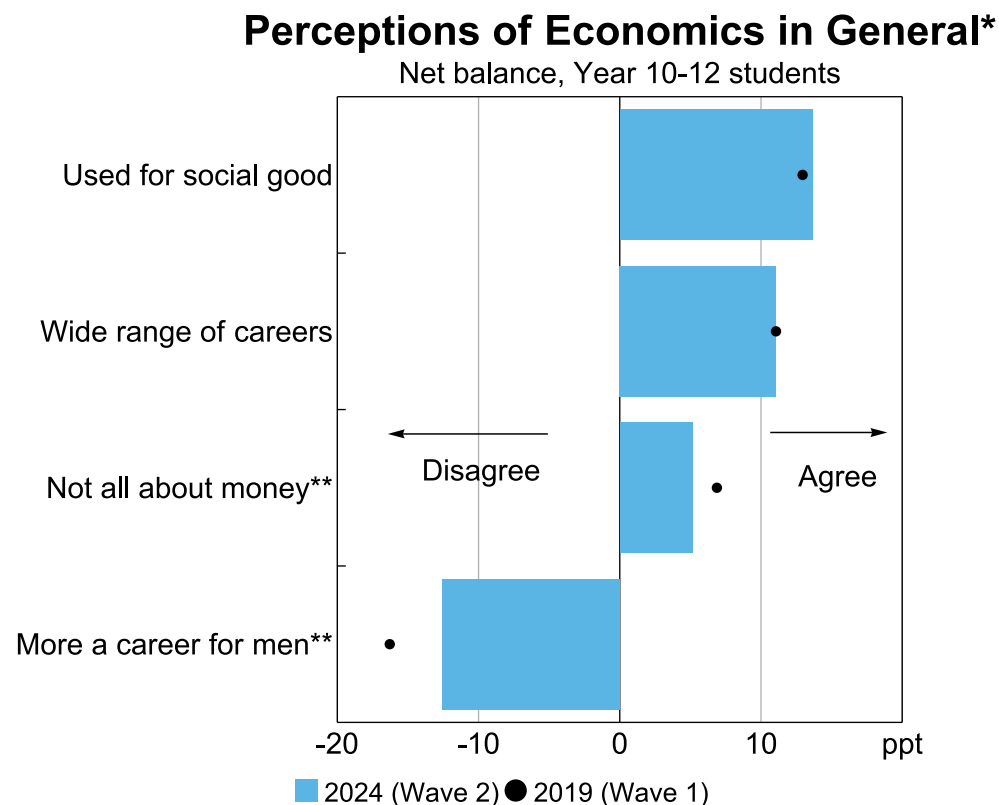
** Statistically significant difference at the 5 per cent level after controlling for sex, socio-economic status, school type and language.

Source: RBA.



What are students' perceptions of economics as a field and subject?

Students continue to see economics as a tool for social good and not all about money...

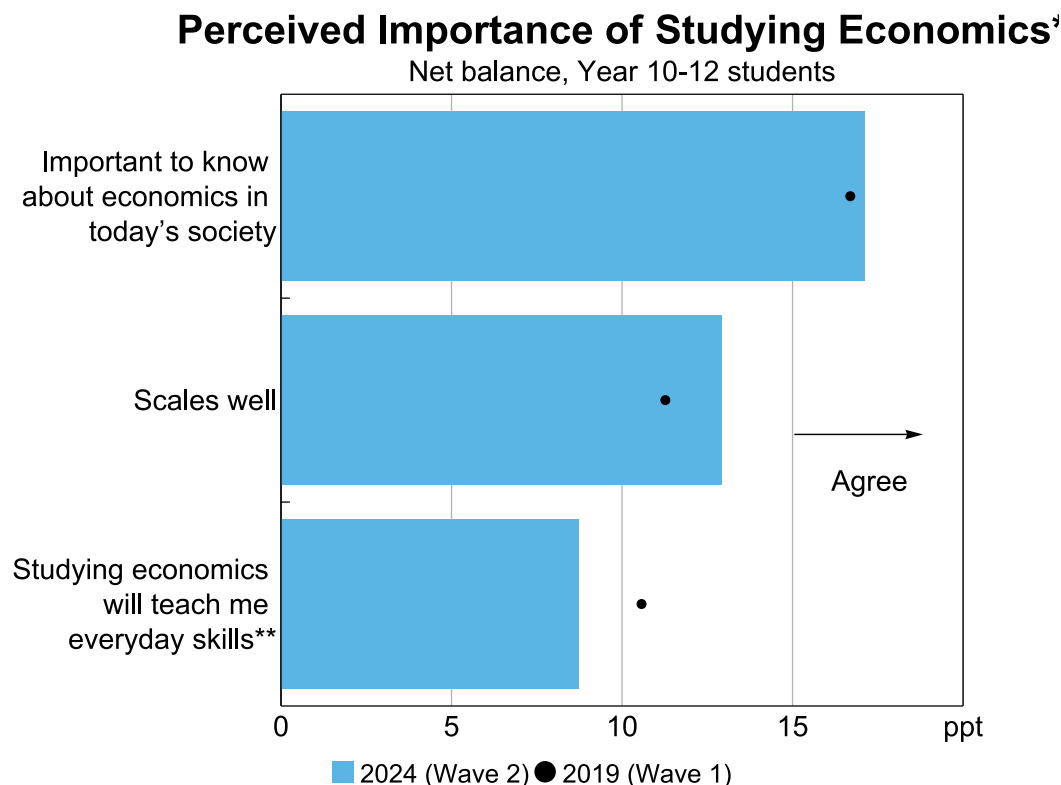


* Share of respondents who strongly agree minus share who strongly disagree.

** Statistically significant difference at the 5 per cent level after controlling for sex, socio-economic status, school type and language.

Source: RBA.

... and that studying economics can teach them important everyday skills

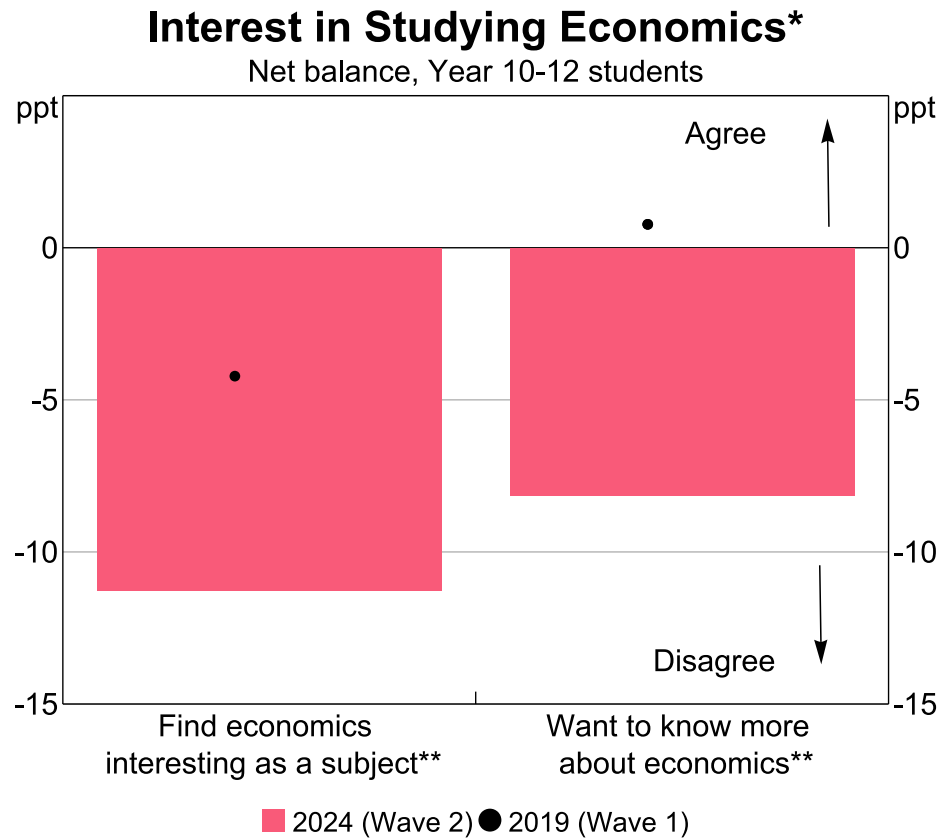


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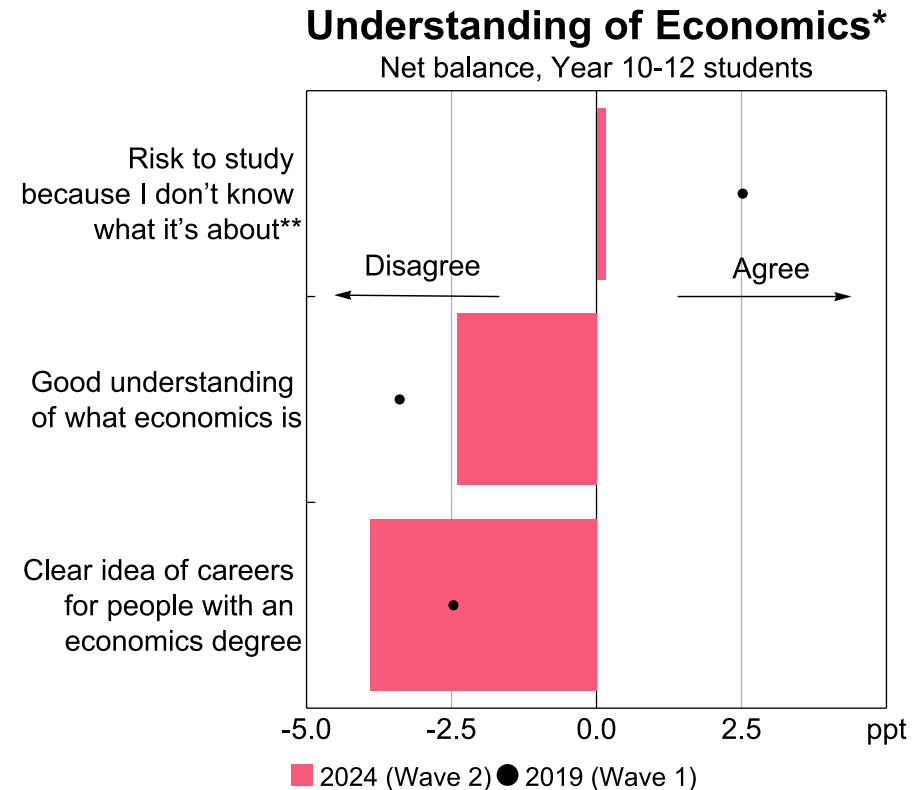
Source: RBA.

But interest in studying economics has declined further, and many still lack a clear understanding of what economics is about



- * Share of respondents who strongly agree minus share who strongly disagree.
 ** Statistically significant difference at the 5 per cent level after controlling for sex, socio-economic status, school type and language.

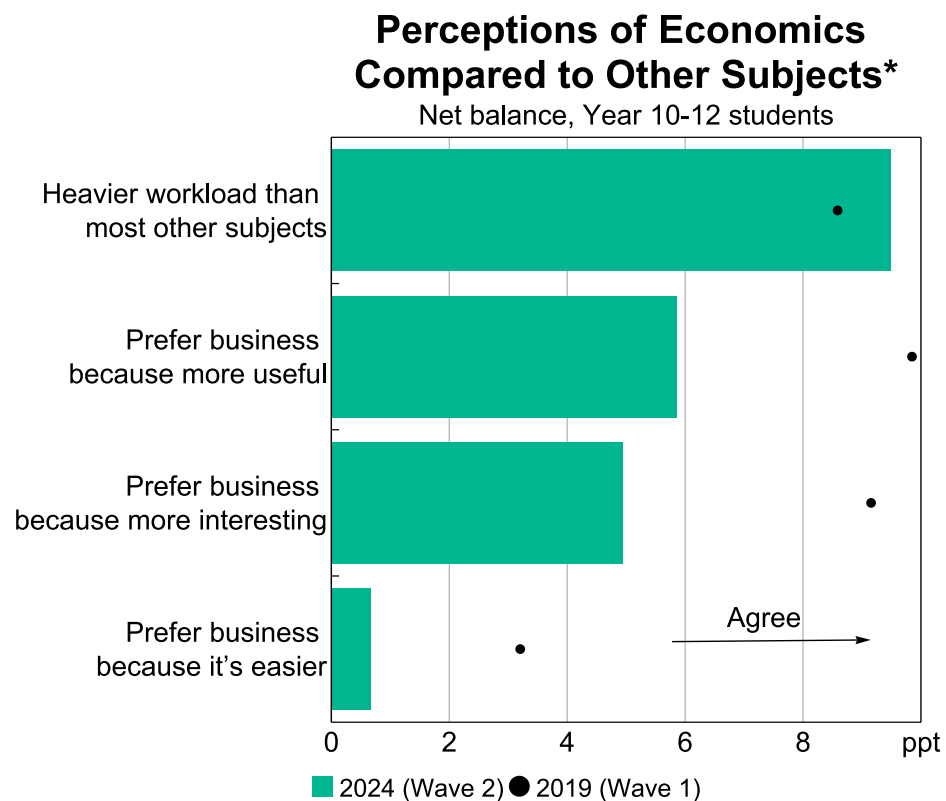
Source: RBA.



- * Share of respondents who strongly agree minus share who strongly disagree.
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Source: RBA.

Economics is perceived as having a heavier workload than most other HSC subjects

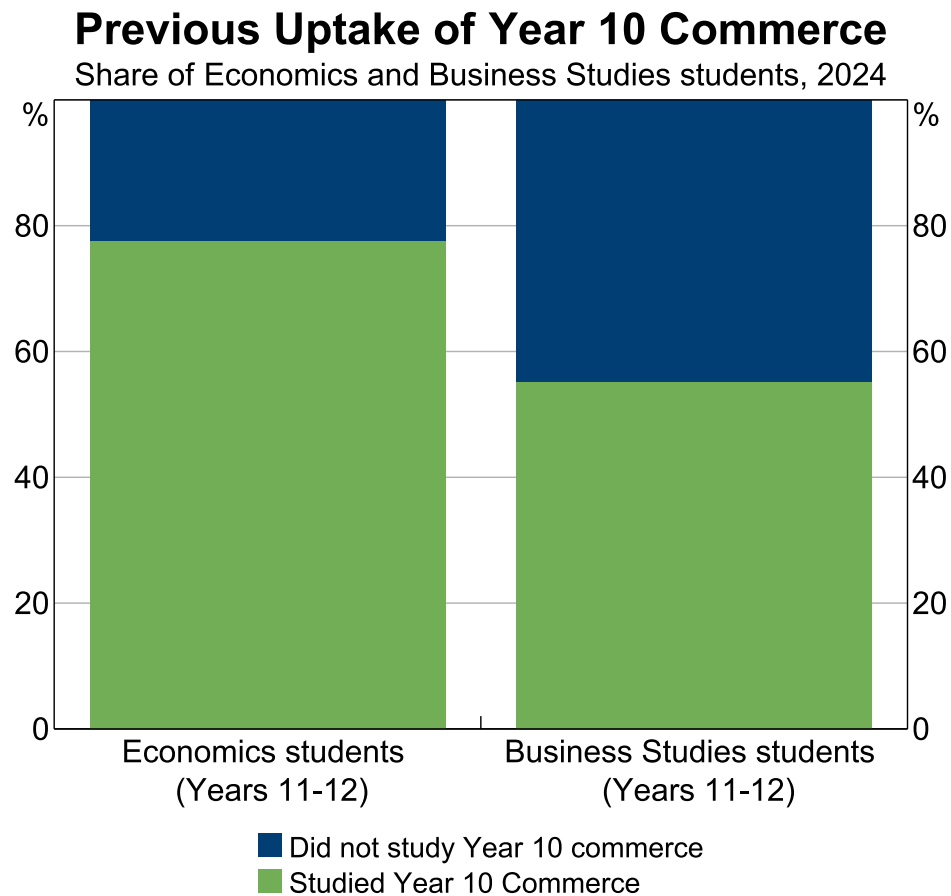


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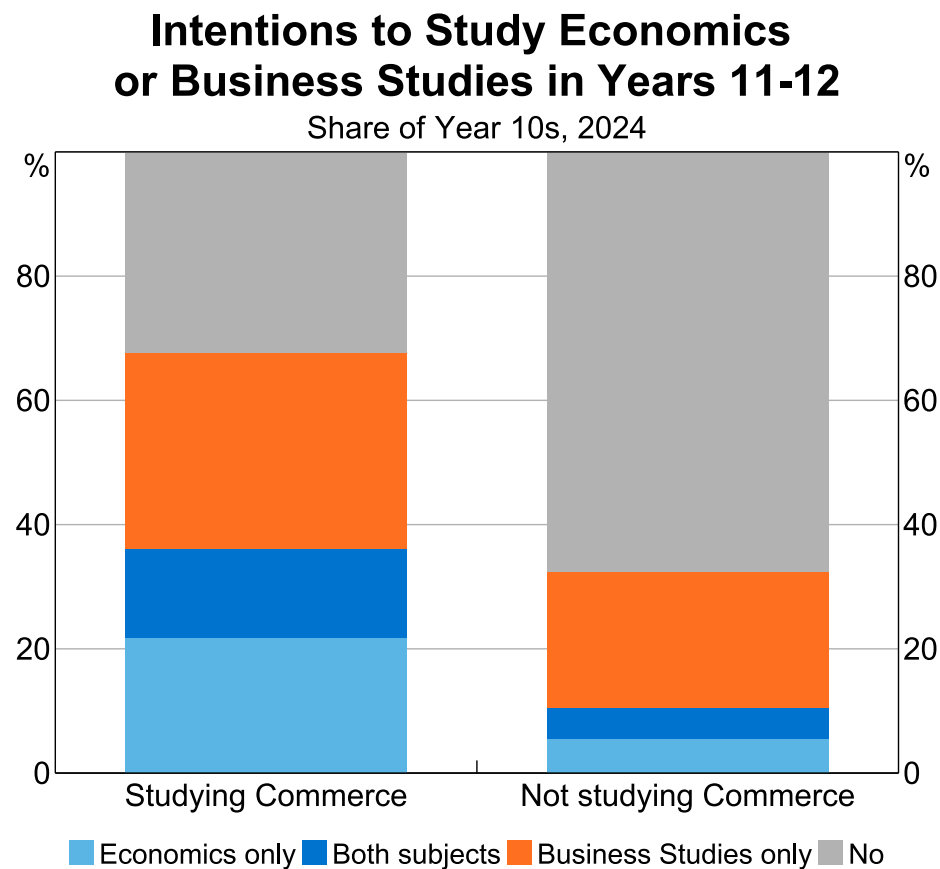
What if students had exposure to
economics in earlier years?

Commerce is an important stepping stone to studying economics in Years 11 and 12



Source: RBA.

A substantial share of Commerce students are interested in studying Economics and Business Studies in Years 11 and 12

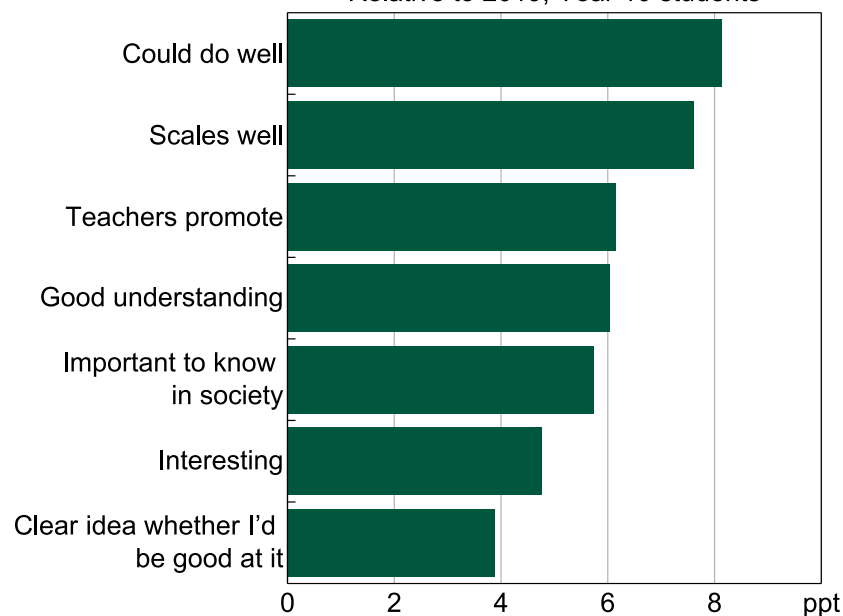


Source: RBA.

Commerce students show greater confidence, interest and understanding in economics, especially following recent curriculum changes

Impact of Studying Commerce in 2024 on Perceptions of Economics*

Relative to 2019, Year 10 students



* Difference in the average marginal effects of studying commerce in each wave on the probability of 'strongly agreeing' for each perception. Results shown are statistically significant at the 5 per cent level.

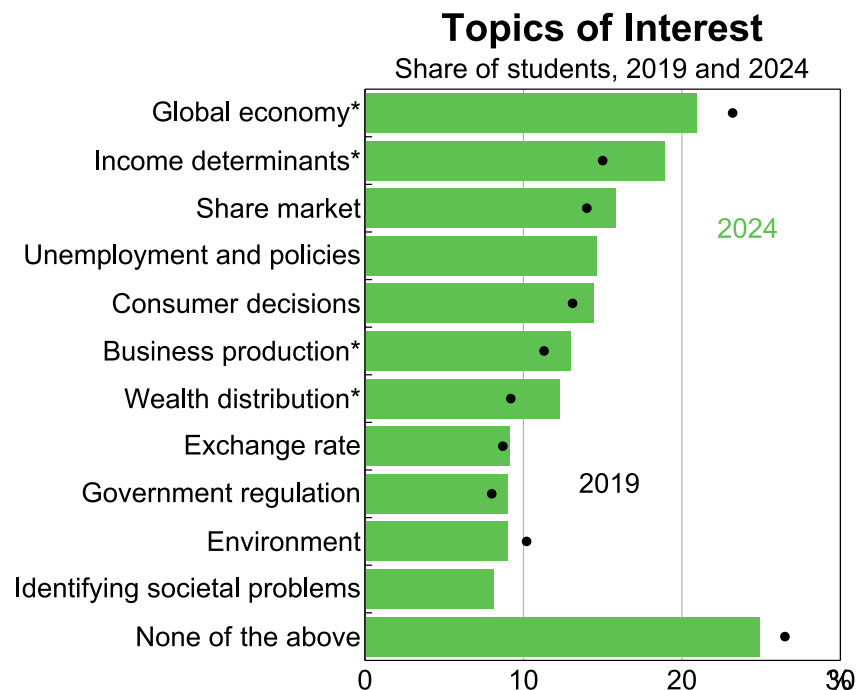
Source: RBA.



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What topics are students most
interested in today?

Topic preferences have evolved, with the largest increase in interest in income determinants and wealth distribution, possibly reflecting cost-of-living concerns

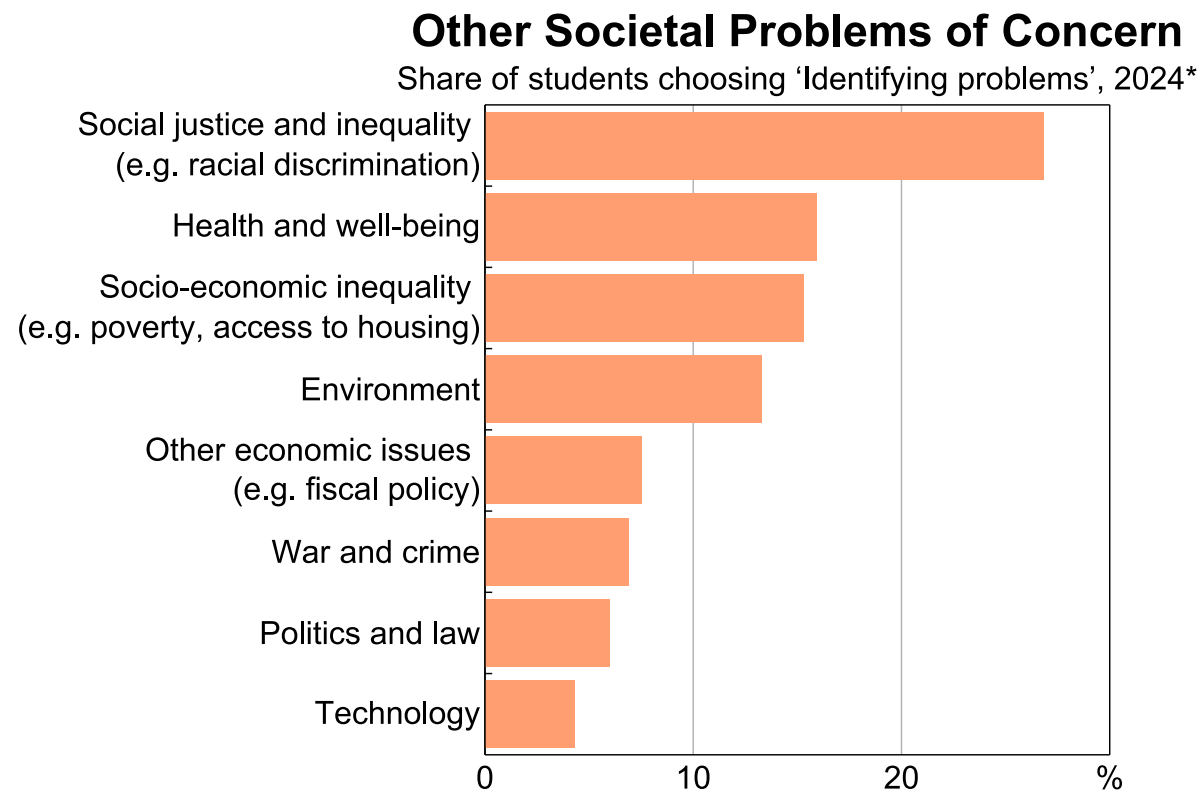


* * denotes statistically significant differences at the 5 per cent level after controlling for sex, socio-economic status, school type and language.

** 'Identifying problems' and 'Unemployment' excluded from 2019 due to question wording changes.

Source: RBA.

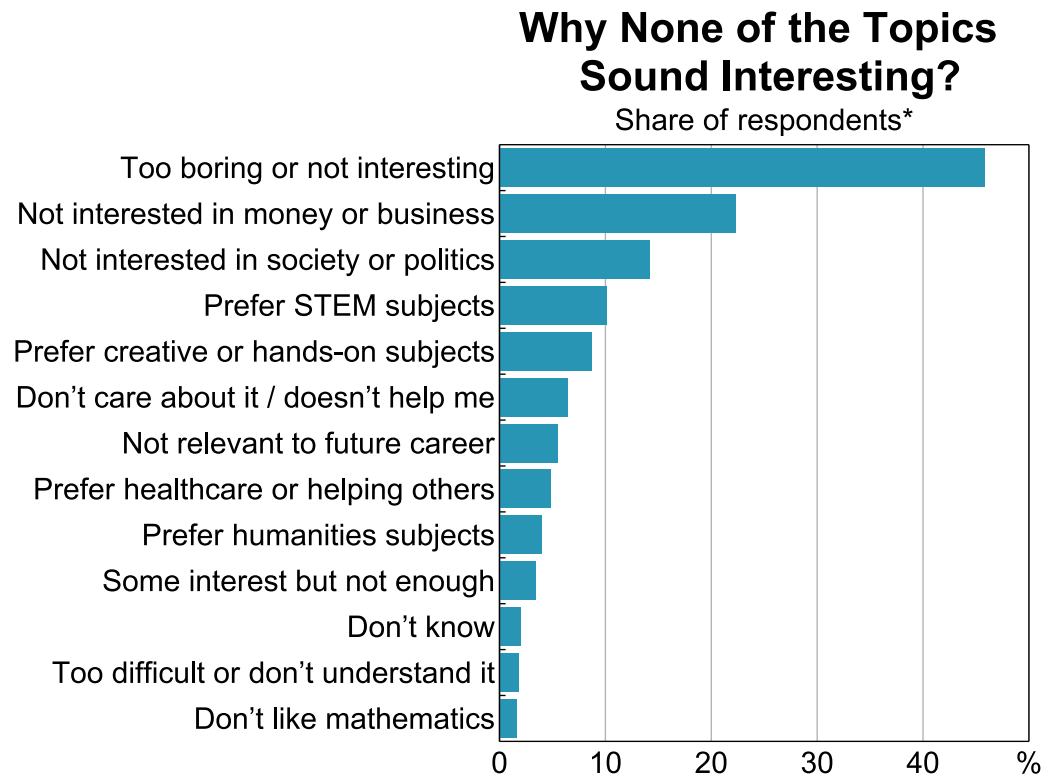
Social justice and inequality were the main concerns among students who were interested in solving other societal problems



* Multiple responses allowed per student; coded by researcher.

Source: RBA.

Importantly, one in four students reported no interest in any of the topics



* Of the 493 students who indicated that 'none of the topics' sound interesting; students were able to provide multiple reasons.

Source: RBA.

"They weren't interesting and sound boring."

"I'm just not interested about money and business."

"These topics are about understanding society and people, but I have no interest in these. I'm more interested in calculation and logic such as math and science."

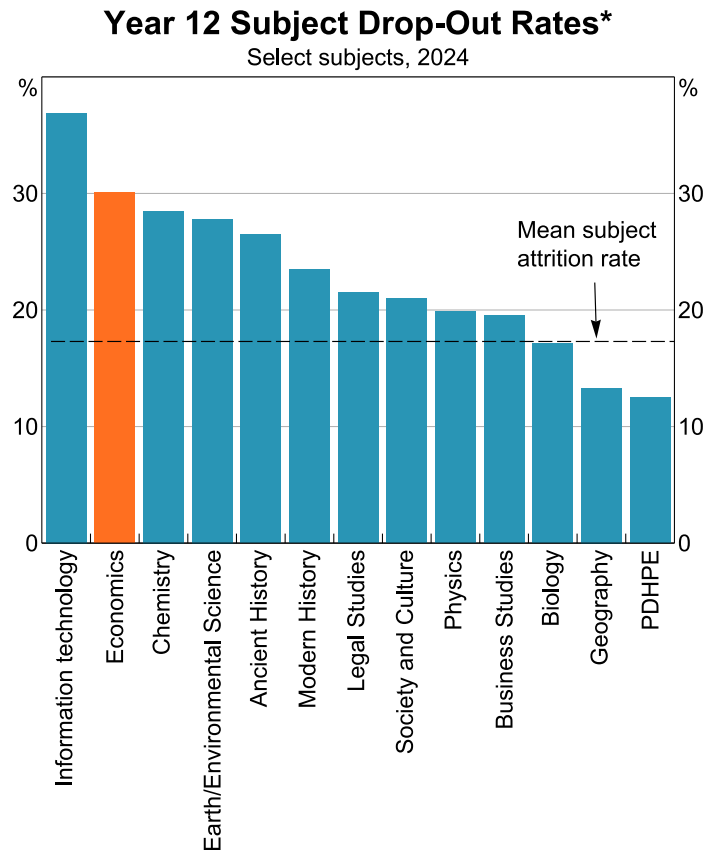
"There are important questions to discuss but not something I would like to study in school."



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Who drops out of economics and why?

Economics has one of the highest student dropout rates between Year 11 and Year 12



* Estimated share of Year 12 students who dropped the subject going from Year 11 into Year 12.
Source: RBA.

Why do students drop out?

Lack of interest

"I lost interest in the subject."

Teachers and resources

"The teacher was not engaging and the notes and resources were not adequate."

Poor performance /too difficult

"Too difficult and nearly failed my exams."

Dropping the subject to maximise ATAR

"I was not doing well in the subject and it was best for my ATAR to drop the subject."

Workload/syllabus

"Too content-heavy and the workload did not match with my other subjects."

3

Implications

So, what's the solution?

RBA research points to consideration of...

Communications



Change perceptions: build interest, relevance, understanding

Leverage positive perceptions: Social good, making an impact, tackling societal problems

Showcase careers: role models, particularly women in economics

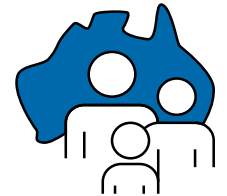
Curriculum



Earlier exposure: Teaching economics in junior high school

Curriculum topics: Consider the topics included and how aligned they are with interests

Supply-side



Equip teachers: professional development in economics, resources for the classroom

Offering of economics as a subject: Supply-side initiatives to ensure more schools in less advantaged areas can offer economics