

Non-formal and formal learning – Adults in education

This fact sheet looks at the percentage of adults aged 25 to 64 engaged in some form of study in 2006, including for the first time, information on non-formal learning.

Formal and non-formal learning covers any form of intentional organised learning provided by an external body. It doesn't include learning that is self-directed or incidental to some other activity. Formal learning is that which is assessed by a nationally recognised body and contributes towards a nationally recognised qualification. Non-formal learning covers that learning which is not so assessed, or does not lead to a nationally recognised qualification. Both formal and non-formal learning can be provided in either a workplace or institutional setting, either intramurally or extramurally.

Short seminars, lectures, workshops or special talks that are not part of a course are also considered non-formal learning. However, in line with the treatment of very short stand-alone formal courses, they have been excluded from the non-formal participation rates figures shown here. Rates for these are instead, presented separately.

Key points

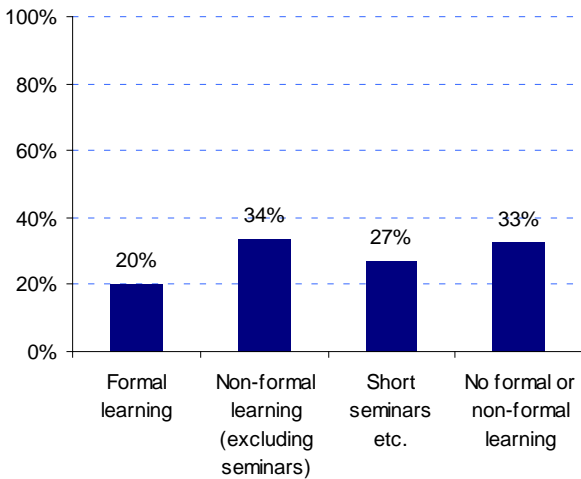
- Nearly half (or 48 percent) of New Zealanders aged 25 to 64 were in some form of study in 2006.
- 34 percent participated in non-formal study (excluding short seminars); 20 percent in formal study and 6 percent did both. A further 27 percent engaged in non-formal learning that involved attendance at short seminars, lectures, workshops or special talks not part of a course.
- On average, adults attending courses spent 47 hours in non-formal courses during the year.
- Women were slightly more likely to participate in non-formal study than males. There was no significant difference in participation rates in formal study between men and women.
- Participation decreased with age for formal study, but peaked in the 45-54 age group for non-formal study.
- Adults with higher-level qualifications were more likely to participate in formal or non-formal study than those with no or lower-level qualifications.
- Employed adults were less likely to participate in formal study than non-employed adults, but were twice as likely to participate in non-formal study as non-employed adults.
- However, once in non-formal study, non-employed adults spent significantly more time in study than employed adults.
- 77 percent of those who did non-formal study in 2006, did so for job reasons. This rate was higher for men, the employed, and those with higher-level qualifications.

Introduction

In New Zealand, as in other countries around the world, participation in post-school study has increased significantly in the last 20 years. Much of this increase has come from adults aged 25 and over.

While good information exists on adults' participation in formal study, less is known about non-formal study. While non-formal learning does not provide nationally recognised credentials, it does provide additional or alternative learning pathways for a significant number of adult New Zealanders, many of whom will already hold formal qualifications.

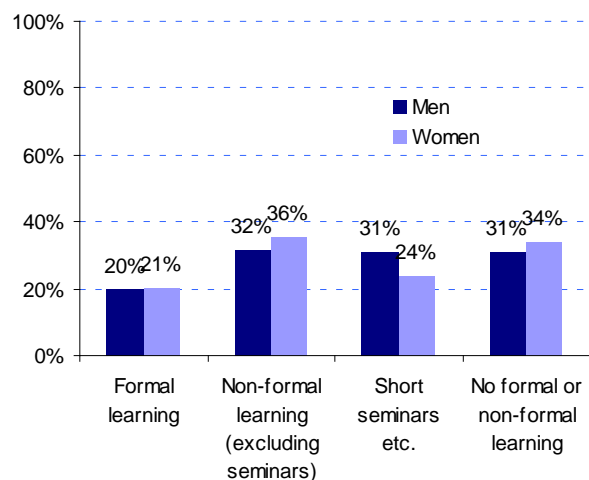
Figure 1: Adults in formal and non-formal study, 2006



Nearly half (or 48 percent) of New Zealanders aged 25 to 64 engaged in some form of formal or non-formal learning (excluding short seminars) in 2006, either in the workplace or in an institution. While one in five (or 20 percent) participated in formal study, one in three (or 34 percent) participated in some form of non-formal study. This included 6 percent who did both.

When attendance at short lectures, seminars, workshops or special talks is included, participation in 2006 in non-formal learning increased to 61 percent of adults aged 25-64.

Figure 2: Percentage of men and women aged 25-64 in formal and non-formal study, 2006



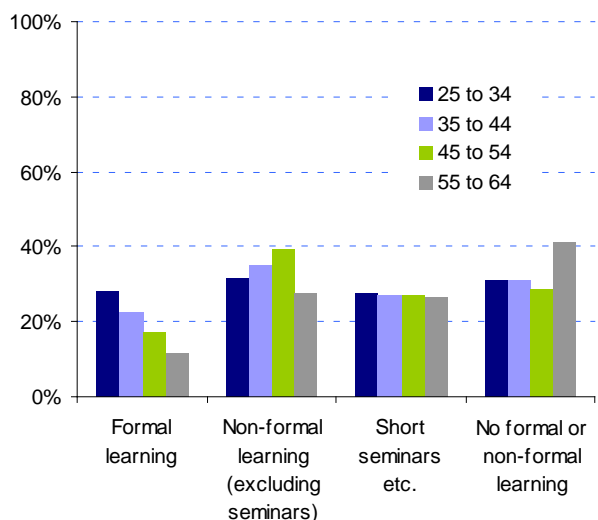
Excluding attendance at short seminars, women were slightly more likely to participate in non-formal study than men. However, men were more likely to participate in non-formal learning involving attendance at short seminars only. There was no significant difference in participation rates in formal study between men and women. However, some differences for different subgroups are discussed below.

Figure 3 looks at participation by age. Participation in formal study was lower among older adults. For adults who already hold qualifications, or who are in work, there is likely to be less incentive to enrol in further formal study, than there is for younger adults needing to gain formal credentials to enter the labour market.

The opposite was true for non-formal study. Participation in non-formal courses increased with age, at least up to around age 55. This may suggest that adults' primary educational motivations shift as they get older from gaining recognised credentials towards learning that meets a more specific work or personal objective.

The rate of participation in short seminars, workshops, lectures or special talks was similar across all age groups.

Figure 3: Percentage of the population in formal and non-formal study by age group, 2006



For some, non-formal learning is undertaken as part of their job. Of all the people attending non-formal courses, 56 percent received contributions to course costs from employers. For others, the higher costs and time commitments associated with enrolling in formal study may be a factor in their decision to choose non-formal study.

Figure 4 shows that higher-educated adults were more likely to participate in further education. This was particularly so for non-formal study, where adults with a diploma or higher were 1.6 times more likely to do non-formal study than adults with upper secondary or post-secondary certificate-level, and 2.4 times as likely to do non-formal study as those with lower-secondary education only¹.

Figure 4: Percentage of adults in formal and non-formal study, by level of education (ISCED)¹

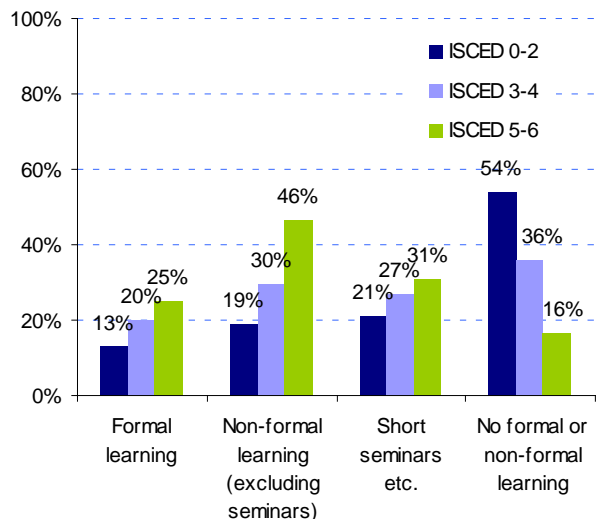
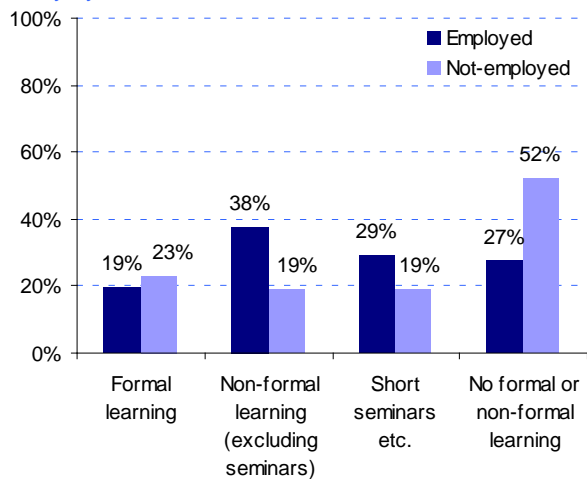


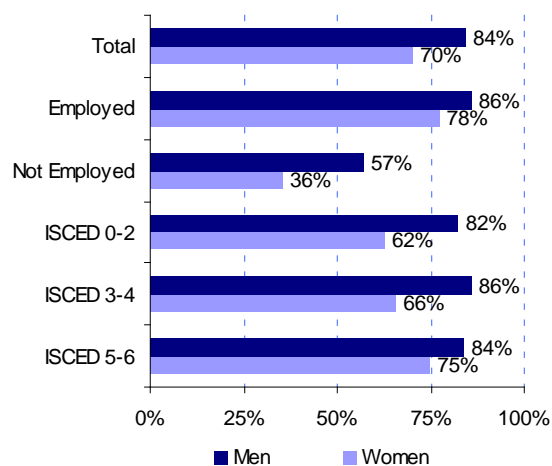
Figure 5 shows that employed adults were less likely to have participated in formal learning than non-employed adults. However, employed adults were twice as likely as non-employed adults to have engaged in non-formal learning. Similarly, non-employed adults were almost twice as likely as employed adults not to have participated in any form of formal or non-formal learning.

Figure 5: Percentage of adults in formal and non-formal study by labour force status, 2006



Figures 5 and 6 highlight the link between work and non-formal learning. 77 percent of all adults who participated in non-formal courses did so for job-related reasons. This rate was noticeably higher for men, and for employed adults.

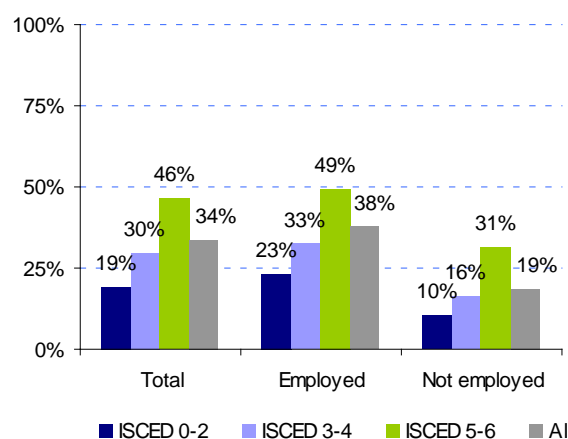
Figure 6: Percentage of adults doing non-formal study for job-related reasons, 2006



Note: Excludes those whose only non-formal learning related to attendance at short lectures, seminars, workshops or talks.

55 percent of adults taking non-formal courses were women. Women were noticeably more likely to take non-formal courses for personal rather than job-related reasons. Women made up 50 percent of adults taking non-formal courses for job-related reasons, but 69 percent of adults taking non-formal courses for personal reasons. Previous statistics have shown that women are more likely than men to be doing adult and community education (ACE) in schools or tertiary education institutions, where non-formal education is more recreational, or non-job-related, than non-formal learning done in the workplace².

Figure 7: Percentage of adults in non-formal study by labour force status and level of education (ISCED), 2006



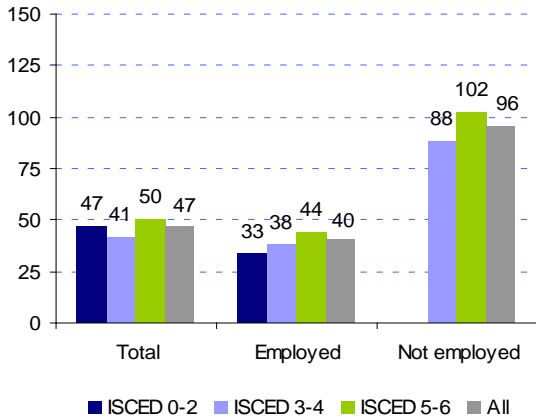
Note: Excludes those whose only non-formal learning related to attendance at short lectures, seminars, workshops or talks.

¹ ISCED stands for the International Standard Classification of Education. Levels 0 to 2 represent pre-primary to lower-secondary level education. Level 3 represents upper secondary – which in ISCED terms – means year 12 equivalent qualifications (eg NCEA 2) or higher. Level 4 represents most one-year post-secondary-level certificates, while levels 5 and 6 represent diploma level or above. The grouping of ISCED levels as in Figure 4 is commonly used in international comparisons of educational systems.

² Ministry of Education, 2009. Profile & Trends 2008: New Zealand's Tertiary Education Sector (chapter 10).

Figures 7 and 8 compare rates of participation in non-formal study with intensity of study. While employed adults were two times more likely to be doing non-formal study than adults who were not employed, they spent less than half the number of hours in non-formal study than those not employed.

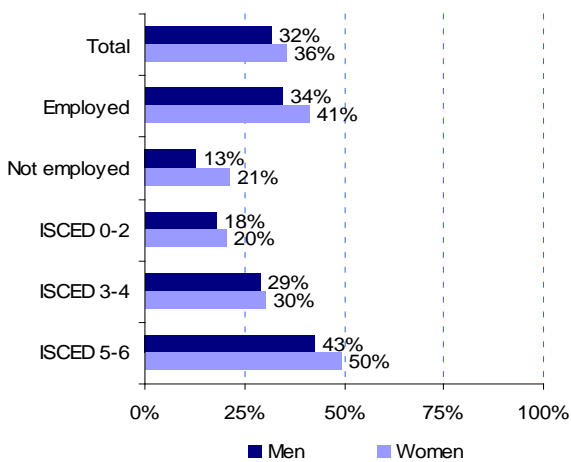
Figure 8: Hours per year spent by adults in non-formal study by labour force status and level of education (ISCED), 2006



Note: ISCED 0-2 and 3-4 are combined for 'not employed' due to small sample size. Non-formal excludes those whose only non-formal learning related to attendance at short lectures, seminars, workshops or talks.

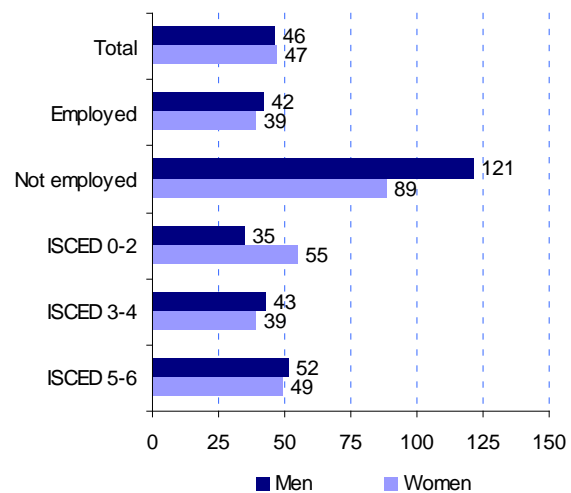
Figures 9 and 10 compare participation rates and study intensity between men and women. In general, women participated at a slightly higher rate (36 percent for women compared with 32 percent for men), but spent on average, the same amount of time in study (46 hours for men compared with 47 hours for women).

Figure 9: Percentage of men and women in non-formal study by selected characteristics



Note: Excludes those whose only non-formal learning related to attendance at short lectures, seminars, workshops or talks.

Figure 10: Hours per year spent in non-formal study by men and women by selected characteristics



Note: Excludes those whose only non-formal learning related to attendance at short lectures, seminars, workshops or talks.

For those not in employment however, women were more likely than men to participate in non-formal study, although men spent noticeably longer time in study than women.

The only group where women spent more time in non-formal study was the group with less than upper secondary level education, who spent almost 1.6 times longer in non-formal study than their male counterparts.

About this data

The data in the fact sheet comes from the Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALL) Survey. This was an international survey coordinated by the OECD and Statistics Canada. The New Zealand survey was conducted in 2006 by face-to-face interview with a representative sample of adults aged between 16 and 65 years living in private households. There were 5,960 survey respondents aged 25 to 64. Results are included only if there were sufficient numbers of respondents in a particular category to provide reliable estimates, according to the Statistics Canada guidelines on data quality. For further information see <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/ALL>.

The ALL survey asked about two types of non-formal study: 'courses that were not part of a programme of study', and 'short seminars, lectures, workshops or special talks that were not part of a course'. Information on reasons for learning and hours in learning was not collected for this latter group, but by definition, this type of learning will generally involve significantly fewer hours than other types of non-formal learning. However, in line with the treatment of very short stand-alone formal courses, they have been excluded from the non-formal participation rates figures shown here. Rates for these are instead, presented separately.