



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga

Different tracks

A look at the different ways New Zealanders get tertiary qualifications

This report forms part of a series called *Learners in tertiary education*.

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1 Key points

Changing qualifications is common.

- 22% of students changed qualifications before they had completed their qualification.
- 5% of students completed a higher-level qualification instead of the one they started.
- Between 5% and 10% completed a lower-level qualification instead of the one they started.

Changing providers is also common.

- 19% of students transferred to a different provider before they completed a qualification.
- 52% of students who progressed to higher-level study after completing a qualification, changed providers.

Students who transfer before finishing a qualification are significantly less likely to complete a qualification at the same level or higher than their original qualification. They are more likely to complete a lower-level qualification or to be still studying.

- For example, the degree-completion rate after 10 years for students who transferred was 35%, compared with 67% for those who didn't transfer. However, when transferring students who completed lower-level qualifications or who are still studying are considered, both groups had the same level of non-completion after 10 years (30%).

Individual provider completion rates (which exclude students who transfer and complete at a different provider), are between 6 and 8 percentage points lower than system completion rates (which include transferring students).

- Specifically, 8% of university degree students who start at one provider, complete at a different provider, and 6% of ITP¹ diploma students who start at one provider, complete at a different provider.

¹ Institute of technology or polytechnic.

2 Summary

There are many different ways students in New Zealand gain tertiary qualifications. New Zealand has a long history of part-time and vocationally-based study often undertaken by adult workers, running alongside the more traditional full-time academic pathways followed by school leavers. While a number of other countries have a dual vocational and higher education system, New Zealand's tertiary education system encompasses all post-compulsory learning undertaken beyond school. Polytechnic providers offer degrees, just as universities offer some vocationally-oriented certificates and diplomas.

The existence of a single national register of qualifications, and a funding and policy framework that operates nationally over this one system, have helped to create an environment where flexibility exists to change track and use parts of one's previous learning towards different course and qualification goals.

So students can and do change track – both in terms of providers, as well as in terms of what courses and qualifications they want to study. Students also often choose how much or how fast they want to learn, and many choose to study part-time in a few courses only.

The aim of this report is to measure this change and to evaluate the impact of this change on a key indicator of system performance, namely qualification completion rates. New Zealand currently has a relatively low qualification completion rate. It also has the highest level of part-time study in the OECD.² This report, along with a forthcoming report,³ hope to show that by isolating the effects of transfers, breaks, changing study goals, part-time, and course-based study, one can get a different view of our performance, when compared with other countries, where more students study full-time towards a qualification.

This study followed a group of 170,000 students, who either began a degree or postgraduate qualification for the first time in 1997, or a certificate or diploma for the first time in 2000. It followed them through to the end of 2006, looking at what and where they studied, and what qualifications they achieved. The main findings were:

1. A significant minority of students completed a higher-level qualification instead of the one they started.

- 5% of students completed a higher-level qualification instead of the one they started.
- Between 5% and 10% completed a lower-level qualification instead of the one they started.

This is important as current Ministry of Education qualification completion rate statistics tend to understate performance as they only include students completing a qualification at the same level as the one they started.

2. Changing qualifications was common.

- 40% of bachelors students changed qualifications before they completed, including 23% to another degree.
- 34% of diploma students changed qualifications before they completed, including 10% who changed to degree-level or higher.
- 25% of certificate students changed qualifications, 8% to diploma level or higher.

² OECD 2007, Education at a glance 2007, page 72 and page 296.

³ Part-time students and tertiary achievement – Ministry of Education, 2008 – forthcoming.

3. Changing providers was common.

- 19% of students transferred to a different provider before they completed a qualification.
- 15% to 25% of certificate, diploma and degree students transferred to a different provider. About 7% to 8% of postgraduate students changed providers before completion. Diploma students were the most likely to transfer before completing (25%).
- Changing providers was more common after completion. 52% of students who progressed to higher-level study after completing a qualification, changed providers. This ranged from 80%, for students completing a degree at an ITP⁴, to 20%, for students completing a degree at a university.
- The most common type of transfer was a student doing a certificate at an ITP changing to another certificate at another ITP.

4. Students who transferred before finishing a qualification were significantly less likely to complete a qualification at the same level or higher as their original qualification, but were more likely to complete a lower level qualification.

- The completion rate after 10 years for degree students who transferred (at 35%) was just over half of that for those who didn't transfer (67%).
- The completion rate for transferring diploma students (at 22%) was half the rate for those who didn't transfer (45%).
- Transferring students were more likely to have completed a lower-level qualification or still be studying.
- In fact, at certificate and diploma level, transferring students were more likely than non-transferring students to leave with a qualification (either higher or lower). At bachelors level, when both higher- and lower-level qualification completion is considered, transferring students and non-transferring students left without gaining any qualification at a similar rate (30%). At postgraduate-level, students were a little less likely to complete a qualification at any level after transferring.

5. University bachelors degrees – based on what happened to 27,000 students between 1997 and 2006.

- 62% of students had gained their degree, or a higher-level qualification after 10 years. This compares with the current 5-year published university degree completion rate (which excludes higher-level completion) of 50%.
- 22% had gone on to postgraduate-level study. By the end of 2006, 4% of the starting cohort was still enrolled in postgraduate study, 14% had gained a postgraduate qualification, and 5% had gained a masters degree.
- 1.4% had progressed to doctorate level. 29% of these had completed their doctorate, 59% were still studying towards a doctorate, and 10% had not completed a doctorate and were not enrolled in 2006.

⁴ Institute of Technology or Polytechnic.

-
- In total, 68% had gained some qualification, including 6% who gained a certificate or diploma instead of a degree.
 - 28% had left without gaining any qualification. 3% were still studying having not yet gained a qualification. 13% of the starting cohort were still enrolled 10 years later.

6. ITP diplomas – based on what happened to 15,000 students between 2000 and 2006.

- Just 34% of ITP diploma students had gained their diploma, or a higher-level qualification after 7 years.
- A further 11% had gained a certificate instead.
- 20% were still enrolled 7 years later, while just 3% were still studying having not yet gained any qualification.
- 29% changed providers before completing, 7% to study towards a degree, 8% to another diploma, and 13% to a certificate. 10% went to another ITP, 9% to a university, and 7% to a PTE.⁵
- The most common transfer was to a university to study towards a degree (6% of the starting cohort). 2% completed a degree at a university instead of their original ITP diploma.
- In total, 21% of ITP diploma students progressed to degree-level or higher study, either before or after completing their diploma, and 8% had gained a degree or postgraduate qualification by the end of 2006.
- 48% had left without gaining any qualification. However, 40% of these students had passed every course they had enrolled in. Nearly half (47%) of all diploma students enrolled in 2006 already held a tertiary qualification gained in the previous 12 years. Nearly one in four (23%) already held a diploma.
- It is likely that many such diploma students studied (and were quite successful) with the intention of passing specific courses, rather than a qualification. So, if wanting to pass specific courses, rather than to gain a(nother) diploma is valid, then New Zealand's overall low diploma completion rate portrays a misleading picture of performance.

7. On average, students transferring add 14% (or between 6 and 8 percentage points) to individual provider completion rates.

- On average, 8% of university degree students transferred and completed at a different provider. The average university degree completion rate (which excludes those who transferred) was 56% compared with the system rate (which includes those who transferred) of 62%.
- On average, 6% of ITP diploma students transferred and completed at a different provider. On average, transferring students added 14% to provider completion rates, increasing rates by 6 percentage points from 36% to 42%.

⁵ Private Training Establishment.

8. Learners' views

- Focus group interviews with students highlight a range of factors impacting on decisions to change providers or qualifications. These include: changing goals and preferences, labour market considerations, and quality of course advice, including information on what is needed to credit existing learning to a different qualification, especially when transferring to a different provider.

This study aimed to present a brief descriptive picture of students who change qualifications or providers during their tertiary study. It raises a number of potentially interesting areas for more detailed research. These include a more detailed analysis of progression within institutions, or of changes between provider-based and workplace-based learning. Only two pathways, namely university degrees, and ITP diplomas, are touched on in this study. Other pathways, such as ITP degrees, and wānanga or PTE study, remain important areas for further research, as do demographic and study-related differences. For example, which fields of study are associated with the least or most change?

Finally, further qualitative research, of the type summarised in section 7, will provide valuable additional insights into the factors influencing decisions to change, and more context to the quantitative analysis presented in this report.

3 Changing qualifications

Current Ministry of Education qualification completion rates only include students completing a qualification at the same level as the one they started. This tends to understate performance as:

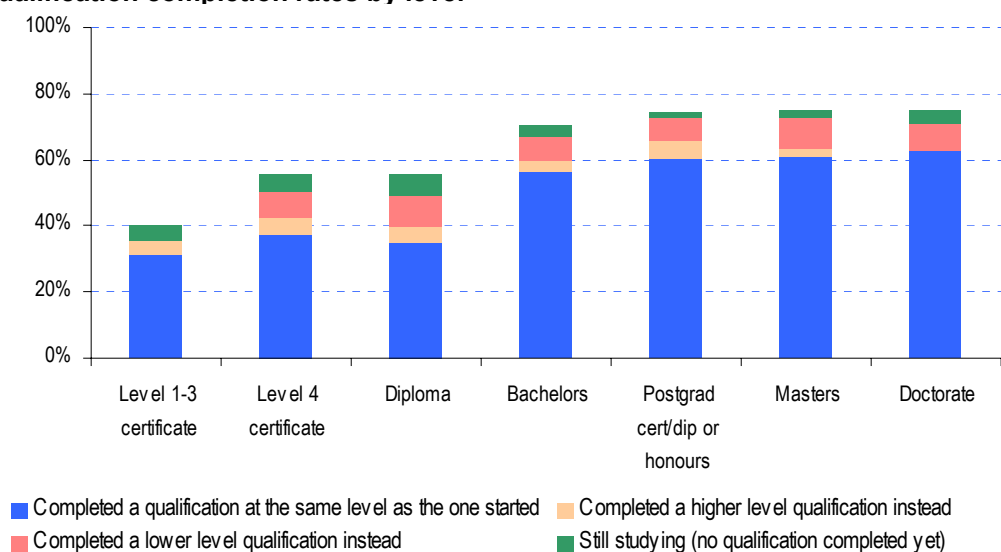
- 5% of students completed a higher-level qualification instead of the one they started.
- Between 5% and 10% completed a lower-level qualification instead of the one they started.
- Another 5% were still studying without having completed a qualification 10 years after starting.

Changing qualifications was common:

- 40% of bachelors students changed qualifications before they completed. 23% changed to another degree, 14% within the same provider. 28% enrolled in another qualification after graduating. 12% progressed directly to postgraduate study, while 8% continued with another degree. Eventually 20% progressed to postgraduate study. [See section 4 for more on degrees.]
- 34% of diploma students changed qualifications before they completed. 10% changed to degree level or higher. 19% enrolled in another qualification after completing their diploma. 7% progressed directly to degree level or higher, while 8% enrolled in another diploma. Eventually 20% progressed to degree study, and 4% to postgraduate study. [See section 5 for more on diplomas.]
- 25% of certificate students changed qualifications, 8% to diploma level or higher. 17% of all the students who started a certificate in 2000 had progressed to diploma level or higher by 2006. 8% had progressed to degree study. 3% had gained a degree or higher by 2006.

A significant minority of students starting qualifications completed a different qualification to the one they started. 5% of students starting a diploma in 2000 graduated with a degree or higher-level qualification instead. 4% of those starting a degree in 1997 gained a higher-level qualification instead.

Qualification completion rates by level⁶



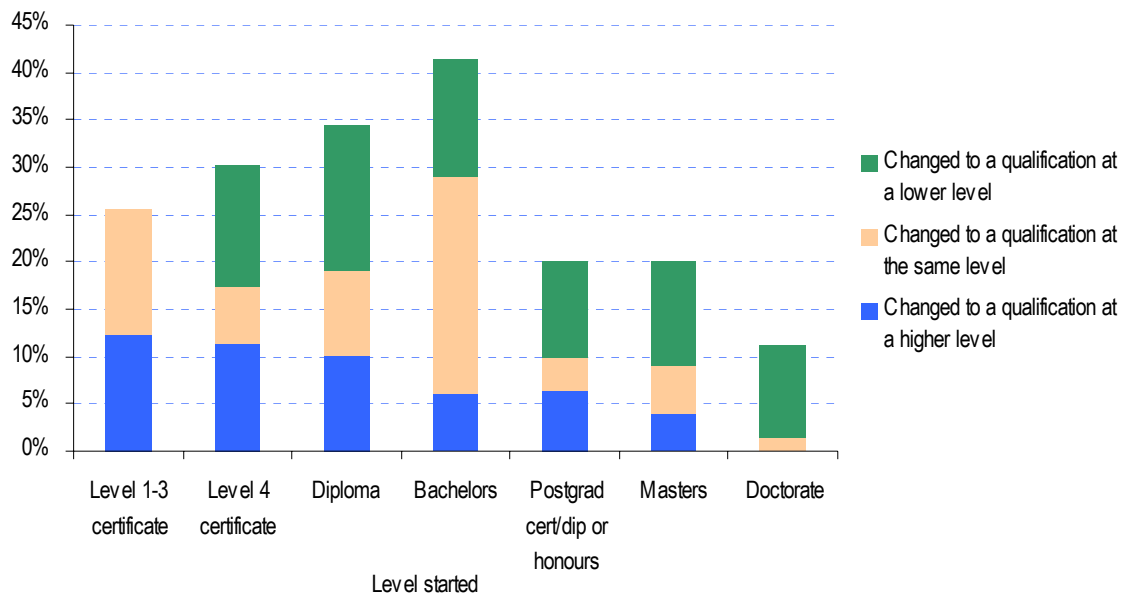
⁶ See technical notes for full details of the data and the definitions used in this graph, and all tables and graphs in this report.

A further 5% to 10% of students completed a lower-level qualification than the one they started. In total, 10% to 15% of students successfully completed qualifications (either at a higher or lower level) in addition to those who started and completed at the same level. The biggest difference was at diploma level, where completion rates rose from 35% to 50% when all qualifications at higher and lower levels were included.

Nearly 30,000 people completed a bachelors degree in 2006. This figure includes between 2,000 and 2,500 students who started a certificate or diploma but changed to a bachelors degree. Similarly, it includes around 1,200 students who started a bachelors degree and who changed to and completed a higher-level qualification instead. These included typically, those who gained an honours degree. Around 300, or 10% of students who began a masters degree left with a lower qualification instead, typically a postgraduate diploma or another bachelors degree.

Changing qualifications before completing is common. The graph below shows that between 25% and 35% of certificate or diploma students changed qualifications, with 10% changing to a higher-level qualification. Changing qualifications was most common for bachelors students, where over 40% of those starting a bachelors degree in 1997 changed qualifications before completion. Of these, 23% changed to another degree, 14% with the same provider, and 9% to a different provider. Changing providers is discussed further in the next section. These figures were relatively similar for 1997, 1998 1999 or 2000 starters.

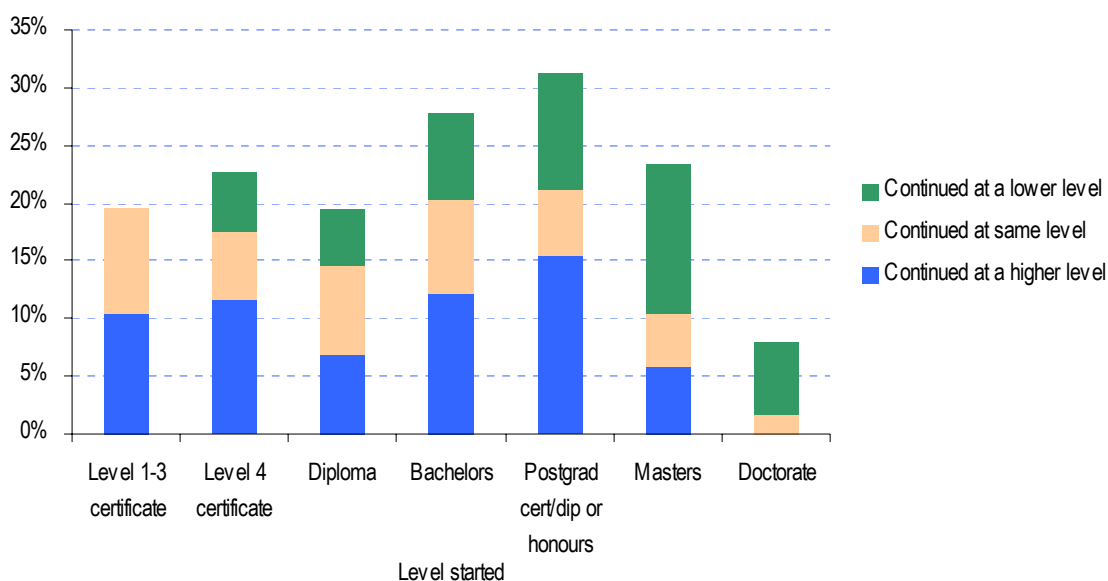
How many students change qualifications before completing?



Postgraduate students were less likely to change qualifications. Around 10% changed to a lower-level qualification before they had completed their postgraduate qualification.

Sometimes changing qualifications represents a genuine change in goal, which more often occurs during or at the end of the student's first year. Sometimes the change reflects the different ways providers structure their qualifications, where students, by design or choice, change the qualification they are working towards, utilising many or all of the courses they have already passed.

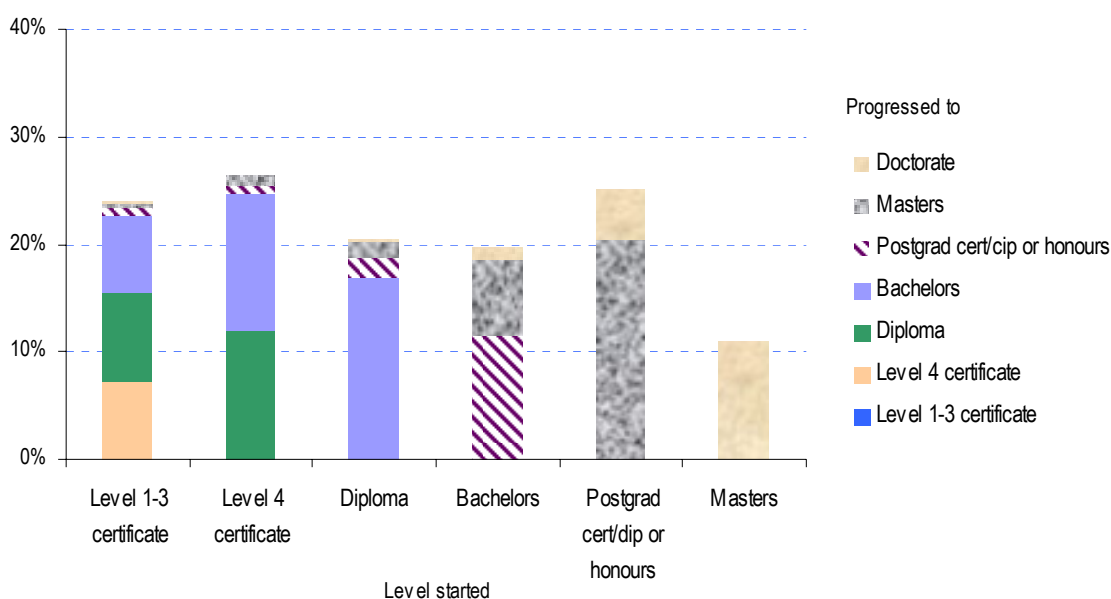
How many students continue study after completing?



The graph above shows how many students enrolled after completing a qualification. Across all qualification levels, 22% enrolled in a different qualification after they completed their original qualification. Over 30% of students starting a postgraduate certificate or diploma, or a bachelors with honours degree in 1997 continued study after completing their qualification. Half of these (15%) progressed to higher-level study.

Across all qualification levels, 30% changed before completing their qualification and 22% enrolled in a different qualification after they completed their original qualification. In total, 46% of all students changed qualification levels at least once during their study, either before they completed, or after, or both. The graph below shows those who progressed to higher-level study.⁷

How many students progress to higher-level study?



⁷ These progression figures differ from other progression statistics published by the Ministry of Education, which relate to the percentage of *students completing qualifications* who enrol in higher level study after completion. The figures used here relate to the percentage of *students starting qualifications* that enrol in higher-level study. These figures include both those who progress directly after completion, as well as those who eventually progress to a higher-level qualification after doing another lower-level qualification, and those who progress without having completed their original qualification.

20% of students starting certificates in 2000 enrolled in another qualification after completing their certificate. 8% enrolled at diploma level or higher. 17% of all the students who started a certificate in 2000 had progressed to diploma level or higher by 2006. 8% had progressed to degree study, and 3% had gained a degree or higher by 2006.

19% of students starting diplomas in 2000 enrolled in another qualification after completing their diploma. 7% progressed directly to degree level or higher, while 8% enrolled in another diploma. By 2006, 20% had progressed to degree study or higher, while 4% had progressed to postgraduate study. Pathways and outcomes for ITP diploma students are explored further later in this report.

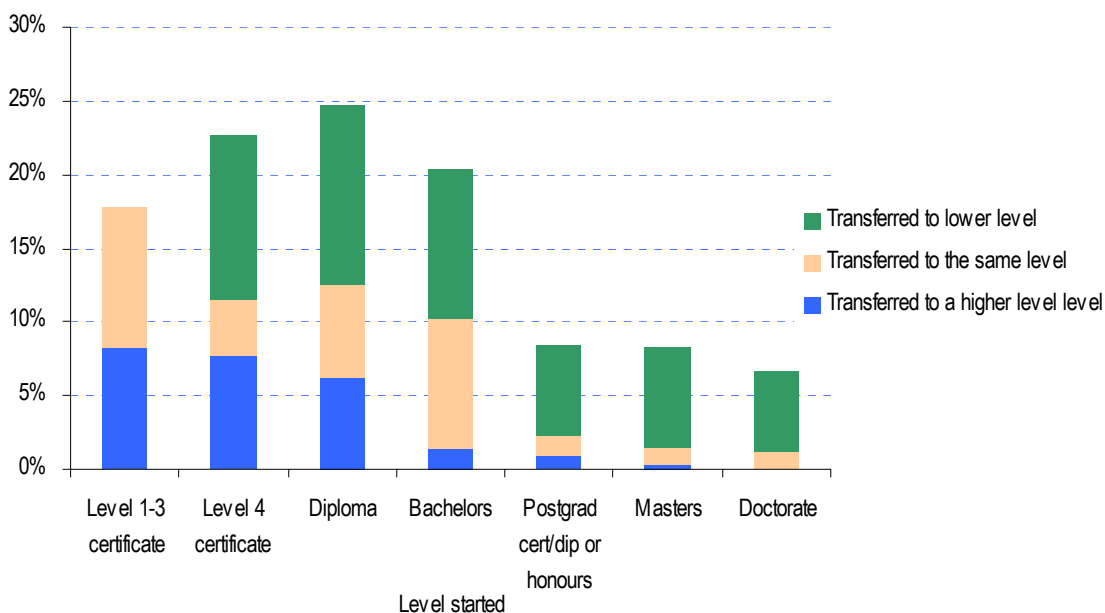
28% of students who started a bachelors degree in 1997 enrolled in another qualification after graduating. 12% progressed directly to postgraduate study, while 8% enrolled in another degree. Eventually 20% progressed to postgraduate study. Pathways and outcomes for university degree students are explored further later in this report.

4 Changing providers

- 19% of students transferred to a different provider before they completed a qualification.
- 18% to 25% of certificate, diploma and degree students transferred to a different provider. About 6% to 8% of postgraduate students changed providers before completion.
- Diploma students were the most likely to transfer before completing (25%), with 6% transferring to degree level or higher.
- Students who transferred were significantly less likely to complete a qualification, and more likely to be still studying. Degree completion rates, after 10 years, were less than 30% for those who changed providers, compared with 62% for those who didn't transfer.
- University and PTE students were least likely to transfer before completing (around 13%), while ITP and wānanga students were most likely to transfer before completing (around 20%).
- The most common type of transfer was a student doing a certificate at an ITP changing to another certificate at another ITP.
- Changing providers is more common after completion. 52% of students who progress to higher-level study after completing a qualification, changed providers. This ranged from 80%, for students completing a degree at an ITP, to 20%, for students completing a degree at a university.

Changing providers is common. Between 18 and 25 percent of certificate, diploma or bachelors students, and 6 and 8 percent of postgraduate students, transferred to a different provider before completing their qualification. Across all levels, 19% changed providers before they completed a qualification.

How many students change providers before completing? – by qualification level

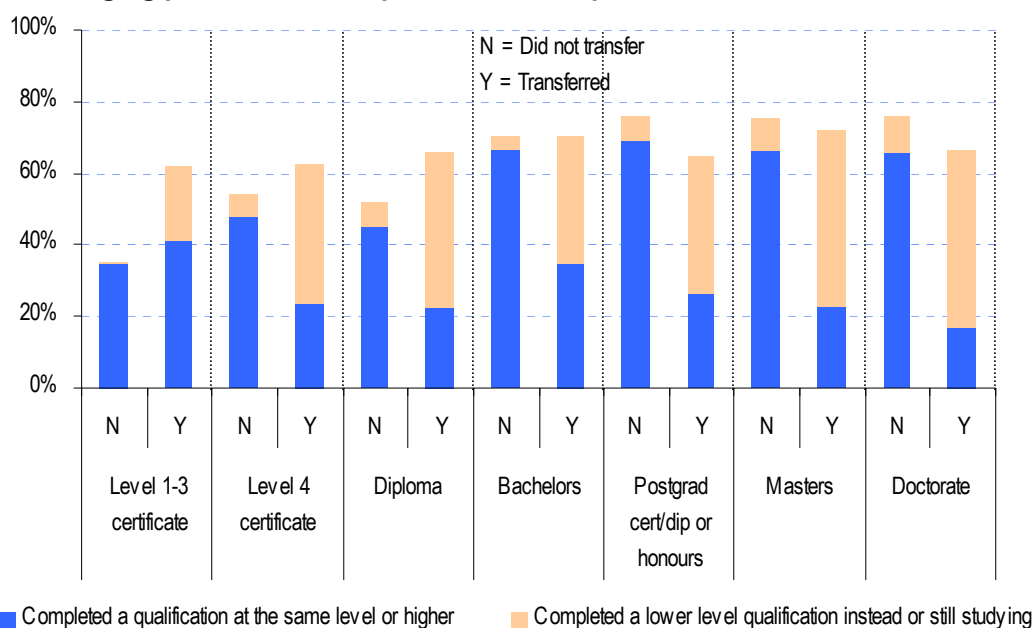


Diploma students were the most likely to transfer. 25% changed provider before completing a qualification, with 6% transferring to a higher-level qualification. This included 4% to a university bachelors degree.

9% of degree students changed to degree study with another provider. This was in addition to the 14% of degree students who didn't transfer, but changed degrees within the same provider. Even at postgraduate level where transfer was less common, between 5% and 7% of students transferred to another provider.

The transfer of ITP diploma and university degree students is explored further later in this report. The following graph looks at completion rates for those students who changed providers.

Does changing providers affect qualification completion?



Apart from level 1 to 3 certificates, those students who changed providers had significantly lower rates of qualification completion than those who stayed with the same provider. The above graph shows that students who transferred were less likely to have completed a qualification at the same level or higher, and more likely to have completed a lower-level qualification, and more likely to be still studying. The difference was significant across all levels. At bachelors level, for example, the completion rate (after 10 years) was 35% for those who changed providers, compared with 66% for those who didn't transfer.

The graph suggests that many transferring students are transferring with a view to completing lower level qualifications. Possible reasons for this are discussed in section 7. If our view of success is broadened to include both lower- and higher-level qualifications, then transferring may, in fact, aid in achieving a successful outcome for certificate and diploma students.

The table on the following page shows how many students in each provider type changed providers before completing their original qualification. ITP and wānanga students were the most likely to change provider before completing a qualification, while PTE and university students were less likely.

6% of ITP students changed to a university, including 4% to degree level or higher. 9% transferred to another ITP, including 8% at diploma level or lower. 1% of ITP students transferred to another ITP to undertake degree study. Conversely, 7% of university students transferred to an ITP. This was mostly

to certificate or diploma qualifications. However, over 600, or 1.2% of university degree students transferred to an ITP degree.

How many students change providers before completing? – by provider type

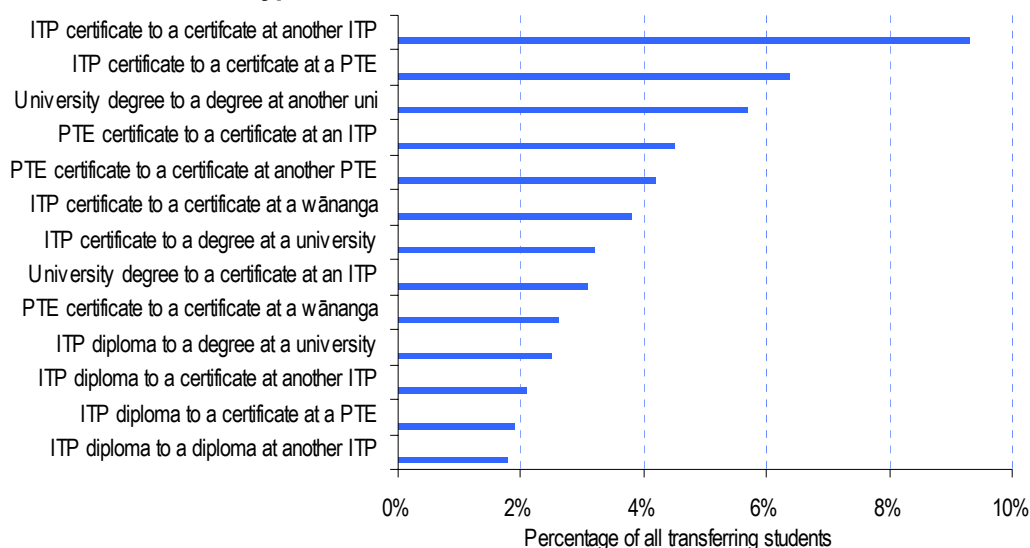
Transferred from a	Did not change provider	Transferred to a				Total who changed provider	Total
		University	ITP	Wānanga	PTE		
University	83%	7%	7%	1%	3%	17%	100%
ITP	76%	6%	9%	3%	6%	24%	100%
Wānanga	73%	2%	9%	4%	12%	27%	100%
PTE	84%	3%	5%	2%	5%	16%	100%
Total	81%	5%	7%	2%	5%	19%	100%

40% of transferring university students transferred to another university, 38% to an ITP. 25% of all transferring students transferred to a certificate qualification at an ITP, and 17% transferred to a university degree qualification.

During the period 1997 to 2006 there were significant changes in tertiary participation in New Zealand. The patterns of transfer reported in this report will have been affected by these changes, and so caution is needed when inferring current or future patterns of transfer based on results from this period. One of the major changes occurred as the country's three public wānanga expanded, in particular, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. Participation grew very significantly between 2000 and 2005, before falling back to 2003 levels by 2007. While much of this growth came from first-time students, the wānanga was also successful in attracting some transferring students, mainly from ITPs and PTEs, and from other wānanga.

However, wānanga also had the highest level of students transferring out of wānanga. This, in part, is due to the nature of wānanga provision which in many cases is aimed at providing entry skills to undertake further vocational or academic study. The number of students transferring out of wānanga was highest for non-degree level study, which makes up 94% of wānanga provision. It may also be in part due to unfavourable attention attracted by Te Wānanga o Aotearoa during the height of its growth, and recent changes in government funding and monitoring aimed at managing how much and what type of provision is funded.

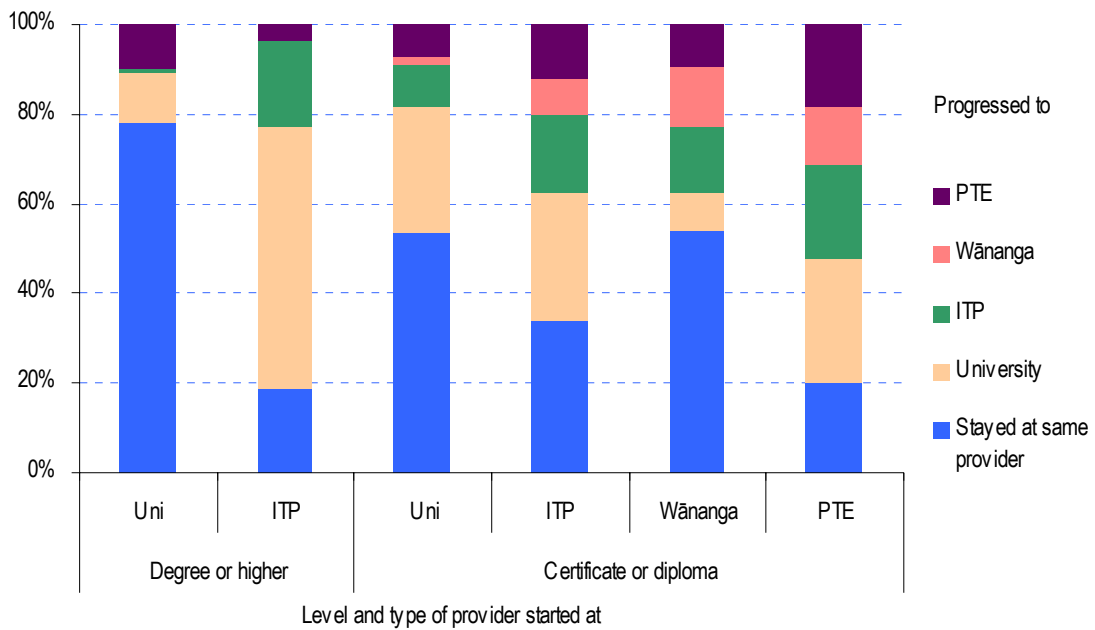
The 10 most common types of transfer



While 19% of students changed providers before completing a qualification, many more students changed providers after completing a qualification. In fact, 50% of those re-enrolling after completing a qualification, did so at a different provider. Transfer rates ranged from 34% for postgraduate certificate, postgraduate diploma or honours students, to 55% for level 1 to 3 certificate students.

About half of all re-enrolment was in higher-level qualifications. About 53% of progressing students changed provider. 15% of masters graduates changed provider to do their doctorate. About a third of bachelors graduates changed provider to do postgraduate study. The graph below shows patterns of transfer for just those who progressed directly to higher-level study.

How many students change providers when progressing to higher-level study?



5 Bachelors degrees at university

This section follows 27,000 students who began a bachelors degree at a university in 1997. After 10 years, that is, by the end of 2006:

- 62% of students had gained their degree, or a higher-level qualification.
- 22% had gone on to postgraduate-level study, 4% were still enrolled in postgraduate study, and 14% had gained a postgraduate qualification.
- 1.4% (or 370 students) had progressed to doctorate level. By the end of 2006, 29% of these had completed their doctorate, 59% were still studying towards a doctorate, and 10% had not completed a doctorate and were not enrolled in 2006.
- 5% had gained a masters degree, and 9% of these had gone on to doctorate level.
- In total, 68% had gained some qualification, including 6% who gained a certificate or diploma instead.
- 28% had left without gaining any qualification. 3% were still studying having not yet gained a qualification. 13% of the starting cohort were still enrolled 10 years later.
- On average, 8% transferred and completed (at bachelors level or higher) at a different provider. The average university completion rate (which excludes those who transferred) was 56% compared with an average rate of 64% when transfers were included.

After certificate study at ITPs, university degree study is the most common entry point for tertiary study. About 25% of all students in formal provider-based study in 2006 began here. About 28,000 people embarked on a university bachelors degree in 2006. A further 6,000 (or 17%) started a degree at an ITP, while another 1,000 (or 3%) began a degree at a wānanga or PTE in 2006.

63% of students starting a university degree for the first time were first-time students (compared with 26% for non-university degrees). 52% were first-time tertiary students aged under 20 (compared with 14% for non-university degrees). One in 8 was an international student. 78% studied full-time for the full year. In 2006, students were enrolled in over 300 different bachelors degrees at the 8 New Zealand universities, plus an additional 180 different bachelors degrees at ITPs, wānanga or PTEs.⁸

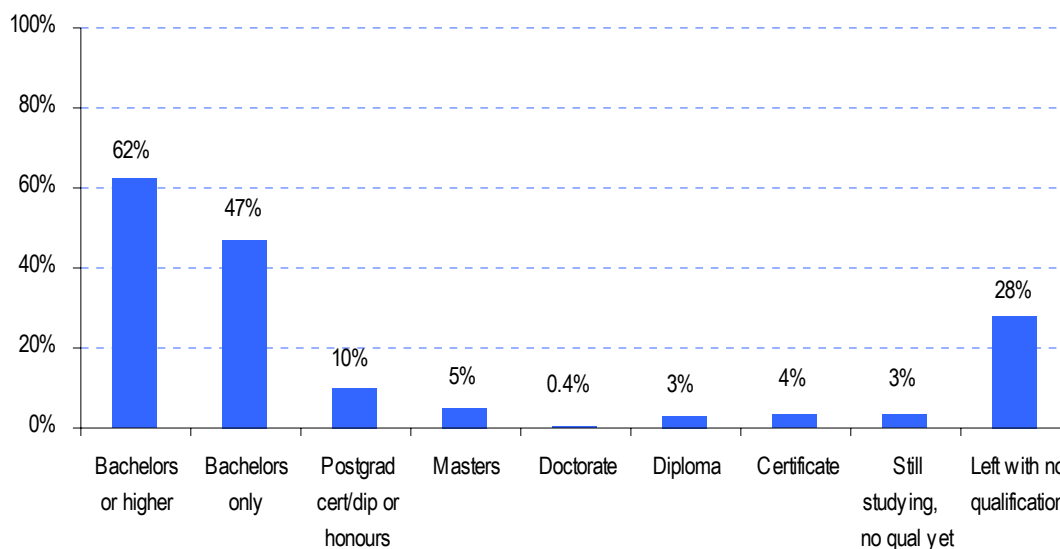
Ministry of Education statistics⁹ show that about 50% of people who start a university degree have completed it after five years. However, this figure excludes those who complete a higher- or lower-level qualification, or who are still studying and may go on to complete in the future. In this section, we look at the group of 27,000 students who started a university degree in 1997 and follow their study over the next 10 years. The graph on the following page summarises the outcomes for this group.

While 50% had completed after 5 years, 58% had completed a degree after 10 years. A further 4% completed a higher-level qualification instead. In total, 62% had completed a bachelors or higher degree after 10 years. A further 6% left with a certificate or diploma qualification, while 2% were still studying towards their degree. 28% had left without gaining any qualification.

⁸ The number of degrees on offer at providers can depend on how providers have structured their qualifications, for example conjoint degrees. For example, what is counted as several different qualifications at one provider may be grouped as one degree at another.

⁹ Education Counts website http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/excel_doc/0010/16300/Gaining_qualifications.xls#COM.32|A1

Students starting a bachelors degree in 1997 – highest qualification attained after 10 years



The table below shows the status of 1997 university degree starters at the end of 2006. 1.4% (or 370) of the 27,000 students had progressed to doctorate level. By the end of 2006, 29% of these had completed their doctorate, 59% were still studying towards a doctorate, and 10% had not completed a doctorate and were not enrolled in 2006.

In total, 22% of the 1997 university degree starters had progressed to postgraduate study, and 15% had completed a postgraduate qualification after 10 years.

Students starting a bachelors degree in 1997 – their completion status after 10 years

Highest level completed or enrolled	At same university	After changing institutions	Total
Completed a doctorate	0.3%	0.1%	0.3%
Studying towards a doctorate	0.6%	0.2%	0.8%
Masters degree	3.1%	1.0%	4.0%
Studying towards a masters degree	0.6%	0.5%	1.0%
Honours degree or postgraduate certificate or diploma	5.7%	3.0%	8.7%
Studying towards an honours degree or postgraduate cert. or dip.	0.4%	0.4%	0.8%
Bachelors degree	34%	9.0%	43%
Studying towards a degree	0.8%	1.4%	2.2%
Certificate or diploma	2.7%	7.0%	10%
Studying at certificate or diploma level	0.0%	1.4%	1.4%
Left with no qualification	22%	5.8%	28%
Total	70%	30%	100%

The above table also shows that around 30% of 1997 degree starters had changed providers at some stage over the following 10 years. 20% did so before completing a degree, while a further 10% did so after completing their degree.

Ministry of Education completion rates are system rates, rather than provider rates, in that they count people who transfer and complete at different providers. These rates will generally always be higher than provider rates, which typically don't count people who transfer away from that provider.

The average 10-year bachelors degree completion rate for 1997 starters across the 8 universities was 56%. On average, 8% of bachelors students transferred and completed their degree or a higher-level qualification at another provider. This rate ranged from 6% to 11% over the 8 universities.

This then was the extent to which system level completion rates exceeded provider completion rates. Between 81% and 92% of those who graduated, did so at the same university, while between 8% and 19% completed at a different university from the one they started at. On average, transferring students increased 10-year university degree completions rates from 56% to 64%.¹⁰

¹⁰ This section uses arithmetic averages for the 8 university completion rates, while the main analysis is based on an overall rate for the 8 universities combined. The average university completion rate was 64% while the overall completion rate was 62%. See the technical notes section for further details.

6 Diplomas at institutes of technology and polytechnics

This section follows 15,000 students who began a diploma at an ITP in 2000. After 7 years, that is, by the end of 2006:

- Just 34% of students had gained their diploma, or a higher-level qualification.
- A further 11% had gained a certificate instead.
- 48% had left without gaining any qualification. However, 40% of these students had passed every course they had enrolled in.
- Nearly half (47%) of all diploma students enrolled in 2006 already held a tertiary qualification gained in the previous 12 years. Nearly one in four (23%) already held a diploma.
- 20% were still enrolled 7 years later, however just 3% were still studying having not yet gained any qualification.
- 29% of students changed providers before completing. 7% to a degree, 8% to another diploma, and 13% to a certificate. 10% went to another ITP, 9% to a university and 7% to a PTE.
- The most common transfer was to a university to do a degree (6% of all starters). 2% of students completed a degree at a university instead of their original ITP diploma.
- In total, 21% of ITP diploma students progressed to degree level or higher study, either before or after completing their diploma, and 8% had gained a degree or postgraduate qualification by the end of 2007.
- On average, 6% transferred and completed a diploma or higher-level qualification at a different provider. On average, transferring students increased individual ITP completion rates (same level or higher) by 6 percentage points from 36% to 42%.

32,000 people started a diploma for the first time in 2006. Students studying diplomas made up 14% of all formal students in 2006. One in every 10 first-time students chose a diploma, and diplomas were the initial entry point to tertiary study for 14% of students enrolled in 2006.

Diploma starters are older than degree starters. Just 20% are under 20 when they start, compared with 52% for degree starters. 60% of diploma starters are aged 25 and over when they start. Diploma students are more likely to come from the workforce than school (54% compared with 13%). Diploma students are less likely than degree students to be studying full-time for a full year (33% compared with 78%).

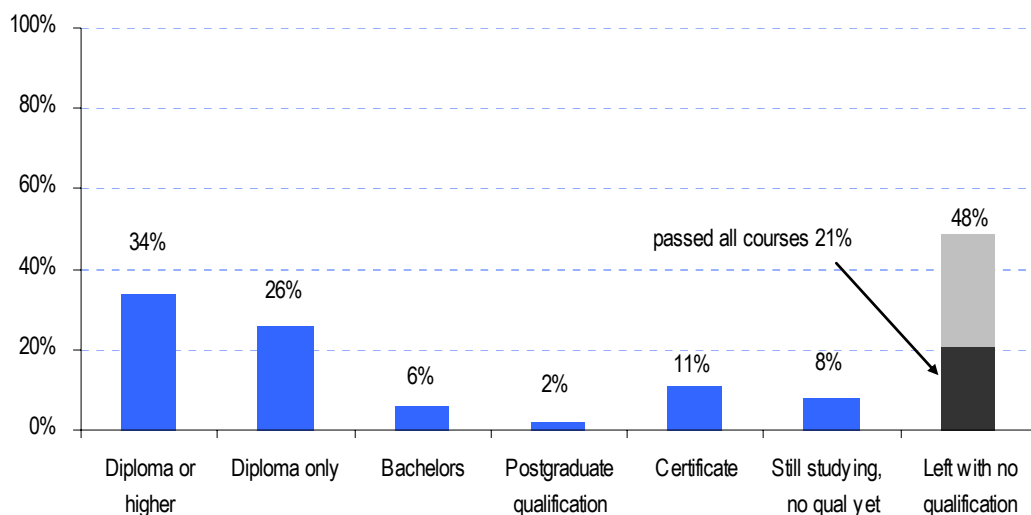
While diplomas are offered by universities and wānanga as well as PTEs, they have traditionally been most widely offered by institutes of technology and polytechnics. In 2006, 47% of all undergraduate diploma students studied at ITPs, compared with 28% at PTEs, 18% at universities, and 7% at wānanga. 15,000 students started a diploma at an ITP for the first time in 2006, and 7% of all students enrolled in 2006 began tertiary study with an ITP diploma. In 2006, students were enrolled in 470 different diplomas over the 20 ITPs.

A diploma has traditionally represented a more vocationally-oriented study pathway. This is reflected in subjects that are more directly related to specific occupations or vocations. Typically lasting two years, diplomas are shorter than degrees, and it is less common to continue on to further, higher-level

academic study. Along with workplace-based learning, diploma study at ITPs provides the most direct pathway for influencing the fit of skills between what the labour market has and what it needs.

Ministry of Education statistics¹¹ show that just 24% of students starting an ITP diploma have completed a diploma after five years. This is the lowest of any qualification level. However, to date, these statistics do not take into account students completing a higher-level qualification, or students who only take out one or two courses, with perhaps no intention of doing the full qualification. This section explores the pathways of 15,000 students who started an ITP diploma for the first time in 2000.

Students starting a diploma for the first time in 2000 – their completion status after 7 years



Note: The figure of 21% for those who passed all courses but left with no qualification is based on 2001 diploma starters, and is used as a proxy for the group of 2000 starters.

The graph above shows the highest qualification obtained by ITP diploma students after 7 years. 34% have gained a diploma or higher-level qualification after 7 years. 48% left without any qualification. An estimated 40% of those leaving without a diploma had passed every course they enrolled in, some 21% of all those who started.

Students starting an ITP diploma in 2000 – highest level achieved after 7 years

Pathway	At same ITP	After changing to a university	After changing to a different provider	Total
Completed a postgraduate qualification	0.6%	0.6%	0.2%	1.4%
Still studying towards a postgraduate qualification	0.3%	0.3%	0.1%	0.8%
Completed a bachelors degree	3.9%	1.7%	0.6%	6.1%
Still studying towards a bachelors degree	1.9%	1.4%	1.0%	4.3%
Completed a diploma	21%	0.7%	2.4%	24%
Still studying towards a diploma	1.4%	0.4%	1.8%	3.6%
Completed a lower-level certificate	3.9%	0.6%	4.7%	9.2%
Still studying at certificate level	0.5%	0.3%	2.1%	3.0%
Left with no qualification	37%	2.7%	7.5%	48%
Total	71%	8.7%	20%	100%

¹¹ Education Counts website http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/data/assets/excel_doc/0010/16300/Gaining_qualifications.xls#COM.32!A1

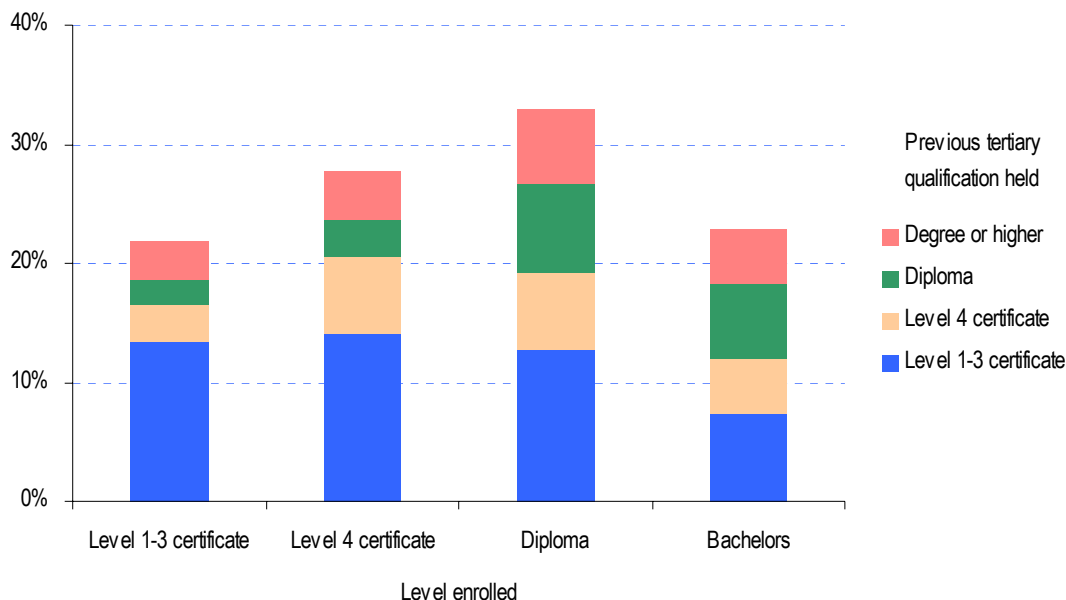
ITP diploma students transferred at a similar rate to bachelors students. 29% of ITP diploma starters changed providers before completing their diploma. 10% went to another ITP mostly to do another diploma, or a certificate instead. 9% of transferring students went to a university, mostly to degree-level study, while 10% went to a PTE or wānanga. 86% of those students who gained a diploma gained it from the ITP they started at. Most of those who had gained higher-level qualifications did so from a university. 59% of those who gained a higher-level qualification did so from the same ITP they started their diploma at.

In total, 21% of ITP diploma students had progressed to degree level or higher study after 7 years. 8% had gained a degree or postgraduate qualification by the end of 2007. In particular, 2% of students starting their diploma at an ITP completed a degree at a university instead.

While 34% of students starting an ITP diploma had completed a diploma or higher-level qualification after 7 years, a further 11% gained a lower-level certificate instead. 48% left without any qualification. Over 40% of those leaving without a diploma had passed every course they enrolled in, some 21% of all those who started. This suggests that for some students at least, their intentions may be course-related rather than qualification-related. Given the more vocational nature of diploma qualifications, it is likely that many of these (particularly those in employment already) have qualifications already, and are enrolling with the intention of passing specific courses, rather than a qualification, for example to update specific vocational skills.

Information on student intentions is not routinely collected. However, one might expect that many of the students who already hold a tertiary qualification, especially at the same level, would be more likely to be enrolling with the intention of passing specific courses rather than another qualification. The graph below shows the highest tertiary qualification gained between 1994 and 2005 by students who were enrolled in ITP diplomas in 2006.

What tertiary qualifications have 2006 students gained in the last 12 years?



A third of all diploma students enrolled in 2006 had completed a tertiary qualification in the previous 12 years. At least 8% already held a diploma and 6% held a degree or higher. Unlike degree students, just one-third of diploma starters were full-time full-year students, 54% came from the workforce, and 60% were aged 25 and over. Given this profile, and the fact that over 40% of all those who did not complete a diploma had successfully passed all their courses, the very low qualification completion

rate for diplomas may mask what is, in fact, successful course-based study for many older workers seeking to up-skill.

Ministry of Education completion rates are system rates, rather than provider rates, in that they count people who transfer and complete at different providers. These rates will generally always be higher than provider rates, which typically don't count people who transfer away from that provider.

On average, 6% of each ITP's diploma students transferred and completed their diploma or a higher-level qualification at another provider. This ranged from 0% for one ITP to 13% for another. This then was the extent to which system-level completion rates exceeded provider completion rates. Between 64% and 100% of those completing a diploma or higher-level qualification, completed it at the same ITP as they started at, while between 0% and 36% completed at a different provider from the one they started at. On average, transferring students added 14% to provider completion rates (same level of higher), increasing rates by 6 percentage points from 36% to 42%.¹²

¹² This section uses arithmetic averages of each ITP's completion rate, while the main analysis is based on an overall rate for the ITP's combined. See the technical notes section for further details.

7 Learners' views

This section describes results of current qualitative research being undertaken by the Tertiary Education Commission into learners' perceptions of tertiary education.¹³ The results are provided in an effort to provide context to the quantitative data set out in this paper. The research involves a substantial number of focus groups with today's tertiary learners.

Learners involved in the research have come from all sectors of tertiary education and from all levels. The research is continuing and will be ongoing as there is a shifting population of learners from year to year. A limitation of the research is that only current students are involved in the focus groups, meaning that at present there is no information available from past students. However, there is no reason to assume that the current thinking of learners is radically different from that of the recent past.

Within the focus groups, participants are encouraged to discuss any issues that may affect their progress through tertiary education. A number of themes are emerging through this research. One such emerging theme concerns progression through the tertiary system.

Some insight into the reasons for learners leaving before completing a qualification has been provided in the focus groups. There are some learners who have chosen to complete a lower-level qualification in a different discipline than their initial enrolment. The decision to change may occur either before or after completion. The most common reason given is that learners consider that they will not be able to gain employment or that they are not enthused by the type of employment they can pursue with their initial qualification. Some students leave one provider and enrol at a different provider in a lower-level qualification because of perceived labour market pressures. Many of those who had not completed their initial qualification indicated that they intend to return to it at some stage. Others are enrolled in another qualification after completion of their initial qualification, as they perceive, in their particular discipline, employers prefer graduates from other institutions.

Transferring between institutions can be a difficult process for learners. The real transferability occurs within an institution with learners able to progress to higher-level qualifications with relative ease. Within the ITP sub-sector, while learners may enrol in a particular qualification – over a number of years – there is the opportunity to leave at the end of each year with a lower qualification. Thus, in some cases, their apparent completion of a qualification lower than their original enrolment is the result of an administrative process rather than a reflection of the learner's wishes regarding qualifications.

When changing from one institution to another, learners encounter a number of administrative and academic problems. Cross-crediting of courses can be a difficult process. Some students who complete a bachelors degree and wish to move on to postgraduate study at a different institution are required to complete other courses (such as a postgraduate diploma), and may be subject to different rules from those who have come from a bachelors degree in the same institution. For instance, transferring learners may be expected to maintain a B+ average over the course to enable them to progress to higher-level postgraduate studies. Students also encounter other barriers. Some who complete at diploma level in the ITP sector and apply for a bachelors-level qualification at a university, are refused entry because the university does not recognise their qualification, even though the ITP has advised the learner that progression is possible.

Coupled with this is the proliferation of similar courses and confusion surrounding nomenclature. Many learners argue that they do not understand the difference between national and provider qualifications.

¹³ Tertiary Education Commission, Learner Engagement Project.

They believe that if a qualification has been approved by NZQA, it is a national qualification. They consider institutions do little to correct this misunderstanding.

Some learners in the latter years of a bachelors degree have commented that they do not consider themselves to be 'work ready'. They also consider that the qualification that they will receive will not allow them to move into the workforce at the level of remuneration that they had anticipated when beginning study. Some refer to this as 'qualification creep' because they feel it is necessary to gain a qualification at a higher level before entering the workforce.

One theme that emerged from the focus groups is that a number of people transition from secondary school to tertiary education (particularly university education) with little real knowledge of the type of course that they wish to study. This results in a hasty, last-minute selection of courses of which the learner has scant real knowledge. In making their selection of courses, learners are, therefore, reliant on course advice supplied by the tertiary education organisation. Learners have commented that course advice is sometimes misleading. This occurs at all levels. Further, changes in courses over the time taken to complete makes it difficult for learners to progress to completion. Students tend to take course advice from one school/faculty only, and therefore, this advice may not include courses available throughout the wider organisation and the tertiary sector as a whole. Learners' ability to complete is affected by this.

Learners also give a number of other reasons for changing their discipline throughout the learning process. For some, it is the differing lecturing styles within disciplines. Some learners prefer smaller, seminar-type, teaching sessions over large (in numbers) lectures and, as a result, are drawn to disciplines employing this type of learning. For others, it is simply recognition that their initial choice of discipline was incorrect. Others cite choosing courses – and disciplines – based on the quality of teaching available.

These are simply a few of the instances that have been commented on within the focus group that allow for some interpretation of the quantitative data from the learner's perspective. They are not meant as a definitive set of circumstances but rather to provide a people-focus to the data. They also do not include any provider perspectives on these issues. Much more research is required in this area to ascertain the full set of circumstances that are behind learner movement within the tertiary education sector.

8 Technical notes

Students

The students used in this study come from two cohorts. The first is all those who started a bachelors degree or higher-level qualification at a public tertiary education institution in 1997. The second group is all those who started a formally assessed certificate or diploma below degree level, of longer than a week's duration at a public or private tertiary education provider in 2000. Both domestic and international students are included.

1997 is used for the degree cohort to allow a long, 10-year window to be used in which to track pathways and outcomes. As shown in this report, there are many students who complete a degree after the five-year window that is often used in published Ministry of Education completion rate tables. The disadvantage of using a longer timeframe is that the tertiary education system under which these students began is becoming increasingly different to the system today's starting students face, and so care is needed when inferring current patterns of transfer, progression and completion from these past patterns.

2000 is used for the certificate and diploma students, and so a 7 (instead of 10) year window is available for tracking pathways and outcomes. The one and two year nature of such programmes, affords us the opportunity to use more recent cohorts. This is particularly important for certificate and diploma study as most of the changes in participation in New Zealand's tertiary education system over the last decade have occurred below degree level from 2000. The year 2000, also allows PTE students to be included (PTE data was not available in 1997). It picks up PTE students at the height of their growth, and wānanga students at the start of their significant growth period.

Course and Qualifications

The term 'course' used in this report, refers to a distinct module, paper, or unit of study that forms part of a larger programme of study that may or may not lead towards a recognised qualification. This is different from other countries, such as Australia or Britain, where the term 'course' is also commonly used to refer to a programme of study or a qualification.

All bachelors qualifications referred to in this study exclude graduate certificates or diplomas. Bachelors with honours degrees, and postgraduate certificates and diplomas are grouped as one level. Historically, universities have structured honours degrees differently, in that the normal pathway is transfer to honours after one year of bachelors study for some, while a one-year postgraduate honours qualification is the pathway for others. This will therefore influence the patterns of transfer and progression reported for this level.

Completion rate

Current Ministry of Education statistics define the qualification completion rate as the percentage of students starting a level of study who complete a qualification *at that same level*. One of the aims of this study was to explore completion at higher and lower levels. In particular, to gauge to what extent Ministry rates understate qualification completion by excluding those who completed a higher-level qualification than the one they started. Note that the definition of a 'starter' hasn't been changed. It's anyone who enrolled in a qualification at that level for the first time. As such, these rates still exclude those who started a subsequent qualification at the same level in later years. Also, under the definition, it does not matter if the student does not complete the same qualification they began, only that they complete a qualification at the same level or higher.

Two types of rates are discussed in this report, system rates and provider rates. The system rate includes all people who complete, regardless of whether or not they completed at the same provider they started at. The provider rate excludes people who transfer and complete at a different provider. This section that discusses the impact of transfer on individual provider rates uses the arithmetic average of each provider's completion rate. This will produce slightly different rates to the rates used in the remainder of this study which are based on overall rate across all providers combined. For example, Provider A with 1,000 starters, and 500 completers has a completion rate of 50%. Provider B with 2,000 starters and 1,200 completers has a completion rate of 60%. The average provider completion rate based on these two providers is $(50\%+60\%)/2 = 55\%$. The combined completion rate $= (500+1,200) / (1,000+2,000) = 57\%$

The completion rates used in this report may differ from those produced by the Tertiary Education Commission because of differences in the historical starting year used, the longer 7 or 10 year timeframe, and small differences in definitions.

Transfer rate

For this study, the term 'transfer' is used to refer to only those students who changed providers before they completed their starting qualification. Data on students who changed providers after completing a qualification is also included in this report, but the term 'transfer' has been reserved in this study for analysing patterns of change before completion.

Progression rate

Current Ministry statistics define 'progression' as the percentage of *graduates or completing students* who enrol in subsequent study, and 'higher progression' refers to those graduates or completing students who enrol in higher-level study.

However, for this study the term 'progression' refers to the percentage of *starting students* who eventually enrol in higher-level study (over some defined period). It does not matter whether they've completed their original qualification, only whether they've subsequently enrolled in a higher-level qualification.

This definition has the advantage of identifying a significant minority of students who go on to higher-level study indirectly, after perhaps, doing another qualification at the same, or a lower level as their first one.

Provider changes

In order to take account of provider mergers, closures and re-designations over the period 1997 to 2006, this study treated each provider according to their status in 2007. For example, Auckland Institute of Technology is treated as a university throughout. Similarly, all colleges of education are treated as part of the universities they merged with, as with all ITPs that merged or closed during this period. All university information therefore includes students who were enrolled in colleges of education, regardless of whether those students were ever part of the university after the merger.



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga