



Briefing Note: 2020 Provider-based tertiary qualification completions

To:	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
Cc:			
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Drafter:	9(2)(a)	DDI:	
Key Contact:	Shona Ramsay	DDI:	9(2)(a)
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Purpose of Report

The purpose of this paper is for you to:

Note that statistics on provider-based tertiary qualification completions in 2020 will be published on Education Counts on 29 July 2021.

Summary

- The number of domestic students completing a tertiary qualification decreased between 2019 and 2020 by 9,565 or 8.5%. The number of international students completing a qualification decreased by 1,125 or 4.7%. Disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have caused a greater decline in 2020 than in previous years. The percentage decreases were greater for males than females, and were much greater for Māori than for other ethnic groups. This large percentage decrease for Māori students was solely for below-degree-level qualifications.
- Domestic completion rates for Level 4 certificates decreased slightly from 66% in 2019 to 64% in 2020. However, bachelors degree completion rates remained steady at 67%. Completion rates for Level 4 certificates decreased in 2020 for all ethnic groups, while for bachelors degrees they were steady. Women and those studying full-time have higher qualification completion rates than men and part-time students respectively.
- Retention rates measure how long students persist in their studies including students who completed their qualification. The latest 8-year retention rate for all types of domestic study and all qualification levels is 75%. For full-time study, the retention rate is 83%.
- Graduate progression rates in 2020 were very similar to those of 2019, apparently unaffected by COVID-19.

Proactive Release

- a **agree** that the Ministry of Education release this briefing in full once it has been considered by you.

☒ **Agree** ☐ **Disagree**



Shona Ramsay
Senior Manager
Graduate Achievement, Vocations and Careers



Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister of Education

14/07/2021

[5 / 8 / 2021](#)

Background

1. The Ministry publishes annual statistical tables on tertiary education on the Education Counts website. The provider-based completion statistics to be published on 29 July 2021 will contain updated data (to the end of 2020) on qualification completions by students enrolled with tertiary education organisations. The statistics analyse completions by characteristics including: type of provider, qualification level, field of study and demographics such as age, ethnic group and gender.
2. The Ministry has already published 2020 enrolment statistics for provider-based tertiary education, and 2020 enrolment and completion statistics for workplace-based training.

What does the 2020 completion data show?

Qualification completion numbers

3. The pattern of the past few years of declining student qualification completion numbers has continued in the context of declining enrolments in a strong labour market. But disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have caused a greater decline in 2020. The percentage change from 2018 to 2019 was a decrease of 4.1% across both domestic and international students, compared with 7.9% from 2019 to 2020. Table 1 shows more impact in 2020 on domestic than international students' completions, though international enrolments were, of course, strongly impacted.

Table 1: Students completing provider-based tertiary qualifications, 2019 and 2020

Year	Domestic	International	Total
2019	112,265	23,790	136,055
2020	102,700	22,665	125,365
% change	-8.5%	-4.7%	-7.9%

Note: Counts are rounded to the nearest five.

4. Table 2 shows that percentage decreases in 2020 for domestic students were greater for under 20-year-olds and those aged 40 years old or more, than for 20 to 39-year-olds. They were greater for males than females. Percentage decreases were also greater for Level 1 – 3 certificates than for higher level qualifications, a pattern which applied to both domestic and international students.
5. Percentage decreases were much greater for Māori than for other ethnic groups. This large decrease in completions for Māori students was solely for below-degree-level qualifications. Degree completions for Māori slightly increased and postgraduate completions were stable. The decrease was mainly in wānanga and Te Pūkenga subsidiaries. Māori students aged 40 or more had by far the largest decrease, though those under 20 also saw significant decreases.
6. In addition, the decreases in domestic completions occurred across all fields of study except natural and physical sciences.

Table 2: Domestic students completing provider-based tertiary qualifications by selected characteristics, 2019 and 2020

Characteristics	Sub-categories	2019	2020	% change
Age group	Under 18 years	4,070	3,490	-14.3%
	18-19 years	9,830	8,675	-11.7%
	20-24 years	34,295	33,225	-3.1%
	25-39 years	34,920	32,590	-6.7%
	40 years & over	29,145	24,720	-15.2%
Gender	Females	71,390	66,055	-7.5%
	Males	40,800	36,500	-10.5%
Ethnic group	European	66,585	62,230	-6.5%
	Māori	29,390	23,845	-18.9%
	Pacific Peoples	10,520	9,980	-5.1%
	Asian	16,835	16,555	-1.7%

Note: 1. Students are counted in each ethnic group they report. 2. Counts are rounded to the nearest five.

Completion rates

7. Domestic student completion rates for Level 4 certificates decreased slightly from 66% in 2019 to 64% in 2020. However, bachelors degree completion rates remained steady at 67%.
8. Domestic completion rates for Level 4 certificates decreased in 2020 for all ethnic groups. For Māori and Pacific Peoples students enrolled in Level 4 certificates, this continued a decreasing pattern over several years. Asian students continue to have the highest completion rates for Level 4 certificates. Completion rates for bachelors degrees were steady across all ethnic groups, except for Asian students where there was a slight decrease in 2020.
9. Women and those studying full-time have higher qualification completion rates than men and part-time students respectively for Level 4 certificates and for degrees.

Retention rates

10. Retention rates measure how long students persist in their studies including students who completed their qualification. The latest 8-year domestic retention rate for bachelors degrees across all types of study is 71%, while for full-time bachelors degree study, the retention rate is 78%. Across all qualification levels and types of study, the 8-year domestic retention rate is 75%, while for full-time study, it is 83%.

Graduate progression rates

11. Graduate progression is continuing to a higher level of study after completing a qualification. Graduate progression rates in 2020 were very similar to those of 2019, apparently unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Progression rates in 2020 are likely to be linked with enrolments in 2020 which, for domestic students, were stable compared with 2019 for universities and slightly decreased for Te Pūkenga subsidiaries.

Next steps

12. The Ministry of Education will update the tertiary retention and achievement tables on Education Counts on 29 July 2021.

Proactively Released