Tertiary student retention

83% of all the full-time domestic students who started study in 2011 were still studying at the same qualification level or higher in 2012, or had completed a qualification.

Indicator Description
The proportion of full-time tertiary education students who started study in a particular year, who were still studying in the following year(s), at the same qualification level or higher, or who had completed a qualification.

Why This Is Important
The retention rate is an indicator of the quality of the tertiary education system and the extent to which it is meeting students’ needs.

There are many factors outside of the tertiary education system that also impact on whether a student continues in study until they complete a qualification. Low levels of unemployment increase the opportunity cost of tertiary education study in terms of earnings foregone. The availability of financial support while studying also influences decisions of whether or not to continue studying.

There are also many social factors that impinge on people’s decisions to continue their studies such as family commitments.

It is important to observe changes in the rate at which students are retained in study so that interventions can be put in place when the rates become lower than what would be expected under certain economic and social conditions. By tracking the retention rates for particular groups of students e.g. students in different ethnic groups or qualification levels, or provider types, steps to improve the rate of retention can be taken when considered necessary. The targeting of groups at greater risk of stopping study can help increase their retention in tertiary education. This ensures the benefits associated with completing a tertiary qualification are available to a greater proportion of those who start study.
How We Are Going

The retention rates of full-time domestic students – one year after starting study – show that the proportion of students retained is higher at the highest qualification levels. Of the students starting study in 2011, those undertaking doctorates had a first-year retention rate of 98%, while students in level 4 certificates and level 5-7 diplomas had the lowest first-year retention rate with 78%.

At all qualification levels the first-year retention rate has improved since 2000, with the highest increase being in students beginning level 4 certificates. 60% of full-time students that started a level 4 certificate in 2000 were still studying in 2001, or had completed a qualification. For students who started in 2011 the proportion retained was significantly higher at 78%; an increase of 30%. The next highest increase over the period was for students studying towards level 1-3 certificates at 24%; up from 64% to 80%. The smallest increase was at Bachelors level where the increase in first year retention rates from 2000 to 2011 was 3%; from 86% to 89%.

Of the full-time domestic students who started study in 2011, Asian students had the highest first year retention rate: 89% of were still enrolled in 2012, or had completed a qualification. This compares to 84% of European students, and 74% and 79% for Māori and Pasifika respectively. The biggest spread in first-year retention rates between ethnic groups was within level 5-7 diplomas. Only 68% of Māori students were still studying level 5-7 diplomas in 2012, or had completed their qualification, compared with 82% of Asian students. The European first-year retention rate for the same qualification was 81% and the Pasifika rate was 72%.

First-year retention rates of full-time domestic students, by starting year and qualification level

![First-year retention rates graph](image-url)
Of all the students who started study in 2011, 84% of women and 80% of men were still studying in 2012, or had completed a qualification. The greatest disparity in first year retention rates between genders can be seen in lower level qualifications: 82% of female students beginning level 1-3 Certificates and 80% beginning level 4 Certificates were still studying in 2012, or had completed their qualification, compared to 77% and 74% for males. This gender difference was reversed only for those starting Masters level study in 2011 where males had higher first year retention rates than women: 91% compared to 88%.

Over the years from 2000 to 2011, the increase in the first-year retention rate at polytechnics and wānanga was greater than for universities. Of the polytechnic students who started study in 2000, 65% were still studying in 2001, or had completed a qualification, compared with 77% of the students who started study in 2011. The corresponding first year retention rates for wānanga were 65% and 76%, and for universities were 83% and 86%. The increase in the first-year retention rate was largest for private training establishments, up from 67% of the 2000 starters to 86% of the 2011 starters.

**Where To Find Out More**

To obtain a more complete understanding of tertiary retention consider indicators:

- Completion of tertiary education
- Tertiary student progression
- Educational attainment in the adult population.

Or consider Tertiary Retention and Achievement Statistics at:


**References**