School leaver destinations

In 2019\(^1\) there were 60,003 school leavers. Of these, 59.6% (35,787 students) enrolled in tertiary education at all levels during 2020.

Indicator Description

Tertiary education destinations of school leavers one year after leaving school.

Why transition to tertiary education is important

Each year, around 60,000 students leave school and move on to further education, workplace training, employment or overseas. This indicator follows the destinations of domestic school leavers into formal tertiary education, including industry training.

The tertiary education sector is a diverse sector. It includes community education courses as well as advanced postgraduate degrees. It provides education for a diverse range of learners, from school leavers to mid-career workers, the unemployed to students from overseas, and those pursuing an interest, a hobby or more social interaction.

Enrolment in tertiary education indicates the extent to which New Zealanders are developing the skills needed for a modern knowledge economy and society.

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\(^1\) This indicator report describes the destinations in 2020 of the cohort of school leavers who left school in 2019. This cohort is a year behind the other school leaver indicators published at the same time as school leavers have the full year to move into tertiary training or education.
How are we going?

Of the 60,003 domestic students who left school in 2019, 59.6% enrolled in tertiary education during 2019. This is down 0.2 percentage points from the 2018 leaver cohort. This continues a downward trend in the proportion of school leavers enrolling into tertiary education in the year after leaving school since the 2013 leaver cohort (65.0%). Declines are mainly due to a reduction in enrolments in low level certificates at level 1 and 2, from 8.4% of the 2013 leaver cohort to 3.8% of the 2019 leaver cohort.

Comparing the 2018 and 2019 cohorts, the proportion enrolled at Bachelors level and above has decreased by 0.1 percentage points, from 32.0% of 2018 school leavers to 31.9% of 2019 school leavers. The proportion enrolled in Level 3 to 7 certificates and diplomas increased 0.2 percentage points, from 23.7% of 2018 school leavers to 23.9% of 2019 school leavers. The proportion enrolled in Level 1 and 2 certificates deceased 0.3 percentage points (4.1% to 3.8%).

**Figure 1.** School leavers enrolling in tertiary study at level 3 or above has been consistent for the last four years.
Ethnicity

During 2020, 74.5% of Asian school leavers from the 2019 cohort enrolled in tertiary education, 14.9 percentage points higher than total leavers. The equivalent measure for European/Pākehā leavers was 62.3%, Pacific leavers 49.3% and Māori leavers 46.3%.

Comparing with the 2018 and 2019 school leaver cohorts, an increase in direct transition to tertiary was observed for European/Pākehā leavers (0.6 percentage points), with decreases for other ethnicities: decreases of 1.7 percentage points for Asian leavers, 1.6 percentage points for Māori leavers, and 0.8 percentage points for Pacific leavers.

Since 2014 there has been a decrease in tertiary enrolments for all ethnic groups. The largest decrease was for Pacific school leavers, which decreased 9.3 percentage points between the 2014 leaver cohort and the 2019 leaver cohort. Over the same period tertiary enrolments decreased 8.6 percentage points for Māori school leavers, 5.8 percentage points for Asian leavers and 3.9 percentage points for European/Pākehā leavers.

Figure 2. Asian school leavers continue to have the highest rate of enrolment in tertiary

Māori and Pacific school leavers are more likely to be enrolled in foundation courses, and certificate and diploma courses than other ethnic groups. From the 2019 school leaver cohort, 32.6% of Māori leavers and 30.1% of Pacific leavers enrolled in tertiary education Level 1-7 during 2020.

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2 Total response ethnicity collection involves counting people who identify with more than one ethnic group in each of their stated ethnic groups. For the New Zealand total, individuals are counted only once.
Figure 3. In their first year after leaving school Māori and Pacific leavers are more likely to be enrolled in foundation courses (2019 school leavers)

Figure 4. In the first year after leaving school, Māori and Pacific leavers are more likely to have limited or no employment (2018\(^3\) school leavers)

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\(^3\) The graph is NOT for 2019 school leaver cohort. The data for this graph is from Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI), which is available up to 2018.
Māori Medium Education

Of the 14,468 Māori students who left school in 2019, 4.4% (639 Māori school leavers) were learning in Māori Medium Education (MME) when they left school. The number of Māori school leavers from MME has increased 62% since 2010. Because of the small number of school leavers coming from MME a small change in numbers can result in a relatively change in the proportions or relatively large fluctuations from year to year.

In the 2019 school leaver cohort, 52.4% of Māori students from Māori Medium Education (MME) enrolled in tertiary education during 2020, an increase of 3.2 percentage points compared to the 2018 cohort. The rate for Māori school leavers from English Medium Education (EME) or Mixed Medium Education (Mixed) decreased 1.7 percentage points to 46.1%. In the 2019 total school leavers’ population, 59.6% made the direct transition to tertiary study in 2019, down 0.1 percentage points.

Since the 2013 leaver cohort, the proportion of Māori school leavers making a direct transition to tertiary education has decreased in both MME and EME or Mixed, as has the proportion of the total population. Between the 2013 cohort and the 2019 cohort, Māori school leavers from MME had a decrease in direct transition of 7.5 percentage points, and Māori school leavers from EME or Mixed had a decrease of 9.1 percentage points.

Figure 5. 2019 Māori school leavers from Māori Medium education had a higher tertiary enrolment rate during 2020

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4 Māori Medium Education used in this report means Māori Medium schools where all students are recorded as enrolled in Māori-medium education (i.e., they are taught in the Māori language for at least 51 percent of the time). Smaller numbers of schools and students meaning that there is more variation in the data. Schools can change classification from year to year. Lower response rate so the coverage is less complete, and results are indicative but not definitive.

Mixed Medium Education includes 3 types of schools:
- School with Māori medium education is a school where some students do Māori medium education and the rest do no Māori language in education.
- Mixed Māori Language in Education School is a school where all students are either involved in Māori medium education or Māori language in English medium education.
- School with Mixed Māori Language in Education School is a school where some students do Maori medium education, some do Māori language in English medium education and some do no Māori language in education.

More information is available at Māori Medium Schools Directory.
In the 2019 school leaver cohort, the proportion of Māori school leavers from MME who enrolled in Bachelors and above (17.2%) was higher than that of Māori school leavers from EME or Mixed (13.6%). Māori school leavers from MME were also more likely to enrol in certificates and diplomas at Levels 3 to 7 (30.2% from MME and 24.5% from EME or Mixed). Māori school leavers from EME or Mixed are more likely to participate in lower level tertiary education (8.0% compared to 5.0% of Māori school leavers in MME). This pattern has been seen over last seven years, since 2013.

**Figure 6.** A higher percentage of 2019 Māori school leavers from Māori Medium education enrolled in Bachelors qualifications and above during 2020
Gender

Female school leavers are more likely to progress to tertiary education in the year after leaving school than male school leavers. During 2020, 61.9% of females from the 2019 leaver cohort were enrolled in tertiary education compared to 57.4% of males. Compared to the 2018 leaver cohort, female school leavers enrolled in tertiary education increased by 0.4 percentage points, while male school leavers had a decrease of 0.6 percentage points.

Female school leavers are more likely to enrol in Bachelors and above qualifications with 37.8% of the 2019 cohort of leavers doing so during 2020, compared with 26.2% of male school leavers. Male school leavers are more likely to participate in work-based learning or to transition to employment.

Figure 7. Female school leavers are more likely to progress to Bachelors qualifications and above in the year after leaving school

In their first year after leaving school male school leavers are more likely to participate in work-based education (1.6% of female and 7.6% of male school leavers in 2018). Of the students who left school in 2018, 12.6% of females and 19.0% of males were working5.

In their first year after leaving school female students are more likely to be living outside New Zealand (5.4% of female and 4.7% of male 2018 school leavers) and more likely not to be in employment or education (NEET) or in limited employment (28.2% of female and 26.2% of male 2018 school leavers).

Figure 8. Female school leavers had higher NEET or limited employment rates in the year after leaving school6

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5 Working is defined as earning equivalent of minimum wage for at least 30 hours per week for 6 months or more.
6 The graph is NOT for 2019 school leaver cohort. The data for this graph is from Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI), which is available up to 2018.
Decile

Students from higher decile schools are more likely to enrol in tertiary education. From the 2019 leaver cohort, 71.3% of school leavers from schools in decile 9-10 enrolled in tertiary education during 2020. This compares with 44.7% of leavers from schools in decile 1-2.

Compared to the 2018 school leavers, the proportion of 2019 school leavers from schools in deciles 7-8 and 9-10 enrolling in tertiary education increased 1.1 and 1.3 percentage points respectively. The proportion of school leavers from schools in decile 1-2 and 3-4 decreased by 3.7 and 1.4 percentage points respectively. There was no change for 2019 school leavers from schools in decile 5-6 enrolling in tertiary education within one year (58.6%) compared to 2018 school leavers.

Figure 9. A gradient of school leavers having a direct transition to tertiary education across deciles

Students from lower decile schools are more likely to enrol in foundation courses, and certificate and diploma courses than students from higher decile schools. Based on the 2019 leaver cohort, 31.2% of leavers from schools in decile1-2 enrolled in tertiary education in Levels 1 to 7 (non-degree) and 13.5% enrolled in Bachelors and above during 2020. In comparison, 17.9% of school leavers from decile 9-10 schools enrolled in Levels 1 to 7 (non-degree) and 53.4% enrolled in Bachelors and above during 2020.

Figure 10. Students from lower decile schools are more likely to enrol in foundation courses

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7 Deciles are used to provide funding to state and state-integrated schools to enable them to overcome the barriers to learning faced by students from lower socio-economic communities. Students from schools with a higher decile have a smaller proportion of students with the lowest socio-economic factors.
Highest school qualification

Students who left school in 2019 with NCEA Level 3 were very likely to enrol in tertiary education during 2020 (72.8%). This compares with 33.7% for school leavers with less than a NCEA Level 1 qualification.

Compared to the 2018 leaver cohort, the proportion of 2019 school leavers with NCEA Level 1 enrolling in tertiary education decreased 1.2 percentage points from 44.7% to 43.5%. However, there were increases in enrolments in tertiary education for leavers with NCEA Level 2, NCEA Level 3 or UE standard between the 2018 leaver cohort and the 2019 leaver cohort. School leavers with NCEA Level 3 or UE standard enrolling in tertiary education in the year after leaving school had the highest increase, 0.6 percentage points from 72.2% for 2018 school leavers to 72.8% for 2019 school leavers. The proportion of school leavers with NCEA Level 2 enrolling in tertiary education in the year after leaving school increased 0.1 percentage points from 48.3% for 2018 school leavers to 48.4% for 2019 school leavers.

Figure 11. Students who left school with NCEA Level 3 were very likely to enrol in tertiary education
Further Education in Three Years

Some students have a gap of more than a year between leaving school and enrolling in tertiary education. The following examines the proportions of leavers who enrol for the first time up to three years after leaving school.

From the 2017 leaver cohort (the latest cohort for which we have three years of destinations data), 61.2% enrolled in tertiary within one year after leaving school (direct transition), 9.1% enrolled for the first time two years after leaving school, 4.3% enrolled for the first time three years after leaving school and 25.4% had no enrolment in a tertiary course within three years of leaving.

In comparing leaver cohorts from 2012 to 2017, the proportions of leavers making a direct transition to tertiary education were stable at around 65.0% from 2012-2014, followed by decreases in 2015 (63.9%), 2016 (61.6%) and 2017 leaver cohorts (61.2%). Over the same period, the proportion of leavers enrolling in tertiary education for the first time two years (around 9.0%) and three years (around 4.0%) after leaving school has been stable.

Figure 12. School leavers are very likely to make a direct transition to tertiary education
Where to Find Out More

To obtain more information about school leavers, consider publications:

- School leavers’ attainment
- 18-year-olds with a minimum of NCEA Level 2 or equivalent

The Ministry of Education has established an Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis Programme to systematically identify, evaluate, analyse, synthesise, and make accessible, relevant evidence linked to a range of learner outcomes. Evidence about what works for this indicator can be found in:

- Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis
- Effective Pedagogy in Mathematics/Pāngarau: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration.
- To access BES publications, visit the BES page on the Education Counts website.

Reference

- Students enrolled at New Zealand's tertiary institutions, https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/tertiary-education/participation