Educational attainment in the adult population

More New Zealanders with a bachelors or higher qualification

The proportion of New Zealanders with a bachelors or higher qualification increased from 2016 to 2017. As expected, the proportion without a qualification continued to fall.

The educational attainment of New Zealanders aged 25 to 64 years was similar to the OECD average in 2017. For higher-level qualifications, New Zealand has average attainment compared to other OECD countries. However, there were more New Zealanders with bachelors degrees and fewer with masters degrees.

Indicator description

Distribution of the population aged 15 years and older by highest qualification. The indicator also includes an international comparison of educational attainment for the population aged 25 to 64 years.

Proportion with a higher-level qualification increases

The proportion of New Zealanders with a bachelors or higher qualification increased from 24 percent in 2016 to 26 percent in 2017. Ten years earlier, only 17 percent of New Zealanders held a bachelors or higher qualification.

In 2017, 51 percent of the population held a tertiary qualification. In New Zealand, all post-school study is considered to be tertiary education study.
Figure 1: Distribution of the population aged 15 years and over by highest qualification level

Notes:
1. In June 2013, the qualification question in the Household Labour Force Survey was updated, leading to improved estimates of people with school qualifications.
2. From 2013, tertiary diplomas and certificates excludes level 7 diplomas and certificates.
3. From 2013, ‘no qualification’ excludes people who did not state their qualification.
4. Data for 2013 is based on the June, September and December quarters.

The proportion with a level 1 to 6 diploma or certificate, at 26 percent, remained stable from 2016 to 2017. Included in this group are people with ‘other post-school qualifications’. They comprised 7.4 percent of the adult population in 2017 and 5.2 percent in 2013.

In 2017, only 2.6 percent of the population held a level 1 to 3 tertiary certificate as their highest qualification. In 2013, the figure was 3.8 percent.

The number of New Zealanders without a qualification has been decreasing. From 2016 to 2017, the proportion without a qualification decreased to 19 percent. The proportion of people with only a school qualification, at 28 percent, remained stable from 2016 to 2017.
Steady upward trend in higher-level qualifications for Māori and Pacific peoples

The proportion of Māori with a bachelors or higher qualification increased from 2016 to 2017, to 13 percent. The comparable figure for Pacific peoples increased to 10 percent from 2016 to 2017.

Figure 2: Estimated percentages of the Māori and Pacific peoples aged 15 years and over with a bachelors or higher qualification

The proportion of Māori with a level 4 to 6 diploma or certificate increased from 2016 to 2017, to 27 percent. The comparable figure for Pacific peoples decreased to 21 percent from 2016 to 2017.
Māori and Pacific populations had largest decrease in proportion without a qualification

The proportion of Māori without a qualification decreased by 2.2 percentage points from 2016 to 2017, to 29 percent. The comparable figure for Pacific peoples decreased by 1.7 percentage points, to 29 percent.

In 2017, 18 percent of Europeans did not hold a qualification and 11 percent of the Asians/MELAA/Other ethnic groups.

Educational attainment of New Zealanders is similar to OECD average

The educational attainment of New Zealanders aged 25 to 64 years was similar to the OECD average in 2017. Thirty-eight percent held a level 5 to 7 diploma or higher-level qualification, 41 percent held an upper secondary qualification or a level 4 certificate, and 21 percent had no qualification or they did not specify their qualification. Compared to the OECD average, there were more New Zealanders with bachelors degrees and fewer with masters degrees.

Note: The Organisation for Economic Development (OECD) defines ‘tertiary’ qualifications as level 5 diplomas/certificates and above.
Figure 4: Educational attainment in 2017 of the population aged 25 to 64 years for selected OECD countries

Note: Data is based on people’s highest qualification level. OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

References