

Education Indicator

EDUCATION AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

Educational attainment in the adult population

The proportion of New Zealanders with qualifications has been increasing for several decades. But growth has slowed since 2019, and gaps persist for Māori and Pacific peoples, especially at degree level and higher.

Indicator Description

The population analysed by highest qualification is those aged 25 to 64. This covers the population who are likely to have completed their initial school and tertiary education and less likely to have retired.

Educational attainment in the population is an important indicator in measuring how well societies are doing. People with higher-level qualifications have higher rates of employment and higher earnings than those with low or no qualifications. They are also more likely to experience a range of better social outcomes, such as better health, social connection and civic engagement.

As the requirements for many jobs and the expectations of employers continue to change, education provides the skills and knowledge necessary for a more productive workforce and for participation in society. Education contributes to an expansion of scientific and cultural knowledge. A population's educational levels are positively related to economic growth rates and to a country's capacity to provide its citizens with a high standard of living.

Why this is important

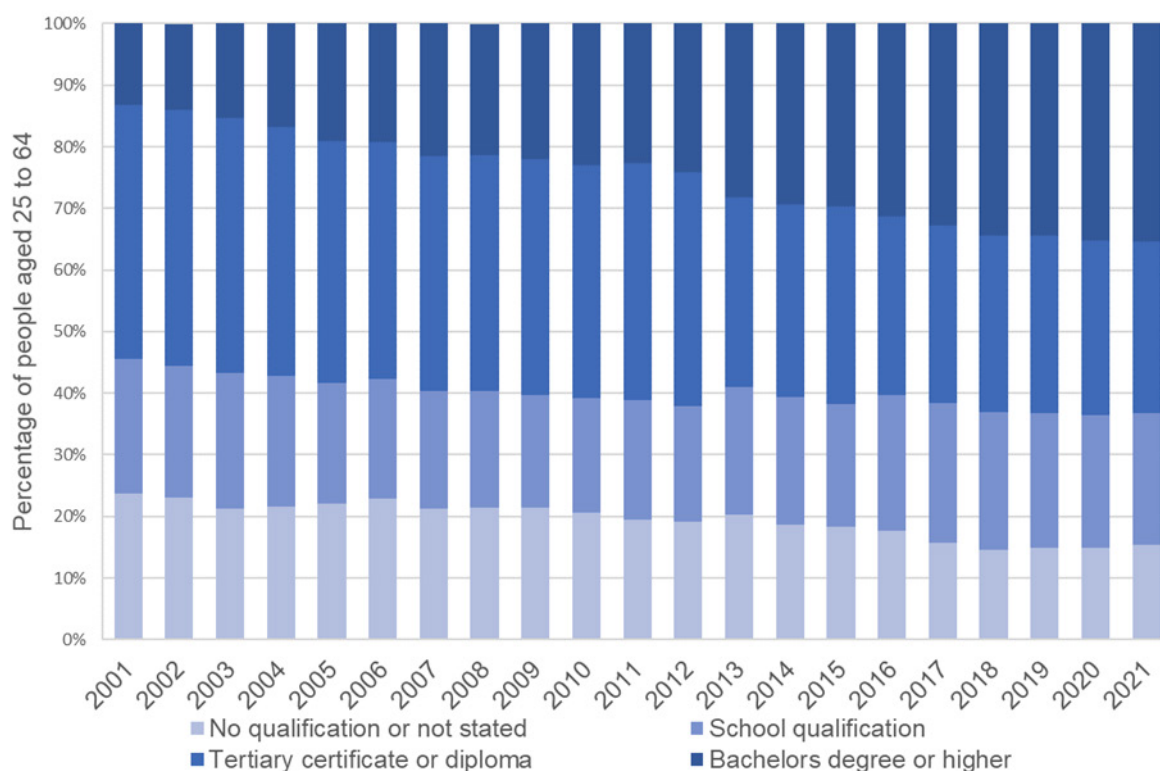
People's qualifications are often considered a proxy for 'human capital', that is, their skills and knowledge. Changes in the educational attainment of the population also provides information about access to education and the equity of the education system.

Knowing how educational attainment in New Zealand compares with other countries is an important measure of how well our system is going, and where we might learn from other countries.

How are we going

Educational qualification attainment has been increasing steadily over the last few decades. In 2001, nearly a quarter (24 percent) of 25 to 64-year-olds did not hold even a school qualification. By 2021, this had reduced to just over 13 percent. However, growth slowed in 2019, and the proportion of adults with no qualifications has remained around 13 percent since 2018.

Figure 1. Distribution of the population aged 25 to 64 by highest qualification level



Notes:

1. Qualification level data prior to 2013 is not completely comparable with that from 2013 due to changes made to the qualification question in the survey in 2013.
2. Values represent an average of March, June, September and December quarters.
3. Source: Ministry of Education analysis of Statistics New Zealand, Household Labour Force Survey data.

More New Zealanders have also gained tertiary education qualifications. The proportion of 25 to 64-year-olds with a tertiary education qualification has increased from 54 percent in 2001 to 65 percent in 2021. All of this growth has been at bachelors degree level or higher, which has more than doubled from 13 percent in 2001 to 36 percent in 2021.



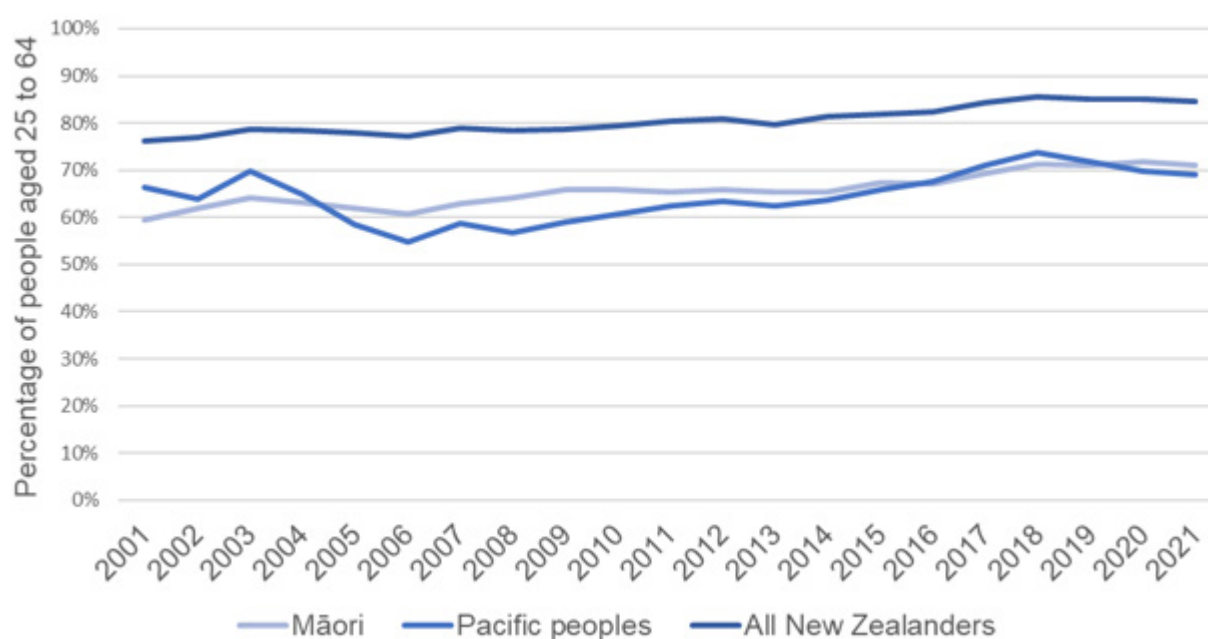
Growth in the number of people with a school qualification, and growth in the number of people with a bachelors degree has seen the relative share of people with a tertiary certificate or diploma decrease from 41 percent in 2001 to 29 percent in 2021. This decrease is a consequence of lower numbers of people gaining trades qualifications (mostly certificates at level 4) after the Global Financial Crisis.

More Māori and Pacific people are gaining at least a school qualification, but the education gap remains, especially at degree level

While qualification attainment for Māori and Pacific peoples has increased noticeably over the last few decades, the gap in attainment between these two groups and other groups persists. The proportion of Māori aged 25 to 64 with at least a school qualification was 71 percent in 2021, up from 59 percent two decades ago. For Pacific peoples it was 69 percent in 2021, up from 66 percent two decades ago. Attainment at the total population level was significantly higher, at 85 percent, up from 76 percent two decades ago.

Growth in qualification attainment has slowed across all groups in the last two years, and the gap in attainment between Māori and Pacific peoples and the total population has remained at around 15 percent.

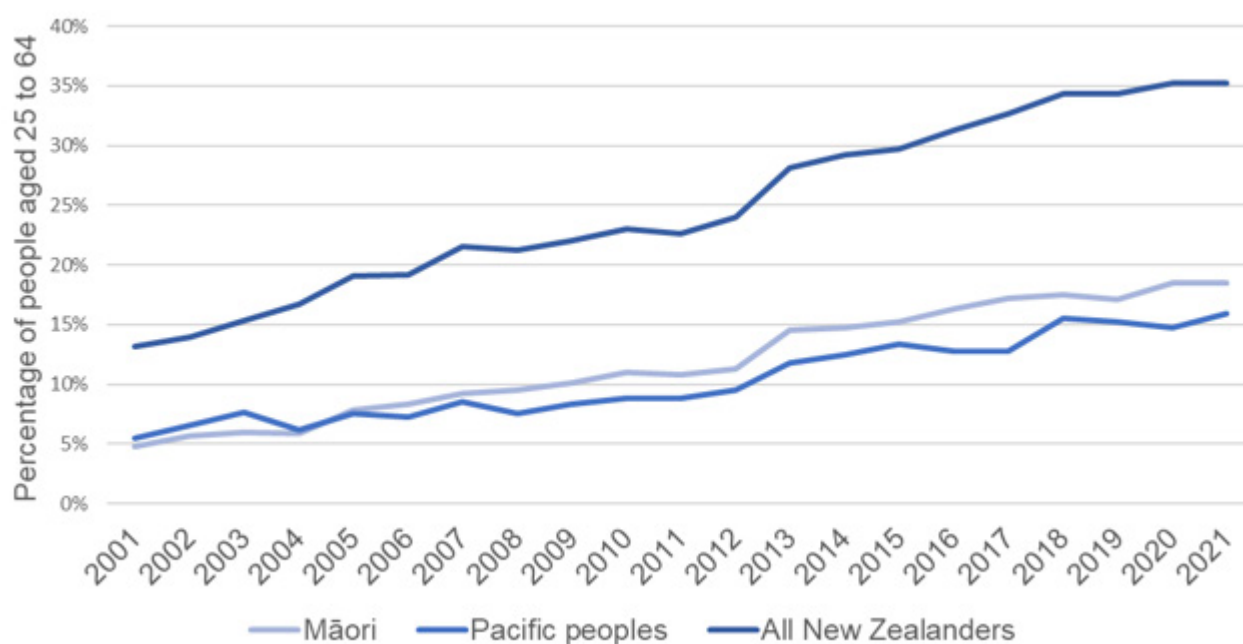
Figure 2. Percentage of Māori and Pacific peoples aged 25 to 64 with at least a school qualification



Notes:

1. Around 2%-4% have not stated their qualifications. These have been counted as having no qualifications, so the figures in this graph are likely to slightly underestimate true levels of qualification attainment.
2. Qualification level data prior to 2013 is not completely comparable with that from 2013 due to changes made to the qualification question in the survey in 2013.
3. Values represent an average of the March, June, September and December quarters.
4. Source: Ministry of Education analysis of Statistics New Zealand, Household Labour Force Survey data.



Figure 3. Percentage of Māori and Pacific peoples aged 25 to 64 with a bachelors or higher qualification**Notes:**

1. Qualification level data prior to 2013 is not completely comparable with that from 2013 due to changes made to the qualification question in the survey in 2013.
2. Values represent an average of the March, June, September and December quarters.
3. Source: Ministry of Education analysis of Statistics New Zealand, Household Labour Force Survey data.

The proportion of Māori aged 25 to 64 with a bachelors or higher qualification in 2021 was 18 percent. The comparable figure for Pacific peoples was 16 percent. These are significantly lower than the figure for the total population, of 35 percent. Growth has slowed in the last two years for all groups.

While degree or higher attainment for both Māori and Pacific peoples has increased significantly over the last few decades, it has not increased as much as for other groups, leading to an increase in the gap in attainment.

Educational attainment of New Zealanders is similar to OECD average

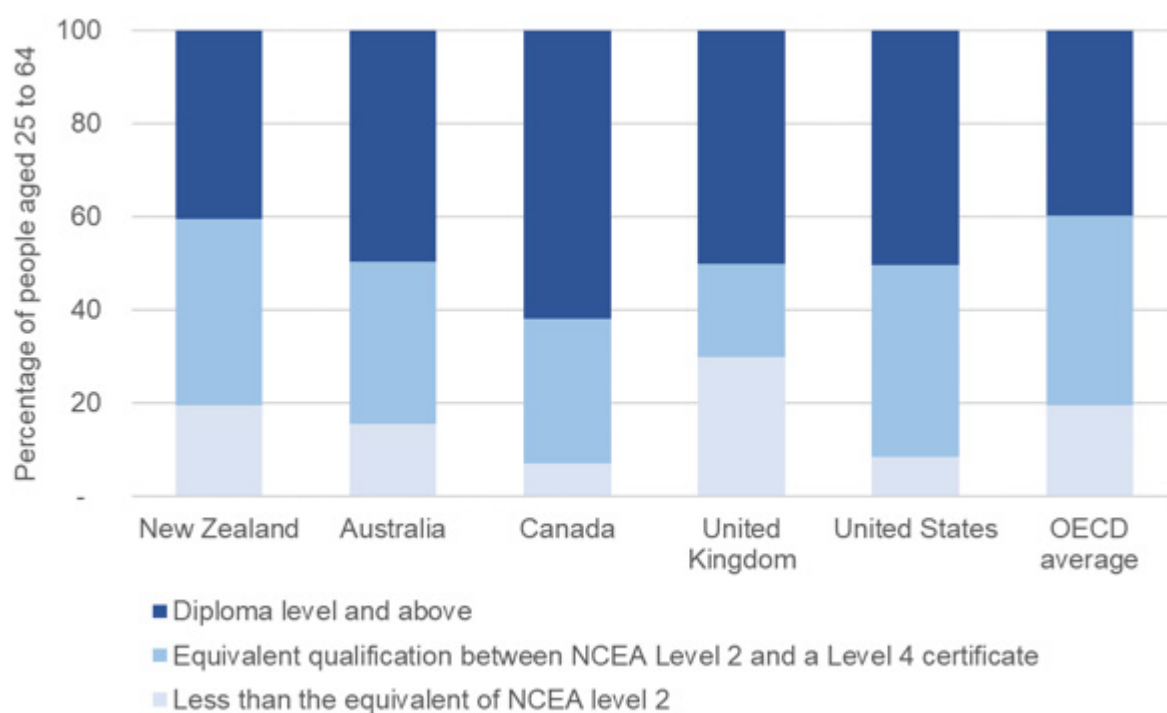
The educational attainment of New Zealanders aged 25 to 64 was similar to the OECD average in 2021. Eighty one percent had attained at least an upper-secondary-level education, which under international standards is a Level 2 school qualification or higher.

Similarly, the proportion of New Zealanders aged 25 to 64 with a diploma-level qualification or higher was 40 percent, similar to the OECD average of 41 percent.

Compared with other anglophone countries in the OECD, New Zealanders are less likely to hold a diploma or higher, and more likely to hold a qualification below diploma-level.



Figure 4. Educational attainment in 2021 of the population aged 25 to 64-year-olds for selected OECD countries



Note:

OECD (2022) Education at a Glance: OECD indicators 2022, Table A1.1.

References

OECD (2022). [Education at a Glance 2022: OECD indicators](#). Paris: OECD

Some things to note

The age group 25 to 64 is used in this summary, as it covers the population who are likely to have completed their initial school and tertiary education and less likely to have retired.

The information used here relates just to the highest qualification that people have attained. They may have attained these qualifications in New Zealand or overseas. The qualifications may have been attained recently or up to nearly 50 years ago. Because it relates to the highest qualification attained, it won't reflect the total attainment for different levels of education. For example, almost all people with degree qualifications will also have a school qualification.

Trends in attainment are also influenced by long-run changes in participation and completion in New Zealand education, as well as the skills of people settling in New Zealand.

