



Demographic and Statistical Analysis Unit

**Students' Transition between School and Tertiary
Education**

2nd Edition

Created by Marian Loader and Jacinta Dalgety
April 2008



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Executive Summary

Completing a tertiary qualification is beneficial to both the individual and society. Students who come to tertiary education directly from school have higher completion rates, lower attrition rates and are more likely to go onto higher levels of study than other cohorts of students. The purpose of this document is to report on recent trends in school leavers' transition between school and tertiary education.

In the last ten years the proportion of school leavers going directly to tertiary education has increased dramatically, much of this growth is due to increases in enrolments in lower level certificate qualifications. Students who leave school to study at certificate level in the tertiary sector typically choose to study at the same levels available to them at school.

This report found that academic achievement while at secondary school is a good indicator of a school leavers' tertiary education enrolment behaviour.

School Leavers with Little or No Formal Attainment¹

In 2005 there were 7,409 school leavers who had little or no formal attainment. Of these school leavers, 43 percent (3,159 students) left school and chose to continue their education in tertiary institutions. Almost all of these students are studying for low level qualifications that are at a comparable level with the study options offered in the schooling sector.

These findings suggest that the low level certificates are providing a way into education for students for whom school is not meeting their needs in some way. It is unclear at this stage what the impact of the planned changes in the tertiary sector will have on these students' options.

School Leavers with Some Attainment at Level 1, 2 or 3 (but less than University Entrance)²

School leavers with some attainment at Level 1, 2 or 3 (but less than University Entrance) have a similar transition rate to tertiary education as school leavers with little or no formal attainment. Māori and Pasifika, and male students are more likely to leave school with this intermediate school leaver attainment.

This group is the most variable in transition rates, with Māori and male students and students from 1-3 and 4-7 decile schools less likely to engage in tertiary education directly after leaving school.

In this cohort of students there is a group which is going into university study probably through discretionary entrance and certificate of university practice programmes. Around half of these students come from high decile schools.

¹ Students with little or no formal attainment are defined as school leavers who attained less than 14 credits (at any level) towards a qualification in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

² Students with some attainment at level 1, 2, or 3 are defined as school leavers who attained 14 or more credits towards a qualification on the National Qualifications Framework at any level. They may have a qualification at Level 1 or Level 2, but have less than University Entrance or a Level 3 qualification (or equivalent).

School leavers with University Entrance or a Level 3 Qualification³

There has been an increase in the proportion of school leavers attaining University Entrance or a Level 3 qualification, from 27 percent of all school leavers in 2002 to 33 percent of all school leavers in 2005. Male, Māori and Pasifika students and students from lower decile schools are less likely to have achieved this level of attainment when they leave school.

Eighty two percent of school leavers with at least University Entrance or a Level 3 qualification in 2005 made a direct transition to tertiary education. Although there are some differences in transition behaviour of students in this group, it appears that students who attain University Entrance or a Level 3 qualification are equally likely to participate in tertiary education regardless of their ethnic or schooling background.

Of the students who made a direct transition to tertiary education with University Entrance or a Level 3 Qualification, 80 percent chose to study at bachelor level, with a small group choosing certificate level courses. Students who leave school having achieved University Entrance or a Level 3 qualification and subsequently enrol in tertiary education at certificate level are more likely to be Māori or Pasifika and are more likely to come from low decile schools.

Overall Trends

School leavers who have attained University Entrance or a Level 3 qualification are almost twice as likely to make a direct transition to tertiary education as students who leave school with lower levels of attainment. They are more likely to be studying at bachelor level and less likely to be studying at a level equivalent to that offered at school.

Demographic differences in rates of transition between school and tertiary education are consistent with the highest attainment a student has achieved when they leave school. Male students, Māori and Pasifika students and students from lower decile schools leave school with lower attainment levels.

Within school leaver attainment groups Māori and Pasifika students have similar transition rates to other students in their attainment group. However, male students remain less likely to attend tertiary education after leaving school and students from low decile schools are more likely to study at the same level offered at school than other school leavers with the same highest attainment.

It is likely that the introduction of the Youth Training⁴ programme, which gives young people with no qualifications the opportunity to study in tertiary institutions at no cost, has contributed to increases in the number of students studying lower level certificate courses.

³ Students who leave school with University Entrance or a Level 3 are school leavers who attained University Entrance or a Level 3 qualification (or higher) on the National Qualifications Framework (or equivalent).

⁴ Youth Training focuses on young learners, with no or low qualifications, acquiring a valuable set of foundation skills that enables them to move effectively into sustainable employment and/or higher levels of tertiary education.

There is some variation by region, with large growth in transition to tertiary education occurring in Auckland, West Coast and Gisborne. In 2005, students from Nelson-Tasman-Marlborough, Manawatu-Wanganui, Northland and Waikato had the lowest rates of direct transition to tertiary education. Although previous research has shown that geographic availability of tertiary education impacts on the distances students travel to study, its impact on likelihood to study at the tertiary level is unclear and warrants further investigation.

Finally, the numbers of school leavers who go onto tertiary education within five years of leaving school are high – 75 percent of all school leavers from 2001 had participated in tertiary education by 2006. For students who take a break most are in employment during the period between school and tertiary education. Upon returning to study they typically take lower study loads, suggesting they are likely to be working or raising family whilst studying.

Note for Second Edition

The business rules used to calculate the proportion of students transitioning to tertiary education by highest qualification have been updated in this report from the highest qualification reported in a students' first tertiary enrolment to the highest attainment in the National Qualifications Framework.

Introduction

The outcomes of tertiary education are numerous: for the economy, society and the individual. Overseas studies suggest that tertiary education is the key to raising labour productivity and through this, economic growth.⁵ Higher levels of education are associated with better health and lifestyles, and lower crime rates. Furthermore, the evidence shows that enrolment and completion of tertiary qualification leads to improved outcomes for individuals. Individuals with tertiary qualifications, even sub-bachelor qualifications, have greater labour force participation and on average, earn higher incomes.

Moreover, there are advantages to students enrolling in tertiary education direct from school: school leavers have higher completion rates, lower attrition rates and are more likely to go onto higher levels of study than other cohorts of students in New Zealand tertiary education.⁶ Given the benefits of tertiary education and the greater success of students who engage in tertiary education soon after leaving school, effective and appropriate transitions between school and tertiary education are an important part of a well functioning education system.

Understanding the transition from school to tertiary education also contributes to the Minister of Education's priorities of staying on in school and effective teaching. Students need to stay at school to ensure better readiness for tertiary education: students that historically have not been well served at school level have subsequently struggled to complete tertiary level. Effective teaching includes providing appropriate, timely, useful careers guidance and advice about different learning programmes and pathways that assist students to make a successful transition to tertiary education.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to report on recent trends in school leavers' transition to tertiary education. This work involved the comparison of school leaver data with tertiary enrolment data to gain a picture of how students transition from schooling to tertiary education. This report describes some of the important trends in school leavers' transition to tertiary education, and gives details on the different pathways students take depending on the level of attainment they gained at school.

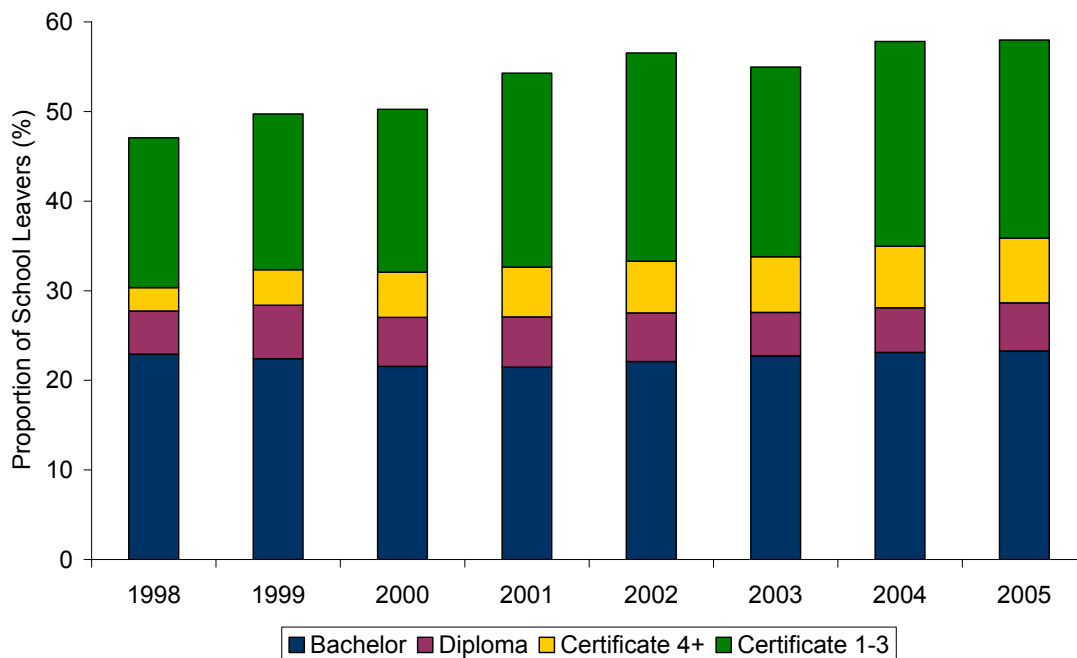
⁵ Smart, W (2006). Outcomes of the New Zealand tertiary education system: A synthesis of the evidence. Ministry of Education, Wellington.

⁶ Ussher, S. (2006). From school, work or unemployment: A comparison of pathways in tertiary education. Ministry of Education, Wellington.

Key Trends in Students' Transition to Tertiary Education

Although many students choose to go directly into tertiary education after leaving school, some take a break of up to five years between secondary and tertiary education. Here we present the characteristics of students who take a direct route from school to tertiary education, before discussing the students who take an indirect pathway. Over half of school leavers (58 percent of 2005 school leavers) chose to continue their education in the tertiary sector within one year of leaving school (Figure 1). The proportion of students transitioning directly into tertiary education has risen since the late 1990's, as a result of increased numbers of students transitioning to certificate courses.

Figure 1: Students who directly Transition to Tertiary Education, by Award Level of Tertiary Course (1998 – 2005 School Leavers).



Certificates

As part of the development of the tertiary education strategy the government is asking for feedback on the intention to encourage more students to enrol in higher level courses (Certificate Level 4 or higher). Each year around 80 percent of those school leavers who go directly to certificate level tertiary courses study at levels similar to those offered in schools (National Qualifications Framework Level 1-3). Around half of the school leavers that enrol in certificate level courses will complete a qualification within five years of first enrolling – with 20 percent of those that complete going on to enrol in a diploma or bachelor level qualification in the following year.

Highest Attainment

The results of this study suggest that students' attainment in secondary schooling is a good predictor of a student's tertiary education enrolment behaviour. These key indicators of student attainment (Table 1) suggest that school leavers' highest attainment has increased in recent years. Since the introduction of NCEA in 2002 there are fewer leaving with no little or no formal attainment and a greater proportion of leavers attaining University Entrance or NCEA Level 3 qualification.

Table 1: School Leavers by Highest Attainment* (2001 – 2005).

School Leaver Year	School leavers by highest attainment as proportion of all school leavers (%)		
	University Entrance or Level 3	Some Attainment at level 1, 2 or 3	Little or No Formal Attainment
2001	26	57	17
2002	27	55	18
2003	29	56	15
2004	32	55	13
2005	33	54	13

* During this period NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Achievement) was introduced, with NCEA Level 1 becoming available in 2002, NCEA Level 2 in 2003 and NCEA Level 3 in 2004.

Changes to the qualification system and, consequently, to the way in which school leaver data is recorded make comparisons over time difficult for intermediate attainment levels. The detailed analysis shown here is restricted to school leavers with very low levels of attainment and school leavers with high levels of attainment, both of which are considered to be comparable over time. The third group, containing about 55 percent of the students each year, contains all of the students with Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications as well as partial qualifications from Levels 1, 2 and 3.

Pathways to Tertiary Education: Students who leave School with Little or No Formal Attainment

In 2005, 13 percent of students left school with little or no formal attainment (Table 2). Proportionally males, Māori students, Pasifika students and students from low decile schools (decile 1-3) are over represented in this cohort.

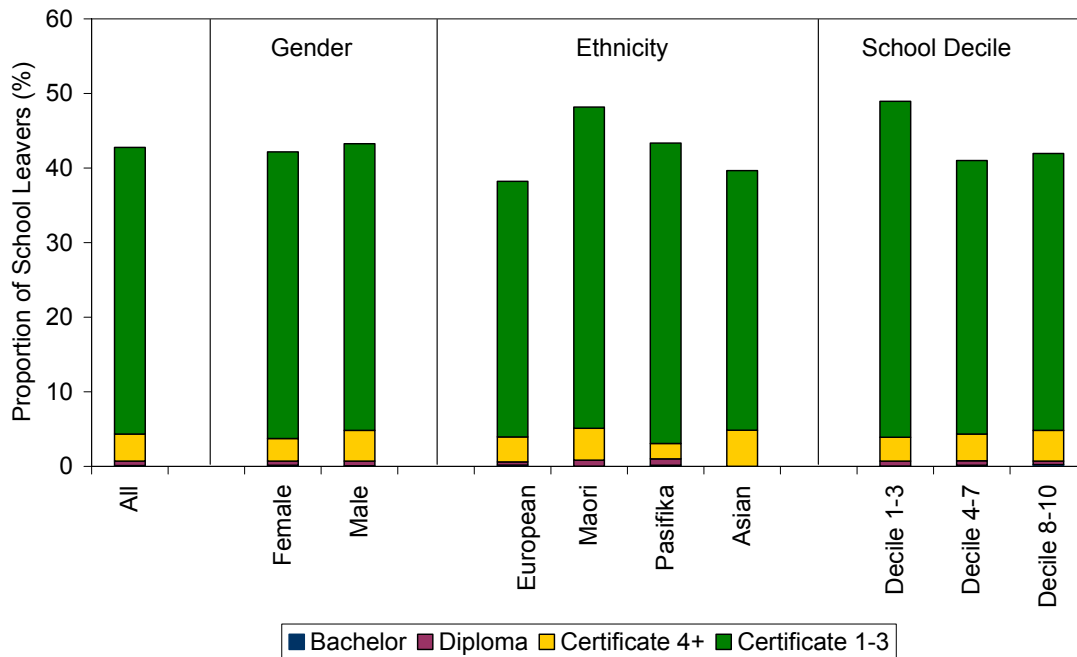
Table 2: School Leavers from 2001 and 2005 with Little or No Formal Attainment

School Leaver Year	Proportion of all school leavers in year (%)	
	2001	2005
All	17	13
Female	14	12
Male	19	14
European	12	10
Māori	33	25
Pasifika	25	15
Asian	8	5
School decile 1-3	30	22
School decile 4-7	18	13
School decile 8-10	7	7

Direct Transition to Tertiary Education

Forty-three percent of 2005 school leavers with little or no formal attainment transitioned directly to tertiary education, most chose to study a certificate level course. Ninety percent of these students were studying a level 1-3 certificate, which is equivalent to the National Certificates offered in schools.

Figure 2: Tertiary Destinations of Students who Leave School with Little or No Formal Attainment (2005 School Leavers)



Approximately one fifth of these students are enrolled in Youth Training⁷ courses, which are designed to help students who do not achieve well at school move into employment or further tertiary education. The Tertiary Education Commission⁸ reports that 72 percent of students enrolled in these programmes experience success within two months of first enrolling – 49 percent find employment, and 23 percent enrol in further tertiary education.

Conclusions

In 2005, of the 7400 school leavers with little or no formal attainment (13 percent of all school leavers), over 3100 students chose to continue their education in tertiary institutions. Almost all of these students are studying level 1-3 certificates that are comparable with the study options offered in the schooling sector. We do not know why some students are choosing to pay for tertiary education rather than taking advantage of the free schooling sector: though it suggests that the schooling sector is not meeting these students' needs in some way, or that the tertiary sector is more attractive.

These findings suggest that low level certificates are providing a way into education for students for whom school is not meeting their needs in some way, or a way out of unemployment for young people. It is unclear at this stage what the impact of the planned changes in the tertiary sector⁹ will have on these students' options.

Pathways to Tertiary Education: Students who leave School with Some Attainment at Level 1, Level 2 or Level 3¹⁰

This group contains a diverse range of school leaver attainment levels, it includes students with complete qualifications at Level 1 or Level 2 on the NQF and also students who leave school with partial qualifications at any level.

Each year about half of all school leavers leave with some attainment at Level 1, 2 or 3 (Table 3). Among 2005 school leavers Māori and Pasifika students, male students and students from 1-3 and 4-7 decile schools are more likely to leave school with attainment in this range.

Grouping such a large range of attainments is likely to conceal trends within this group. It contains students who can only participate in Level 1-3 certificate study, since they do not have entry qualifications for higher level study and students who just missed University Entrance requirements, some of whom may be studying at bachelor level with provisional entry.

⁷ Youth Training focuses on young learners, with no or low qualifications, acquiring a valuable set of foundation skills that enable them to move effectively into sustainable employment and/or higher levels of tertiary education.

⁸ http://www.tec.govt.nz/education_and_training/youth_training/success_stories.htm

⁹ Tertiary Education Strategy 2007/12.

<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/index.cfm?layout=document&documentid=11727&data=>

¹⁰ Or equivalent attainment in a qualification not on the NQF.

For many courses a Level 2 qualification is required. There is reason to believe that most students enrolling in Level 4 certificate study (or higher) have a Level 2 qualification, however, it is not possible to differentiate between school leavers with less than a Level 2 qualification in the aggregate school leaver data until 2004; and it is not possible to separate students with partial or complete Level 1 or 2 qualifications in any enrolment year in tertiary education.

Table 3: School Leavers from 2001 and 2005 with Some Attainment at Level 1, 2 or 3

School Leaver Year	Proportion of all school leavers in year (%)	
	2001	2005
All	57	54
Female	56	51
Male	58	58
European	58	52
Māori	59	63
Pasifika	66	70
Asian	38	37
School decile 1-3	60	64
School decile 4-7	61	59
School decile 8-10	50	46

Direct Transition to Tertiary Education

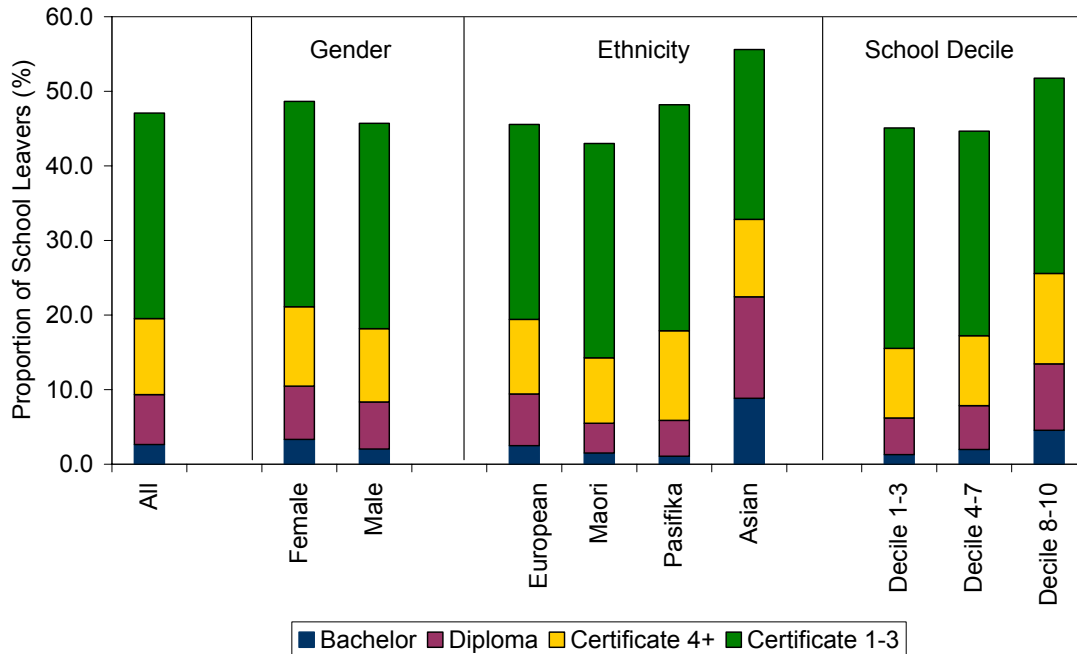
Under half (47 percent of 2005 school leavers) of the students who leave school with some attainment at Level 1, Level 2 or Level 3 transition directly to tertiary education (Figure 3). Of this cohort, proportionally fewer males, Māori students and students from low and medium decile schools directly transition to tertiary education.

Certificate level study is also the most common option for this cohort, with a small group studying at bachelor or Diploma levels. About 68 percent of students studying for certificates are studying at NQF Levels 1-3, equivalent to the attainment the students gained at school.

Three percent of students with some attainment at Level 1, Level 2 or Level 3 enrol in bachelor level study. Whilst some choose to enrol at polytechnics or institutes of technology others are gaining access to universities. Some of those studying at university will have entry from an overseas qualification, others are probably entering through Certificate of University Practice programmes or with Discretionary Entrance to University¹¹. Students who enter bachelor level study with lower level qualifications are often from high decile schools, mainly European or Asian and / or female students.

¹¹ Programmes where students can gain early entrance to university after completing Level 2 qualifications, usually requiring a recommendation from the students' school principal.

Figure 3: Tertiary Destinations of Students who Leave School with Some Attainment at Level 1, 2 or 3 (2005 School Leavers).



Conclusions

School leavers with some attainment at Level 1, 2 or 3 have low rates of direct transition to tertiary education, similar to those with little or no formal attainment. This group is also the most variable in transition rates, with Māori and male students and students from 1-3 and 4-7 decile schools less likely to engage in tertiary education directly after leaving school.

In this cohort of students there is a group which is going into bachelor level study probably through discretionary entrance and certificate of university practice programmes. Around half of these students are from high decile schools.

Pathways to Tertiary Education: Students who leave School with University Entrance or a Level 3 qualification

In 2005, almost one third of school leavers left with University Entrance or a Level 3 qualification (Table 4). Females, Asian and European students and students from high decile schools are all proportionally over-represented in this cohort.

Table 4: School Leavers from 2001 and 2005 with University Entrance or a Level 3 Qualification

School Leaver Year	Proportion of all school leavers in year (%)	
	2001	2005
All	26	33
Female	30	38
Male	23	28
European	30	38
Māori	7	12
Pasifika	10	15
Asian	54	58
School decile 1-3	10	14
School decile 4-7	21	28
School decile 8-10	42	48

Direct Transition to Tertiary Education

Eighty-two percent of 2005 school leavers with University Entrance or a Level 3 qualification went directly to tertiary education after leaving school (Figure 4). Māori and Pasifika students were the most likely to go on to tertiary level. However since students can change their ethnicity between school and tertiary education it is not clear whether this trend is due to changes in ethnicity or a higher transition rate. In a report on a subset of school leavers, it was found that Asian and European school leavers were more likely to transition directly from school to tertiary education than Maori and Pasifika school leavers.¹² In 2008, trends among students who change their ethnicity between school and tertiary will be investigated further in a collaborative project between New Zealand Qualifications Authority and Ministry of Education.

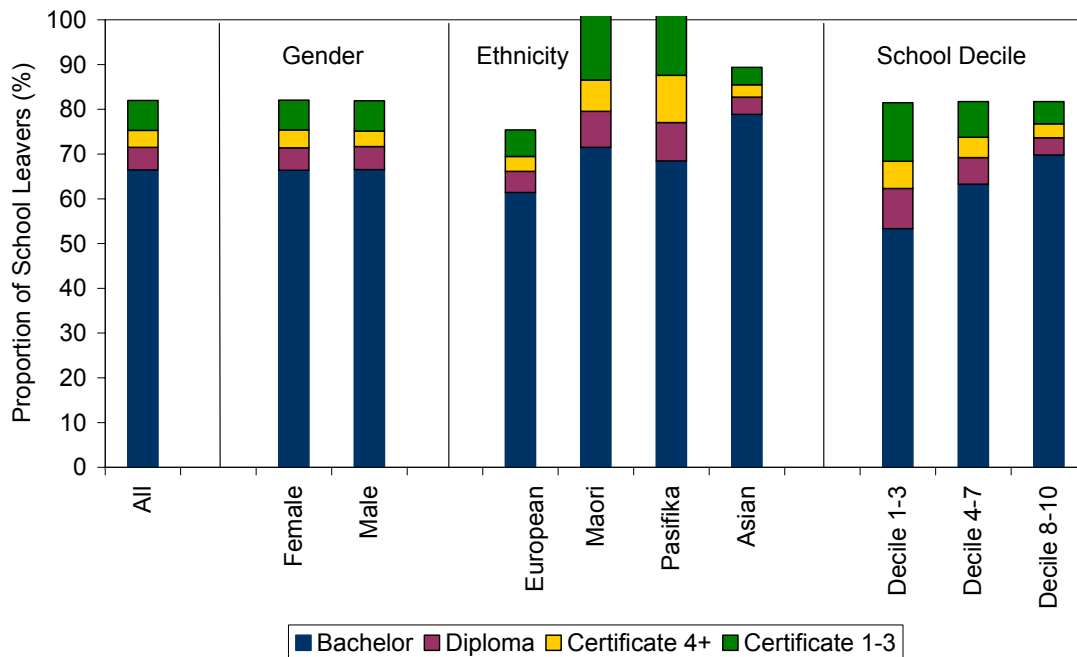
Among students who attained University Entrance or a Level 3 qualification in 2005, students from low and medium decile schools were as likely to make a direct transition to tertiary education as students from high decile schools. Female students with this level of attainment are slightly more likely to make a direct transition to tertiary education than male students.

Most of the students who attain University Entrance or a Level 3 qualification and went directly to tertiary education chose bachelor-level qualifications (81 percent of 2005

¹² Ussher, S. (2007). Tertiary education choices of school leavers. Ministry of Education, Wellington

cohort). Only a small proportion of students chose to study at certificate level (13 percent of 2005 cohort)– Pasifika and Māori students, or students from lower decile schools are more proportionally likely to study at certificate level.

Figure 4: Tertiary Destinations of Students who Leave School with University Entrance or a Level 3 Qualification (2005 School Leavers).



Note: The differences in transition rates by ethnicity in this graph are inflated due to students changing their nominated ethnicities between the school leaver data and their first enrolment in tertiary.

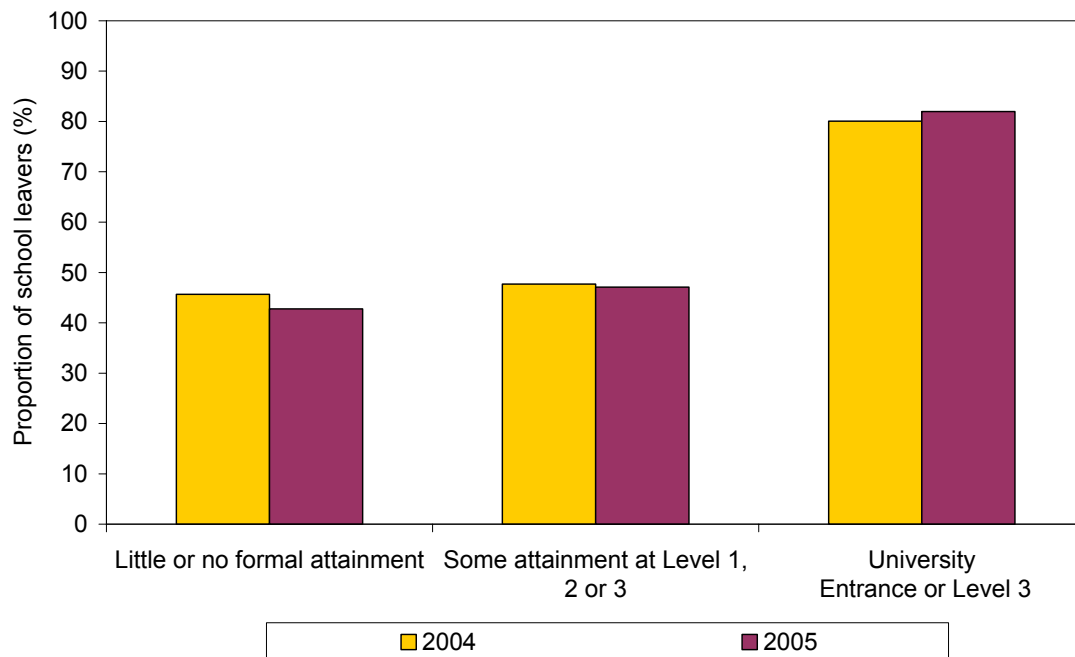
Conclusions

Although there are differences in the type of school leavers who attain University Entrance or a Level 3 qualification at school, this group of students is very homogenous in their transition to tertiary behaviour. Most study at bachelor level, with a small group choosing certificates. Students who leave school with University Entrance or a Level 3 qualification and study at certificate level are more likely to be Māori, Pasifika or from low decile schools.

Direct Transition between School and Tertiary Education: Overall Trends

The level of attainment a student attains at school impacts on the choices they make about tertiary education. Figure 5 summarises these trends¹³, showing that in 2004 and 2005 the group most likely to go directly to tertiary education after leaving school are those who leave school with University Entrance or a Level 3 qualification.

Figure 5: School Leavers who make a Direct Transition to Tertiary Education by Highest Attainment at School (2004 and 2005 School Leavers).



Ethnicity

The rates of direct enrolment in tertiary education have increased for all ethnicities (Figure 6). The increases for Māori, Pasifika and Asian students were higher than for European students. Historically, fewer Māori and Pasifika students chose tertiary education after leaving school. However, in 2005 Māori and Pasifika transition rates were close to the average for all students. Almost all of the increase in participation of Māori and Pasifika students has been among students with less than University Entrance or a Level 3 qualification, enrolling in low level certificate courses.

Gender

The gap between male and female transition rates to tertiary education remains with consistently fewer males enrolling directly into tertiary education after they left school. Note that these enrolments do not include students enrolling in industry training and modern apprenticeships, where more males participate than females.

¹³ Also see the appendix for a flow diagram summarising school leavers' tertiary enrolment behaviour as a percentage of highest attainment they achieved at school.

Regional Variation

The rate at which school leavers transition to tertiary education varies around the country. In 2005, students from Auckland and Gisborne had highest rates of direct transition to tertiary education after schooling. Students from the Nelson-Tasman-Marlborough, Manawatu-Wanganui, Northland, and Waikato have lowest direct transition rates (Figure 7).

Similarly, Auckland had the highest proportion of students going directly to bachelor level study, whereas the West Coast had the lowest.

Figure 6: School Leavers who make a Direct Transition to Tertiary Education by Demographic Groups (2000 and 2005 School Leavers).

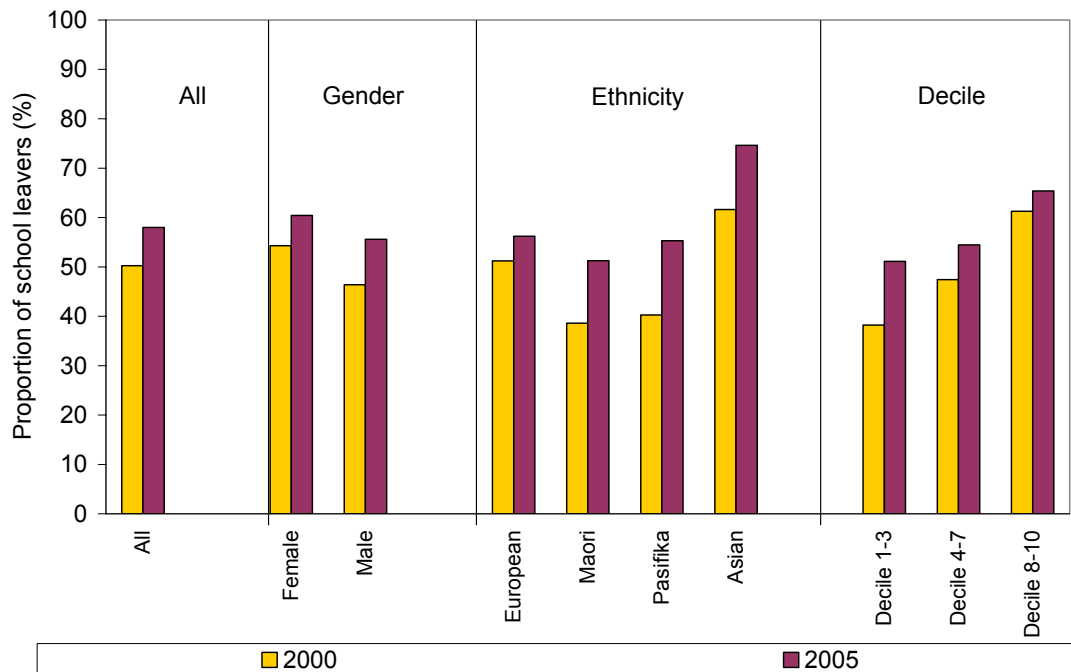
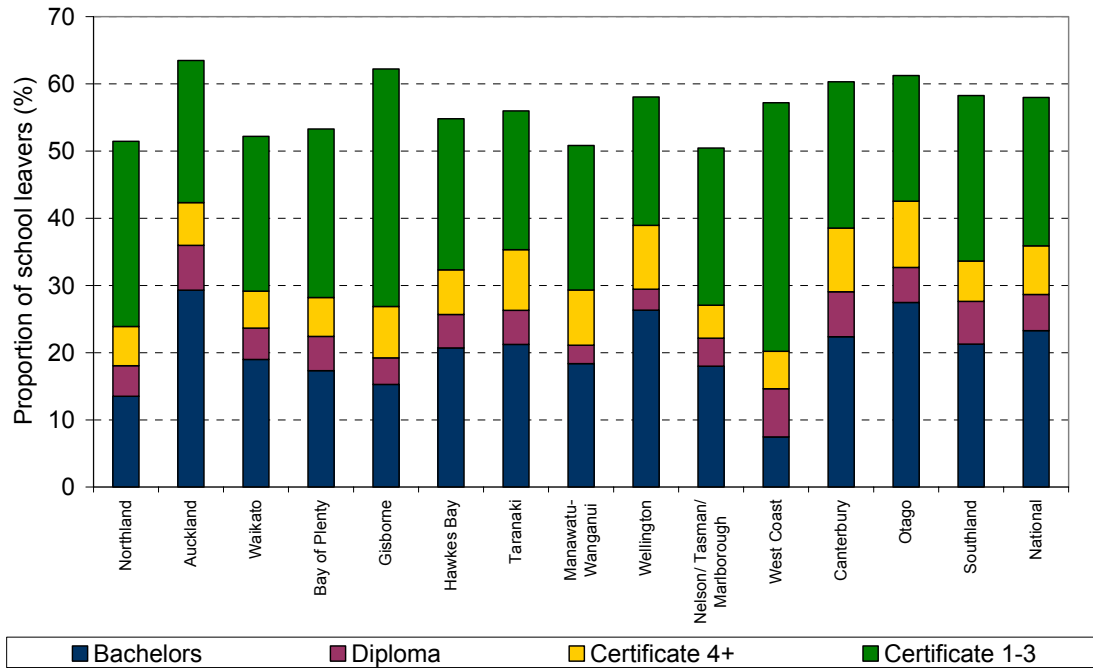


Figure 7: School Leavers who make a Direct Transition to Tertiary Education, by Region (2005 School Leavers).



Nationally, from 2000 to 2005 there was an increase of eight percentage points in the proportion of students directly transitioning to tertiary education – though this growth was not seen evenly across the country. Auckland (18 percentage points), the West Coast (17 percentage points) and Gisborne (16 percentage points) had the largest growth over this period, whereas Southland, Otago, Nelson/Tasman/Marlborough, Taranaki and Wellington had small changes.

Availability of Tertiary Education

A recent study on what makes a student travel to study found that the most important factor was geographic access to tertiary provision.¹⁴ Students who were comparatively more isolated from tertiary provision were more likely to travel further to tertiary education. What is not known is the impact of the availability of tertiary education on the likelihood that a student will attend tertiary education.

All New Zealand regions have Institutes of Technology / Polytechnics and Private Training Institutes in their region. Degree level study, is mainly available at universities, which are concentrated predominantly in areas of high population. Therefore, students in more isolated regions, must leave their home to study at degree level. Regions that do not have a university located in them have lower rates of transition to bachelor level study, but also have lower rates of attainment to University Entrance or a Level 3 qualification.

¹⁴ Ussher, S. (2006). What makes a student travel for tertiary? Ministry of Education, Wellington.

Indirect Transition between School and Tertiary Education: Overall Trends

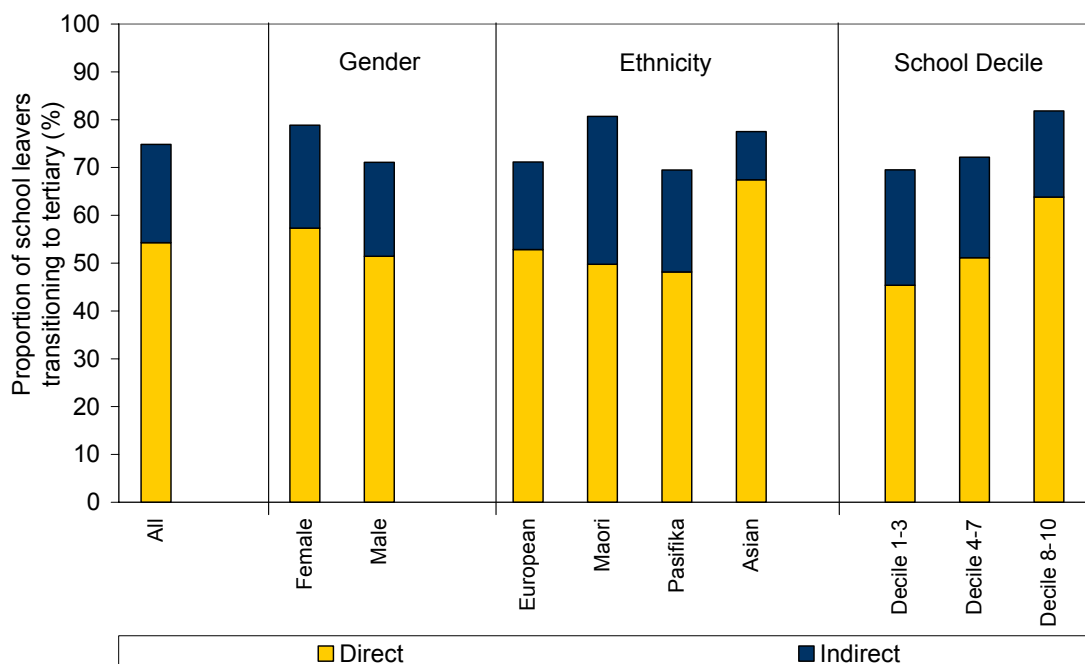
Whilst a large group of school leavers go directly to tertiary education, a second, sizable group take a break before enrolling in tertiary education. The behaviour patterns among students who make an indirect transition to tertiary education within five years of leaving school have been very steady despite the increases in direct enrolment transition rates.

The results of this analysis suggest that students' engagement in tertiary education is high, five years after leaving school 75 percent of 2001 school leavers have enrolled in tertiary education (Figure 8). Proportionally, more Māori students take the indirect route to tertiary education than students of any other ethnicity. Among the 2001 cohort, Māori students are most likely of all ethnicities to enrol in tertiary education within five years of leaving school.

Before they enrol in tertiary education most of the students who take a break between school and tertiary education are either working or unemployed (with a small minority going overseas between secondary and tertiary education). A greater proportion of males come to tertiary education from employment, whereas more females were unemployed or receiving a benefit. Similarly, many Māori and Pasifika students' activity prior to tertiary education was unemployment or a beneficiary.

Like their peers who go directly to tertiary education from school, these students typically choose certificate level courses. Young people who take indirect routes to tertiary education often take lower study loads than direct school leavers, possibly indicating that many are studying part time whilst working and or raising a family.

Figure 8: School Leavers from 2001, who Transition to Tertiary Education Directly (by end of 2002) or Indirectly (during 2003-2006).



Conclusions

The group least likely to go on directly to tertiary education after leaving school are students with little or no formal attainment. However, the range of tertiary courses available for students in this group has grown and there are many more students participating in tertiary education direct from school studying at the certificate level, particularly Level 1-3 certificate courses than there were five years ago. It is likely that the introduction of the Youth Training programme, which gives young people with no qualifications the opportunity to study in tertiary institutions for no cost, has contributed to this growth.

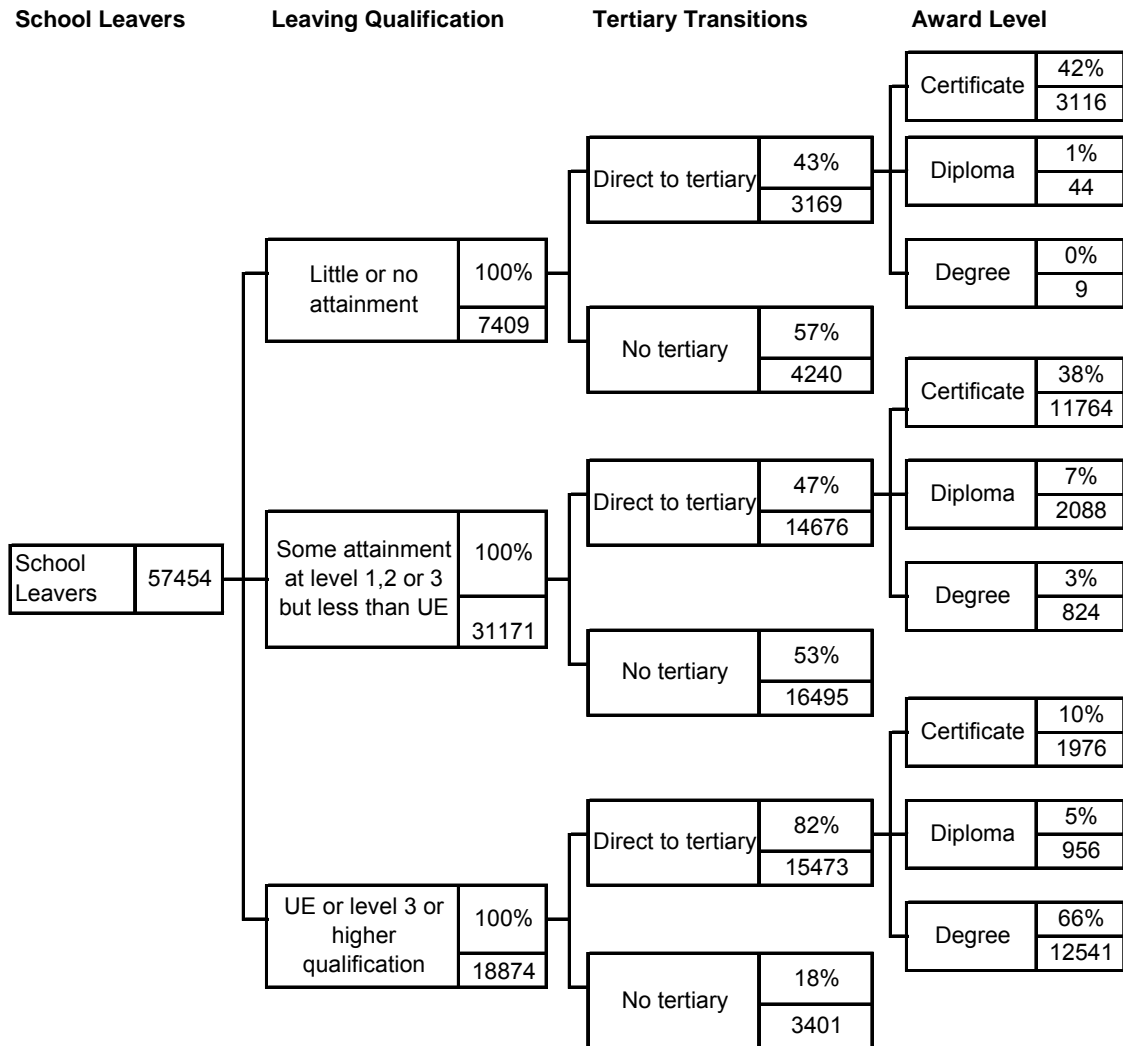
Most of the demographic differences in rates of transition between school and tertiary education are a result in differences in the attainment students leave school with. Māori and Pasifika students have similar transition rates to all students, though male students remain less likely to attend tertiary education after leaving school.

There is variation by region, with large growth in transition to tertiary education occurring in Auckland, West Coast and Gisborne. Although previous research has shown that geographic availability of tertiary education impacts on the distances students travel to study, its impact on likelihood to study at the tertiary level is unclear and warrants further investigation.

Finally, the number of school leavers who go onto tertiary education within five years of leaving school is high, about 75 percent of school leavers participate in tertiary education within five years. For students who take a break, most are in employment during the period between school and tertiary education. Upon returning to study they typically take lower study loads, suggesting they are likely working and or raising family whilst studying.

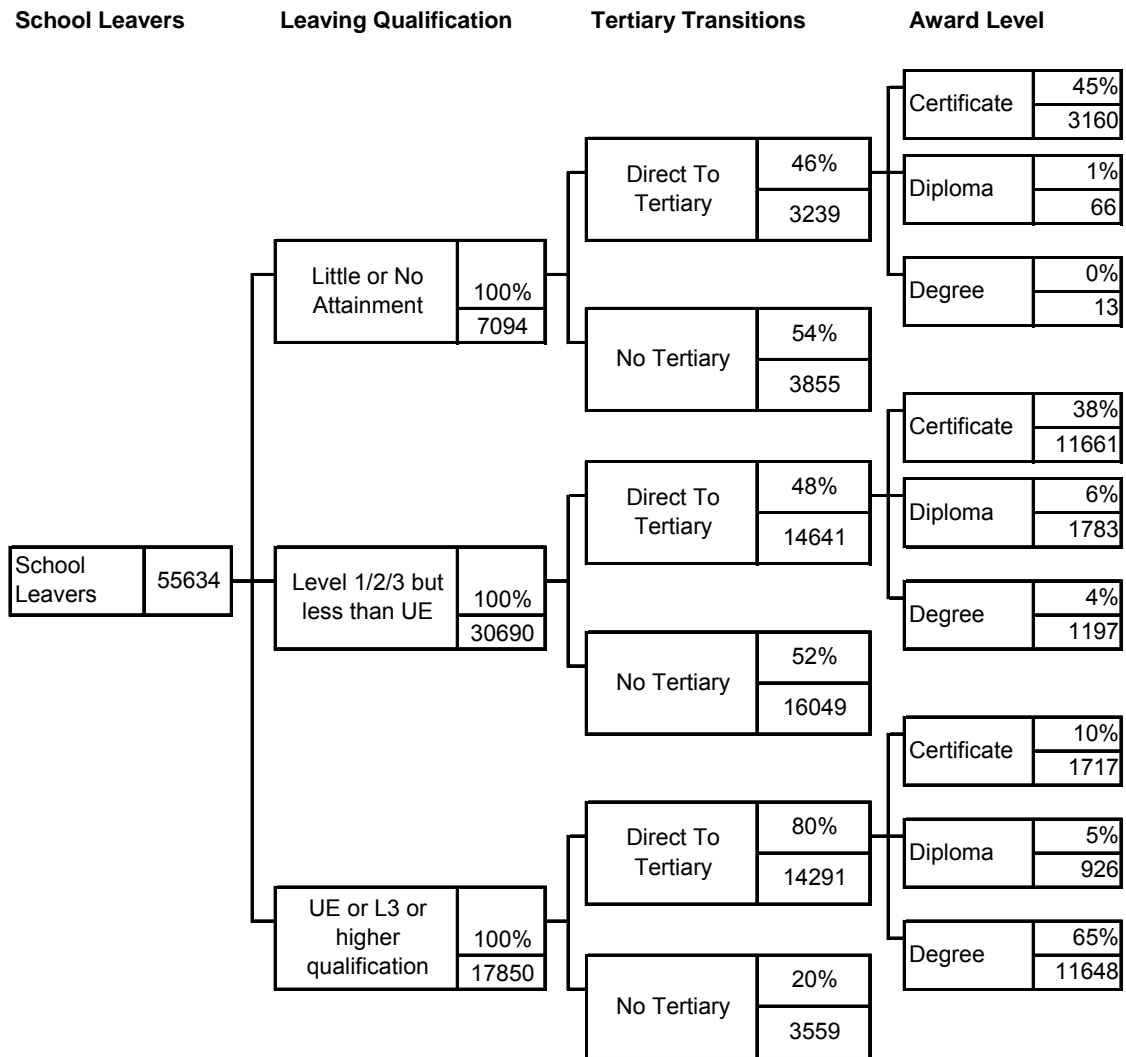
Appendix

Figure 9: Flow Diagram of 2005 school leavers transitioning to tertiary education (in 2005 or 2006), as a proportion of the school leavers with the same highest attainment upon leaving school in 2005.



Students who did not make a direct transition to tertiary education by the end of 2006, labelled “no tertiary” in the flow diagram, may choose an indirect route to tertiary education in the future.

Figure 10: Flow Diagram of 2004 school leavers transitioning to tertiary education (in 2004 or 2005), as a proportion of the school leavers with the same highest attainment upon leaving school in 2004.



Students who did not make a direct transition to tertiary education by the end of 2005, labelled “no tertiary” in the flow diagram, may choose an indirect route to tertiary education in the future.