Trends in Enrolment and Completion in Vocational Education and Training in New Zealand (2016-2024)

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Aims and Context

This report analyses trends in enrolment and completion within New Zealand's Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. It compares patterns across ethnicity, age group, gender, qualification level, field of study, and region.

New Zealand's VET landscape has undergone significant transformation under the Reform of Vocational Education (RoVE), introduced in 2019. The reform created Te Pūkenga by merging all polytechnics, transitioned industry training from Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) to education providers, established Workforce Development Councils, and implemented a unified funding system in 2023. These changes aim to create a more coherent, flexible, and learner-centred VET system with stronger industry involvement and better support for Māori, Pacific, and regional learners. Enrolment and completion trends in recent years therefore reflect not only COVID-19 disruptions but also the effects of structural reform across the sector.

The data for this report was sourced from the Ministry of Education website. It should be noted that the dataset consists of summary statistics, which limits the ability to conduct individual-level or longitudinal analysis across learner characteristics. In addition, the completion rate is calculated on a same-year basis, meaning that completions are only counted within the year in which learners finish their programmes. As a result, the measure does not track cohorts over time and may underestimate true completion outcomes, particularly for multi-year programmes or pathways where learners complete in a different year from when they enrolled.

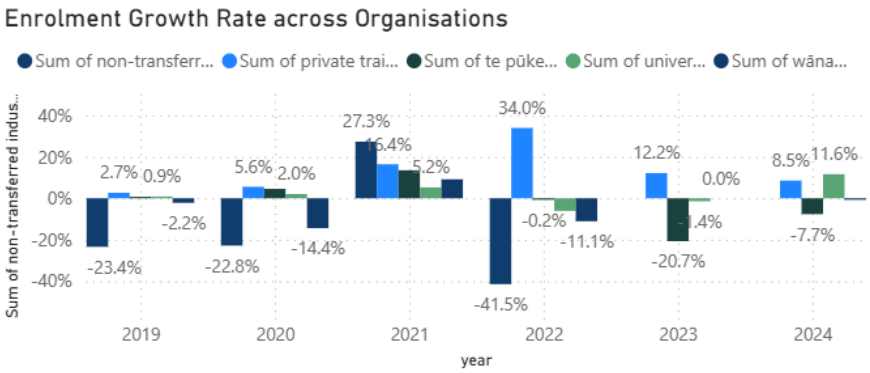
1. Overall Enrolment Trends across Organisations

VET enrolments experienced substantial fluctuations from 2019 onward as both RoVE and COVID-19 reshaped the sector. Overall participation fell slightly from 248,000 in 2018 to 247,000 in 2019, reflecting the early impacts of the RoVE reforms. In 2020, despite the disruption caused by the pandemic, government initiatives such as the Targeted Training and Apprenticeship Fund (TTAF) and Apprenticeship Boost stimulated a strong rebound in participation. Total enrolments rose to 284,000 in 2021 and remained high at 281,000 in 2022. However, with TTAF ending in 2022, overall enrolments subsequently declined, reaching 241,000 by 2024.

RoVE, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the TTAF incentives affected provider types in distinct ways, including Te Pūkenga, ITOs, Private Training Establishments (PTEs), universities, and wānanga. The introduction of RoVE in 2019 led to a marked decline in ITO enrolments, with further reductions in 2020 as the pandemic disrupted VET (Figure 1). In contrast, strong government incentives such as the TTAF and Apprenticeship Boost drove a significant rise in enrolments across all provider types in 2021 (Figure 1). By 2022, ITO enrolments dropped sharply—by 41.5%—as their functions were transferred to education providers under the RoVE transition, while PTE enrolments

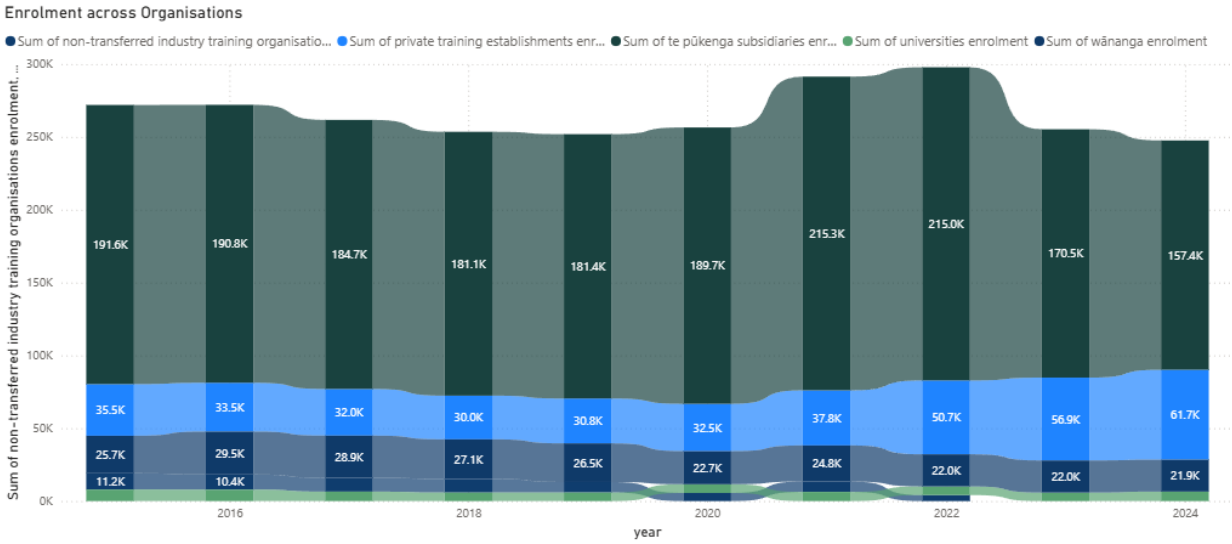
expanded by 34% over the same period. By 2023, ITOs had been fully phased out, and PTE enrolments continued to grow.

Figure 1.



Te Pūkenga remained the largest provider of vocational education throughout the period, followed by PTEs and wānanga. Its enrolment share shifted only modestly, with a slight redistribution toward PTEs (Figure 2).

Figure 2.



2. Overall Completion Trends Across Organisations

Completion trends across VET organisations generally reflected the shifts observed in enrolments. Nonetheless, government incentives such as TTAF and Apprenticeship Boost had a stronger influence on increasing enrolments than on improving completion outcomes. Overall completions declined from 104,000 in 2019 to 94,000 in 2020, and despite the temporary surge in enrolments from 2021, completions continued to fall in subsequent years as overall

participation began to decline again.

Completion rates within ITOs fell sharply from 2020, reaching a low of 16.4 % in 2022 (Figure 3). By 2023, with ITOs fully disestablished and their learners transferred to provider-based delivery, completion volumes shifted from the ITO category to Te Pūkenga and PTEs. PTEs also experienced a notable drop in completion rates during the COVID-affected years of 2022 and 2023, though early signs of recovery emerged in 2024.

Wānanga consistently recorded the highest completion rates among all provider types, with particularly strong performance in 2024 (Figure 3). In contrast, while Te Pūkenga contributed the largest volume of completions due to its scale, its completion rate remained among the lowest across organisations throughout the period (Figure 4), even as PTEs and wānanga continued expanding their relative shares. Completion rates at universities also remained modest over time, with little variation from year to year.

Figure 3.

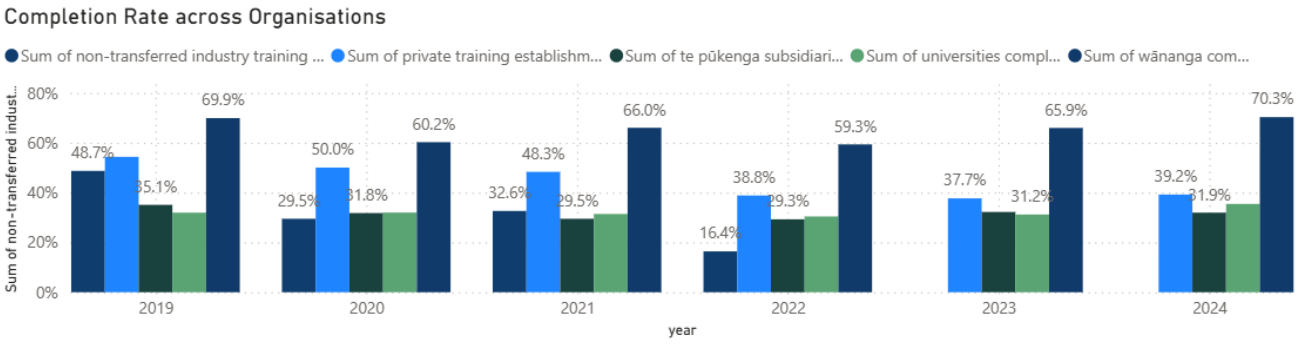
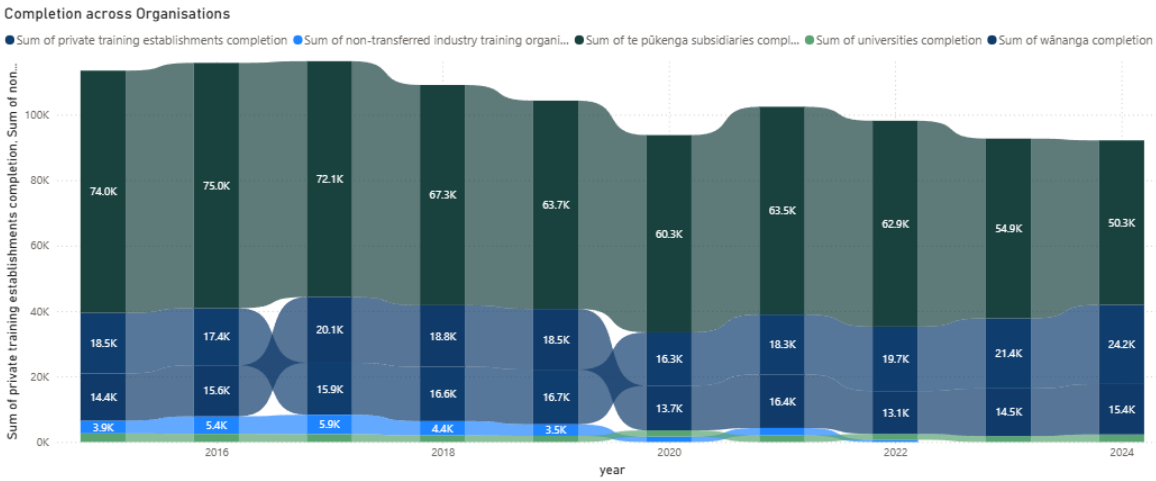


Figure 4.



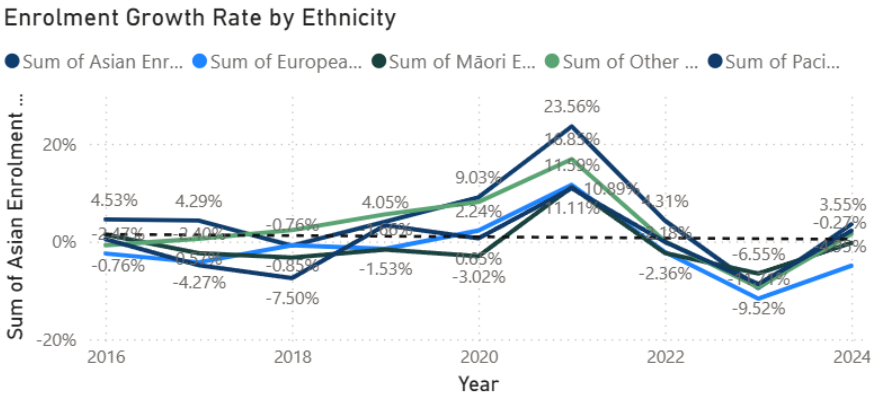
3. Enrolment and Completion Trends by Ethnicity

Enrolments across ethnic groups displayed similar overall patterns throughout the period, though

the magnitude of change varied across groups. European learners consistently represented the largest share of VET enrolments, followed by Māori and Asian learners, with Pacific and Other ethnic groups contributing smaller but stable proportions.

The introduction of the TTAF and Apprenticeship Boost in 2020–2021 contributed to increased enrolments across all ethnic groups, despite the wider disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The rise in 2021 was particularly pronounced among Asian and Other Ethnic learners (Figure 5), who recorded the strongest proportional increases—23. 6% and 16.9%, respectively—indicating high responsiveness to reduced financial barriers. European, Pacific, and Māori learners also experienced moderate growth during this period, reflecting improved accessibility and strengthened support for workforce upskilling during the early recovery phase.

Figure 5.



By 2023, following the conclusion of TTAF, enrolments declined across all ethnic groups. The reduction was most evident among European learners (i.e., -9.5%), who experienced the sharpest contraction in participation. While declines were observed among Māori, Pacific, Asian, and Other learners as well, the changes were generally smaller in scale. Despite these shifts, the overall ethnic distribution within VET remained broadly consistent: Europeans remained the largest enrolment group, followed by Māori and Asian learners.

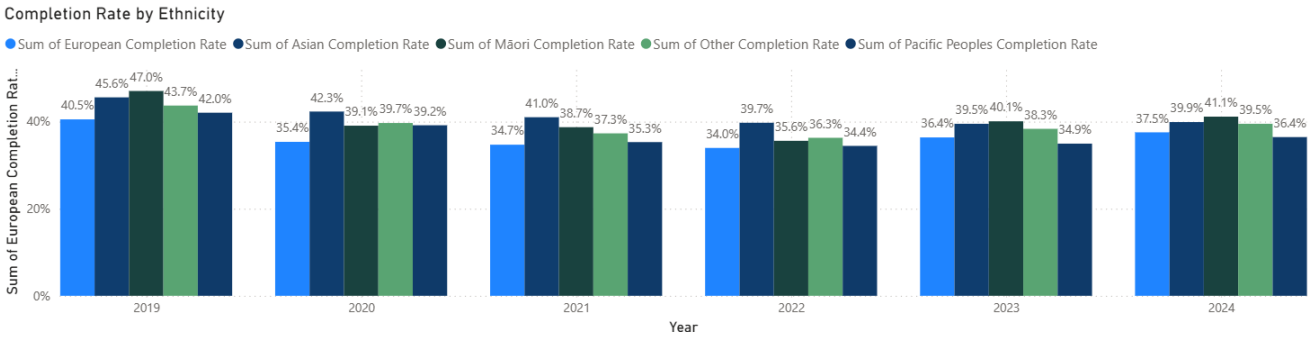
Completion outcomes exhibited clearer disparities across ethnic groups than enrolments. Across the period, Asian learners recorded the highest average completion rate (44.3%), followed by Māori (42.9%), Other ethnic groups (41.9%), Pacific peoples (40.5%), and European learners (38.6%). These differences indicate variations in learner persistence and programme completion across ethnicities.

Completion rates across all ethic groups were significantly disrupted during the COVID-19 years. The strongest impact was observed among Pacific learners, whose completion rate dropped from 39.2% in 2020 to 34.4% in 2022 (Figure 6), reflecting heightened vulnerability to pandemic-

related barriers, including access to stable learning environments and increased economic pressures. Māori, Asian, European, and Other learners also experienced declines in completion rates during this period, although to a lesser extent.

From 2023 onwards, completion rates began to recover gradually across all ethnic groups. While full recovery was not yet evident by 2024, the overall trajectory was positive, suggesting improving learner outcomes as pandemic-related disruptions eased and training providers stabilised delivery models.

Figure 6.

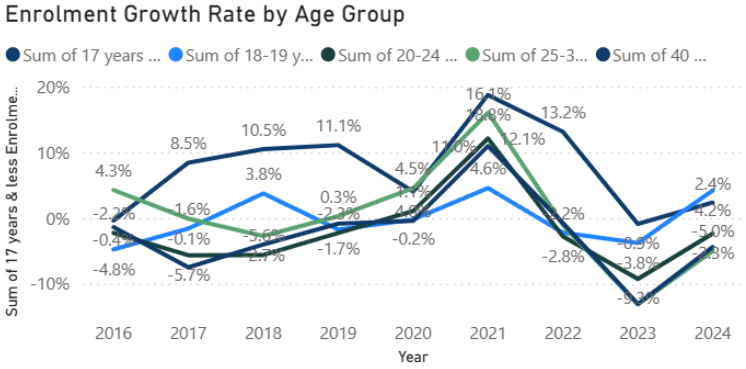


4. Enrolment and Completion Trends by Age

Enrolment patterns across age groups showed distinct shifts over the period. Learners aged 25–39 consistently accounted for the largest share of VET enrolments, reflecting strong participation from mid-career adults seeking upskilling and retraining opportunities. The next largest groups were learners aged 40 years and over, followed by those aged 20–24. In contrast, younger learners aged 19 years and under represented the smallest proportion of enrolments throughout the entire period.

The introduction of TTAF and Apprenticeship Boost in 2020–2021 contributed to increased enrolments across all age groups, despite the wider disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The rise in 2021 was particularly pronounced among learners aged 17 years and under and those aged 25–39, who showed the strongest proportional increases of 18.8% and 16.1% (Figure 7), indicating high responsiveness to reduced financial barriers. Learners aged 20–24 and 40 years and over also experienced moderate growth during this period, reflecting improved accessibility and enhanced support for workforce upskilling during the early recovery phase.

Figure 7.



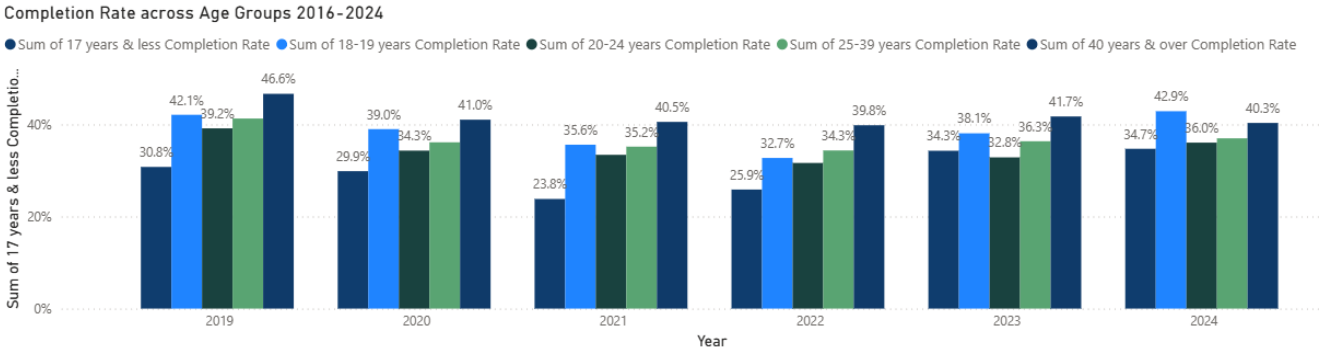
By 2023, following the conclusion of TTAF, enrolments declined across all age groups. The reduction was most evident among older learners—those aged 25–39 and 40 years and over—who experienced the sharpest contractions in participation, with declines of 13.1% and 13.1% (Figure 7), respectively. While declines were also observed among 20–24-year-old learners, these changes were comparatively modest. In contrast, enrolments among younger learners (i.e., 19 years and under) were affected to a lesser extent, suggesting lower sensitivity to the withdrawal of financial incentives. Despite these shifts, the overall age distribution within VET remained broadly consistent: learners aged 25–39 remained the largest group, followed by those aged 40 years and over, and 20–24-year-olds.

Completion outcomes exhibited clearer disparities across age groups than enrolments. Across the period, learners aged 40 years and over recorded the highest average completion rate (43.7%), followed by those aged 18–19 (41.2%), 25–39 (39.1%), 20–24 (37.7%), and learners aged 17 years and under (32.5%). These differences indicate meaningful variations in learner persistence and programme completion across age groups.

Completion rates across all age groups were significantly disrupted during the COVID-19 years. The strongest impact was observed among learners aged 17 years and under, whose completion rate declined from 29.9% in 2020 to 23.8% in 2021 (Figure 8), reflecting heightened vulnerability to pandemic-related barriers, such as reduced access to stable learning environments. Learners aged 18–19 also experienced declines during this period, although to a lesser extent. In comparison, those aged 40 years and over were less affected by pandemic-related disruptions in terms of completion outcomes.

From 2023 onwards, completion rates began to recover gradually across all age groups, with particularly notable improvement among learners aged 19 years and under. While outcomes had not fully returned to pre-pandemic levels by 2024, the upward trajectory signalled gradual improvement as disruptions subsided and providers strengthened the consistency of their delivery models.

Figure 8.



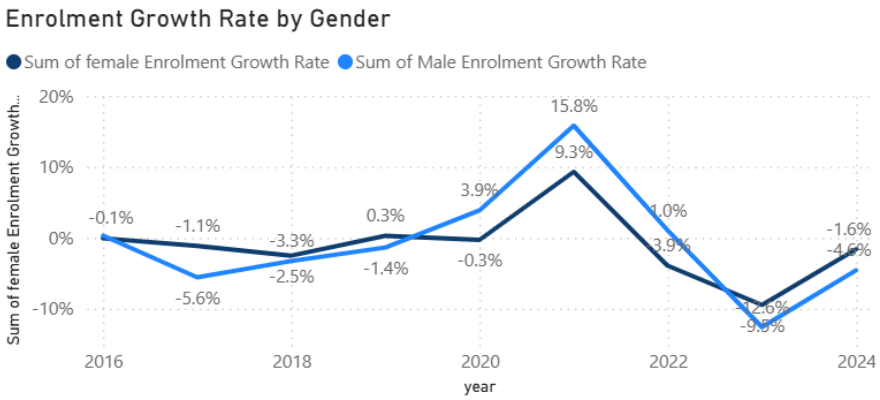
5. Enrolment and Completion Trends by Gender

Enrolment patterns by gender remained broadly stable over the period. Male learners consistently accounted for the largest proportion of VET enrolments. Female learners formed the second-largest group, with participation increasing modestly over time.

The introduction of TTAF and Apprenticeship Boost in 2020–2021 contributed to increased enrolments across both gender groups. The most pronounced growth occurred among male learners, whose enrolments rose by 15.8% in 2021, demonstrating strong responsiveness to expanded apprenticeship funding and fee-free training opportunities. Female learners also experienced steady growth during this period, with enrolments increasing by 9.3% in 2021.

By 2023, following the conclusion of TTAF, enrolments declined across all gender groups. The reduction was most evident among male learners, whose participation fell by 12.6% (Figure 9), indicating greater sensitivity to the withdrawal of government incentives. Female learners experienced a more moderate decline of 9.5%. Despite these shifts, the overall gender distribution of VET participation remained consistent: males continued to comprise the largest enrolment group, followed by females and gender diverse learners.

Figure 9.



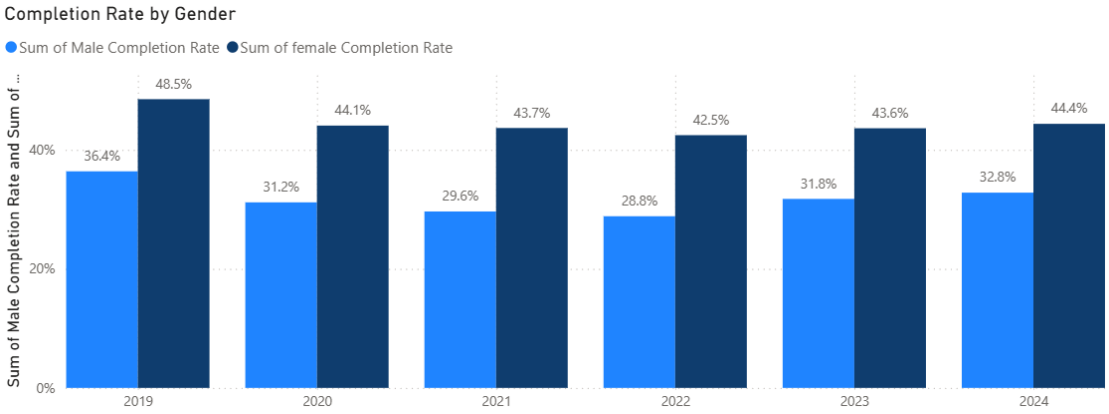
Completion outcomes revealed notable gender differences. Across the period, female learners

recorded higher average completion rates (46.4%) than male learners (34.7%), reflecting generally stronger retention and academic persistence. Although male learners contributed a larger share of total completions due to higher enrolments, their completion rates remained comparatively lower.

Completion rates were significantly affected by COVID-19 across all gender groups. Male learners experienced the most substantial decline during the disruption period of 2020–2022, with completion rates falling from 36.4% in 2019 to 28.8% in 2022 (Figure 10). Female learners also saw declines, though these were less pronounced; their completion rates decreased from 48.5% in 2019 to 42.5% in 2022.

Recovery in completion outcomes began in 2023, with male learners showing slightly stronger early improvement than females. Although completion rates had not fully returned to pre-pandemic levels by 2024, the overall trajectory was positive, suggesting strengthening learner outcomes as training delivery stabilised and pandemic-related barriers diminished.

Figure 10.



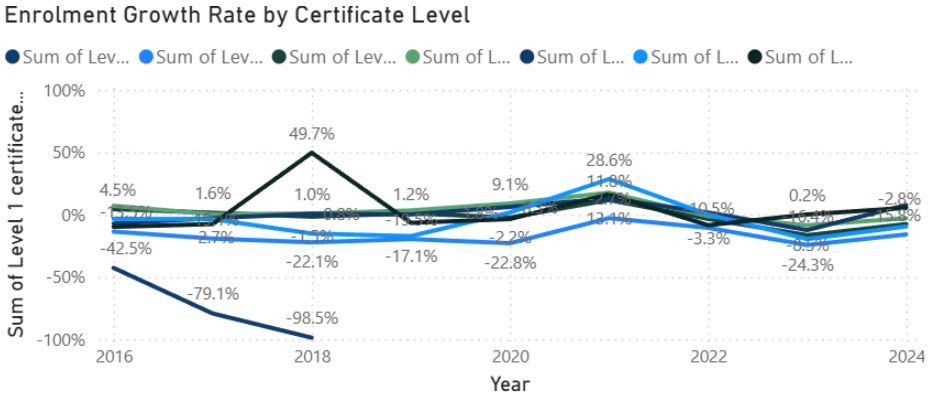
6. Enrolment and Completion Trends by Certificate Level

Enrolment patterns varied considerably across certificate levels over the period, reflecting differences in programme purpose, duration, and learner profile. Certificate Level 3 consistently attracted the largest share of VET learners due to its close alignment with apprenticeships and industry training pathways. Certificate Levels 4 and 5 formed the second- and third-largest groups, supporting learners seeking higher-skill technical or paraprofessional roles.

Enrolments in Certificate Level 2 were substantially smaller and declined over time, as participation increasingly shifted toward higher-level programmes. Notably, no Certificate Level 1 enrolments were recorded after 2019, reflecting the phasing out or reclassification of Level 1 foundation qualifications during NZQA's qualification review processes and the early stages of RoVE restructuring.

Government initiatives such as TTAF and Apprenticeship Boost contributed to increased enrolments at Level 6, which rose by 28.6% in 2021 (Figure 11). This level benefited strongly from fee-free access and expanded apprenticeship-related funding, resulting in substantial proportional growth. In contrast, enrolment growth at other qualification levels was more modest—ranging from 11.8% to 17.7%—although still positively influenced by improved accessibility during this period. A minor decline in Level 2 enrolments may reflect the impacts of RoVE on foundation-level programme offerings.

Figure 11.



By 2023, following the conclusion of TTAF, enrolments declined across most certificate levels. The contraction was most pronounced at Level 2, with a 24.3% decrease. Other levels experienced moderate declines, ranging from 8. 5% to 19.5%, while Level 7 remained relatively stable over the period. By 2024, enrolments at Level 5 and Level 7 began to recover, increasing by 7.8% and 5.6%, respectively. In contrast, enrolments in other certificate levels continued to decline, with decreases ranging from 2.8% to 15.8%.

Completion outcomes exhibited clear variation across certificate levels. Across the period, Level 3 and Level 2 learners recorded the highest average completion rates (46.5% and 45.6%, respectively), followed by Level 7 (40.6%), Level 5 (36.5%), and Level 4 (34.7%). Level 6 learners had the lowest average completion rate at 25.1%. Overall, lower-level qualifications tended to show stronger completion outcomes than higher-level programmes. Levels 2 and 3 generally demonstrated the highest completion rates, consistent with shorter programme durations, well-defined vocational pathways, and strong learner motivation among apprenticeship and foundation-level cohorts.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted completion outcomes at all certificate levels. Levels 6 and 7 experienced the largest declines, with completion rates falling from 29.2% and 29.5% in 2019 to 21.4% and 22.7% in 2022 (Figure 12), respectively. Other levels also exhibited

declines, although to varying extents depending on programme structure and learner profile.

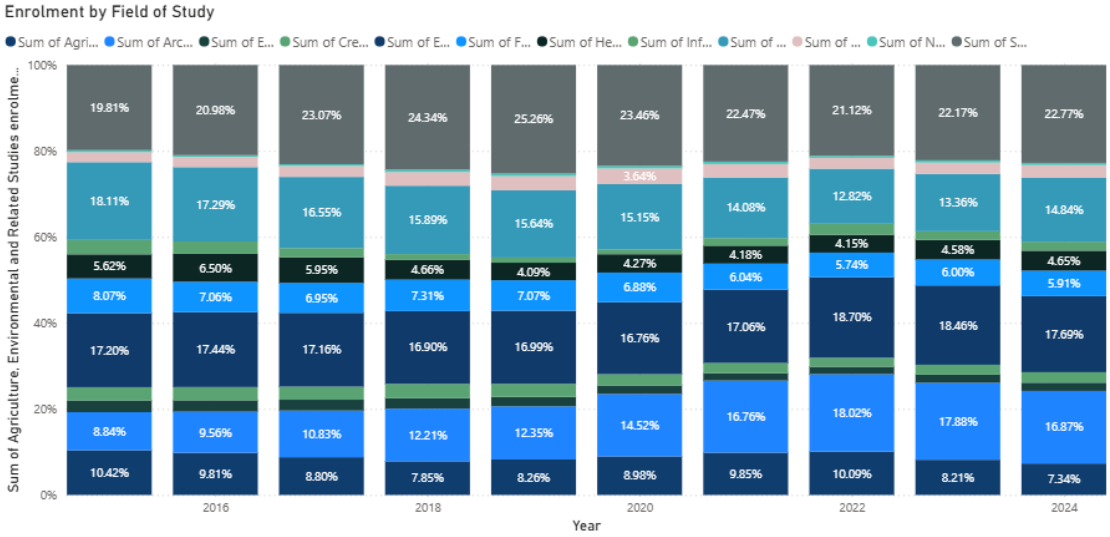
Completion outcomes began to recover gradually in 2023, with modest improvement evident across most certificate levels. Although completions had not fully returned to pre-pandemic levels by 2024, the overall trajectory was positive.

Figure 12.

7. Enrolment Trends by Field of Study

Enrolment patterns across fields of study displayed notable variation over the period, reflecting shifts in labour-market demand, government policy settings, and structural changes introduced through RoVE. Society and Culture, Engineering and Related Technologies, Management and Commerce, and Architecture and Building consistently attracted the largest share of VET learners (Figure 13).

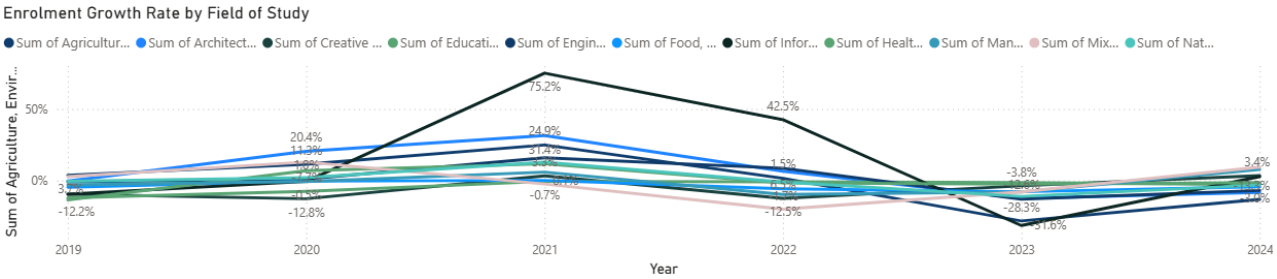
Figure 13.



Government initiatives such as TTAF and Apprenticeship Boost contributed to increased enrolments in 2021 across several fields. The most substantial proportional growth—75.17%—occurred in Information and Communication Technologies (Figure 14). Architecture and Building and Agriculture and Environmental Studies also recorded notable growth, rising by 31.4% and

24.9%, respectively. These incentives reduced financial barriers and encouraged both learners and employers to engage more actively in vocational training during the early recovery phase following COVID-19 disruptions.

Figure 14.



By 2023, following the conclusion of TTAF, enrolments declined across most fields of study. The contraction was most evident in those areas that had experienced the strongest policy-driven growth during the pandemic, particularly Information and Communication Technologies and Agriculture and Environmental Studies. Despite these shifts, the overall distribution of enrolments across fields remained consistent, with Society and Culture, Engineering and Related Technologies, Management and Commerce, and Architecture and Building retaining their dominant positions.

Some fields showed early signs of recovery by 2024. Programmes in Management and Commerce and Mixed Field Programmes demonstrated gradual enrolment growth. In contrast, Agriculture and Environmental Studies, which had experienced strong TTAF-driven growth in 2021, displayed a slower recovery trajectory.

Overall, enrolment trends by field of study underscore the strong influence of workforce demand, financial incentives, and policy direction on participation in vocational education. Fields aligned with apprenticeships and identified skill shortages experienced the most volatility, while service-oriented and professional fields exhibited steadier patterns of engagement.

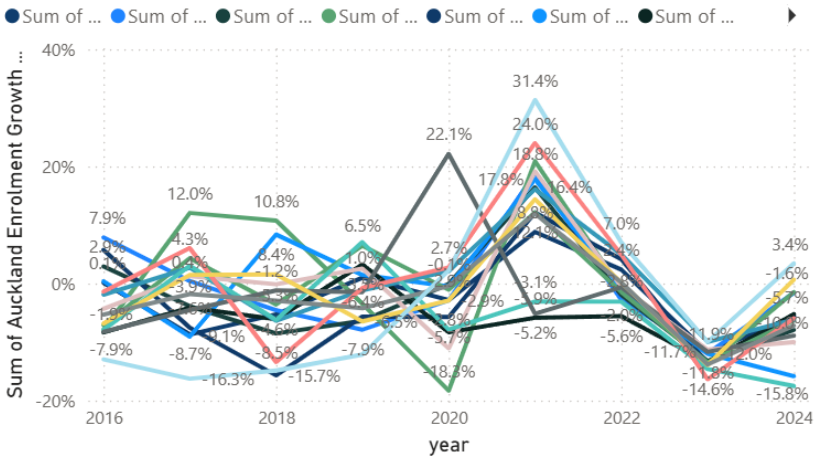
8. Enrolment and Completion Trends by Region

Enrolment patterns varied across regions over the period, reflecting differences in population size, provider distribution, labour-market conditions, and the regional impacts of RoVE. Regions with large urban centres—such as Auckland, Canterbury, and Wellington—consistently recorded the highest VET enrolment levels, supported by larger populations, greater provider capacity, and broader programme offerings. Regions with strong industry bases, including Waikato, Bay of Plenty, and Otago, also demonstrated stable enrolments, reflecting ongoing demand for vocational training.

Government initiatives such as TTAF and Apprenticeship Boost contributed to increased enrolments across most regions in 2021. The strongest proportional growth occurred in West Coast (31.4%), Tasman (24.0%), Gisborne (20.9%), Otago (19.2%), and Bay of Plenty (18.8%) (Figure 15). These increases likely reflect strong employer engagement, sectoral skill shortages, and improved financial accessibility in these regions.

Figure 15.

Enrolment Growth Rate by Region

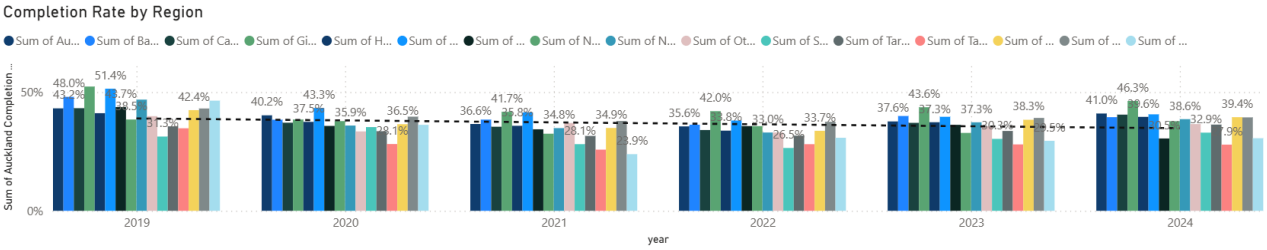


By 2023, following the conclusion of TTAF, enrolments declined across nearly all regions, with decreases ranging from 10.0% to 16.4%. Despite these changes, the overall geographic distribution of enrolments remained broadly stable, with major population centres retaining the largest share of VET learners. By 2024, regional enrolment levels continued to fall, indicating a system-wide contraction rather than region-specific effects.

Completion outcomes also varied across regions. Gisborne and Manawatū-Whanganui recorded the highest average completion rates (47.4% and 46.1%, respectively), while Tasman and West Coast recorded the lowest (33.5% and 35.5%). These differences may reflect variations in learner profiles, provider capacity, and the availability of consistent workplace-based training.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted completions across all regions, though the extent of disruption differed markedly. West Coast experienced the most significant decline, with completion rates falling from 46.6% in 2019 to 23.9% in 2021 (Figure 16). In contrast, Otago, Southland, and Taranaki experienced comparatively minor declines of 2.9% to 4.1% over the same period, suggesting more resilient programme delivery or sectors less affected by lockdown restrictions.

Figure 16.



Completion outcomes began recovering from 2023, with most regions showing gradual improvement as training providers stabilised delivery models and workplaces resumed normal operations. Nevertheless, by 2024 completions had not fully returned to pre-pandemic levels in many regions, indicating that recovery remains uneven across the vocational education landscape.

Conclusion

This report examined enrolment and completion trends in New Zealand's VET sector between 2016 and 2024 across organisations, ethnic groups, age groups, gender, qualification levels, fields of study, and regions. The findings show a sector shaped by the combined influence of large-scale structural reform under the RoVE, targeted government investment through TTAF and Apprenticeship Boost, and the widespread disruptions caused by COVID-19.

Overall, enrolments rose sharply during the TTAF period, particularly in 2021, with strong growth evident across provider types, demographic groups, and many qualification levels. These increases highlight the effectiveness of financial incentives in boosting participation, especially in areas aligned with apprenticeships, skill shortages, and emerging labour-market needs. However, the conclusion of TTAF in 2022 contributed to system-wide contractions in enrolment across nearly all population groups, fields, and regions by 2023 and 2024. Despite these fluctuations, the relative composition of the VET population remained broadly stable over time, with consistent patterns evident across ethnicity, gender, and age.

Completion outcomes displayed greater variability than enrolments, underscoring persistent differences in learner engagement and programme structure across demographic and qualification groups. While wānanga and several regions such as Gisborne and Manawatū-Whanganui recorded strong performance, completion rates generally declined across the sector during the COVID-19 years. Younger learners, male learners, learners in higher-level certificates, and those in certain regions experienced the sharpest disruptions. Recovery in completion rates began from 2023, although levels had not fully returned to pre-pandemic benchmarks by 2024.

Across the period, RoVE played a pivotal role in reshaping the organisational landscape of VET,

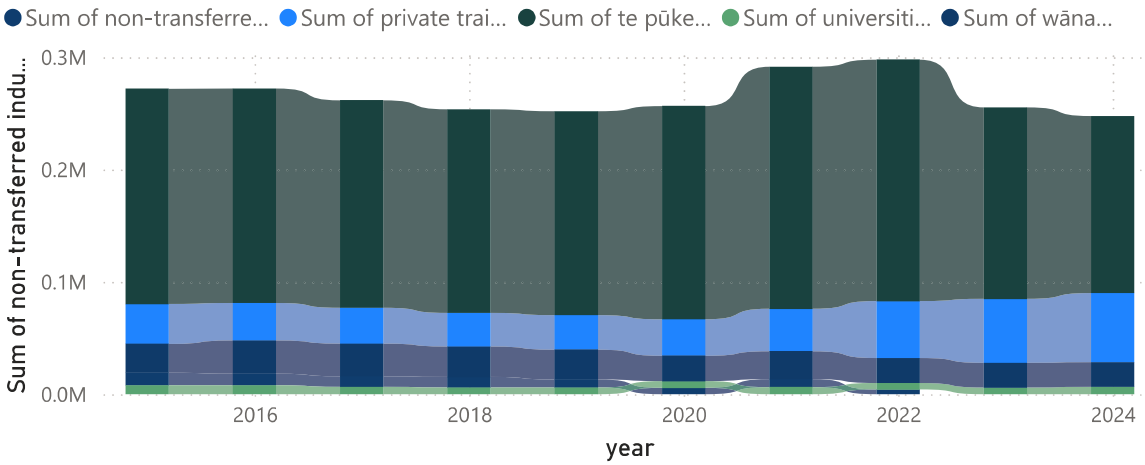
most notably through the integration of polytechnics into Te Pūkenga and the transfer of industry training from ITOs to providers. These structural changes, combined with the shift to a unified funding system, contributed to both transitional instability and opportunities for more coherent, learner-centred delivery. The trends observed in this report therefore reflect both the short-term impacts of transformation and the longer-term direction of system reform.

Taken together, the findings highlight the sensitivity of VET participation to policy incentives, economic conditions, and sectoral change. They also point to areas requiring continued attention, including improving completion outcomes, supporting learners most affected by COVID-19 disruptions, stabilising qualification pathways, and strengthening regional and demographic equity. As the VET system continues to evolve, sustained investment in quality provision, targeted learner support, and industry alignment will be essential to ensuring that vocational education remains responsive, equitable, and effective in meeting national workforce needs.

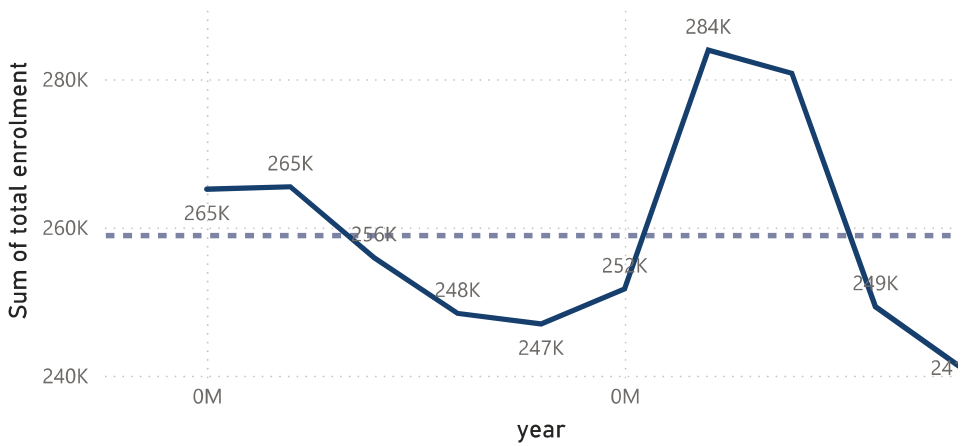
Dashboard

Trends in VET Enrolment in New Zealand

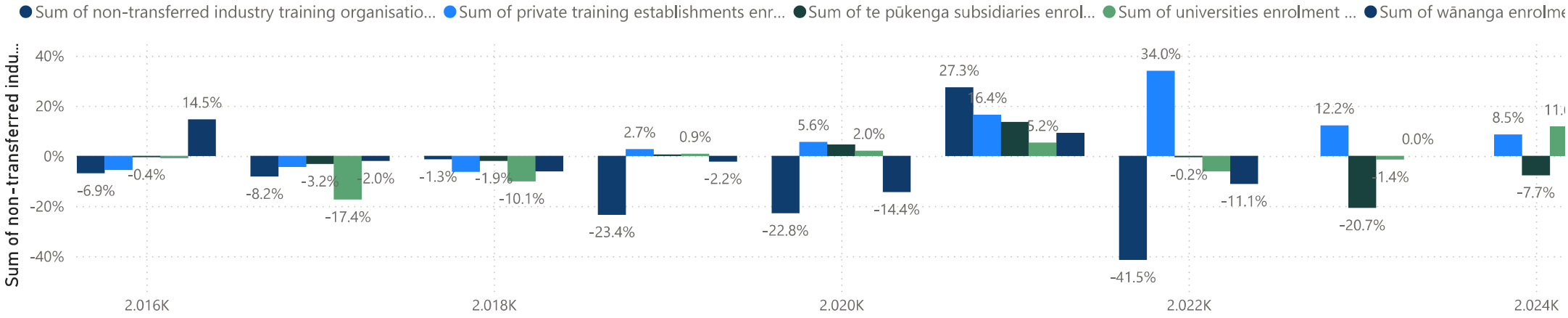
Enrolment across Organisations



Total Enrolment by Year

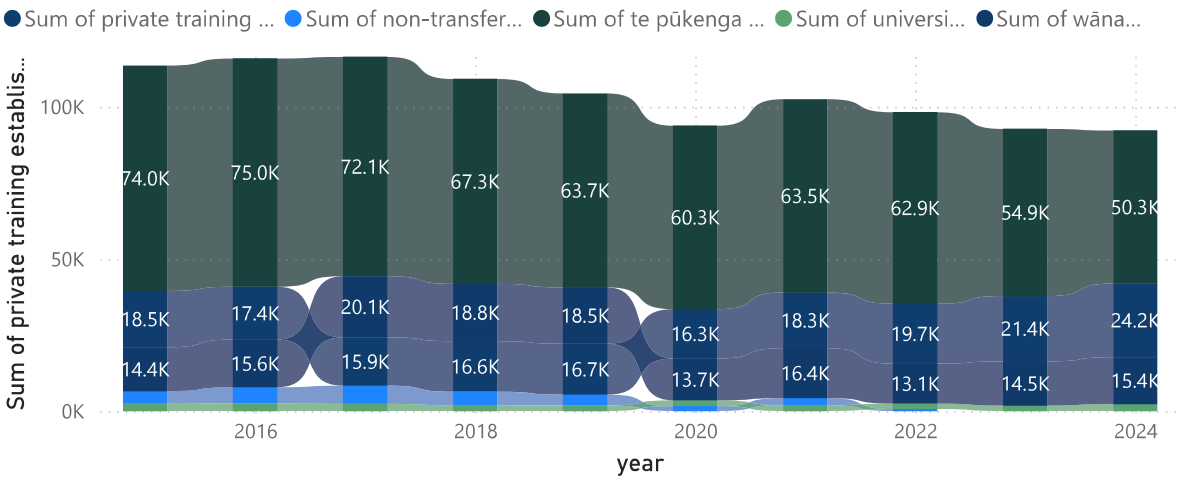


Enrolment Growth Rate across Organisations

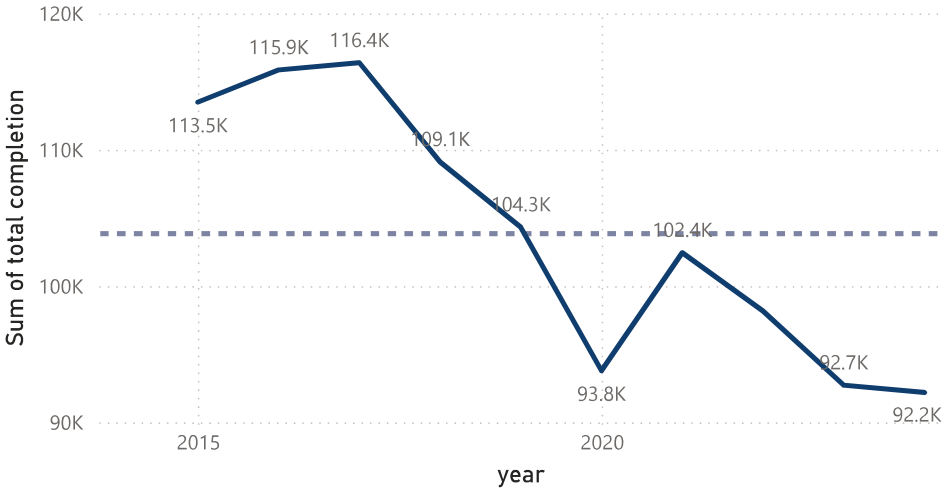


Trends in VET Completion in New Zealand

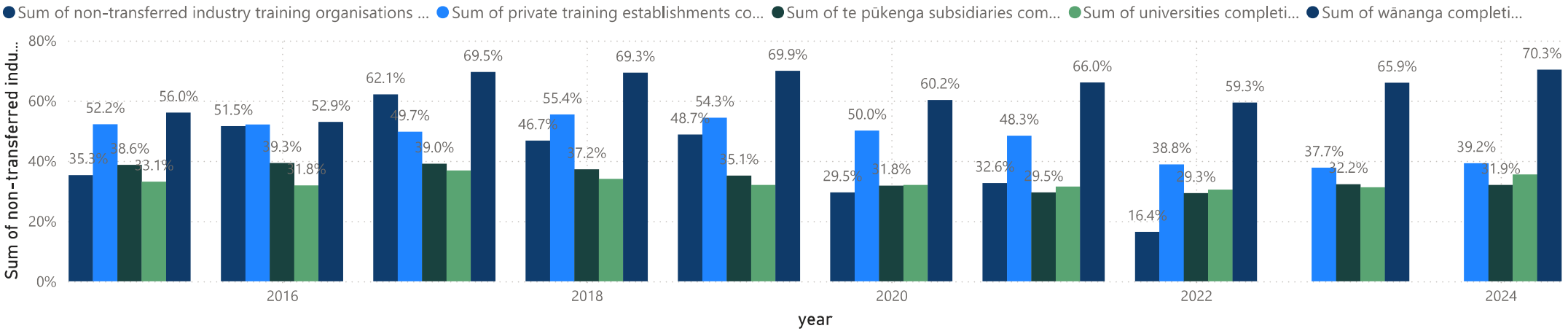
Completion across Organisations



Total Completion by Year

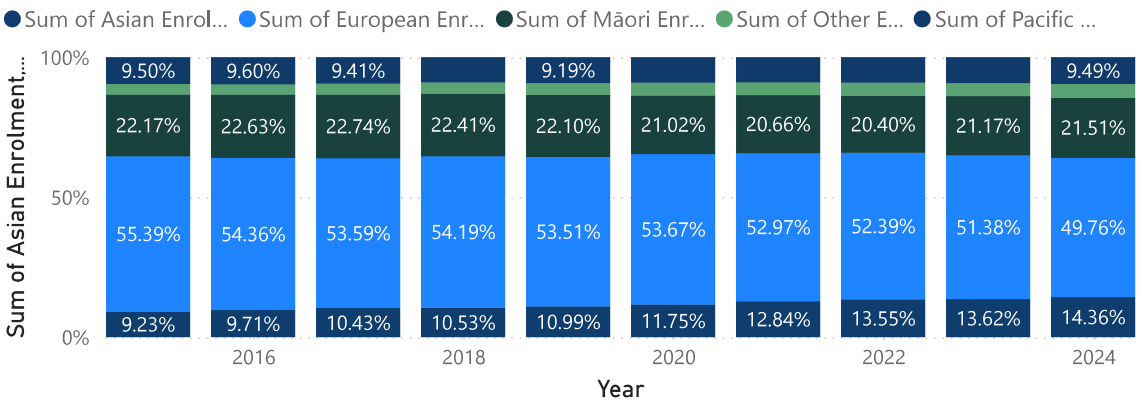


Completion Rate across Organisations

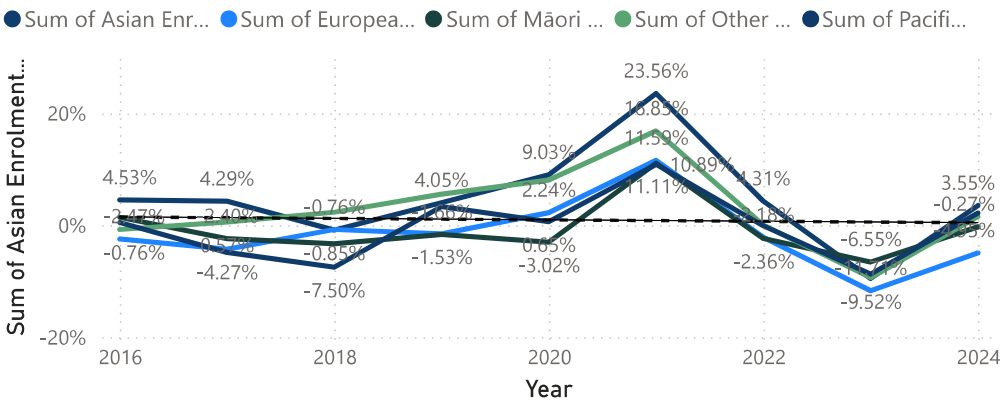


VET Enrolment and Completion by Ethnicity

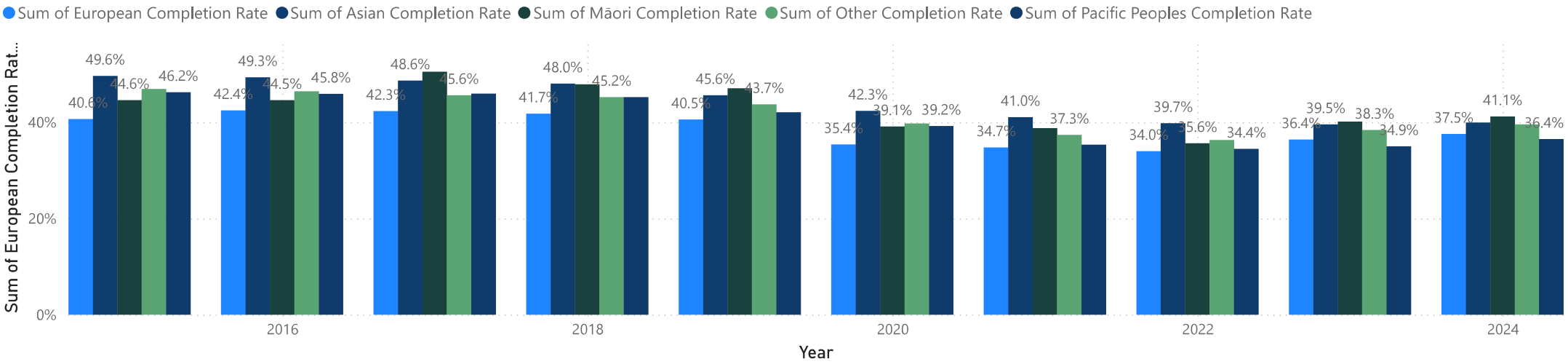
% Enrolment by Ethnicity



Enrolment Growth Rate by Ethnicity

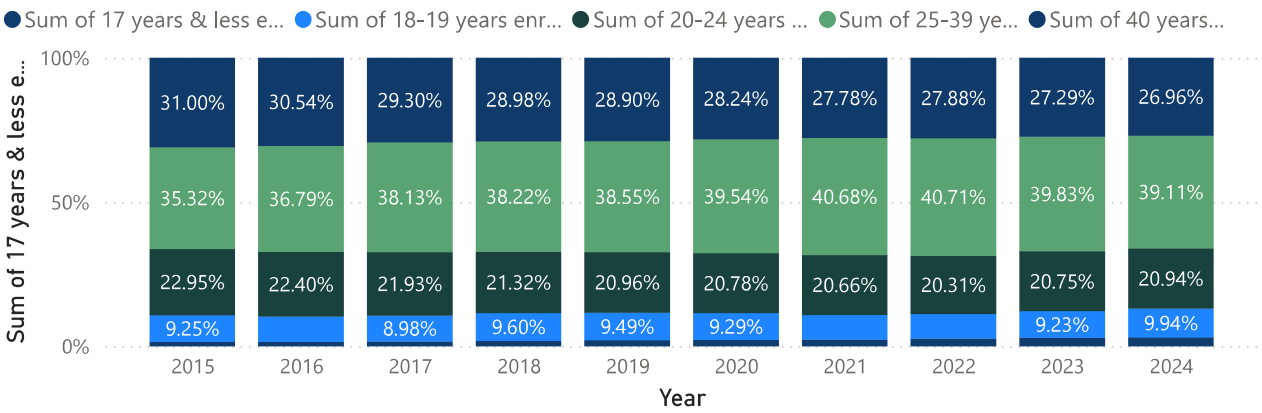


Completion Rate by Ethnicity

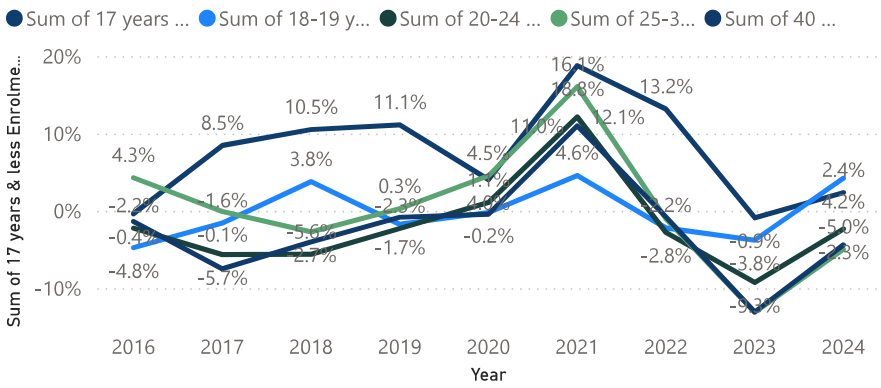


VET Enrolment and Completion by Age

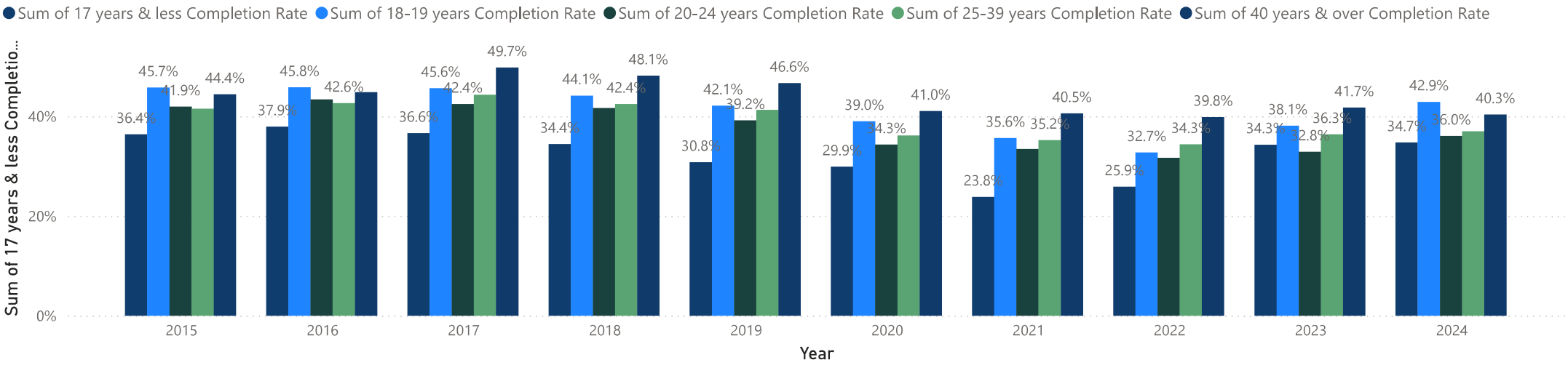
% Enrolment across Age Groups



Enrolment Growth Rate by Age Group

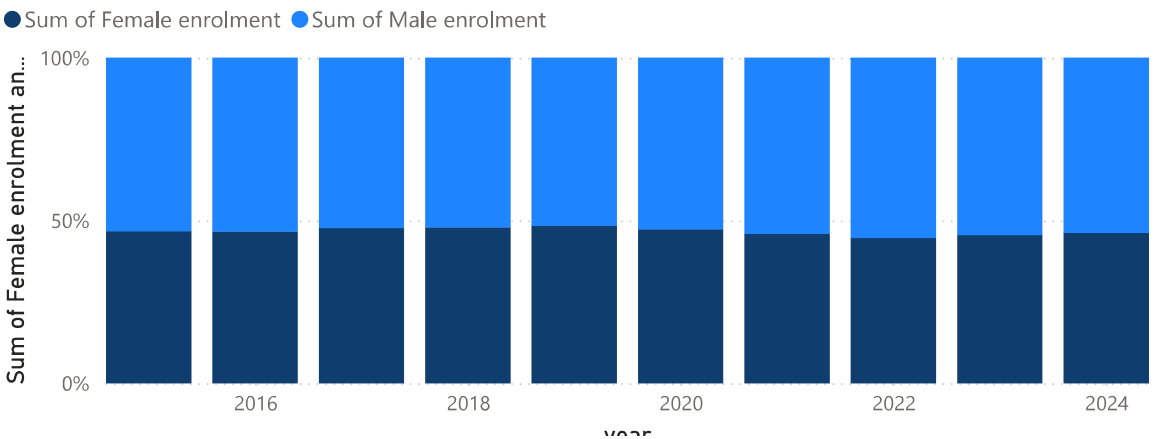


Completion Rate across Age Groups 2016-2024

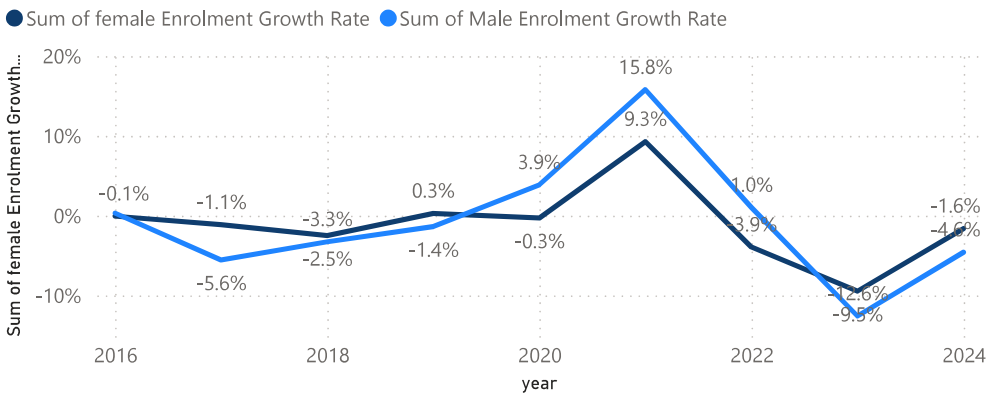


VET Enrolment and Completion by Gender

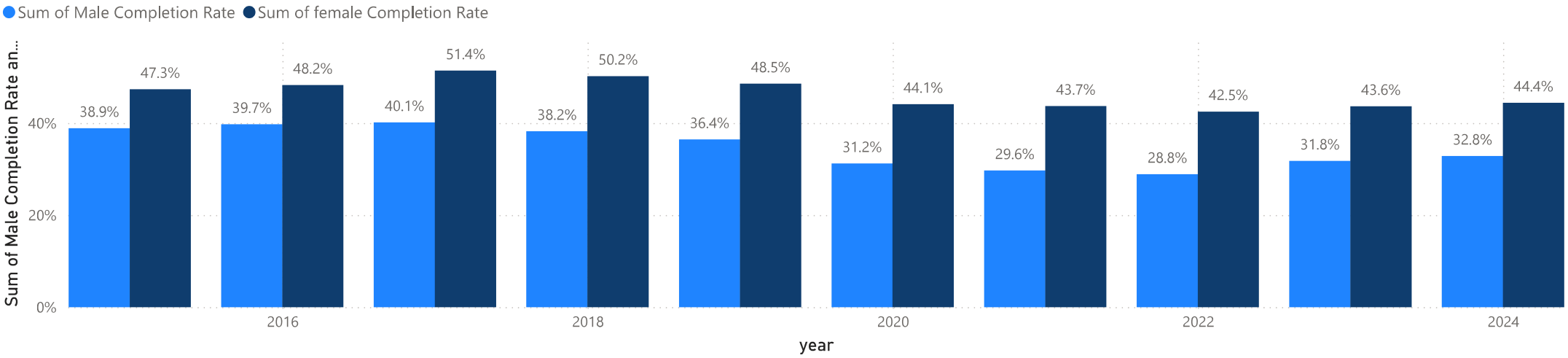
% Enrolment between Gender



Enrolment Growth Rate by Gender

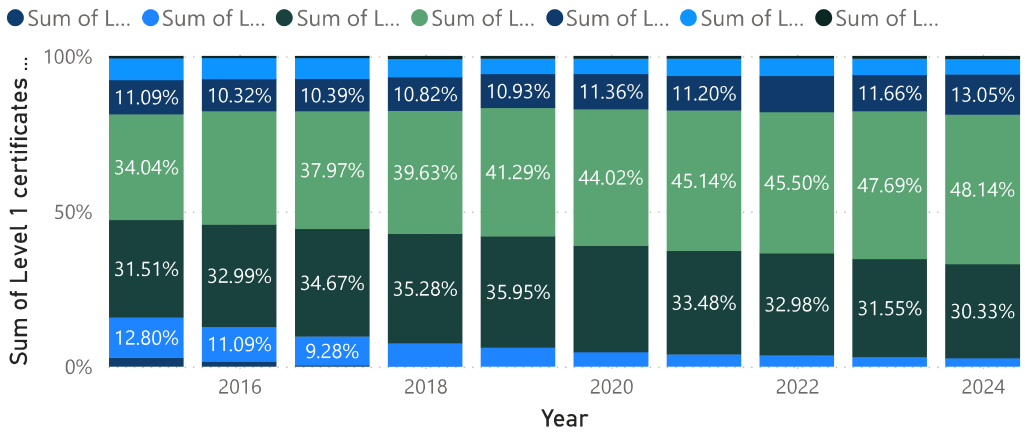


Completion Rate by Gender

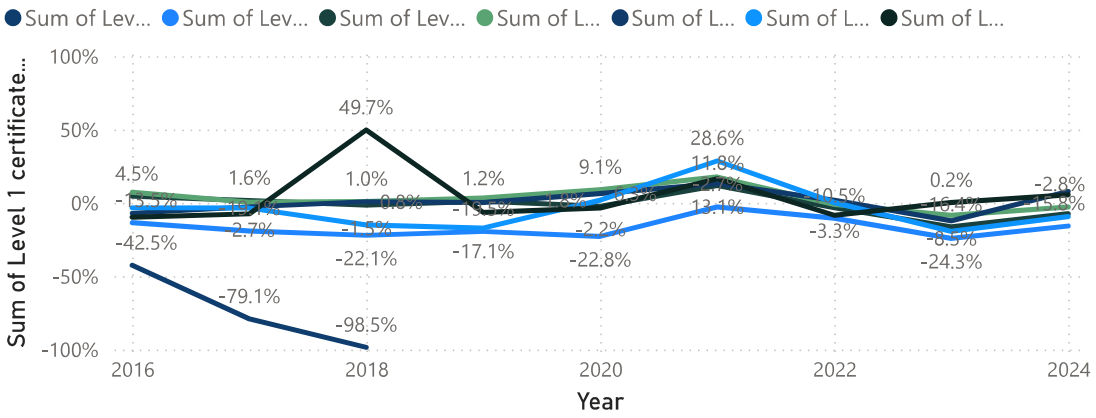


VET Enrolment and Completion by Certificate Level

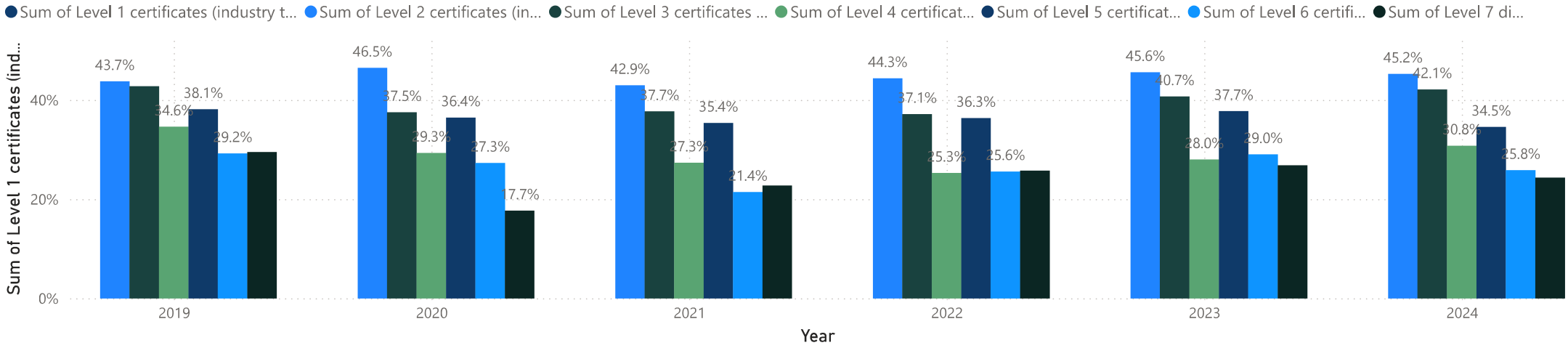
% Enrolment acorss Certificate Level



Enrolment Growth Rate by Certificate Level

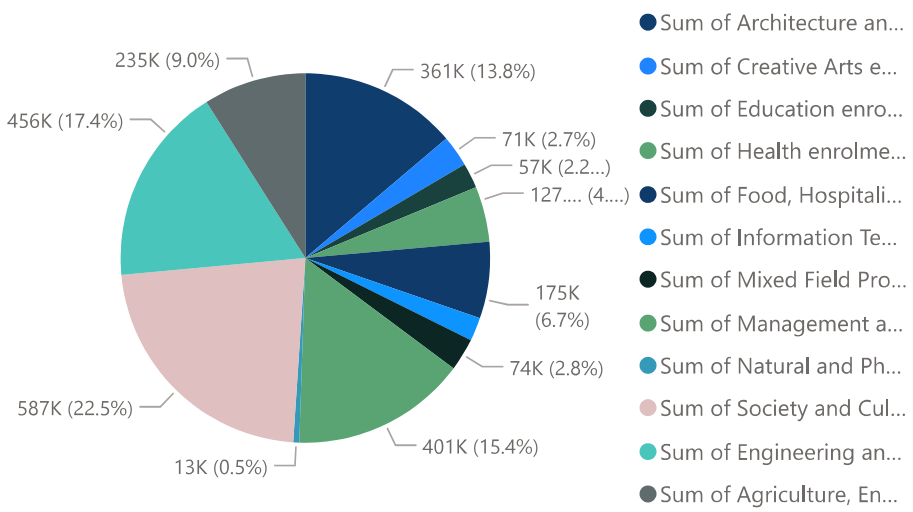


Completion Rate by Certificate Level

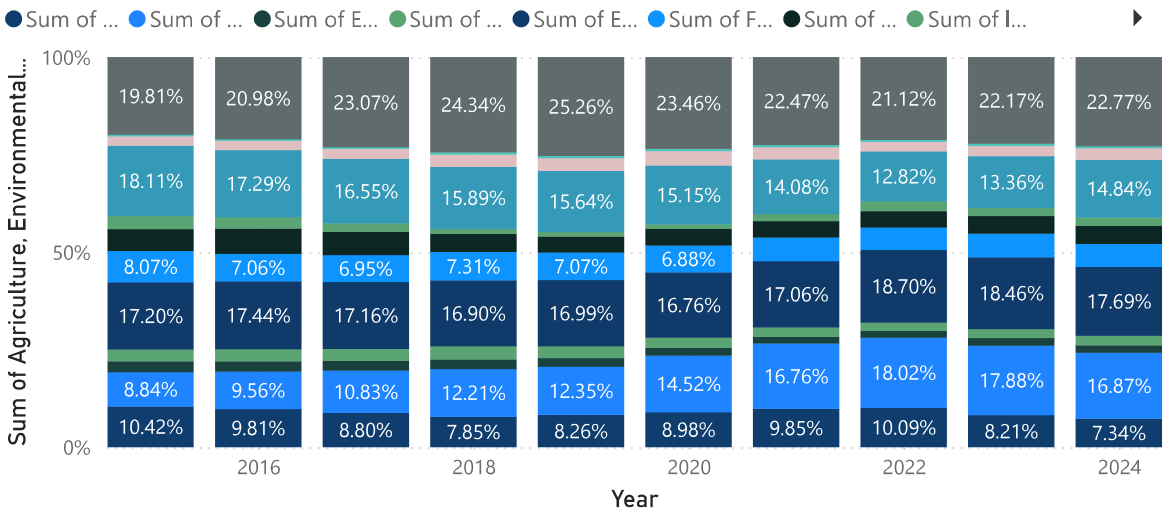


VET Enrolment and Completion by Field of Study

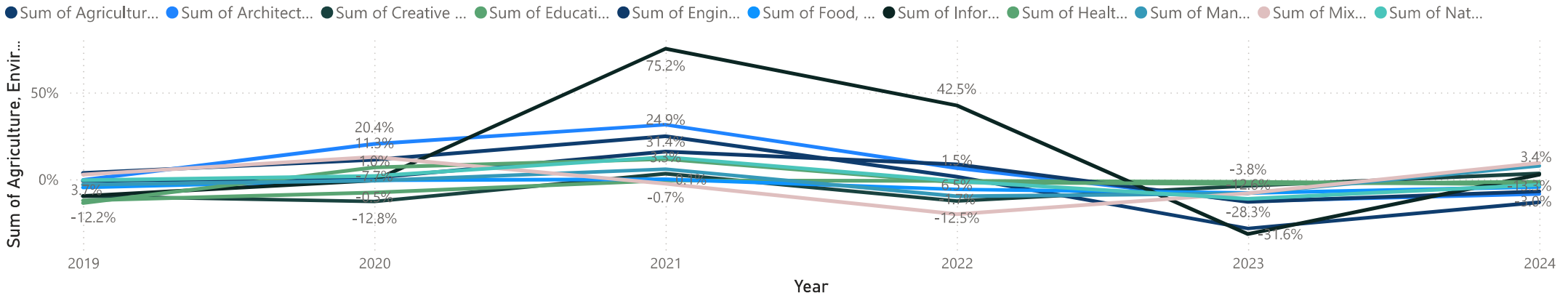
% Enrolment across Field of Study



Enrolment by Field of Study

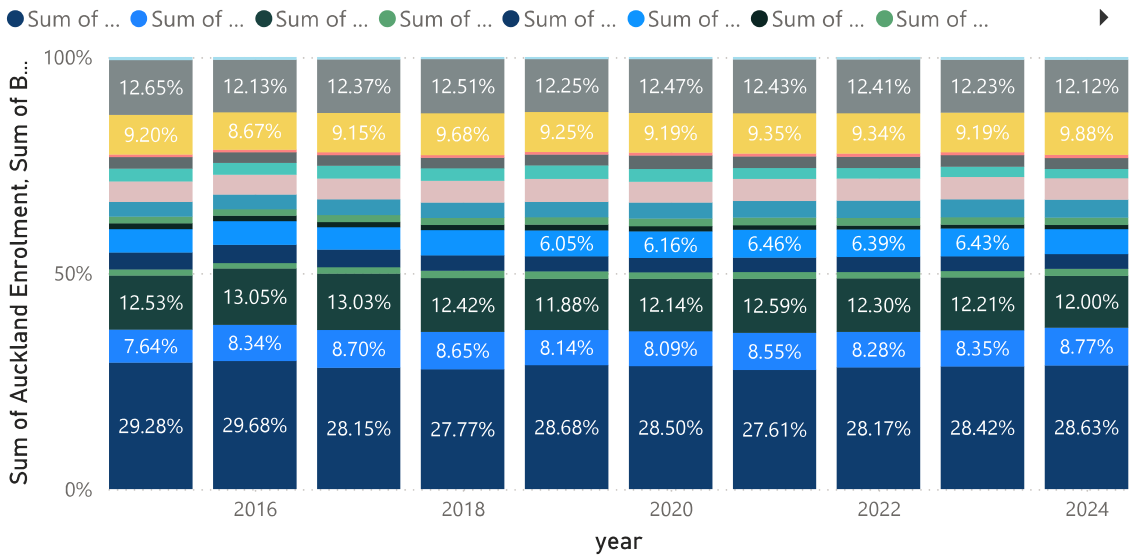


Enrolment Growth Rate by Field of Study

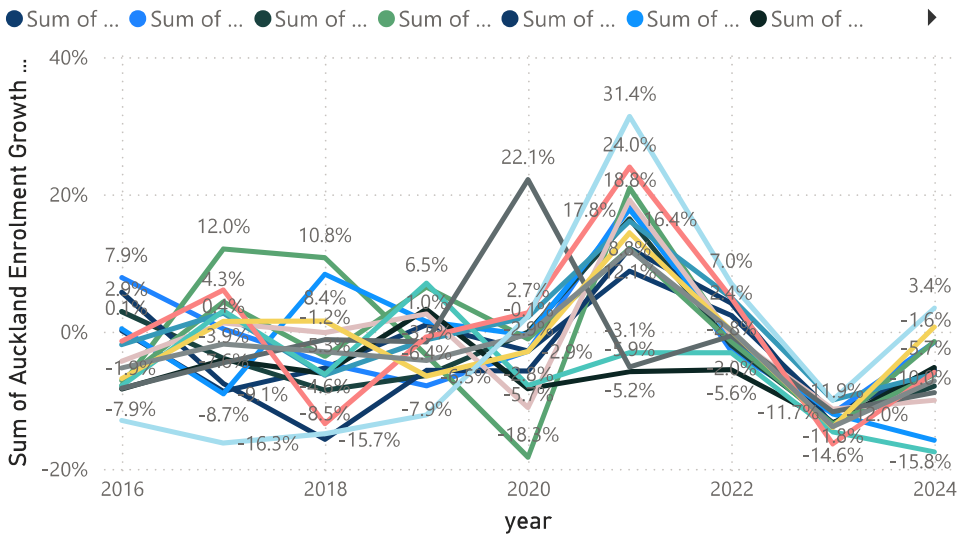
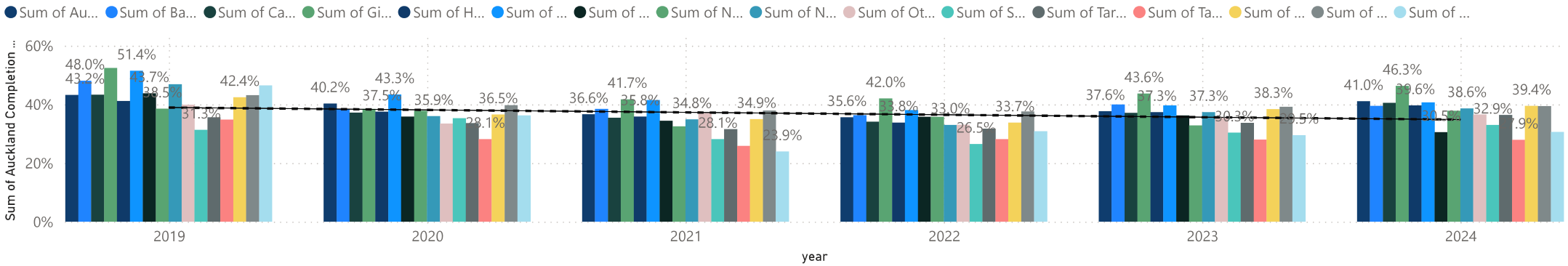


VET Enrolment and Completion by Region

% Enrolment by Region



Enrolment Growth Rate by Region



Completion Rate by Region