

Domestic postgraduate enrolments in 2013 – early indications

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DOMESTIC POSTGRADUATE ENROLMENTS IN 2013 – EARLY INDICATIONS

KEY FINDINGS

There is considerable interest in postgraduate enrolment trends in 2013 because of changes made to financial support in Budget 2012. Enrolment data for January to August shows that:

- In 2013, the number of domestic postgraduate students at the masters and doctoral level was similar to that in 2012
- Enrolments in postgraduate diplomas fell in 2013, but this was a continuation of a downward trend that had been evident for the previous two years
- Where there was significant change in enrolment patterns at other levels of postgraduate study, this was mostly due to changes in classifications of particular qualifications rather than an actual change in student enrolment behaviour

Preliminary student loan and student allowance data for January to June suggests that the proportion of students at the masters and doctoral level who financed their study from non-Government sources increased in 2013.

Introduction

In Budget 2012, the Government made changes to student allowance eligibility criterion, with postgraduate study above bachelors with honours no longer eligible for student allowances. This was designed to:

“...refocus allowances on students' initial years of study, when they most need additional support, and will update allowance policy settings to reflect the wide availability of interest free student loans. Expecting postgraduate students to borrow to fund their study also reflects the higher private benefit gained from postgraduate study.”

Source: www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/Budget/Budget2012/TertiaryEducation.aspx

In this paper, we access preliminary enrolment data to analyse the number of domestic students studying at the postgraduate level in 2013, and how this compared to the previous three years. We complement the analysis of student enrolments by also presenting interim data on student loan borrowers and student allowance recipients.

The structure of this paper is as follows:

- We examine domestic enrolments at the postgraduate level, including analysis of headcounts and equivalent full-time students
- We examine student loan and student allowance data
- Finally, we present a discussion on the findings of the analysis.

Data

Enrolment data

- The counts of domestic students presented in this report are based on enrolments in formal qualifications of more than 0.03 equivalent full-time students (EFTS) in length between January and August of each year from any funding source. Data excludes all non-formal learning and on-job industry training.
- Enrolments between January and August represent around 95 percent of students and equivalent full-time students over the full calendar year.
- We count students in each level of qualification they are enrolled in. This means that students can be counted in more than one level of qualification.
- For the calculation of EFTS data, we count all EFTS in courses associated with the qualification that the student is enrolled in.
- Due to changes by some institutions in reporting of out-of-time doctoral students, we calculate EFTS at the doctoral level based on the sum of the course EFTS factors – where only the part of the course in that year is counted.

Student loan living cost and student allowance data

- Student allowance and student loan living costs data presented in this report is based on the numbers of students drawing down student loan living costs and/or receiving a student allowance between January and June of each year.
- The counts of students accessing student loans and student allowances are based on the highest level of qualification attempted by the student.
- The student loan and student allowance data used in this study was provided by StudyLink.

Domestic student enrolments

Students by qualification level

In Table 1 we present the number of domestic students enrolled in selected levels of qualification between January and August of each year. We split out postgraduate study into five levels (highlighted in blue): bachelors with honours, postgraduate diplomas, postgraduate certificates, masters degrees and doctoral degrees. We also present the number of students at bachelors and graduate certificates/diploma level in Table 1 as contextual data.

It is important to note that the changes to student allowance eligibility at the postgraduate level in Budget 2012 did not apply to study at the bachelors with honours level.

The data in Table 1 shows there was little change in the number of students at the masters and doctoral level in 2013 (an increase of 0.6 percent and a decrease of 1.4 percent, respectively). The number of EFTS fell by 2.8 percent at the doctoral level in 2013, suggesting a shift to more part-time enrolments. This was a continuation of a trend that started in 2012. Masters-level EFTS remained stable.

The number of domestic students enrolled in bachelors with honours degrees increased by around 8 percent in 2013. Compared with the change in previous years (a decrease of 1.7 percent and 1.6 percent, respectively), this represents a significant upwards shift in student numbers. However, a significant proportion of this increase was due to a switch in the classification of degrees at two providers in 2013. This meant that around 660 enrolments which had previously been reported at the bachelors level changed to the honours level. This accounts for most of the increase of around 870 students in 2013.

At the postgraduate diploma level, enrolments dropped by 5.6 percent in 2013. This continued a trend of falling enrolments at this level over the previous three years.

At the postgraduate certificate level, there was a 3.9 percent drop in domestic students in 2013. An apparent change in classification of a qualification at one provider was a contributing factor to this result.

Table 1

Domestic student counts, EFTS and study load by selected levels of qualification – January to August

Measure	Level	Year				Percentage change		
		2010	2011	2012	2013	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Students	Bachelors degrees	129,238	128,442	130,831	128,748	-0.6%	1.9%	-1.6%
	Graduate cert/dips	12,384	11,036	10,871	10,293	-11%	-1.5%	-5.3%
	Bachelors with honours	10,716	10,535	10,366	11,236	-1.7%	-1.6%	8.4%
	Post-graduate diplomas	9,416	8,790	8,534	8,055	-6.6%	-2.9%	-5.6%
	Post-graduate certificates	4,459	4,179	4,190	4,025	-6.3%	0.3%	-3.9%
	Masters degrees	11,506	11,766	11,670	11,740	2.3%	-0.8%	0.6%
	Doctoral degrees	5,016	4,918	4,937	4,869	-2.0%	0.4%	-1.4%
EFTS	Bachelors degrees	103,246	104,010	106,779	105,443	0.7%	2.7%	-1.3%
	Graduate cert/dips	6,066	5,296	5,334	4,936	-13%	0.7%	-7.5%
	Bachelors with honours	9,656	9,412	9,284	10,082	-2.5%	-1.4%	8.6%
	Post-graduate diplomas	4,502	4,121	3,944	3,586	-8.4%	-4.3%	-9.1%
	Post-graduate certificates	1,477	1,392	1,445	1,332	-5.8%	3.8%	-7.8%
	Masters degrees	6,485	6,437	6,509	6,511	-0.8%	1.1%	0.0%
	Doctoral degrees	3,903	3,740	3,690	3,586	-4.2%	-1.3%	-2.8%
EFTS per student	Bachelors degrees	0.80	0.81	0.82	0.82			
	Graduate cert/dips	0.49	0.48	0.49	0.48			
	Bachelors with honours	0.90	0.89	0.90	0.90			
	Post-graduate diplomas	0.48	0.47	0.46	0.45			
	Post-graduate certificates	0.33	0.33	0.34	0.33			
	Masters degrees	0.56	0.55	0.56	0.55			
	Doctoral degrees	0.78	0.76	0.75	0.74			

Notes: 1. The counts of domestic students are based on enrolments in formal qualifications of more than 0.03 equivalent full-time students (EFTS) in length between January and August of each year from any funding source. 2. Data excludes all non-formal learning and on-job industry training. 3. Students can enrol in more than one level of qualification. 4. The blue shading identifies study at the postgraduate level.

Starting cohorts of students by qualification level

Figure 1 shows the number of domestic students who commenced study at that level of qualification in that year. By concentrating on the number of students starting a qualification in each year, we can see if there are different patterns that might indicate that the stability in the total number of students enrolled at some postgraduate qualification levels is due to cohort effects from previous years and that student numbers may fall as smaller intakes in 2013 work their way through.

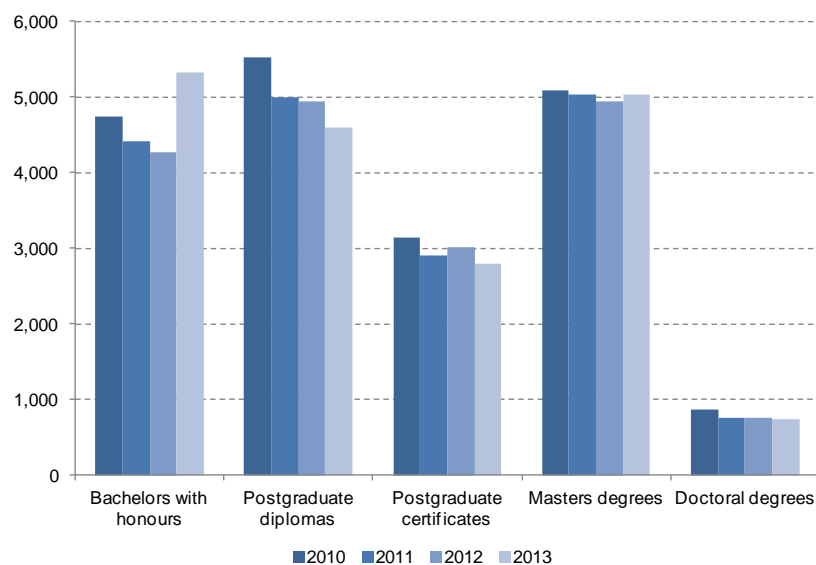
The data in Figure 1 shows that between 2011 and 2013, the number of starting students was relatively stable at the masters and doctoral degree level.¹

In 2013, the number of starting students increased at the bachelors with honours level, but this was mainly a result of a change in qualification classification. Similarly, the drop in the number of starters at the postgraduate certificate level is mainly due to a reclassification of a qualification. The number of starters at the postgraduate diploma level fell in 2013.

¹ The higher number of starters in 2010 in some levels of qualification reflects the increase in participation in tertiary study as a result of the recession.

Figure 1

Domestic students starting postgraduate qualifications by level – January to August



Progression rates

In this section we present progression rates from/to particular levels of study. This shows the proportion of students who have completed a particular level of qualification and then enrolled in another level of qualification. By doing so we can control for the different size of graduating cohorts.

Table 2 shows that the rate of progression from bachelors to masters-level qualifications was relatively unchanged in 2013, as was progression from masters to doctoral degrees. The rate of progression from bachelors-level study to bachelors with honours increased from 22 percent in 2012 to 26 percent in 2013. However, this increase in progression reflects the reclassification of two degrees mentioned in the previous sections. Similarly, the drop in progression from bachelors to postgraduate certificate in 2013 is due in part to the reclassification of a qualification to a lower level. The rate of progression from bachelors to postgraduate diplomas fell slightly from 16 percent in 2012 to 14 percent in 2013.

Table 2

Direct progression to/from selected levels of qualifications for domestic students

Combination	2010	2011	2012	2013
Bachelors to honours	23%	24%	22%	26%
Bachelors to postgraduate diploma	16%	17%	16%	14%
Bachelors to postgraduate certificate	25%	26%	24%	18%
Bachelors to masters degree	15%	13%	14%	13%
Masters degree to doctoral degree	1.8%	1.9%	2.2%	2.0%

Notes: 1. Bachelors includes graduate certificates and diplomas. 2. In calculating these rates, we look at the full-year data in previous years.

Trends in student loan living costs and student allowances

In this section we examine trends in student loans and student allowances. We focus on the living cost component of student loans, as this is the component most likely to be directly affected by the change to postgraduate student allowance eligibility in Budget 2012. Students have the ability to access both the student loans living costs component and student allowances, with the access to the living costs component of a student loan abating as a student allowance increases.

Table 3 presents preliminary data on the number of student loan borrowers for living costs and the number of student allowance recipients for postgraduate qualifications.² These represent borrowers and allowance recipients between January and June in each year. The Budget 2012 removal of student allowance for postgraduate study above bachelors with honours came into effect on 1 January 2013. Transitional arrangements are such that students granted an allowance in 2012 for study which extends into 2013 retain their allowance. This means that in 2013 we are still seeing some postgraduate students receiving a student allowance.

The data in Table 3 shows that the number of students accessing student loan living costs but not taking an allowance increased significantly at most postgraduate levels of study in 2013. At the masters level the increase was 78 percent, 33 percent at the doctoral level and 52 percent at the postgraduate diploma level.

Table 3

Numbers of students drawing down student loan living costs and receiving student allowances by selected levels – January to June

Student support type	Level	Year				Percentage change		
		2010	2011	2012	2013	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Student loan living cost only	Bachelors degrees	34,396	33,366	34,338	36,101	-3.0%	2.9%	5.1%
	Bachelors with honours	3,699	3,732	3,605	4,029	0.9%	-3.4%	12%
	Post-graduate diplomas	703	610	557	844	-13%	-8.7%	52%
	Post-graduate certificates	110	97	126	129	-12%	30%	2.4%
	Masters degrees	1,402	1,475	1,413	2,520	5.2%	-4.2%	78%
	Doctoral degrees	497	441	411	545	-11%	-6.8%	33%
Both student loan living costs and student allowances	Bachelors degrees	14,063	16,193	16,806	16,774	15%	3.8%	-0.2%
	Bachelors with honours	1,464	1,517	1,493	1,546	3.6%	-1.6%	3.5%
	Post-graduate diplomas	231	228	266	70	-1.3%	17%	-74%
	Post-graduate certificates	40	45	46	23	13%	2%	-50%
	Masters degrees	606	668	721	357	10%	7.9%	-50%
	Doctoral degrees	128	144	149	146	13%	3.5%	-2.0%
Student allowances only	Bachelors degrees	26,549	26,675	26,137	22,415	0.5%	-2.0%	-14%
	Bachelors with honours	2,670	2,484	2,356	2,098	-7.0%	-5.2%	-11%
	Post-graduate diplomas	691	647	589	68	-6.4%	-9.0%	-88%
	Post-graduate certificates	104	99	87	28	-4.8%	-12%	-68%
	Masters degrees	1,737	1,896	1,903	579	9.2%	0.4%	-70%
	Doctoral degrees	504	575	592	335	14%	3.0%	-43%
Total	Bachelors degrees	75,008	76,234	77,281	75,290	1.6%	1.4%	-2.6%
	Bachelors with honours	7,833	7,733	7,454	7,673	-1.3%	-3.6%	2.9%
	Post-graduate diplomas	1,625	1,485	1,412	982	-8.6%	-4.9%	-30%
	Post-graduate certificates	254	241	259	180	-5.1%	7.5%	-31%
	Masters degrees	3,745	4,039	4,037	3,456	7.9%	0.0%	-14%
	Doctoral degrees	1,129	1,160	1,152	1,026	2.7%	-0.7%	-11%

Note: 1. Student loan borrowers and student allowance recipients are counted in the highest level of qualification. 2. The blue shading identifies study at the postgraduate level. 3. Many/most borrowers and allowance recipients borrow for fees also. This table looks only at loans/allowances for living cost support. 4. Transitional arrangements are such that students granted an allowance in 2012 for study which extends into 2013 retain their allowance. This means that in 2013 we are still seeing some postgraduate students receiving a student allowance.

Source: StudyLink

² We also present data at the bachelors degree and bachelors with honours level for context.

This increase in the number of students drawing down student loan living costs helped to partly offset large decreases in student allowance recipients at the postgraduate level. In 2013, the number of students who received student allowance and did not draw down student loan living costs decreased 70 percent at the masters level, 43 percent at the doctoral level, 88 percent at the postgraduate diploma level and 68 percent at the postgraduate certificate level.

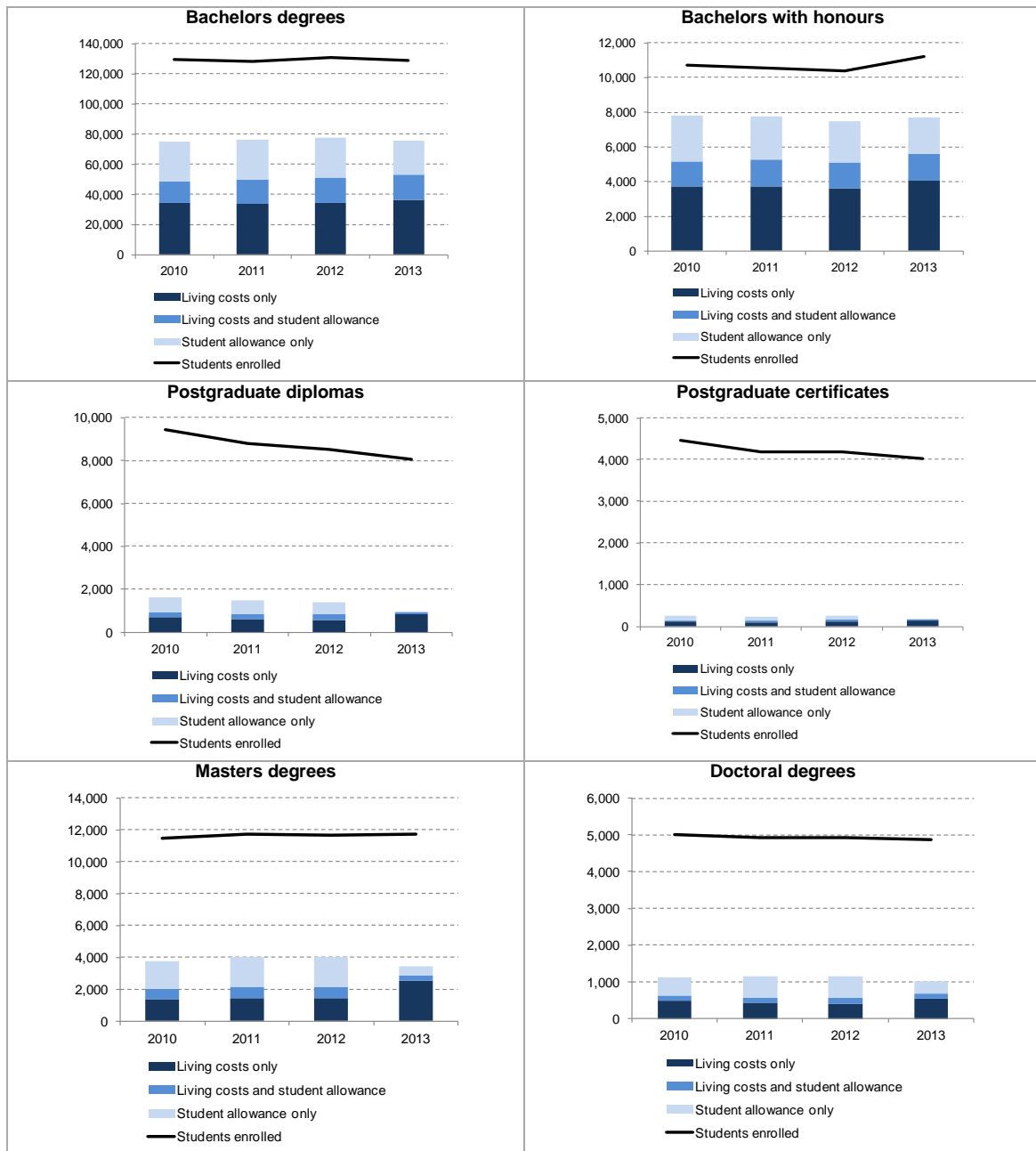
At most postgraduate levels of qualification, the number of students accessing either student allowances and/or student loan living costs decreased in 2013. At the masters level the numbers decreased by 14 percent, at the doctoral level by 11 percent, at the postgraduate diploma level by 30 percent and 31 percent at the postgraduate certificate level.

Figure 2 presents the numbers of students receiving student allowances/and or drawing down student loan living costs between January and June of each year, along with the number of students enrolled in these levels of qualification between January and August of each year.

In 2013, the relatively stable enrolments data at the masters and doctoral level combined with the falling number of students accessing either student loan living costs or student allowances suggest that an increased proportion of students have financed their studies from non-Government sources.

Figure 2

Number of domestic students (January-August) and the number of students drawing down student loan living costs and receiving student allowances (January-June) by selected levels of qualification



Source: Ministry of Education and StudyLink

Discussion

Preliminary enrolment data for 2013 suggests that there has been no significant shift in the number of domestic students studying at the postgraduate level, especially at the masters and doctoral degree level. Where there were changes in student numbers in 2013, it was mainly due to reclassification of qualifications to different levels.

Preliminary student support data for 2013 shows that the number of students accessing student loan living costs and/or student allowances decreased at all levels above bachelors with honours. Given the stable enrolment data in 2013 at the masters and doctoral level, this indicates that an increased proportion of students at these levels are financing their studies through non-Government sources.

The enrolments data used in this study only counted students enrolled for the first eight months of each year. Enrolments data for the full 2013 year will not become finalised until early 2014. It is not until then that we will be able to get a full picture of how postgraduate enrolments behaved in 2013.

Also, because of the transitional arrangements that apply in 2013 we will not see the full impact of the policy change until 2014.