



Increasing Retention and Graduation in a PTE Learning Environment

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September 2011



AOTEAROA
NATIONAL CENTRE FOR
TERTIARY TEACHING
EXCELLENCE

An Ako Aotearoa publication.
This project output has been funded by
Ako Aotearoa through the
Regional Hub Project Fund.



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One of the key challenges in working with learners in the non-compulsory education sector is maintaining consistent attendance at courses until completion. Whilst it is clear that the reasons for non-completion of educational programmes in an adult education setting are diverse, Zepke et al., 2005, this small study has been able to provide clear indications for a small PTE, of the contributing factors relating to its experiences in post-secondary education within Te Hiku o Te Ika¹. The main body of learners studying at Kiwidotcom fit into the general grouping of 'second chance learners'² who seek both long-term and 'just in time' learning opportunities. These are important factors in analysing the reasons for students not completing their chosen courses of study. In addition, geographical and environmental factors also play their part.

Programmes delivered by the organisation have graduation rates between 52% and 70% (and average of 60%), and an average retention rate of over 75%³. Of particular interest in this study, are the reasons that the remaining participants (30% - 40%) do not complete and whether some influence or strategies can be identified which would increase education achievement levels. This is important not only because the organisation expects to continue to improve its performance and positively influence local communities, but also because with a change in government there is a shift in paradigm to 'value for money,' increases in participation, retention, graduation, learning pathways and obtaining qualifications. The Tertiary Education Commission and government have clear priorities, (TEC Strategy 2010-2015), which naturally have a flow-on effect to providers.

This study found that the main elements impacting on retention and graduation of its students are:

- Family situations and unplanned events – personal situations impacted on learners heavily
- Under-estimation of the commitment required for tertiary study/workload
- A limited understanding of the multiple aspects of study support

These can be further categorised into 'institutional and non- institutional' factors. (Zepke et al, 2005). It is in the main the non-institutional factors which hold the most influence over learners in their attempts to engage and complete tertiary study.

Since the last engagement with formal education for most was as teenagers in a compulsory education model, adult learners re-engaging with education find themselves challenged in having to re-evaluate their routines and absorb new thinking and ideas. Many find the initial weeks of class difficult and exhausting. Over 60% of learners studying at Kiwidotcom persevere to completion, however 40%, with half that number (20%) giving up within the first few classes. The remaining students (20%) withdraw over later periods of the programmes due to personal circumstances.

¹(The tail of the fish – geographically the most northern area of the North Island of New Zealand located to the north of the Mangamuka Ranges including the Te Aupouri and Karikari peninsulas with Kaitia as its main centre of business.)

²students re-engaging in study, mature age, unmatriculated school-leavers, students returning to study, students from disadvantaged backgrounds and under-represented groups <http://www.aall.org.au/forum/second-chance-learners>

³Statistics and data Kiwidotcom 2010

As adults it is easy to assume that students are 'independent learners' with the skills and motivation to seek the necessary support required to complete their programmes of study. However this research and recent programme evaluations indicate that this is not the case. The more recent contemporary culture of study where negotiating workloads and timeframes is a normal part of meeting student goals and outcomes is relevant to students understanding and seeking support services to assist with personal challenges.

Part of what has become apparent in this study is that even though tutors have a 'learner-centred' approach (Yorke and Thomas, 2005), and participants actively use tutor support in terms of utilising catch-up tutorials, or completing assessments, this 'classroom' support is the only support sought. Consequently, students give no indication that they consider study support (Hallet F, Bernstein B, 2000 Pedagogy Symbolic Control and Identity), as an integral part of their programme or work ethic. To know that study support is part of enabling success as a student is not generally understood by students themselves. Layers of study support relate to many other aspects of succeeding as a student; and while tutor support is also vital, there are a number of other factors implicit.

Modern learners are accustomed to receiving instruction on topics such as how to study, how to write assignments or essays, managing timetable and study load so on and so forth. Second-chance learners however by their nature, are a pool of learners who having left the formal learning scene some years hence, have either not received this kind of instruction or have not received it for many years. This is a key factor in their ability to understand the importance of study support in successful learning.

Larger education groups operating in the area either do not have dedicated student support staff located in Kaitia or have staffing at very minimal levels. PTE's provide tutor support and skirt some areas of study support however are not equipped with full provision of support services which research shows are critical to successful learning pathways. (Ross C, Zepke N, et al, 2005)

Not having access or an understanding of how study support contributes to learners achieving their goals meant that learners simply stopped study when they were confronted by significant personal issues.

It is therefore evident that there are gaps relating to the following:

- comprehensive technical skills support prior to programme commencement to include workshops on;
 - study skills
 - study management
 - assignment writing etc
- easily accessible and locally available student support services
- orientation or induction to study which involves
 - Identifying and setting clear goals
 - Greater focus on informing learners of the importance of support services and how they are used to best effect

- Awareness of where and how to access greater levels of support

In addition successful students had one or a combination of the following:

- Clear, end goal/s
- Short and long term aspirations
- Engaged in working in or owning an existing business
- Familiar with writing tasks/assessments
- High expectations of their own outcomes
- Learner centred tutors

If Kiwidotcom is further able to ensure that services or support is available for learners to better plan, engage and achieve successful study then there is a high likelihood that they will be further able to positively influence a greater proportion of learners in terms of programme completion. It would not be unreasonable to expect that this could relate to at least half (of the 40%) of those currently failing to complete their courses of study. This is especially true since as has been demonstrated in this research, the main reasons affecting completion of study in Te Hiku o Te Ika, are non-institutional.

Statement of Limitations

A specific limitation for this study is that the proposed sample size was significantly reduced in that a number of students who studied in 2008-2009 were not able to be contacted. While some students were likely to have just moved house and are still likely to be living in the region, contact details were not current. In some instances, students had relocated to other regions. As mentioned in this study, transiency levels are high where people leave the region consistently to seek employment opportunities elsewhere. This is an inter-generational trend as a result of limited employment opportunity and is particularly notable in the Far North region, though is likely to be also reflected in other rural areas.

Some contact numbers for students further belonged to family members, rather than to the students themselves. This would indicate in some instances that students at times provide contact details of family members who reside in central Kaitaia, but who themselves alternate residency between town and an outlying rural area. Although this is not necessarily a common theme to emerge from within this study, it is a common reality of the region. While Kaitaia is a central location within the Far North, many people are from the outlying rural areas that sit at varying distances between 20 minutes and an hour and a half in travelling time from Kaitaia.

It is acknowledged that the small sample size for this study is a limitation of the research and that consequently findings for this study are partial. This is further compounded by the lack of research literature available specific to the realities of and for rural learners in Aotearoa.

The Research Question

‘To investigate the causes of learners withdrawing or not completing courses of study and to formally identify those current practices which are working effectively in keeping up to 60% of learners engaged to completion.’

Increasingly adults are choosing to study to learn new skills, update their knowledge, increase their range of opportunities or meet set criteria of government agencies. Of those engaging in learning there, there is a high proportion (often in excess of 30%), who do not complete their chosen course of study. What are the reasons for this and what strategies and initiatives work best in a rural, isolated environment. The aim of this research project therefore has been to investigate the causes of learner withdrawal prior to completion and to formally identify those practices which are most effective in keeping learners engaged.

Though student retention has historically been an issue for education providers, (Zepke et al., 2005), data specific to student retention in the Far North region is relatively non-existent; this is also mirrored at a national level. (Research Division, Ministry of Education, 2005). Supporting Students in Tertiary Study) It is an issue that has been somewhat evaded prior to policy introduced by the Tertiary Education Commission. (NZCER) This research has set out to identify at the very least, some of the issues that result in early withdrawals and non-completion of students attending programmes of study with Kiwidotcom.

Background

Kiwidotcom has been delivering foundation education to adults since 1992. Under new ownership, it is re-assessing its role and purpose in tertiary education in the Far North region.

The characteristics of learners enrolled at Kiwidotcom are:

- ⁴school leavers that left college just after or before ‘School Certificate’
- students who have engaged in learning after long periods of time since leaving college
- students whose last engagement with formal learning was at college, often in the 80’s
- students who have a lack of study skills or independent learning strategies
- students who hold an expectation that they must achieve on their own
- students who were not used to engaging with student support services and therefore do not see services as such as integral to their programme of study
- students who are employed or involved with community projects and committees
- students who have a high level of responsibility within their families and whanau e.g. were mothers or fathers, sole or main caregivers

⁴ Student enrolment forms and registrations

Since the majority of learners who undertake programmes of learning at Kiwidotcom are aged 25 and over. Their experiences involve a larger degree of teacher led learning compared to today's youth who are encouraged to use independent learning strategies to obtain their information. There is an initial expectation by mature learners that 'they will be taught', rather than gaining strategies with which to learn.

Along with continuing the historical delivery of a TOPs programme, the company directors have also invested their skills and time in analysing further need within its contributing communities and are moving to meet those demands. This has meant significant growth in the number of learning programmes now offered and in the educational partnerships it engages in. An obvious trend which became more apparent as the number of courses expanded (public programme delivery), was that retention issues were not isolated to one particular programme but were easily identifiable across a range of different courses with different subjects. We reasoned that the issue of keeping learners engaged was unlikely to be solely attributed to individual tutors or course topics since the retaining of learners had too great a spread and percentages of withdrawal were similar across the board. If it was not the chosen topic or the quality of the tutoring, what other issues/impacts would be significant enough to cause these generic statistics? As a small organisation with limited resourcing and through an Ako Aotearoa hui where we discovered from other providers present that this was an ongoing and major issues which still pressed despite significant concern, we undertook to find out what we could further do to strategise efficiently to positively impact on our retention percentages. Involved in a working relationship with Te Wananga o Aotearoa to increase their profile and delivery in the Far North, we made an initial approach to partner with them on this research. We were unable however to arrive at a place of agreement for both parties regarding the research and its finding. As a result we made the decision to pursue the research on our own but remain happy to share findings.

Methodology

Kaupapa Māori (Ross C, 2010) is the primary research approach used in this project. Ideally, Kaupapa Māori works from a foundation that seeks positive outcomes and benefits for the collective groups of whanau, hapu, iwi, (Durie, M. (1998), Smith, L. T. (1999), Smith, G. H. (1997)), and wider community. As Kaupapa Māori research has emerged as an approach that has been driven by Māori academics in that it seeks to address critical change for, with and by Māori,⁵ it is an approach that is essentially linked to the needs of Māori populations and their communities.

As a theoretical approach, Kaupapa Māori aims to provide positive outcomes (Smith, L. T. 1999) for the collectives of whānau, hapū, iwi and society in general. It is an approach that views the holistic makeup of people, both as individuals and as collective groupings that work toward gains of collective well-being.

⁵ ibid

Research specific to this study views Kaupapa Māori research as being action based, an aspect highlighted in the growing body of Kaupapa Māori research that emphasises that Kaupapa Māori exists in active relationship with practice. (Smith, G. H. 1997)

In seeking to represent Māori views of the world within academic research, Kaupapa Māori research provides a voice for Māori that did not previously exist; at least not in terms of being positioned from a foundation that is determined by Māori aspirations, culture, values and knowledge. As Māori communities are increasingly undertaking their own research projects, Kaupapa Māori research provides approaches grounded in Māori views, concepts and understandings of the world. Kaupapa Māori research holds particular significance at this time with local iwi in the region moving towards treaty settlement and consequently post-settlement development.

Although specifically focused on providing a strengths-based approach in which to achieve gains for Māori, Kaupapa Māori is nevertheless able to include wider community groupings. While essentially driven and controlled by Māori (Nepe, T. (1991)) Kaupapa Māori can and does involve non-Māori in various contexts. Involvement of non-Māori may be where agreed, in the actual research process and design or alternatively as participants of the research. In terms of this project, Kaupapa Māori is considered an appropriate approach for Māori and non-Māori alike, in that it seeks to find strategies that support rural students to complete their programmes of study. While there is a high percentage of Māori in the local population, non-Māori have been part of the target group of students in this project as they make up nearly half of the students enrolled with Kiwidotcom.

As there are common assumptions made around the general needs of students, it is further necessary to highlight the different needs of students living and studying in rural locations to the needs of urban, campus-based students. The lack of research in regard to the needs of rural learners highlights this dilemma.

Although there is a growing body of literature on Kaupapa Māori research, the continuing emergence of Kaupapa Māori as a research approach is still in its fledgling stages. In acknowledging that Kaupapa Māori research is diverse, it is also necessary to state its clear alignment to Māori self-determination and subsequently to Māori development. (Smith & Reid, 2000) That Kaupapa Māori is utilised as a research approach is further significant to informing Māori development at a national level; as it is also important in terms of representing the interests of the high population of Māori in the Far North region.

While there is a growing knowledge of Kaupapa Māori, the considerable lack of clarity and understanding of Kaupapa Māori as a research approach highlights the need for consistent and on-going discussion.

In working from a community base of what is considered as a predominantly Māori populated region, it is further significant that Kaupapa Māori provides local communities with a framework that is specific in valuing Māori aspirations for education specifically and; development generally.

Community-based research is intrinsic to a Kaupapa Māori approach in that it is ideally based in and/or linked to the communities in which the research is conducted, as it will further involve people from those communities in various aspects of the research process. Acknowledgement of existing local expertise and a focus on building local expertise (Strand K., Cutforth, N., Stoecker, R., Marullo, S., Donohue, P. 2003) are both aspects of community based research that align to Kaupapa Māori research. Similarly, Kaupapa Māori research validates the existing expertise held within the group/community and also seeks to further build capacity.

Qualitative Approach and Research Specifics

In the instance of this research the project has been instigated by Kiwidotcom in their endeavour to improve overall student completion of their programmes. While this is in the interest of Kiwidotcom achieving their student retention rates as a Private Training Establishment, it is also a reflection of the organisations' commitment to both their students learning outcomes and the resulting impacts on Far North communities. Few, if any providers who deliver in the region have attempted to research in order to address issues of student retention and student completion to date. The effort to address these issues is proactive and is important in identifying the barriers to student's completion of studies.

The study is largely qualitative in that it is primarily informed by interviews and case studies of students and tutors. Students contacted for the research were made up of one of three groupings:

1. Students who had completed their course of study
2. Students who were early withdrawals from their course of study
3. Students who did not complete their course of study

Past and current students were contacted initially by phone to ask if they were interested in participating in a student retention research project with Kiwidotcom. Students' names were selected from the Kiwidotcom student database with the intention of attaining a mix of the above named categories. All participants were enrolled with a programme of study with Kiwidotcom during 2008 or 2009. As the number of women participating in study with Kiwidotcom is significantly more than that of men, the number of men who have participated in this research is represented as just over one third of participant interviews.

Students interviewed for this study were selected from four of the programmes offered by Kiwidotcom. The majority of programmes have a focus on small business development and delivered under contract to Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. The other programme involved is 'UpSkill', a TEC funded programme which the organisation has delivered since opening.

The 4 programmes were:

- UpSkill (TOPs/TEC funded)
- Certificate in Small Business Management (TWOA funded)
- Certificate in First Steps to Business (TWOA funded)
- Certificate in Money Management (TWOA funded)

Across the four programmes and over the last 3 years, (2008-2010 inclusive), gender splits have remained relatively close. This is especially true of the 2008 and 2009 intakes with 67% and 68% of participants being female and 33% and 32% of participants being male. In 2010 however, there was an almost 10% increase in female enrolments to 75% with a reduction in male enrolments at 25%. There was also a reduction of intakes in that year compared to the previous 2 years, (which had 2 intakes each), so the information is not totally comparable.

Initial contact with students undertaken by the research instigator suggested that there was little interest in participating in focus groups or in face to face interviews. With a number of students living in outlying rural areas the extra onus of travelling into Kaitia to take part in an interview is here assumed as a cost factor for participants, specifically so in regard to the cost of petrol. Transport is a constant issue for people in the region, where people are commonly reliant on others for transport since there is no public transport system. Issues specific to the road worthiness of vehicles is further a common factor in the region and must also be considered in regard to people not always being available to travel to face to face interviews. This can also be related to the situation of students not being able to attend class. Time is also assumed as an added factor to participation. One-third of participants chose to be interviewed face to face, whilst the majority were interviewed over the phone. A small number of participants who agreed to be involved in the research were unavailable at the time organised with the researcher and have therefore not been included in this study.

In trying to make contact with some students, their phones were either found to be disconnected indicating that they had moved or alternatively it was found that they had relocated outside of the region. The high instance of transiency in the region is here noted and; related to a constant and sizeable transient population frequently seeking employment opportunities outside of the Far North region. With few employment opportunities across the wider region, this has been an on-going trend across numerous decades.

A total of twenty one students and three tutor interviews were conducted after over 50 learners were approached to participate in the research. Up to 5 people from 4 programmes were interviewed with one additional interview being undertaken. This represents a sample of 25% for each course.

The research has also included other sources of data where appropriate and relevant to further illustrate specific themes that have emerged within the study.

Findings

This writing has been drawn from participant interviews where consistent themes have resulted in the following findings.

Reason for Study

In asking participants what were their initial reasons for undertaking study with Kiwidotcom, the primary reasons given were to:

- upskill
- up skill to improve their employment opportunities
- gain the skills to set up their own business
- improve skills in operating an existing business

Other significant comment made by participants in regard to their reasons for taking on their programme of study included increasing their knowledge and information around investments and also to improve their skills in managing and tracking their money.

Being able to attend night classes after work was an attraction for those working to engage in study. One mature participant attended his programme of study to gain further learning but noted his particular interest in the study was to stimulate his thinking. In addition learners were keen to take advantage of learning to support businesses or initiatives that they were engaged in without previously having had any kind of formal qualification.

Enrolment

The enrolment processes at Kiwidotcom were viewed positively by learners and the ease of completing this necessary requirement was highlighted by participants.

*...they helped me through the application...*⁶

One factor relating to commencement of study however concerns a change in course start dates which for at least two participants impacted on their ability to attend classes.

Are students adequately prepared?

Although the majority of participants expressed that they were adequately prepared for study from their perspective, with sufficient skills or prior learning in place with which to undertake their programme of study. A deeper analysis of learner surveys indicated however that students had underestimated the:

1. commitment required of consistent study
2. comprehensive nature or quality of writing required for assignments
3. hours needed for study outside of the class/tutorials
4. support they would need at home

In addition many were unaware of how to 'plan to study'.

*I think I might have put a little bit extra on my plate that I couldn't handle, I've got six kids so...*⁷

*The ones that didn't complete...it's the family situations, like the babysitters, the workload...*⁸

It is noted that for students with young children, unless they have added support from whānau or friends they will experience at times, difficulties in regular attendance and also in finding time to

⁶ Student, interview 15, non-completion

⁷ Student, interview 11, non-completion

⁸ Tutor, interview 2

fulfil the requirements of the coursework. In saying this, responsibilities to family are not the only circumstance related to student non completion, as outlined in the following participant interview.

*It was a challenge, I hadn't been in a classroom situation for some time and the first night I felt whoa, it was full on...but he was very good at taking us through it step by step, so as long as we kept up there was no problem of getting too far behind, but it was a little bit daunting at times...*⁹

This participant describes a sense of anxiousness in terms of her ability to engage with study and while she also expresses that the tutor has made the effort to walk her through the programme she nevertheless relays a sense of being at times, overwhelmed. Tutor comment made in regard to student anxiety around their learning is reflected in the following comment,

*I understand that some of the topics we've been talking about are quite frightening, not only to that person but to everybody in the class, so I hope to reflect back to that person that what they're feeling is that they're not the only one...*¹⁰

The same tutor also makes the following observation,

... people that work in office jobs and that type of work are a lot more comfortable at doing the assessments than people that are doing the manual labour type jobs or the physical labour type jobs like the shop assistants or the retail assistants find it more difficult than the ones who are in a job doing paperwork as their day to day job. The ones that do office-type work or that type of environment are handing in the assessments and doing the work and the ones in more physical type work, they're the ones that are struggling.

The point made by the tutor highlights how students who do not have written tasks involved in their day to day work are more likely to experience difficulties in completing their assessments.

Some participants responded to the question of whether they felt adequately prepared to take on the study by relating to how well their tutors had inducted or coached them in their study where comments in regard to the tutors were consistently positive,

*Well basically all the support was there...*¹¹

Participants repeatedly acknowledged the various support offered by their tutors,

*..Everything was there, if you got stuck at any point all you had to do was email [tutor's name] or [tutor's name], they'd go through it with you or make the time to sit down with you, the support was there, there's no doubt about that...*¹²

Positive comment was also made by students who were either early withdrawals or students who did not complete,

⁹Student, interview 7, non-completion

¹⁰Tutor, Interview 2

¹¹Student, interview 16, completed

¹²Student, interview 5, completed

*... the presentation, the orientation was brilliant, the kaiako were really good, they actually explain things to a level that you really understand...*¹³

Even students who did not complete their study made clear statements indicating the potential of the programme:

*It was very thorough, I think if I could have got to the end of it, I think it would really place a person in a good space to run a fledgling business to be in business to begin with...it made you look outside the box in many areas.*¹⁴

All participants interviewed felt there was good support in place through a variety of systems including catch up classes and one on one tutor support. Good communication and the accessibility of tutors through phone, txt and email were also seen as good support mechanisms. The flexibility of tutors to meet with students at a time convenient to both parties was also considered as important by participants interviewed in this research.

*...the help I always received from the tutor, she's always flexible, willing to go the extra mile and always help us whenever we needed really. She made the course easier to understand, it made it easier for me who had been out of study for so long, to complete the course and want to go and do it...*¹⁵

As evidenced, reasons for early withdrawal or non-completions were more likely to do with either a change in personal circumstances, family responsibilities or crisis, in other words non-institutional circumstances. (Zepke N, et al., 2005).

Another tutor also made reference in regard to the programmes/tutors needing to be flexible and innovative in developing approaches that keep students engaged with their study,

*...always changing, always implementing new ways constantly to make it better for the students...*¹⁶

The need to constantly re-evaluate programme content and delivery is further discussed by the same tutor,

*...[need to]revisit the actual programme, the workload at the beginning of the programme, where you lose them, most of them...maybe doing a bit more to simplify some areas...give people more time at the beginning...to get through their assessment...*¹⁷

The main point made by the tutor here is specific to what she considers as a relatively heavy workload at the beginning of the programme which is again identified by the tutor through her observations as impacting on where students start to drop off. While it would appear that the tutor adapts the programme in ways that make it manageable for her students, in light of this being an identified area for withdrawals, her suggestion of review is pertinent. If the programme is

¹³Student, interview 10, early withdrawal

¹⁴ Student, interview 7, early withdrawal

¹⁵ Student, interview 14, completed

¹⁶Tutor, interview 3

¹⁷ ibid

not manageable in the early stages and is the cause of early withdrawals or leads eventually to increased numbers of non-completion the programme should have the flexibility to adapt through its delivery.

Those students indicating that they were not adequately prepared for their programme of study were usually more strongly focussed on other activities such as seeking employment where a course was seen as 'filling in' or something they had been directed to do through Work and Income.

*I probably wasn't (prepared), cos I was probably looking for work more than doing the course...*¹⁸

With the high rate of unemployment in the mid and Far North region coupled with the scarcity of employment opportunities, the reality of the Northland region is reflected in this frank response. Several participants that either withdrew or did not complete the programme did so in taking on an offer of employment. For people living in the North, the opportunities for consistent employment and quality jobs are rare.

Though participants of this research gave positive feedback about their tutors and their programme of study, it is further noted that other forms of study support were not named or indicated in their feedback although they were asked what extra support they might require.

This includes:

- Study Link
- study and student support services
- peer support or mentoring
- counselling

Importantly, it would seem that students do not know what they do not know' and are unaware that services are available to help with study needs. Indeed until very recently this kind of study support has been unavailable in the Far North and it remains limited at this time. It would seem that students may not recognise that there are multiple aspects of study support. While students are comfortable in using more simplistic levels of support e.g. phone, website, or teacher led tutorials, none took the opportunity to engage with student support personnel. In the minds of learners 'study support' would appear to be more strongly linked with course content, rather than the provision of problem solving or exploring options related to the more personal nature of the issues that they face as students. This particular thinking is further compounded by the fact that student support services have been until very recently based in Whangarei which is a two hour drive from Kaitia. Although student support services are accessible to students requiring additional help, their lack of visibility at a local level need be considered as a factor in ascertaining as to whether students are fully aware of this provision of service. Although there is also local student support through Far North REAP, specific to general study skills, this type of help needs to be front-loaded at the beginning of student's programmes of study. It is however student support

¹⁸ Student, interview 15, non-completion

services funded by the actual programme provider that is likely to involve a wider more comprehensive range of support.

The need to recognise the difference for rural students in accessing student support services in comparison to those students located in urban settings is of further note. For students living in rural outlying areas, issues specific to isolation, lack of transport, limited income and in some circumstances no electricity can be seen as further barriers to learning and therefore to retention and completion of study. This is identified as another area for research.

What supported students to complete?

Learners highlighted six key elements during interviews as 'good practice' which tutors had engaged in, in supporting learners to complete. They are:

1. The extent of the tutor support
2. Flexibility of the tutor (catch up tutorials, individual help etc)
3. Tutors ability to focus learners to the task and expectations that learners will succeed
4. The identification of a final goal which would be reached through the undertaking of study
5. Quality of planning
6. Quality and availability of course resources

Clearly, participants saw the completion of study as enabling or a way of establishing their own business/s. According to one tutor,¹⁹ student completion in her view is related to having an end goal. Another remark made by the same tutor also highlighted the following,

...if you've actually got a business going you've got a real reason[to complete], but if you're thinking of starting a business or you're there to learn how to write a business plan, less of a reason [to complete].²⁰

A second tutor also provides further discussion in talking about what she understood as contributing to students completing their study,

Their desire for the information, the ones that have completed are quite dedicated from the beginning. 60% of the class were mostly on track all the time and kept up and they were just keen to learn and once we actually got towards the end it was the actual success, that you have actually achieved something...²¹

Signalled from the interviews undertaken with students and tutors, it would seem that students that had a clear end goal, good writing skills or an existing business would be the students most likely to complete their study. The success is however consistently emphasised by participants in this study as related to tutor support,

¹⁹ Tutor, Interview 3

²⁰ ibid

²¹ Tutor, Interview, 3

*....[tutor's name] is like the best tutor I've ever had, so she's got [an]A-class tutorial, you can't beat having tutors like that, she was the biggest one[support], but the programme was good itself, well resourced...*²²

This previous excerpt is taken from an interview with a participant that had completed two programmes with the same tutor and runs his own small business. He adds to discussion in terms of his more recent programme of study by saying,

*I think it was a well laid out plan, a really well run course ...works in with peoples lifestyles too, being night classes makes it much easier for people that are working or got kids... for a lot of people doing night classes is a big bonus...catch-ups is the other thing...I've heard other tutors (Kiwidotcom) are the same as well (offer catch up classes). I think the plans[study], wouldn't run as smoothly if the planning wasn't sorted out, I haven't got any faults with it at all.*²³

While participants commented on the quality of the overall planning of the programmes, tutor support is referred to consistently, where tutors flexibility around providing tutorial support was frequently referred to.

*[tutor's name]was really handy on either email, txt or telephoning her, she provided us weekend classes if we needed to catch up...she was always available on email so it made it really easy if we didn't understand questions in our module we could go back to her during the week before our next module and just say hey I need a minute can you clarify the question on blah, blah, blah.... she was really handy on either email, txt or telephoning her, she provided us weekend classes if we needed to catch up...she was always available on email so it made it really easy if we didn't understand questions in our module we could go back to her during the week before our next module and just say hey I need a minute can you clarify the question on blah, blah, blah....*²⁴

Similar feedback about tutor support is given by another participant who the youngest participant in this study,

*It was mainly [tutor's name], he really motivated me and he really made me stick to the tasks that I was doing like not going off track and keeping me to the work I was doing at the time.*²⁵

While this student spoke about being motivated by his tutor, he also comments about his own determination to finish his programme of study. Similarly this students' tutor makes reference to the level of expectation in regard to his learners.

*I've always been taught and always believe that better to aim high and then come off that line than to start low and then fight to go up...*²⁶

The participant further talked about the expectation by his grandparents that he finish his programme of study. It would seem that this participant had internalised his own expectation of himself to achieve in his study and that this particular thinking was also reinforced by his

²² Student, Interview 4, completed

²³ ibid

²⁴ Student, Interview 6, completed

²⁵ Student, Interview 8, completed

²⁶ Tutor, Interview 3

grandparents. It is somewhat notable that between the tutor, the student and his family there was a general high expectation that he work towards achieving completion.

Retention Strategies

The key strategies used by tutors in retaining their learners can be defined as:

1. Developing a strong rapport and continual dialogue with learners
2. Using strategies and activities which both build and enhance learners confidence daily
3. Ignoring resentment, identifying interest or need and incorporating these elements into the programme with a view to initiating attitudinal change
4. Engaging in interview processes to understand learner attitude, aims, capabilities
5. Facilitating ways of setting goals which are meaningful to the learner and finding context to meet those goals within their programme of study
6. Investing time beyond the classroom with additional tutorials arranged either for groups or one to one sessions

A UK study highlighted the links between retention and learner centred teaching strategies. Yorke & Thomas, 2003, Zepke, N. et al., 2005 stated that tutors who embraced a flexible learning approach and who created environments where learners felt comfortable experienced greater success in their classes.

..[I] try and keep an eye on everybody, try and have a bit of an individual conversation with people and it's just really a question of how open they are going to be on their side...

The need for both tutors and students to be open to discussion has the potential to improve retention and completion rates, though for students to do so does require a certain confidence and attitude to learning that cannot be assumed. A lack of confidence and feelings of inadequacy and shame can be the undoing of many students. In making extra efforts to reassure her students the same tutor says the following,

I've tried to put in more time, just to get them through that scary bit...its more about their confidence than their ability to do the work...

As illustrated by the tutor, lack of confidence rather than ability is common.

In relaying her own strategies to improve student retention and completion rates another tutor says,

...One of the main ones[approach] is letting people go at their own speed and letting the fast ones move forward and catching the slow ones and working one on one with them, and giving them some really good systems and ways to get things done faster and not spend too much time in getting bogged down...

In working constantly to keep her students engaged by adapting the workload to make it manageable, the tutor comments further as to some of the strategies she employs within her teaching,

...moved faster through the work book but give them more time to do their thinking and they're discussing and all of that and actually getting things written... so rather than read their workbook in class it's better to actually work on their business idea in class and then go and do their reading at home....so just swap things around a little bit, try everything, that doesn't work, try something else...

While the tutor discusses the need to consistently adapt so as to make the learning achievable for her students, it is further an approach that encourages students to discuss and work on assessments in class. This in turn allows students to feel a sense of achievement in that they are getting through their work load. One student comments of this particular approach to learning,

In asking the tutor involved with the programme that has a substantial number of young students enrolled what approaches he had tried to improve retention and completion rates, his initial response was that he had 'drawn a line in the sand' emphasising that students meet the expectations of the programme. This particular programme is somewhat different from the others delivered by Kiwidotcom in that there has historically been a high instance of referrals from WINZ. Though WINZ referrals are also made to some of the other programmes, the majority of students have chosen their programmes of study for their own reasons. The tutor concerned expressed some frustration in terms of younger students not having the maturity to fully engage in their programme of study.

I recognise that it's the younger youth arena that need to be built up that I at times find very hard to actually cope with, because of the fact that they are too young for their age even though they may be of the right age, like 18+ but they still have the mentality of a very young, young 18, experiencing quite a full life at a very young age and so emotion comes into play, how to actually ...engage in a discussion without it actually turning into an argument, which can then escalate into quite verbal aggression on their part...²⁷

Though maturity is stated as a factor for young students involved in this programme, where students have been referred from Work and Income, aggression or resentment can be an added consequence; this is indeed a challenging situation for tutors who have to deal with the fall-out.

...from their previous experience of learning what they see learning as is just being able to retain their benefit or some form of income, that's what I've seen in my experience through all of the people that come through in the last 3 years that I've been involved...²⁸

Though the above comment is not only related to younger students, situations as such are made more complicated where emphasis has concentrated on filling courses rather than filling courses with students that specifically choose their programme of study.

²⁷ Tutor, Interview 1

²⁸ *ibid*

*...previously it use to be about bums on seats, now it's a bit more about quality retention and making sure you get quality outcomes...*²⁹

Though this comment applies to recent times and a particular thinking within our tertiary culture, it highlights how governments and accordingly government agencies have forced unemployment beneficiaries into programmes of study³⁰ that are not of their choice resulting in precarious outcomes.

*Most of the people on the First Steps don't have any reason to be there, other than someone [WINZ] told them that they should, they might not even want to be there. Certificate in Small Business Management more likely want to be there, so it's quite different.*³¹

Outlined in this excerpt is the difference between being forcibly made to enrol in study and choosing your programme of study. This has been a dilemma for education providers and their tutors in terms of attracting committed students, where in some instances rigorous measures have been taken,

*...there has been an extreme point where I make sure that I get a quality student...*³²

In this situation the tutor took the approach where he interviewed potential students, taking on only those who were genuinely interested in the programme of study and declining those who were not. In being asked as to what could be done differently to further improve retention outcomes the same tutor replied,

*The biggest thing is a closer working relationship with other providers, the providers of the clients which is WINZ, working together with them, a more holistic approach, more cooperation and collation of information so that we get a better outcome.....*³³

The tutors comment highlights the need to work in a cohesive way where the outcomes for government, agencies, providers and client/students need be not only meaningful but purposeful.

Issues for withdrawal and non-completion

Participants interviewed who were either early withdrawals or students that did not complete their programme of study gave a range of reasons for disengagement. They are:

1. Needing to gain employment to improve their financial situation
2. Family crises
3. Over-committing or under-planning
4. Missing classes/a perception of being unable to 'catch-up' but not making contact with the tutor

²⁹ ibid

³⁰ Student, Interview 19, completed

³¹ Tutor, Interview 3

³² Tutor, Interview 1

³³ ibid

5. Timing with regard to other aspects of learners lives – home/work/other family and commitments
6. Timing of Semesters – lower completions for programmes running across Semester B which takes in the Christmas and New Year breaks

All participants gave genuine reasons for the early withdrawal or non-completion of their study. Participants also had a fairly diverse range of reasons regarding personal or situational circumstances that prevented them from continuing with their study.

*...didn't complete for personal reasons, my husband went into full time study; we needed to pay the mortgage, so I went to work...*³⁴

Faced with the possibility of losing her family home or re-prioritising her time and accordingly her commitments, this particular participant was very clear on where her options lay, taking up employment. In various aspects, timing is a factor in this instance, personal circumstances dictated certain action. If the personal circumstance has a high impact on the student, their ability to complete is compromised.

For some participant's family responsibilities or crisis also impacted on their programme of study, situations as such cannot necessarily be for-seen and can have serious repercussions for students who struggle to maintain their studies if their family needs are not sorted or while in a crisis situation.

*If I had my home life more sorted...*³⁵

*....heaps of family drama, couldn't concentrate, got too far behind...*³⁶

Similarly another participant shares her experience in regard to non-completion,

*...for myself the issue of not finishing was a time factor and my own situation, it was being by myself with the kids and working full time and doing that as well[study] and it did impact quite a bit on it...but that was because of my circumstances not because of the course...*³⁷

The following remark further highlights the pressure of coping with study, on top of the responsibility of having a job and also in meeting the needs of a family as a sole parent/caregiver.

*I just started falling behind and there was a couple of times when I couldn't make it and then because I was behind on one and then missing two of them I just thought it was just too impossible trying to catch up...*³⁸

In this instance this participant expresses being overwhelmed by falling behind with her study workload; as exemplified in the previous excerpt increasing pressure to fulfil her study and her responsibilities to both employment and her family resulted in non-completion. Through

³⁴ Student interview 1, non-completion

³⁵ Student interview 2, early withdrawal

³⁶ ibid

³⁷ Student, Interview 14, non-completion

³⁸ ibid

scenarios that show students facing extreme pressure or family crisis, a specific concern arises, 'Do students fully realise the role of study support as being a critical aspect of their programme of study and therefore of achieving their study goals?' If students were more actively engaged with their tutors or programme providers, and are able to problem-solve issues impacting on their study by discussing their circumstances and negotiating their workloads with their tutor/provider or study support person, these are all potential aspects that could improve student retention and completion. This is signalled as a further area of research.

Although only two students withdrew because of a mismatch between expectation and content, the following comment provides an illustration of their perception.

*...in the first class I just felt the stuff we were going through was stuff I already knew...and like my husband wanted me to go with him...but then once we went to the class we discussed it and I just felt that...not that I knew it all but I felt that I didn't need to go over that...*³⁹

This participant indicates how her early withdrawal from the programme was due to not wanting to re-learn familiar content, notably her husband did complete the programme. It is of further significance however that while he did find the programme of value that he had been given a choice of either enrolling in the programme or losing his benefit.⁴⁰

A second participant, who did not complete his programme of study, stated that his priorities for learning had changed since starting the programme,

*...Different interests, I decided to do something else...went on to join the ATC course and currently enrolled for the army....I felt I needed to do something more immediate and I was more interested in the army, it had better options for what I wanted to do...and I went and did army training...*⁴¹

Whether this participant enrolled with Kiwidotcom to retain a WINZ benefit or not is not apparent in his interview. The previous two interview excerpts signal another potential area of research in terms of identifying whether course enrolments are related specifically to being directed to enrol in a programme of study to retain a benefit and what are the implications this scenario has on retention and completion rates.

Other Issues

Timing would seem to be a major factor as to whether participants are able to embark on a programme of study to completion. Timing is not only relevant in terms of programme start dates, but is also relevant in terms of where the students personal circumstances are at, in which health issues, family commitments and crisis also impact on student's ability to continue with study.

³⁹ Student, Interview 18, early withdrawal

⁴⁰ Student, Interview 19, completed

⁴¹ Student, Interview 9 – non completion

The changing of start dates for programmes is therefore identified in this research as a factor related to early withdrawal for at least two of the four participants who were early withdrawals. Though this is a small sample of participants, it is nevertheless indicative that a change of dates can impact on whether participants are able to continue with study as exemplified in the following participant interviews,

*It was a little bit awkward when it was initially advertised, it was going to be starting and it didn't start till several months down the track which eventually made it awkward for me to continue, I think it would have been perfect if I was able to start when it was first advertised but I think they were waiting on a certain amount of numbers before they could actually start it and by the time it did start it was just a bit too late in the season and things just got too busy, I ended up getting another job actually so time wise it didn't go as it was meant to...*⁴²

A second participant who was also an early withdrawal describes her dilemma in the change of dates that resulted in her withdrawal from the programme,

*... At the beginning I believed I could[handle the study] until the days changed, because one of the contracts I had was on days I needed to come into class, so that was when I had to move away from the programme...*⁴³

Though only two participants were unable to continue in their intended programme of study due to the change of start dates, this is nevertheless significant in that 2 out of 4 early withdrawals were a result of changing the programme start dates.

A further issue identified by the organisation itself, is the timing of the Semesters. Semester B intakes begin in August/September and continue across the Christmas and New Year break.⁴⁴ Withdrawals for those programmes are significantly higher than the programmes that begin and complete in the same year. In addition, with the introduction of a shorter programme at the end of last year, (2009), there is some evidence to suggest that this may also impact on the number of learners completing. E.g. a 20 week programme has a 70% completion rate compared to a 24 or 36 week programme at 50%/60% completion. Since tutor evaluations for these programmes give equal merit to the tutor and their abilities, the tutor is not considered to be a factor in this. Discussions with learners involved across all three programmes, suggest that added commitment for longer duration programmes also contributes to non-completion, though not as heavily as continuing study through a significant holiday break.

Further comment

Most students who were early withdrawals or students that did not complete expressed a sense of regret and disappointment in regard to not completing their programme of study. None of the participants interviewed attributed their withdrawal or non-completion as related to the provision

⁴² Student, Interview 7, early withdrawal

⁴³ Student, Interview 10, early withdrawal

⁴⁴ Kiwidotcom course statistics

of the course as demonstrated in the following excerpts where the change in participant's personal circumstances is clearly outlined.

*...I'm kind of disappointed that I never did finish when I should have, it was just situational...*⁴⁵

*..Time commitment and getting a job just meant that I was going to get too far behind and by getting behind it was not going to be enjoyable, it was putting too much pressure on life. I had full time employment, plus trying to keep the family, plus keeping our farm going...*⁴⁶

Participant's also voiced their aspirations to take up their programme of study at some other time,

*...overall the course is great, I would have loved to finish it actually, I still would love to finish it....I still know that I really need to go on this course...I need to actually make a commitment to a course to sort of make it easier for me in the long-run...*⁴⁷

These comments highlight that even for those participants that did not complete their programme of study that they nevertheless saw the value and potential of the programmes.

Another area to be considered in relation to this study is specific to the timing or follow-through between one programme and the next. Comment made by one participant though not directly related to retention or completion is nevertheless another area to be factored in terms of the planning and funding of programme delivery,

*It's a pity that it's not easier to follow through from one course to the next, the availability of the courses really, because up here in Kaitia if you don't have enough people attend the courses, they sort of can't follow through with them... I wanted to do the next level but again with like waiting to see if we have the numbers, that's the downside of it, if you don't have the numbers it's not so easy to follow through...the courses aren't always available when you are kind of thing...*⁴⁸

The issue raised by this participant is that students wanting to continue with the next level of study are frequently faced with no option of study at the time they are at a point of readiness. While the participant spoke about not having enough numbers to warrant a new programme, this is not necessarily the case since Kiwidotcom have been turning away potential students because there is no allocation of new programmes for Semester B 2010. In addition, those students who do not complete are kept on file and contacted as new intakes are confirmed to give another opportunity for further study.

Summary and Key Themes

As this research has set out to establish what factors are involved for students regarding early withdrawal or non-completion, there are a number of key themes that have been drawn from participant interviews. Key themes identified from this research highlight the following thinking:

⁴⁵ Student, Interview 1, non-completion

⁴⁶ Student, Interview 7

⁴⁷ Student, Interview 10

⁴⁸ Student, Interview 12, completed

- Assumptions are made regarding adults students as independent learners based on current practise
- Student support is not recognised as being integral to study so its value is therefore underestimated and underutilised
- Learners fall at the first hurdle since their perception is that they must 'achieve on their own'
- The perception by learners that once classes are missed, they will not be able to catch up
- New learners or second chance learners are under skilled in their ability to plan their study
- Literacy and numeracy levels are lower than the national average and learners are hesitant to acknowledge the difficulties that this leads to in study
- Delaying programme start to fulfil 'numbers' requirements was detrimental to enrolment with some learners withdrawing
- Non-completions were higher in the second semester intakes for TWoA programmes as they continued across semesters and the Christmas/New Year breaks
- Communication strategies between providers are not comprehensive enough
- There are differing realities and issues between urban and rural learners e.g. Kaitia (urban), Te Kao (rural)

As stated in the 'Executive Summary', there is a general assumption that students are 'independent learners'. Assumptions as such are potentially problematic in that many of the students that enrol in programmes with Kiwidotcom are frequently students who have not achieved qualifications within compulsory education settings. This raises specific concern in terms of some of the expectations on students who may have both limited skills in terms of study, as well as possible negative experiences in their previous learning. For students who did not achieve any form of qualification at secondary school, negative experience is here implied.

It is further suggested that on starting their programme of study that students have direct access to study support personnel. Of further importance is that study support staff are able to fully outline the extent of their assistance, so that students are aware of what support they can access prior to needing it, with a full understanding of its positive impacts. This is crucial in terms of students having better forms of coping mechanisms when faced with particular situations whether they are related to either their performance as students or personal circumstances. The need for students to recognise and understand that study skills are important to achieving their study goals is of further significance to improving student retention and completion rates. The need that students are proactive in seeking to problem-solve issues they face in completing their studies is also relative to this study. Another area highlighted is that not all students engaged in programmes of study undertake writing tasks as a common aspect within their working roles or daily lives; and therefore struggle to complete their coursework. Potentially workshops or programmes that assist students to improve their writing skills may reduce this kind of occurrence. It is further noted that the change of start dates or days, whilst not figuring extensively in the study, is a factor that contributes to early withdrawals, since some students are then unable to begin their chosen programme.

It is also noted that an improvement in relationships between providers could improve retention and completion rates. Improvement as such would see a more connected approach between tertiary institutions, private training enterprises and government departments.

Changes Undertaken as a Result of this Research

It was always important to the organisation to be able to use the results of this research to affect change and address the retention issues it saw affecting the quality of learning and outcomes for its students. In addition it was envisaged that the findings would also be of use to other providers operating in similar environments so that they could use the learning for their own improvements.

As a result of the findings in the report, the organisation is developing action plans which include the following:

1. ⁴⁹Holding study technique/writing workshops post enrolment but prior to programme start for first time enrolments to build assessment and assignment skills and to identify and discuss strategies to resolve literacy and numeracy issues
2. Orient learners to the availability and importance of study support services (coordinate with Far North REAP who hold a tertiary support contract), so that learners are aware of the importance of planning study and seeking student support services in order to maintain their momentum and resolve issues
3. Improving the 'follow-up' time by contacting learners who do not attend class immediately
4. Developing better communication strategies with agencies such as Work and Income who support learners to study, so that a collaborative approach can be taken in ensuring regular attendance
5. ⁵⁰Ensuring a more complete and serious understanding of the responsibilities and work-load of study at enrolment interviews
6. Advocate for set start dates without change
7. Where possible, study should be completed within the calendar year and not carried across Semesters (this is common with TWoA programmes)
8. Policies and action plans which are well researched, and effectively respond to learner issues is a necessity for successful and sustainable retention and completion strategies which result in ensuring quality experiences and outcomes for learners as well as for providers and funders

By identifying these specific steps, Kiwidotcom will be able to further improve the experiences of its learners and contribute towards the following four key concepts.⁵¹

1. *Create an institutional culture that is learner centred*

⁴⁹Ross, C. 2010

⁵⁰Ross, C. 2010

⁵¹Zepke, N., et al., 2005

Teaching and student support are servants to learning, so should meet the learning needs of diverse students. This requires flexibility in teaching, assessment, workloads, and administrative systems.

2. *Focus on fostering positive relationships between students and significant others in the Institution*

Relationships emerge as a key factor in determining success or failure; retention or early withdrawal. Positive relationships between students and their peers, institutional support staff and teachers, do have major effects.

3. *Nurture institutional support structures and services*

Even though support services are often under-used, for students at risk of leaving early they can be vital. The functions of various support services need to be understood by all staff within the institution, who must consider themselves as reference points to appropriate services.

4. *Operate an early-warning system*

If factors outside the institution's control are frequently responsible for students leaving early, then an early warning of imminent departure will minimise actual departure. Systematic reporting of absences, missed assignments, and sudden deterioration of grades to designated people within the institution are examples of early warning processes.

Other areas of research and further questions signalled as a result of this study

1. Valuing education and accepting it as 'the norm' – Perspectives of Education in Muriwhenua
2. What are the key barriers to retention and completion for youth-aged students?
3. Comparisons of achievement between students directed to study and those who study with freedom of choice
4. Finding successful employment as a result of successful study
5. What improvements are made by students in existing business as a result of completing this programme of study and how many go on to open businesses
6. What percentage of students who have both employment and family responsibilities complete their programme of study
7. What mechanisms can be employed to overcome barriers to completion for sole parents

Appendices

Kiwidotcom Ltd is an incorporated company formed in 2005 by 3 friends who live and work in the communities of the Far North and who had a desire to work together to impact positively within Far North communities. As a step towards achieving these goals they purchased a local PTE engaged in vocational training when it came up for sale in 2006.

⁵²Kiwidotcom specialises in knowledge development by providing access to services and opportunities which are not readily available in the Far North. This includes a range of services from strategic planning, financial management, research and evaluation to programmes of learning for iwi, small business and local organisations and individuals.

Kiwidotcom is situated in central Kaitaia in Te Hiku o te Ika, an historic town which services small isolated rural communities. Kiwidotcom occupies a purpose built, modern education facility employing 3 full-time administration and teaching staff and 4 contract tutors. Traditionally its main programme has been Up Skill (The National Certificate in Employment Skills), a foundation programme funded by TEC which leads students to further learning or employment. In recent years the selection of courses has been increased to provide pathways of learning rather than one-off courses. This includes business programmes from level 1 – 5 along with short courses in human resourcing, governance and management, marketing and computing. The organisation is also heavily involved in community research.

Kiwidotcom has experienced a rapid ‘growth spurt’ over the last 3 years and its student base has more than tripled in that time from its 55 learners in 2006. This has occurred as a result of the increase of access to programmes delivered either in partnership or in its own right and an increase in enrolments throughout the recession.

Success or completion rates for the organisation average 60%.

In 2009 it entered the regional ‘Tall Poppy’s awards sponsored by local energy trust, ‘Top Energy’ and the Far North District Council for which it received a silver award in the service division.

⁵² Kiwidotcom business profile

Rewiti

Factors contributing to early withdrawal

'Rewiti',⁵³ enrolled in a small business programme at Kiwidotcom with a view to gaining a general understanding of small business processes. Rewiti is involved in a non-profit group for which he holds a leadership role. Although he works as a volunteer for this group, he realised that he needed to improve his skill base, particularly in relation to marketing and managing finances. He completed the necessary enrolment forms and process and fully expected to join the course at its start. Rewiti did not attend the opening night of class and though he was contacted by the course coordinator, he did not attend the programme. It eventuated through the course of the research, that Rewiti was contacted as one of the students who did not complete his course of study. Despite his intentions, Rewiti was unable to co-ordinate study between his full-time employment and volunteer position. The volunteer position was significant in terms of the work-load he was intending to manage and although he recognised a need to obtain further skills, he was in the end, unable to reconcile a further work-load, (study), with the responsibilities he had already undertaken. Rewiti's view remains that study is a worthy pursuit to grow his knowledge of the specific things he needs to manage his volunteer role better, however he has been unable to marry that need with his current commitments.

Many people in the Far North are involved heavily in the volunteer or non-profit sector. Numbers in the volunteer sector have been dwindling however as economic pressures impact on families to 'improve their lot'. This has meant both parents undertaking employment and the traditional role of the 'bread winner' being divided between both mother and father. With more time pressures on families, parents are choosing to be less involved in the committees and groups that have traditionally been the social capital builders of communities. I.e. sporting, social and interest groups. This has increased the loads of those who do contribute and whilst there is an understanding of how 'just in time' learning and higher education can help to perform roles more effectively, they are not prioritised as such because of the immediate nature of the work that is being undertaken. Further, it is not considered that higher education is of 'the norm' for those hailing from the Far North with education from an early stage being under-prioritised. The benefits of higher education and higher education itself are seen as being 'out of reach' for many adult learners and this thinking is often broadened to include their children.

Understanding preparation and priority management required for study has not been fully understood by course participants in many cases at Kiwidotcom. Managing commitments effectively through better time and priority management processes has a positive impact on the learner and allows them to achieve their aspirations and improve their performance even in challenging situations. A number of action points have been identified to address this.⁵⁴

⁵³An alias

⁵⁴P32 of this report

‘Marama’⁵⁵ is a mother, an aunt and grandmother. She aspired to open a small business with which she could involve her family to better their circumstances. Although Marama held a trade certificate, she had not had any experience in managing or starting her own business. In addition literacy and numeracy levels for the whole whānau were moderately low which impacted on confidence levels. She felt that with the support of her children and niece, who also attended the UpSkill programme at Kiwidotcom, they would be able to improve their communication skills and it would give her and her whānau the best chance of success. Marama and her whānau were regular attendants at the course and found the work challenging but with their sights set on opening their own business, they were able to persevere with their studies. All of the whānau were beneficiaries and in general they were able to manage their family roles and study well as their tuition took place in evening classes.

During the course of study, Marama received a legal penalty which resulted in Home Detention, however by working with Corrections Services, arrangements were able to be made to allow her to continue to programme completion. ‘The Whānau, as they became known, were often called away as they embodied their sense of whānauntanga, driving and remaining in Auckland at times when their extended whānau called for support. This added to the time-frames of expected completion of the courses by almost 6 months, however within the course criteria there was enough flexibility to accommodate the needs of the family and their values. Immediately prior to finishing the programme The Whānau opened a small takeaway bar in a local hotel where they employed and rostered family members for the cooking and serving duties.

Marama was able to pinpoint her limitations and understood that in order to achieve her dream, she would need to seek support and address areas of vulnerability. She set about doing that through her whānau and by choosing a course of study and place of study with which she felt a degree of comfort. She also defined specific goals for herself and her whānau accordingly. With her Te Ao Māori world view, it was a natural assumption for her to make, that she would not succeed if she undertook to do this in isolation. She sought the comfort and support of her whānau believing that this was the best way forward not only for her, but equally so for her immediate whānau. By defining these critical factors of success, Kiwidotcom has formulated an action plan for the support of future learners.⁵⁶

The intricacies of Te Ao Māori and the responsibilities of whānau are less and less well catered for in ‘main-stream- study. Indeed, although Te Wananga o Aotearoa is recognised as a Māori provider, it has by necessity conformed to many of the habits and regulations of its funder which operates under a ‘main stream’ view. The two systems are fundamentally different with the framework under which they operate at odds with each other. The ‘culture’ of the frameworks are not compatible and as more structure and rigidity is introduced at lower levels of adult education, there will always be a section of society for whom this prohibits engagement or completion.

⁵⁵ibid

⁵⁶P32 of this report

'Rose'⁵⁷ was a mature woman who owned her own business in the centre of town. She had a son from a marriage which had previously failed. At times she experienced bouts of depression which she declared on her enrolment and was the basis for discussion at interview. Initially Rose was living on the east coast and commuting to town. She attended classes for a small business programme which was being run on the coast with one coinciding in Kaitaia. Struggling with the daily travel to work, she moved into town and transferred to the Kaitaia class. Rose had been in business for a number of years however she had no 'formal' business experience and she saw the course as a way of:

- Learning new information to enhance her business
- Meet a like-minded circle of people
- Keep her mind occupied and healthy

At approximately 2/3rds of the way through the programme, Rose began having issues with staffing at her work. The stress of this situation impacted on her health with her depression returning and she was unable to function to the same level that she had been previously. Rose attempted to continue with considerable support from the tutor and was able to complete 3 out of 4 modules, however, completing the programme in total was beyond her at that point and after some discussion she felt that an extension would also be out of the question for her.

The tutor maintained contact with Rose to ensure that she was seeking the appropriate health support and to keep communication open. Several months after the course completed during which the tutor maintained occasional contact, Rose visited the Kiwidotcom offices and advised that her health had improved. She was appreciative of the support she had received and wanted to express her thanks. Shortly after, Rose closed her business and relocated closer to her son.

Of those who were unable to complete or who intended to study but did not start, personal issues played a significant role in their decisions leading up to their non-completion. The Far North has a low socio-economic profile which also impacts on increased volumes of health related issues. Many families are either directly or indirectly affected by this which in turn has an impact on the success and completion of adult education programmes or other similar undertakings. In addition, once the 'study habit' is lost or has to be learned or re-learned, many learners choose not to re-engage with study because once having lost the momentum and motivation, they find it 'too difficult' to start again.

Interviews for enrolments are an important way of honestly assessing a learner's intentions or capabilities for study. At that time, learners are 'categorised' by their responses and accepted with confidence or declined through a lack of confidence in their ability. A learners history, whilst important needs to be taken in context as an indicator of the further support required both by the provider and also is an indicator for the learner that they should seek addition professional or medical support prior to beginning study to minimise potential health risks or relapses.

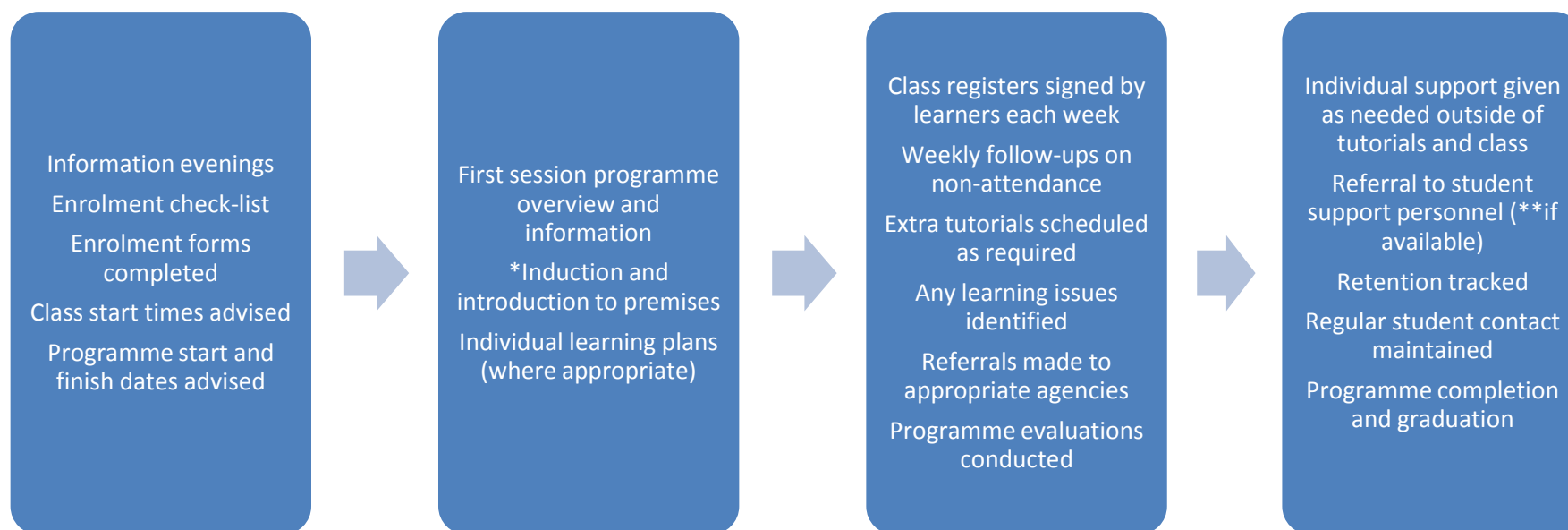
⁵⁷ An alias

The following flow-chart gives an overview of the pre and post-enrolment information and support used by Kiwidotcom.

*Induction includes:

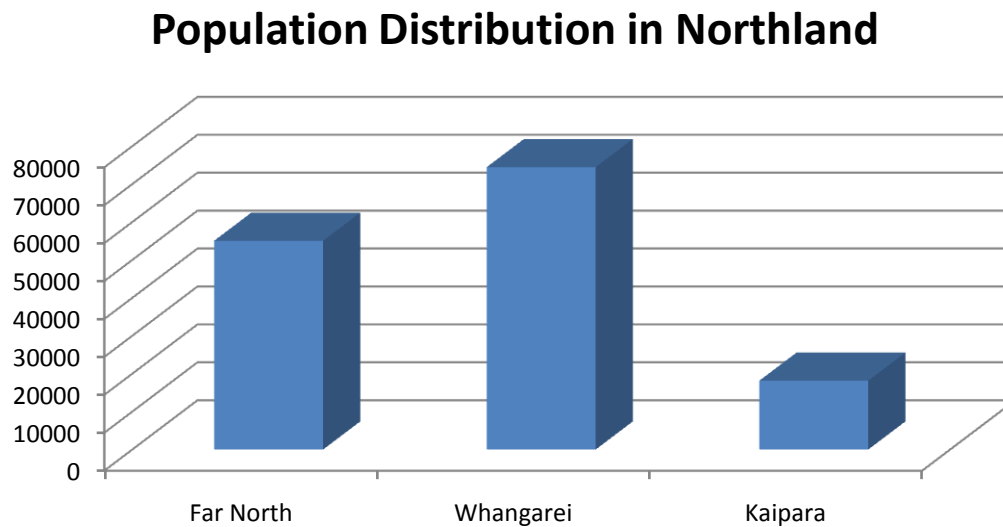
- overview of organisation (in case of Te Wananga, their induction programme is followed)
- overview of student support services and contact information
- introduction to resources and how they are used
- overview of programme/s content and structure, schedules, timeframes, assessment processes etc
- building orientation

**Student support services for partner programmes are provided by those organisations e.g. Te Wananga o Aotearoa, North Tec and; also through Far North REAP as a local community student support service to local learners.



⁵⁸Kiwidotcom QMS Manual

Figure 1.7



⁶⁰There are 3982 unemployment beneficiaries in Northland, the biggest proportion of whom are aged between 25 and 54. The unemployment rate sits at 9.3% in the year to June 2010, and increase from 7.8% in the year June 2009. Labour force participation is down to 62% from 64% in the year to June 2009.

The main industries of the region are:

- forestry
- agriculture
- horticulture
- tourism
- social and health Services
- education

The region has a large number of small businesses in the service industries related to these industries. Social and health services and the education sector are the biggest employment areas in the region at this time. Forestry, agriculture, horticulture and tourism are growth areas.

⁵⁹<http://www.farnorthnz.com/economic.php>

⁶⁰ Quarterly Labour Market Update June 2010

Income

The median income (half earn more/half earn less) for the Far North is \$19,200⁶¹ per annum. In comparison the median income for New Zealand is \$24,400 per annum. With the high rate of unemployment in the region, the median income is significantly less than the median income stated where income levels have experienced little growth over the last decade. With many living on such low incomes, housing and food are the main priorities for families on a day to day basis. Survival is the standard of living for many families in the region.

Local Population

44% of the population identify as Māori . The region consists of five local iwi, Te Rarawa, NgatiKahu, NgaiTakoto, Te Aupouri and NgatiKuri, with Ngapuhi located in the mid north region. The remaining part of the population has historically consisted of Pākehā, New Zealanders with a significant number of Dalmation-Yugoslav migrants establishing residency in the North during the period of gum-digging in the late 1800's. The region is more recently attracting a small number of Asian and Pacific Island migrants.

Though Te Hiku o Te Ika has been traditionally viewed as a stronghold of the Māori language; the decline of Māori language use as a first language since the period of the 1950's has impacted severely on current generations. Despite local initiatives and efforts to renew te reo Māori, the language remains at a critical stage of language endangerment. At this time few students that study with Kiwidotcom would have a high level of proficiency in te reo Māori, those that do would likely be in their early 20's (graduates of Kura Kaupapa Māori and Wharekura) or in the 60 plus age group (native speakers). There are however increasing numbers of second language speakers in the 25-60 year age brackets.

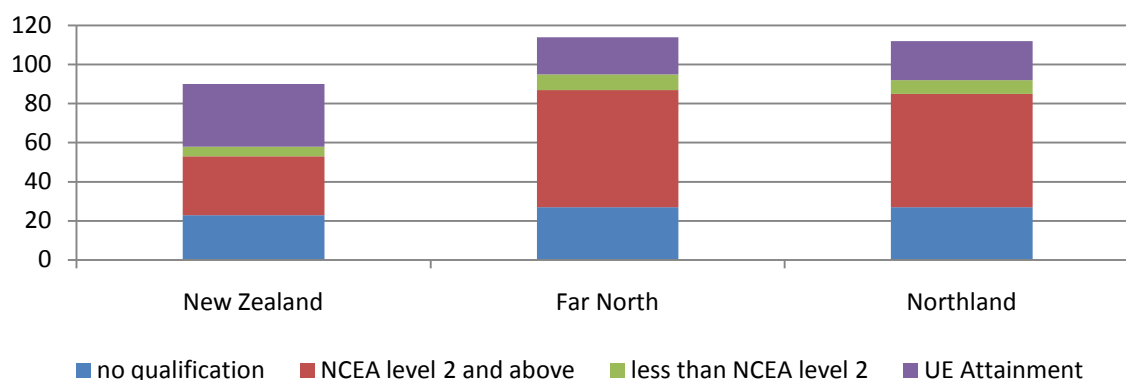
Te Tiriti o Waitangi - Settlements

After several decades of negotiations between local iwi and the Crown, it would appear that settlement of Treaty claims will eventuate in the not too distant future. The period of post-settlement will be a critical time for local iwi in terms of making quality decisions and prudent investment of assets and resources. Education and economic development are likely to be priority areas of investment.

⁶¹<http://www.farnorthnz.com/economic.php>

Figure 1.8

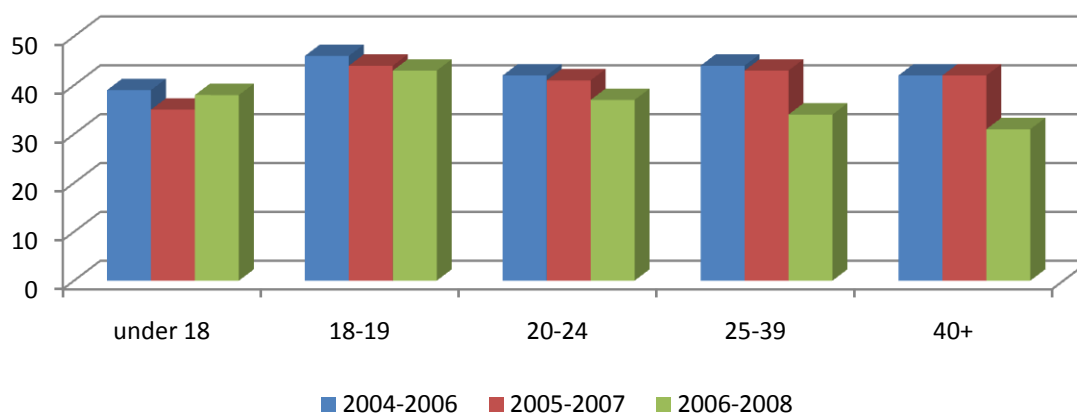
School Leaver Attainment Comparison 2006



62

Figure 1.9

3 Year Completion Rates of Students in Level 1-3 Certificates by Age Group



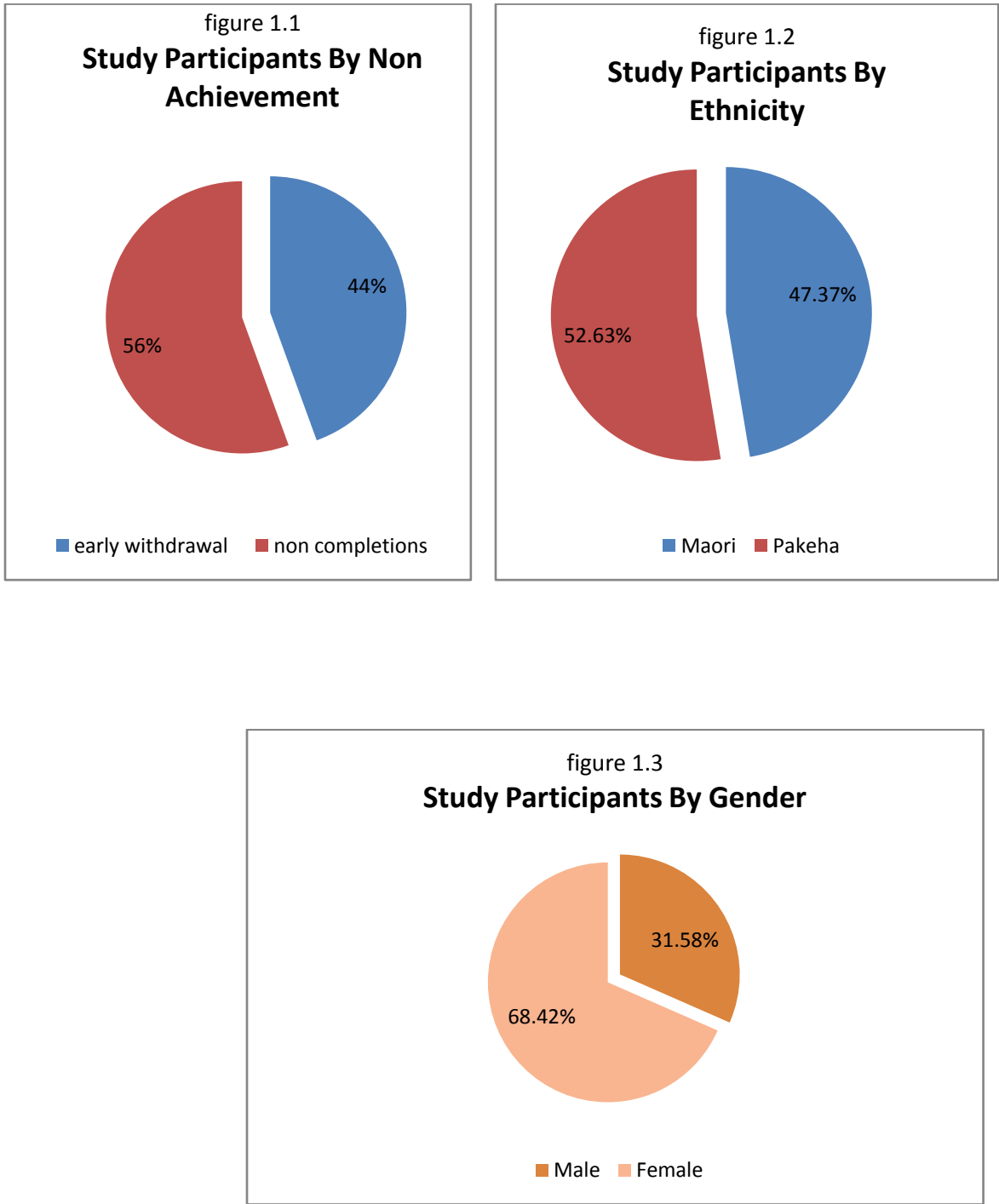
The proportion of students completing certificates within three years of starting study decreased from 44 percent (for those who started study in 2003) to 35 percent (for those who started study in 2006). (TEC Report)

Completion rates were highest for students who started study before they turned 20 years old. In 2008, the proportion of under 18 year olds completing a qualification within three years increased while for the other age groups it fell. (Gaps and Priorities, 2009)

⁶²Regional Statement of Tertiary Education Needs, Gaps and Priorities in Tai Tokerau (June 2009 Report)

School leavers with the equivalent of University Entrance qualifications are most likely to continue in education, however in areas with limited access to a range of tertiary education, it is these people that are most likely to leave Northland and not return.

Study Participants



All study participants were aged between 28 and 50 with the exception of one who was 19. This is representative of the age of the student population studying at Kiwidotcom overall.

Of the Māori male participants 50% achieved and completed their course of study whilst 50% did not achieve their certificates.

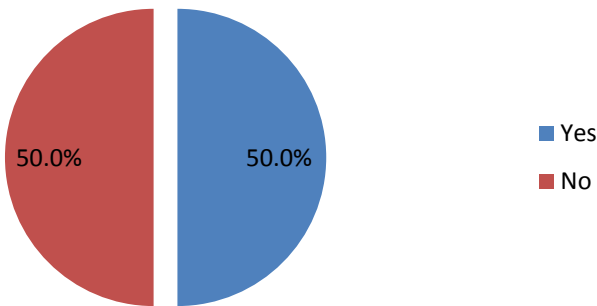
50% of Māori female participants achieved and completed their course of study whilst 30% failed to achieve and 20% failed to complete through early withdrawal (i.e. within the first 3 weeks of commencing study).

Pakeha males represented the smallest group of participants in the research however each participant of that group achieved and completed their study.

Just over half the pakeha female participants completed and achieved their study programmes with 30% not achieving and 10% as early withdrawals.

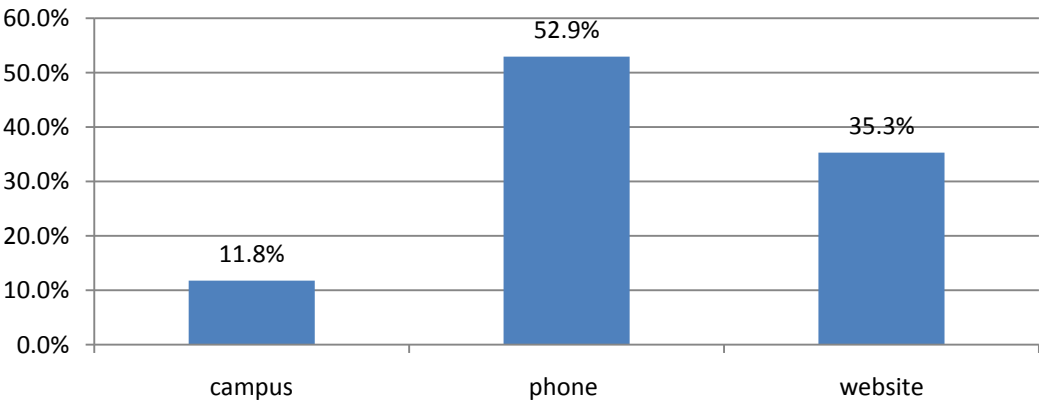
Percentage of learners who knew how to access student support services

figure 1.4



Support used by students outside of tutorials and classes

figure 1.5



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