



**Social Workers  
Registration Board**  
Kāhui Whakamana Tauwhiro

**Annual Education Providers  
Report 2021**

A high-level overview of the social work education programmes leading to SWRB-prescribed qualifications for the 2021 academic year

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# He ara pūkenga, he ara tauwhiro, hei whakamana mātā waka

*The many pathways of knowledge, the many pathways of social work,  
upholding the dignity of all*

## Introduction

This Annual Education Providers Report (the Report) summarises information provided to the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) by all social work education providers, who deliver SWRB-prescribed social work qualifications.

The Report presents demographic information about students enrolled in social work programmes in the 2021 academic year. It also gathers valuable information about student field education placements. The Report will be used as an evidence base to develop insights into trends and patterns relating to social work students and social work programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand. It will also be used to support the wider work the SWRB does as the Lead Agency for workforce planning for all social workers, particularly concerning entry into the profession.

The 2021 Report also includes information from education providers about changes the SWRB made to the Programme Recognition Standards (PRS) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

For the purposes of this Report, data was collected through a form completed by staff at each institution.

We would like to thank our Social Work educators for their participation in this survey, enabling us to compile this report.

## Headlines

- There has been an increase in student numbers in the 2021 academic year with a total of 3059 students enrolled (compared with 2899 in 2020).
- The percentage of students identifying as female has remained around 85% and male was still approximately 15%.
- The largest age groups for students were 24 or younger (around 32%) and 30-39 years old (around 25%). This trend was similar to last year's results.
- The proportion of students who identified as Māori or Pacific Peoples has remained consistent with last year's survey at around 27% and 20% respectively. However, the overall numbers have increased in line with the increase in total student numbers.
- The rate of students dropping out of social work courses between year one and four remains around 50% of students who started in their first year going on to enrol into year four courses.
- When compared to last year, the number of graduates decreased by 81 this year (465 in 2021 compared with 546 in 2020).
- There were slightly fewer students who completed placements this year than last year. This may be due to disruptions caused by COVID-19.

## Qualification overview

The SWRB prescribes qualifications for the Social Work General Scope of Practice. Prescribed social work qualifications recognised by the Board allow entry into the social work profession through two qualification routes: a four-year bachelor's degree and a two-year master's level qualification. Both degrees require students to complete 120 days of field education in the final two years of their study. Before being registered onto a social work programme, students must demonstrate academic and professional suitability.

## Total number of enrolled students

In the 2021 academic year there were 3059 learners enrolled in social work courses, this number is an increase of 160 from 2020 when there were 2899 students enrolled.

There was a significant drop in the number of students enrolling into social work courses between 2015 and 2018. This may have reflected changes made to social work degrees as they became four-year degree programmes, and changes to the student allowance entitlements. With the recent slow increase in numbers since 2018, future years' data will be of interest to see if this trend continues. Mandatory registration came into effect in 2021 which may influence the number of students enrolling.

*Figure 1. Number of enrolled students per year*

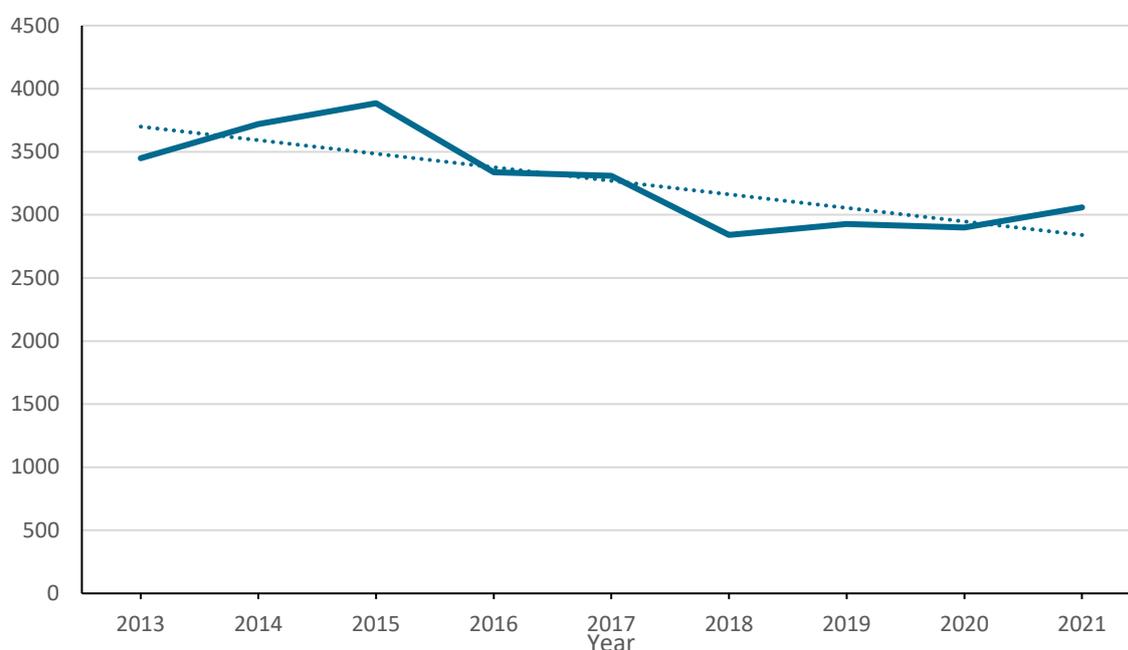


Table 1 below shows the change in student numbers by institution. Massey University had the largest number of students enrolled with 620 students.

In 2020 there were only four institutes that had increases to their roll size. In 2021, nine institutes had increases in their student numbers.

The institutes that had fewer students in 2021 than were enrolled in 2020 had minimal losses to their roll size. For example, Bethlehem Tertiary Institute had the largest percentage decrease in student numbers and their roll size only reduced by 12 students.

*Table 1. Number of students enrolled in each institution*

Institution	Enrolled Students 2020	Enrolled Students 2021	Percentage change in enrollment
Ara Institute of Canterbury	113	112	-1%
Bethlehem Tertiary Institute	57	45	-27%
Eastern Institute of Technology	99	93	-6%
Manukau Institute of Technology	219	260	16%
Massey University	575	620 <sup>1</sup>	7%
Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology	66	68	3%
NorthTec	84	87	3%
Open Polytechnic	165	158	-4%
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa	376	369	-2%
Te Wānanga o Raukawa	76	67	-13%
The University of Auckland	212	245	13%
Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology	44	75	41%
Unitec	185	200	8%
University of Canterbury	208	260	20%
University of Otago	133	124	-7%
University of Waikato	63	64	2%
Wintec	101	92	-10%
Whitireia	123	120	-3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,899</b>	<b>3,059</b>	

<sup>1</sup> The data for Massey University uses data provided to us by TEC due to possible inaccuracies.

## Number of part-time and full-time students and year level

In 2021 there was an increase of 126 full-time students enrolled into first year courses when compared to 2020 and the number of students studying part-time has also increased.

*Table 2. Number of part-time and full-time undergraduate students*

Year level	Full time 2020	Part time 2020	Full time 2021	Part Time 2021
Year 1	687	171	883	222
Year 2	484	94	507	126
Year 3	451	72	399	98
Year 4	417	55	395	106
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2039</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>2184</b>	<b>552</b>

*Table 3. Number of part-time and full-time postgraduate students*

Year level	Full time 2020	Part time 2020	Full time 2021	Part Time 2021
Postgraduate year 1	78	41	102	50
Postgraduate year 2	63	47	80	96
<b>Totals</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>146</b>

Of all students enrolled in 2021, the largest cohort was first-year students (around a third of all students) both full and part-time.

Reported statistics show a decrease in the number of students as courses progress.

The smallest proportion of enrolled students were those completing a Master's of Applied Social Work. The Applied Masters course was only available through four institutions: Massey University, University of Auckland, University of Canterbury, and the University of Otago. Postgraduate students made up 11% (328 students) of all enrolled students in the 2021 academic year. The proportion of students studying an Applied Master's course has increased since 2020 by around 30%.

In 2021, 18% of undergraduate social work students were studying part time. This figure represents nearly a 4% increase in the proportion of undergraduate students studying part time since 2020.

## Course completion and attrition rates between graduation and registration

Table 4 below displays an estimate of the number of students that have registered with the SWRB from each year group. The date used, is the year that a student was awarded their qualification, as recorded in our online database. This is only indicative data of the number of students registering each year and should be treated with some caution. However, it does suggest that not all students who gain an SWRB-recognised qualification are registering with the SWRB and are not therefore, entering the social work workforce.

*Table 4. Attrition rates between graduation and registration*

	2018	2019	2020	2021	Average over four years to nearest whole number
<b>Eligible Graduates</b>	396	521	546	465	482
<b>Number of graduates becoming registered</b>	364	445	431	381	405
<b>Attrition rate (graduates to registration)</b>	8%	14%	21%	18%	16%

Table 5 below displays the completion rates of social work students since 2010. This tracks the year a student started and plots it against the year that each student completed their degree and uses this data to calculate both a noncompletion and completion rate. It is useful to note that around half of the students who are enrolling in a social work degree are not completing.

The table also shows the length of time that students are taking to complete a degree. For example, some students who enrolled in year 2012 did not complete their degree till 8 years later in 2020. This is not altogether surprising as we know of many social work students who are supporting themselves through the course of their studies by working and studying on a part time basis.

Table 5. Student completion rates<sup>2</sup>

Enrolment year	Year complete												Not Complete	Total	Complete
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021			
2010	2%	24%	9%	9%	3%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	49%	100%	51%
2011	0%	17%	6%	20%	11%	6%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	36%	100%	64%
2012	0%	0%	1%	7%	25%	11%	7%	2%	2%	1%	1%	0%	44%	100%	56%
2013	0%	0%	0%	1%	7%	27%	16%	5%	3%	1%	1%	0%	39%	100%	61%
2014	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	9%	27%	12%	6%	2%	1%	1%	40%	100%	60%
2015	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	7%	29%	18%	4%	2%	1%	38%	100%	62%
2016	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%	9%	22%	7%	3%	53%	100%	47%
2017	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	4%	27%	10%	53%	100%	47%
2018	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%	3%	26%	65%	100%	35%
2019	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	7%	6%	85%	100%	15%
2020	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	6%	93%	100%	7%
2021	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	98%	100%	2%

<sup>2</sup> This data was provided to us by the Ministry of Health.

## Student demographics

### Gender of enrolled students

The gender breakdown of enrolled students has remained relatively stable between 2020 and 2021, with a slight increase in the number of males enrolled in a social work degree. The gender breakdown of students is consistent with that of registered social workers.

*Table 6. Gender identities of enrolled students*

Gender	Numbers in 2020	Percentage	Numbers in 2021	Percentage
Male	373	13%	452	15%
Female	2282	86%	2548	84%
Gender diverse	9	<1%	10	<1%
Not identified	1	<1%	4	<1%

### Age of enrolled students

The most common age group of enrolled students was 24 or younger. The next largest age group was 30–39-year-old students who made up a quarter of the enrolled student cohort. The distribution of enrolled students across age groups has remained relatively stable between 2020 and 2021.

*Table 7. Age of enrolled students*

Age	2020	Percentage	2021	Percentage
24 or younger	852	32.0%	970	32.8%
25–29	523	19.6%	530	17.9%
30–39	609	22.9%	724	24.5%
40–49	458	17.2%	503	17.0%
50–59	195	7.3%	213	7.2%
60 or older	24	<1%	15	<1%

### Ethnicity of enrolled students

Nearly all the education providers surveyed reported that enrolled students were able to self-identify with multiple ethnicities. As a result, there is a higher count of ethnicities than there are enrolled students.

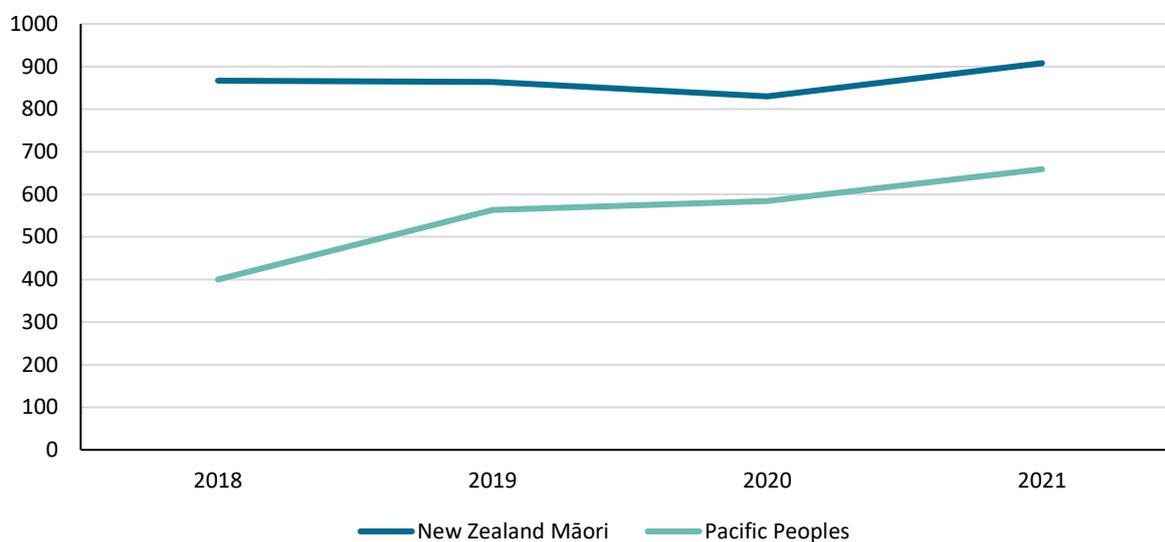
Largely, the proportions of self-identified student ethnicities have remained consistent since 2020, though there has been an increase in student numbers across all ethnicities.

**Table 8.** Ethnic identities of enrolled students

Ethnicity	2020	Percentage	2021	Percentage
NZ Māori	830	27.1%	908	26.9%
NZ European	1203	39.3%	1392	41.2%
Pacific Peoples	584	19.1%	659	19.5%
European	136	4.4%	132	3.9%
Asian	162	5.3%	170	5.0%
Middle Eastern/Latin American/African	75	2.5%	52	1.5%
Other	69	2.3%	67	2.0%

Figure 2 below displays the numbers of enrolled students by ethnicity for Māori and Pacific Peoples populations. There has been a steady increase in the number of students who identify as Pacific Peoples over the last four years. The numbers of students identifying as Māori has stayed relatively stable over this period.

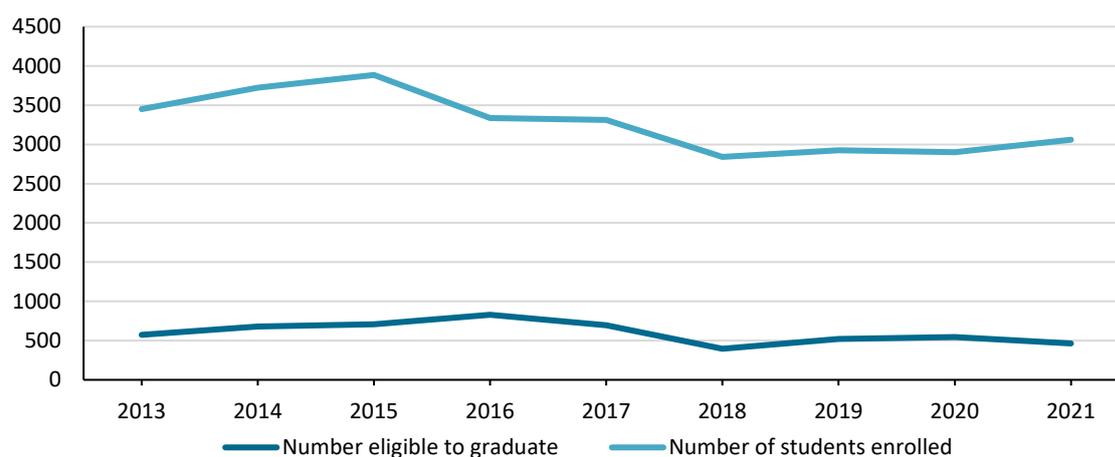
**Figure 2.** Changes in student ethnicities over time.



## Students eligible to graduate during the 2021 academic year

There were 465 students who were eligible to graduate in the 2021 academic year. There was a decrease in the number of students who were eligible to graduate in 2021 in comparison to 2020. There were 465 students who were eligible to graduate in the 2021 academic year and 546 in 2020.

*Figure 3. Number enrolled students and eligible graduates*



## Field education placements for social work students

1025 students completed field education placements in 2021. This represents a slight decrease from 2020 where there were 1058 social work students who completed placements.

Massey University and Te Wānanga o Aotearoa had the largest number of students that completed placements, reflecting their higher student numbers.

The table below shows the locations where institutes are located, with Auckland having the most. Given the increased use of distance learning some students may take their placements outside of the location where an institute is based, as is seen in table 10 which displays the regions placements occurred in.

*Table 9. Institute, region, and number of placements*

Institute	Number of Students on Placements	Institute Location
Massey University	199	Palmerston North & Albany Auckland
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa	147	Auckland, Te Awamutu, Hamilton, Tauranga, Palmerston North
University of Auckland	98	Auckland

Manukau Institute of Technology	90	Auckland
University of Canterbury	82	Christchurch
Unitec New Zealand	64	Auckland
University of Otago	52	Dunedin
Whitireia Polytechnic	52	Porirua
Ara Institute of Canterbury	49	Christchurch
Open Polytechnic	39	Lower Hutt-NZ wide
Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology	24	Nelson
Eastern Institute of Technology	21	Napier
Te Wānanga o Raukawa	21	Otaki & Manukau Auckland
NorthTec	19	Whangarei
Wintec	19	Hamilton
University of Waikato	19	Hamilton
Bethlehem Tertiary Institute	16	Tauranga
Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology	14	Rotorua

## Distribution of placement days

Social work education programmes are required to provide students with a minimum of 120 days of field education placements. There must be at least two different placement experiences and one must be at least 50 days in duration.

The majority of education providers distributed the required 120 days across two different placements with a 60/60 split. Only three institutions did not employ a 60/60 split. Two institutions had 50/70 days across the two placements, the other required students to do three placements for a total of 140 days with a 20/60/60 breakdown.

For postgraduate students, the days on placement were either distributed as 60/60 or 50/70.

## COVID-19 disruptions to placements

During the 2021 academic year, COVID-19 lockdowns resulted in 155 students completing less than 50% of their placement hours. The institutes reporting that students did not complete placement hours were located in Auckland, Waikato, and Northland. These regions experienced the most time in lockdowns during 2021, which is likely to be the explanation for the non-completion of placement hours by students in these areas.

## Regional location of field education placements

The three regions where the most student placements were completed were Auckland, Christchurch, and Wellington, respectively.

Marlborough, Tasman, and the West Coast had the lowest number of completed placements in their region.

*Table 10. Regional location of student field education placements.*

Region	Number of students
Auckland	387
Canterbury	145
Wellington	109
Manawatū-Whanganui	69
Bay of Plenty	66
Waikato	63
Otago	48
Hawke's Bay	28
Nelson	27
Northland	26
Taranaki	17
Southland	10
Gisborne	8
West Coast	7
Tasman	3
Marlborough	3
Overseas	1

## Field education settings

The table below depicts the number of students that undertook placements in government agencies, non-government organisations (NGOs) or iwi organisations.

The breakdown of students in each setting has generally remained stable, with a slight increase in the number of students completing placements in a government setting. NGOs remained the largest provider of placements for students.

*Table 11. Placement settings*

Field work placement	2020 numbers	Percentage	2021 numbers	Percentage
Government agency	305	25.3%	323	28.8%
NGO	750	62.3%	651	58.0%
Iwi organisation	148	12.4%	148	13.2%
Total	1203	100%	1122 <sup>3</sup>	100%

<sup>3</sup> This rate is higher than the number of students as students may complete more than one placement during the academic year

## Government agency placements

A total of 323 students were placed in government agencies. The breakdown of type of government agency is outlined in the table below. Some of the other government agencies that students undertook their placements in included Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, New Zealand Police, and Community Law.

*Table 12. Breakdown of government agency placements*

Agency	Number of students
DHBs	130
Oranga Tamariki	154
Corrections	27
Local/regional council	1
Other government	11
Total	323

## Non-government placements

There were 799 students that completed their placements outside of a government setting. From this total, there were 651 students placed in NGOs and 148 who completed placements in an iwi/Māori social service. The NGO sector continues to provide a large number of placement opportunities.

## Placements in current place of employment

In 2021, there were 118 students that completed placements at their place of employment. This was slightly lower than 2020 where 139 students completed placements at their place of work.

## Placement fail grades and placement non-completion

In 2021, there were 12 students that received a placement fail grade, this was down from 16 students who received a fail grade in 2020.

The primary reasons for fail grades being given were for:

- did not submit assessments
- did not meet the learning requirements
- displayed unprofessional behaviour
- withdrew from the programme.

A total of 28 students did not complete their placements, this was down from 57 students in 2020 representing a 51% decrease in placement non-completion.

The reasons for these non-completions were due to:

- health issues, both personally and whānau members.
- COVID-19 disruptions
- are still completing
- personal difficulties.

## Feedback on COVID-19 flexibilities

During the initial wave of COVID-19, the SWRB introduced flexibilities around the Programme Recognition Standards (PRS) to help students complete their social work degrees whilst COVID-19 restrictions were in place. These changes allowed students to complete placements in hours as opposed to full days. Students were also allowed to complete both of their required placements in their place of employment as long as it was in a different practice area and were allowed to complete some of their placement hours online.

The Education Providers survey asked for feedback on the PRS flexibilities introduced during COVID-19 restrictions. All education providers indicated that they were supportive of the changes that had been introduced. Specifically, the ability to complete placements in hours as opposed to full days, complete online learning relevant to a placement and the option to have placement supervision delivered online, were supported.

One institute stated that they had experienced increases in the retention and completion rates of student placements in comparison to previous years. They attributed this to their staff's commitment to ensuring that students would not be disadvantaged by COVID-19 and they utilised the changes made by the SWRB to ensure the success of their students.

Another institute reflected on the ability to complete two placements in the same agency. They stated that it worked well for students who lived in rural areas where there may be limited placement options. Having the ability to complete both placements in one organisation reduced both travel and the costs associated with it. The institute also stated that the use of two supervisors and two fields of practice ensured robust learning.

## Conclusion

Student numbers have increased at the majority of institutes, and the overall number of enrolled students is up from 2020. The proportion of Pacific and Māori students has remained consistent. Student numbers have still not returned to the levels they were before 2016, but they have been trending up over the last two years.

Of interest is the rate of attrition for students between years one and four of the social work Bachelor's degree programmes. Nearly half of those who enrol in year one do not continue into year four, and even fewer become registered with the SWRB. In order to

increase the numbers entering the social worker workforce, this attrition rate could be an area of focus for institutes.

The institutes generally reported satisfaction with the flexibilities introduced by the SWRB to allow social work students to continue to progress their studies during the pandemic. However, there were still issues around the completion of placements for students who were affected by the governmental restrictions in places such as Northland, Auckland, and Hamilton.

There have been numerous issues in the collection of data from various institutions. Some of these issues included late returns, data inaccuracies and unfilled data items. As such, the method of data collection for 2022 is likely to change. Data around student numbers will be collected directly from the Tertiary Education Commission so that institutes do not have to provide the data twice.

The Education Providers survey 2022 will include additional qualitative data questions to support a deeper insight into the social work student pipeline into the social work profession. This will help to highlight barriers faced by students.

**Note on data quality:**

There was a lack of consistency in some of the data returned to us by institutes and so we have made some assumptions based on the data presented. For example, the count of the number of enrolled students did not match with the total number of students when year groups were added together. At times there was discrepancy between the data provided by TEC and the institutes. In order to best overcome these discrepancies data was used from TEC as this was a verified source.