

# Demographics of the veterinary profession in New Zealand

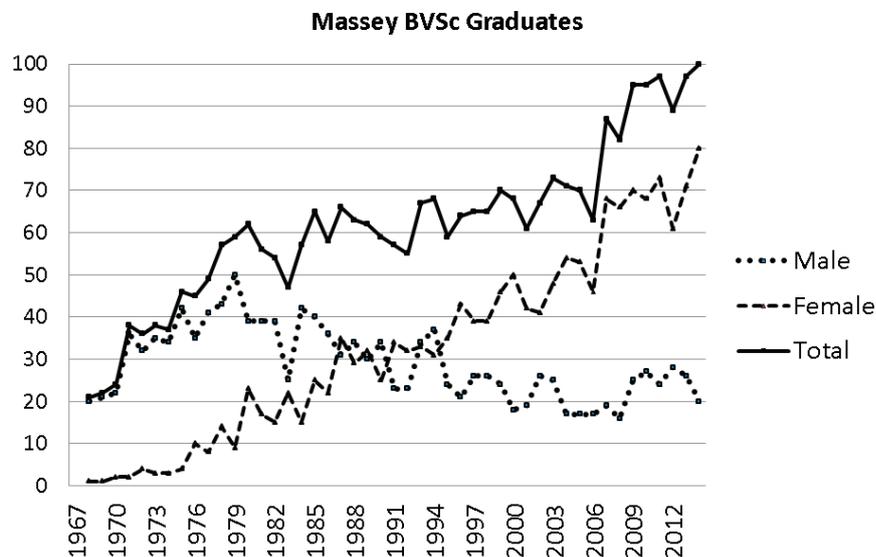
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The changes in the demographics of the veterinary profession in New Zealand reflect what is happening internationally with more women being accepted into veterinary schools. To some extent this is occurring across all the professions (except engineering).

The first graduating class of veterinarians from Massey University (1967) consisted of 20 men and one woman. By the mid 1970s, women made up 20-25% of the class and class size had grown to about 50 students. By the mid 1980s there were equal numbers of male and female students in each class with an average class size of 64. Since 1994 there have been more women than men in the final year of the programme and in recent years, women comprise 75-80% of each class.

Figure 1. Gender split and total number of BVSc graduates from Massey University.

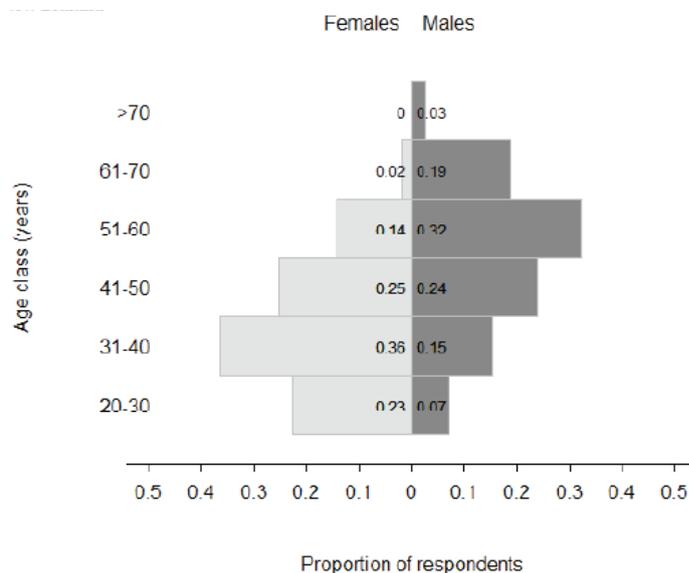


The intake of students into first year has increased over the past 50 years from 20 to about 102 currently. The number of students graduating each year fluctuates somewhat due to students repeating years, taking time out from the programme and, very occasionally, leaving the programme. Full fee-paying international students were able to undertake veterinary training at Massey University with the first intake being in 2003. Since that time there have been 24 places for international students and these are predominantly filled by students from North America and South-east Asia. The number of domestic students (government-supported) is capped by government funding and tends to only increase slowly. Every year, a number of graduating international students seek employment in New Zealand and some stay for more than five years post-graduation.

Analysis of New Zealand and Australian registered veterinarians by Mark Stevenson has shown very similar trends

with men aged 40-70 and women aged 20-50 making up the bulk of the workforce.

*Figure 2. Population pyramid comparing the proportions of male and female veterinarians in 10-year age groupings in 2012 (New Zealand).*



VCNZ registration statistics for 2012 showed that 28% of full-time equivalent (FTE) veterinarians working in NZ qualified overseas and that although equal numbers of men and women were registered, women made up 45% of the FTE workforce.

The temporary or permanent loss of veterinarians from the NZ veterinary profession appears to be high and independent of education, gender or age at graduation. Within seven years of first registering with VCNZ, 60% of vets have either started a period of discontinuous registration (e.g. for overseas travel etc) or have permanently left the profession.

Veterinary employers and farmers alike now generally accept that the female graduates are as capable as the male graduates in rural practice. Despite this statement, male final-year students at Massey University were much more likely to have been offered a position in New Zealand by the time final exams commenced (90% versus 25%).

I have been lucky enough to have been involved with feedback from a lot of recent veterinary graduates and interviewing a number of senior veterinarians in New Zealand. There is a common desire from younger veterinarians (not always women) to reduce their work hours, mainly to manage family commitments. Many senior veterinarians who are nearing retirement also express a desire to reduce their work hours to 3-4 days per week in preparation for retirement. It seems that very few veterinarians in mixed or rural practice are achieving this. Part-time work in companion animal practice tends to have been better managed – it seems that it is time for rural practice to adapt or develop a new business model.

## Acknowledgements

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