

Return Migration of New Zealanders: Shuttle and Circular Migrants

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Concerns about a “brain drain” are expressed when the number of people leaving a country exceeds the number entering. This is what happened in New Zealand in the last few months of 2000 and the beginning of 2001. In fact the concern was so great that the Government sponsored *Catching the Knowledge Wave*, a conference in August 2001, when considerable attention was focussed on initiatives to attract “talent” to New Zealand (Ho 2001). As 2001 drew to a close, rather than a bout of anxiety over the “brain drain” there was a Ministerial re-evaluation of the qualifying pass mark for new immigrants following a surge of interest in New Zealand as a migrant destination (Dalziel 2001). This is a clear indication of how quickly situations can be reversed in the early 21st first century.

For some decades concern has been expressed in the international literature at the loss of human capital through emigration. In the 1960s and 1970s this “brain drain” phenomenon was commented on extensively (Fortney 1970; Wilson and Gaston 1974). The conclusion at that time was that “brain drain” is conditioned by political and economic imbalances in the world system (Portes 1976). The major “push” factor appeared to be an asymmetry between the capacity of a nation to produce numbers of highly trained personnel and its capacity to absorb them into the workforce. Far more professionals than are needed are often produced by countries with free entry policies to their universities. The fact that many of these people need to leave their country of birth to find employment is more of a brain “overflow” than “drain”.

In a key study of “brain return” in the late 1970s, Glaser (1978) showed beyond doubt that the commitment to return to their country of birth is

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very strong among high level personnel working or studying abroad. He found that although many people may stay away from their home country longer than their initial planned term they still *intend* to return.

An attachment to one's birthplace seems to be a universal sense in human experience. As the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1977:154) has observed:

This profound attachment to the homeland appears to be a worldwide phenomenon. It is not limited to any particular culture and economy....
The city or land is viewed as mother and it nourishes; place is an archive of fond memories and splendid achievements that inspire the present; place is permanent and hence reassuring.

Tuan (1977:3) also suggested that "place is security – and space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other". The freedom of "space" is usually what young New Zealanders dream of when they plan their great "O.E." – an established part of middle-class, New Zealand culture. Many people in New Zealand have family or close friends who have spent time or who are living overseas. A significant proportion of these people, however, retain strong ties to New Zealand and it is the "security" of home that eventually draws them back from their bed-sits in London – a theme used effectively in advertising campaigns during 2001.

Researchers have suggested that migration in advanced industrial societies since the 1970s is largely "exchange migration" (Richmond 1984) with return often a substantial part of this exchange. More recently, Morrison (2001) suggests that this is "circulation of the elite". He argues that more attention now needs to be focussed on this global trend and the expanding opportunities for international work for the professions. In a paper on the ethnic diversity and "brain circulation" of the Silicon Valley workforce in the United States, Saxenian (2002:28) argues that high-skill immigration makes everyone better off and that "economically speaking, it is blessed to give *and* receive".

This paper focuses on the return migration of New Zealand nationals. It is based on data sourced both from arrival and departure cards supplied by Statistics New Zealand, as well as from surveys of return migrants to New Zealand conducted over the past decade. First, the migration of New Zealanders and the relevance of return migration since the beginning of the 1960s is outlined. Second, there is a brief description of the surveys conducted in 1990 and 2000 and the methodology used to identify a national sample of New Zealand citizens who returned after absences overseas for more than 12 months.

Next, some of the selected characteristics of the sample of returnees who arrived back in November 2000 are compared with the characteristics of a

similar sample that returned in November 1990. Some comparable characteristics from the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study of the "age-26" (1998-1999) assessment are also included (Milne *et al.* 2001). The profiles focus on the age-sex structure, ethnicity, country of residence prior to return, employment and current source of income. Reasons given for leaving and returning are also discussed. Then the discussion of the feelings of returnees about the effects of time spent overseas is complemented by the findings from a separate in-depth study of six returnees living in the Waikato region.

The paper concludes with a brief comment on the movement of the current labour market "winners" who have the opportunity in the early 21st century to pursue transnational careers and maintain multi-local lives. For New Zealanders this may mean "shuttling" backwards and forwards across the Tasman or "circulating" through countries of the Northern Hemisphere. The words from some of the recent returnees are used, for as "insiders" of the return process in 2000 they provide valuable insights into reasons why New Zealanders continue to leave and then come back to this country. Policy makers are reminded that New Zealand has a pool of citizens overseas, estimated to be almost equal to a quarter of the resident population. These people have the option to return to this country whenever they please.

Migration of New Zealanders in the Past 40 Years

New Zealanders are very mobile moving frequently both internally and internationally (Bedford 2001). A survey of New Zealanders departing for overseas destinations on a permanent basis in October 1979 showed that barely 10 per cent left saying that under no circumstances would they return to New Zealand (Barrington and Davey 1980). Clearly when most citizens leave New Zealand they intend to become part of a reverse population flow or part of a group of people whose population movement is better labelled as circulation rather than migration.

The significance of studying return migration lies in the fact that skilled emigrants bring back not only their specialist skills acquired from their education in New Zealand but also their additional skills and experience acquired while living overseas. In addition they also help to establish and intensify networks connecting New Zealand and New Zealanders to their previous countries of residence. Thus returnees can play a pivotal role in the strengthening of relationships within the world system of capitalist economies.

Arrivals Classified Permanent and Long-Term (PLT)

In New Zealand, during the past 40 years, the decade of the 1980s stands out as the time when the number of New Zealand citizens returning to the country as PLT arrivals was higher than that of new immigrants arriving (Table 1). Between April 1980 and March 1990 return migration added 231,000 citizens to New Zealand's population compared with 209,000 new immigrants. That is 52.5 per cent of the PLT arrivals were New Zealand citizens during this period. This compares with the two previous decades – the 1960s when just over a quarter of PLT arrivals were returning New Zealanders and the 1970s when 35 per cent of this group were New Zealand citizens.

During the 1990s a combination of factors saw the return of New Zealand citizens far outweighed again by the arrival of new immigrants even though the number of New Zealanders returning (231,701) was marginally larger than in the previous decade (230,517). The substantial net migration gains of the early 1990s were, in part, a response to government strategy to encourage immigration to New Zealand, especially immigration from countries in Asia. In the 1990s 63 per cent of the PLT arrivals to New Zealand were new immigrants compared with 47.5 per cent in the 1980s (Table 1). Although the 21st century has begun with rising numbers of PLT arrivals (45,294), the percentage of these arrivals that were returning New Zealand citizens was only 32 per cent of total PLT arrivals in the year ended 31 March 2001 (Table 1).

Table 1: Permanent and long-term arrivals of New Zealand citizens and non-citizens, 1 April 1960 to 31 March 2001

Year ended 31 March	NZ Citizens		Non-Citizens		Total PLT Arrivals
	Number	% Total	Number	% Total	
1961-1970	82,104	26.4	229,366	73.6	311,470
1971-1980	168,167	35.1	311,542	64.9	479,709
1981-1990	230,517	52.5	208,962	47.5	439,479
1991-2000	231,701	37.5	386,588	62.5	618,289
1961-2000	712,489	38.5	1,136,458	61.5	1,848,947
2001	21,171	32.0	45,294	68.0	66,465

Source: Unpublished tables provided by Statistics New Zealand.

In the two March years in which the surveys of return migrants were conducted – 1991 and 2001 – the share of New Zealand citizens in the PLT arrival stream dropped by 20 percentage points. Although the change in the proportion of New Zealanders in the PLT arrival flows is large this drop is not really surprising for three reasons. First, 1991 was a year of big returns, in fact the largest return of New Zealand citizens in any year since the troops returned from the Second World War (Lowe 1991). This large inflow occurred after the massive outflow in 1988/89. Second, the cycle of migration at the last quarter of 2000 and the first quarter of 2001 was in the outflow phase, fuelled by the Australian government change in the automatic welfare entitlements for New Zealanders living and working in Australia. A media headline in February “Migrants rush to beat Australian residence clampdown” (Small and Gregory 2001, A1) summed up what took place in the first few months of 2001. Third, immigration in 2001 was running at higher levels than in 1991; so although the number of New Zealanders returning is still over 20,000 per year, this equated to a smaller share of the total PLT arrivals in 2001.

Arrivals and Departures in PLT flows

Since the mid-1990s the number of New Zealand citizens departing on a PLT basis has been rising steadily (Figure 1). By the year ended 31 March 2001 the number departing had reached a record high of 63,500 surpassing the previous high year of departures, year ending 31 March 1979, by three and a half thousand. In the debate about these rising levels of citizens departing there is a significant group of people that is usually overlooked – the New Zealand citizens returning after an absence of 12 months. For the past 22 years returning New Zealand citizens aged mainly in their late 20s, have been adding over 20,000 citizens to the total population each year (Figure 1).

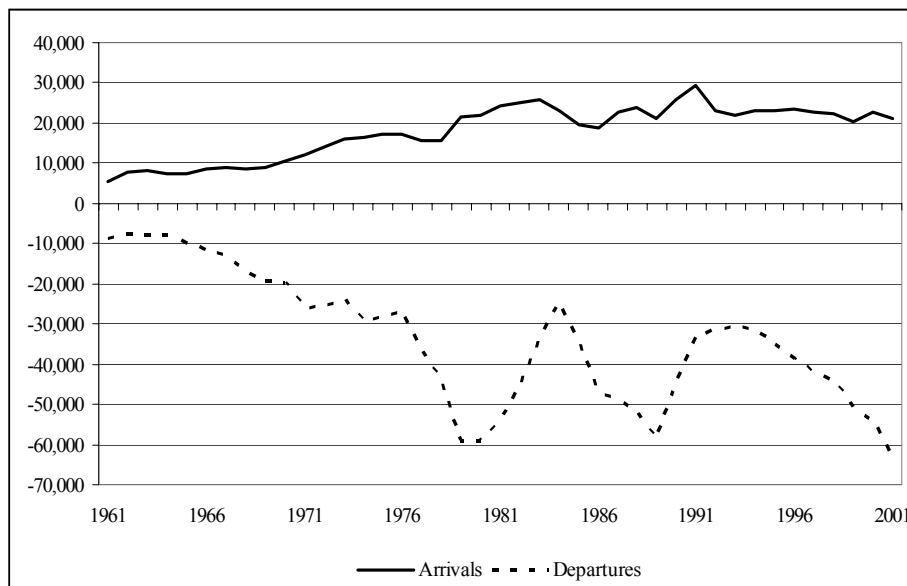
The pattern of departures, however, is much more volatile (Figure 1). Clearly more people have left New Zealand on a PLT basis than have returned. In spite of the fact that category jumping means that the overall net loss of New Zealand citizens is lower than suggested by the numbers departing in the PLT category (Bedford 2001), clearly there are significant expatriate populations developing overseas.

Development of a large pool of people with residence rights living outside of New Zealand means that even a small percentage returning at any given time would create a relatively large inflow of people. It is estimated there are now around 435,000 New Zealand nationals living in Australia

(Birrell and Rapson 2001). If 10 per cent of this group decided to return that number is over one per cent of the resident population (3,792,654).

Accordingly, it is important to recognise the return flows of New Zealanders as they are outside the control of immigration authorities and are often overlooked when new policy is being formulated. These hundreds of thousands of New Zealand citizens and other people with residence rights living and travelling overseas can come back to New Zealand whenever they please, whatever the immigration policy of the day. In fact, the free movement of citizens in and out of the country means that the government in New Zealand has limited direct control over levels of international migration.

Figure 1: Arrivals and departures of New Zealand citizens, permanent and long-term, years ending 31 March 1961 to 31 March 2001



Source: Unpublished tables provided by Statistics New Zealand

Return Migration Surveys

Locating return migrants in the community at large is costly and time-consuming (Lidgard 1991, 1993). There is an excellent source of information on ALL New Zealand citizens returning to the country after an absence of 12 months or more, and that is the arrival cards. In order to

obtain a national sample of returning New Zealanders at a particular time a procedure was developed, in consultation with the New Zealand Immigration Service and Statistics New Zealand, for accessing a sample of returning New Zealand citizens using the information contained on the arrival cards. This procedure involved the New Zealand Immigration Service sending an invitation to all those New Zealanders who had returned after an absence of 12 months or more during the month of November 1990. The nationality, name and address information given on the arrival cards was used to identify who should receive this letter. A reply paid card was included, addressed to me. Those who agreed to participate in the project returned this card with their names and addresses noted and they were subsequently sent a questionnaire.

Funding was provided by the Department of Labour and the FRST-funded *New Demographic Directions Programme* to replicate the 1990 national study in November 2000. The second questionnaire was designed to enable the results of the survey in 2000 to be comparable with the research conducted a decade before in 1990. The analysis of the 2000 data is based on 499 completed questionnaires while the comparative sample in 1990 was 740. The remainder of this article contains a comparative analysis of the country the returnees spent most time in while overseas, their age and gender composition, ethnicity, length of absence from New Zealand, educational qualifications, employment and sources of income and their reasons for going overseas and subsequent return.

New Zealand Citizen Returnees

In November 1990, the total PLT arrivals for that month was 4,870, of which 2,824 identified themselves as New Zealand citizens returning after an absence of 12 months. That is 58 per cent of all PLT arrivals in that month were returning New Zealand citizens. Introductory letters were only sent to those that had given legible, full postal addresses and were aged 15 years and above. The initial sample group in 1990 comprised 77 per cent of the total population of returning New Zealand citizens (Table 2).

The number of New Zealand citizens returning after 12 months overseas in November 2000 was 2,191 (37%) out of a total PLT arrival count of 5,922. The introductory mail-out list contained 1,817 names (all those aged 15 years and over recording a legible name and full postal address). The initial sample group for the 2000 survey was 83 per cent of the base population of all ages. Although the proportion of New Zealand nationals returning at the beginning of the 21st Century is lower than it was

a decade ago the survey sample is a similar proportion of the returning New Zealand citizens (Table 2). By the end of May 2001 568 responses had been received from people interested in participating in the research. This response rate of 31 per cent was the same as that of a decade ago.

Table 2: Returnee populations, November 1990 and 2000

Year	Total long-term arrivals (1)	NZ Citizen arrivals (2)	(2)/(1) (%) (3)	People contacted (4)	% Total (4)/(2)
1900	4870	2824	58	2175	77
2000	5922	2191	37	1817	83

Source: Statistics New Zealand arrival data

Some Characteristics of New Zealand Returnees in 1990 and 2000

A review of international literature on return migrants shows that returnees have distinctive demographic and socio-economic characteristics (see King *et al.* 1983 for a useful review). New Zealand citizens who return after a lengthy absence overseas are no exception.

Age and Gender Composition

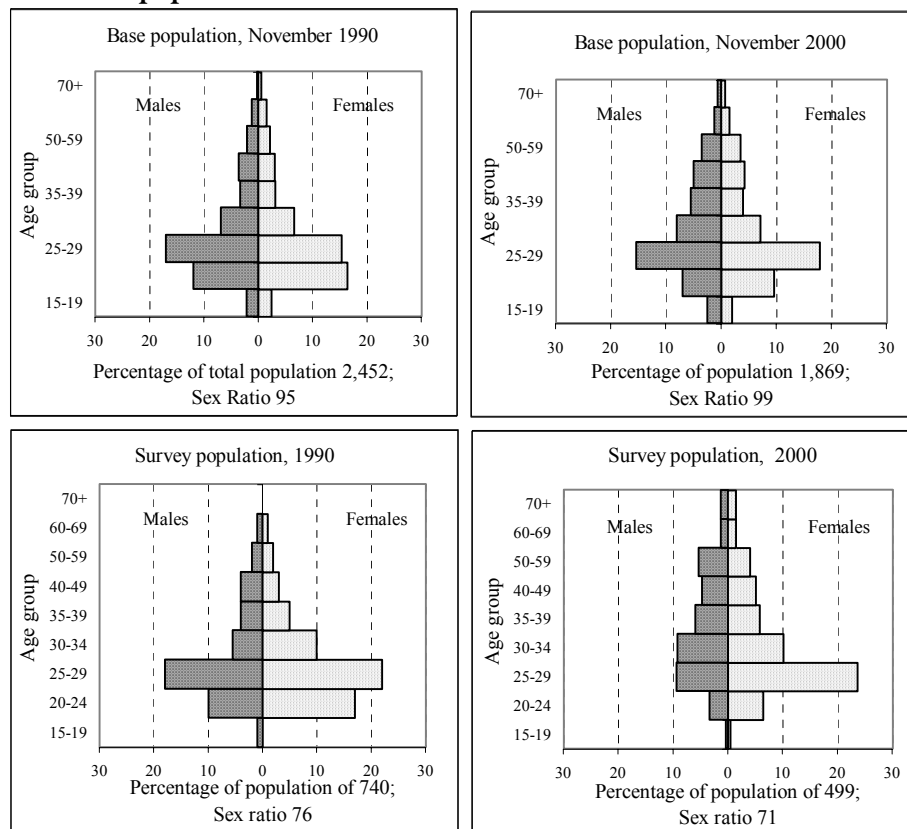
The most striking characteristic of return migrants is their age composition and numerous studies have reported that return migrants are clustered around age 30 (Appleyard 1962; Campbell and Johnson 1976; Population Monitoring Group 1991; Richmond 1968). It has been recognised for some time that the age composition of New Zealanders in the migrant flows into and out of New Zealand is distinctive. As Lowe (1991:84) noted,

...because New Zealanders have the most highly concentrated age structure of any major immigrant group [c]hanges in the balance between New Zealand return migrants and "new" immigrants ... have the potential to significantly affect the age-structure of the total immigrant inflow.

The 20-29 year age group dominated the survey populations in both years with 40 per cent concentrated in the 25-29 year age band in 1990 and 32 per cent in 2000.¹ There was a higher proportion of recent returnees in the age groups above 30 years in 2000 reflecting, in part, the progressive aging of the New Zealand source population (Figure 2). While two thirds of returnees in the 1990 sample were under the age of 30 years, in the 2000

survey less than a half (45%) were in their late teens or twenties. In the 2000 sample there was virtually the same proportion of returnees in the 30-39 year age group (31%) as in their late twenties (32%).

Figure 2: Comparative age-sex pyramids of the base and survey populations in November 1990 and 2000



Source: Return Migration Surveys and Statistics New Zealand base population data

Notes: 1 Base population refers to the NZ citizens who returned in the month of November

2 Survey population refers to those from the base population who responded to the invitation to answer a questionnaire

In 1990 there was a significant difference in age structure between return migrants from Australia, the United Kingdom and “other” countries (Lidgard 1992:86) (Figure 2). Just under half (49%) of those returning from Australia were in the 20-29 year age group compared with 80 per cent in the case of the United Kingdom. It was felt that this difference in the age characteristics of return migrants from Australia and the United Kingdom

was a reflection of the absence of any control over residence of New Zealanders in Australia and the impact a maximum age (27) entitlement for the two year work visa New Zealanders can apply for when travelling to the United Kingdom (the maximum age changed in 2002 to 30 years).

In 2000, there was still a significant difference in country of previous residence for those returnees in their twenties (from Australia 20 per cent, from the United Kingdom 53 per cent). In the group who returned aged in their thirties, however, there was an even spread over the countries of previous residence. A third were returning from Australia, just under a third were coming back from the United Kingdom and a further third were returning from "other" countries (Figure 2).

The sex ratio (males per 100 females) was lower in 2000 (71 compared to 76 in 1990). When the age sex pyramids are compared for the two surveys (Figure 2) the most obvious change is the drop in the percentage of males in their twenties and an increase in the percentage in older age groups. As in 1990, the returnee group in 2000 was dominated by women in the 25-29 year age group (Figure 2). For women this age group is slightly larger than in 1990 while the biggest change for women has been the drop in the proportion returning in their early twenties.

Country Lived in for Most of 12 Months Prior to Return

In 1990 80 per cent of the returnees were returning from two countries - Australia and the United Kingdom. The return flow from these two countries had dropped to 76 per cent in the year 2000 (Table 3).

The respondents that the surveys are based on are, in a sense, "self selected" as there was no opportunity to follow-up those people who failed to respond to the invitation to participate in the research. In 1990, out of a survey respondents of 740, over half were returnees from the United Kingdom, a quarter were returning from Australia and a fifth from "other" countries (Table 3). Returnees from the United Kingdom were over-represented in the sample of migrants who agreed to participate in the survey. It was felt that this was partly due to the fact that for many people trans-tasman travel is viewed as similar to internal rather than international movement and hence not as "interesting" to friends or researchers.

Table 3: Country of previous residence of base and survey populations

Year	Total		Australia		United Kingdom		Other Countries	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Base								
1990	2452	100	997	41	964	39	491	20
2000	1869	100	507	27	905	49	457	24
Survey								
1990	740	100	186	25	404	55	150	20
2000	499	100	82	17	279	55	138	28

Source: As for Figure 2

Note: It is acknowledged that weightings to standardise these return rates have not been applied. Much of the subsequent analysis has been done on three individual countries rather than the total.

In the recent survey, the percentage (55) returning from the United Kingdom in 2000 remained the same as in 1990 (55) although there was a drop in the percentage returning from Australia and a corresponding rise in the percentage returning from “other” countries (72 per cent from the United Kingdom and Australia) (Table 3). This means that the Australian returnees are even more under-represented in the recent survey. The drop in the proportion of those responding that were returning from Australia is as expected given that the migration cycle to that country was in the outflow phase in 1999 and 2000.

The rise in the numbers of those returning from “other” countries is expected to be, in part, the return to New Zealand of recent immigrants. These people will have taken out New Zealand citizenship and may have travelled offshore as part of their strategy for maintaining economic and social connections in former homes (Ho 2002; Lidgard *et al.* 1998).

In fact, there was no evidence that many recent immigrants were amongst the returnees in November 2000. Eighty-eight per cent of the returnees had been born in New Zealand. Only one other country had been the birthplace of more than five per cent of the returnees – the United Kingdom (6%). Two other regions featured as the birthplace of just over one per cent of the returnees – Europe (1.6%) and the Pacific Islands (1.2%). The same small percentage (0.6%) had been born in Asia, North America and Australia.

Ethnicity

The ethnicity of the returnees was more varied in the sample for 2000 than it was a decade ago. Over 90 per cent of the 1990 sample that completed the survey were New Zealand European, four per cent identified themselves as New Zealand Maori and three per cent said they had other ethnic origins (Lidgard 1992:99).

In the sample for November 2000, those citing New Zealand European ethnicity again comprised the dominant group amongst the returnees who completed the survey although the percentage of total returnees had fallen by almost 10 percentage points over the decade (Table 4). The percentage identifying themselves as New Zealand Maori had also dropped from four to three per cent. The biggest change (10 percentage points) was in the return to New Zealand of people identifying themselves as having an ethnicity other than the two major ethnic groups in New Zealand (Table 4).

Table 4: Ethnicity of survey populations, by country of previous residence, 1990 and 2000 (per cent)

Ethnicity	Australia		United Kingdom		Other countries		All countries	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
NZ European	88	74	94	89	88	82	92	83
NZ Maori	7	6	2	0.4	5	3	4	3
Other ethnic groups	3	19	2	9	5	13	3	13
Not specified	2	1	2	1.5	2	2	1	1
Total Number	186	82	404	279	150	138	740	499

Source: Return Migration Surveys

The percentage of people of Samoan ethnicity returning in November 2000 (3%) was almost as high as those declaring New Zealand Maori ethnicity. A further one and a half per cent of the returnees were of Chinese ethnicity and just over one per cent did not answer the question (Table 4). While it was expected that some of these people might be returning from former homelands, those in the survey identifying themselves as Samoan or Chinese were New Zealand born, and had in fact, returned from either Australia or the United Kingdom.

Length of Absence from New Zealand

To gain an insight into how closely the survey participants' intentions on length of absence matched their actual length of time away, they were asked to remember how long they intended to live overseas when they left New Zealand. The results are compared for the two surveys in Table 5.

As shown in Table 5, at the end of the 1990s over half the citizens who leave the country still plan to be away from New Zealand for less than two years. Undoubtedly, the two-year working holiday visa, which New Zealanders under the age of 28 years are eligible to obtain in the United Kingdom, affects these figures. Indeed, when the length of stay overseas is examined on a country basis, around three-quarters of those returning from the United Kingdom return within the two years allowed on the working holiday visa.

Table 5: Planned duration and actual length of stay overseas, returnees in November 1990 and 2000 (per cent)

Duration	November 1990 (N=740)		November 2000 (N=499)	
	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual
< 2 years	65	65	54	55
3-5 years	10	21	15	19
6-9 years	1	6	1	6
20 years+ *	9	6	7	8
Unsure & unclear	15	2	23	12

Note: *Includes those who stated they planned to be away indefinitely or permanently

Although more citizens left New Zealand in the late 1990s planning to be away for between three to five years, slightly less actually returned in that time frame. The percentage who leave with no clear intention of the length of time they plan to stay overseas has also increased as has the number in the "unsure" category that have returned.

Number of Years Lived Overseas and Return Trips

The participants in the November 2000 group were asked how many years in total they had lived overseas. Just over a third of the group had lived away from New Zealand for between 1-2 years (34%). Almost another third (30%) had lived overseas for between 3-5 years while 10 per cent had lived outside

the country for between six and nine years. Almost 20 per cent of the returnees had lived out of New Zealand for over 10 years.

While living overseas over half of the participants (55%) had made a return visit to New Zealand with an average length of stay of less than one month. Just over 20 per cent had visited up to three times before the current return. Clearly this group of people have retained close ties with New Zealand while living overseas.

Future Travel Plans

In the group that had returned in November 2000, just over a quarter said they planned to leave New Zealand again for 12 months or more. Just over a third were undecided and an equal number said they had no plans to leave again for a lengthy period. Of those who were planning to leave, a third indicated that they would be returning to a country where they had already lived, while just under a quarter said they would be going to a country where they had not yet lived. It appears that at least a third of these returnees are, or plan to become, "circulators".

Marital Status

In 1990, there was a disproportionately large proportion of return migrants who had never been married. The dominant group were young men and women returning from the United Kingdom. Amongst returnees from across the Tasman there was both a higher incidence of married and divorced (Lidgard 1992:92; Lidgard and Bedford 1992:438). The return of New Zealand-born men and women without a spouse but accompanied by their Australian-born children was also noted in Bedford and Lowe (1993).

Analysis of the 2000 returnees indicates that once again the largest group (39%) were those who had never been married although the group recording they were separated was almost as large (36%). As suggested previously the break-up of relationships can create a desire to return to the comfort of the "home" region and the presence of family (Lidgard 1992:94; Lidgard and Bedford 1992:438). The group indicating they were in a "de facto" relationship was 15 per cent and those married six per cent.

On a country of previous residence basis the largest group in both surveys was young men and women who had never been married returning from the United Kingdom (44%). The second largest groups were those who were separated returning from across the Tasman (40%) and from all other countries except the United Kingdom (41%). All other marital status categories (de facto relationships, married, widowed, divorced) had similar

small percentages returning from all countries. Although, the pattern is similar to a decade ago the indication is that marital status in the 21st Century is a much more complicated variable to analyse and the results need to be interpreted as reflecting trends in changing family patterns as much as changes in migration patterns.

Travelling Groups

Participants were asked to record whether they travelled overseas alone, with companions or as part of a family group. In both the 1990 and 2000 returnee populations surveyed, 40 per cent said that they did not have travelling companions when they left New Zealand (Lidgard 1992:115). In 2000, 10 per cent of those returning said that when they left they did so as part of a family group (partner and children).

When they returned to New Zealand a slightly higher percentage of the respondents travelled back alone than went overseas alone in 1990 (46%). However the reverse was the case in 2000 when 35 per cent returned alone with a corresponding rise in the percentage of those coming back as a family group (16%).

The high incidence of solo travel amongst New Zealanders going overseas lends some support to the proposition that much of this movement is for some “overseas experience” or a “holiday”. If the movement was to involve permanent relocations it is likely that more family groups would be moving.

Educational Qualifications

The people who returned in 1990 were highly educated with over half of the survey population indicating that they had received some form of tertiary training – a higher percentage than is found in the New Zealand population as a whole (Lidgard 1992:100; Lidgard and Bedford 1992:438). In the recent survey the returnees again appeared to have a similar high level of educational qualifications – 50 per cent with tertiary qualifications and a further seven per cent with trade certificates. Thirteen per cent were returning with an overseas qualification.

It is possible to compare the results for the 2000 returnees with characteristics of the 980 members of the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study² participating in the “age-26” (1998-1999) assessment (Milne *et al.* 2001). This study has found that “Emigrants were

significantly more likely than non-emigrants to have a tertiary qualification” (Milne *et al.* 2001:451).

Employment and Source of Income

By March 1991, two thirds of those who returned in November 1990, and stated they had been searching for work, reported that they had found employment, while the remainder were still job hunting (Lidgard 1992:148). In March 2001 just under two-thirds of the total survey population were working (58% for wages or salary and 6% self-employed). This indicates that it is reasonable to expect that four months after return approximately two thirds of returnees will be employed.

When the data on sources of income were analysed using country of previous residence just over two thirds of the returnees from the United Kingdom in November 2000 were in waged employment compared with just under half of those returning from “other” countries and 44 per cent of those returning from across the Tasman. The highest proportion in self-employment were Australian returnees (11%) compared with four per cent in this category returning from the United Kingdom and five per cent of returnees from “other” countries. A slightly higher percentage of those returning from Australia were on a government support payment of some kind (16%) than was the case for returnees from “other” countries (14%) or the United Kingdom (12%).

Employment Activities

The respondents in 2000 were asked to show which employment activities they were engaged in 3-12 months prior to leaving New Zealand, while they were overseas and currently. This question was included to gain an insight into the occupational characteristics of the survey group and to compare their current occupation with occupations they have had in the past. Amongst the survey population a share was engaged in study at all three levels (Table 6).

Study activities were as expected highest in the 12 months prior to leaving (Table 6). However, just over a fifth of the group recorded that they had engaged in some form of study activity whilst overseas. Nearly 30 per cent of the participants studying were doing so at the postgraduate level both overseas and since their return to New Zealand.

Table 6: Study activities of the November 2000 returnees, prior to leaving New Zealand, while overseas and back in New Zealand, March 2001 (per cent)

Study Activity	Prior	Whilst	Currently
Secondary School	20	7	21.1
University (undergraduate)	28	15.7	24.1
University (graduate)	21.6	29.6	29.3
Other Tertiary Study	30.4	47.8	34.5
Total number engaged	125	115	58

Source: Return Migration Survey, 2000

Respondents were allowed to report more than one activity so the numbers in Tables 6 and 7 do not sum to the total number of respondents. Table 7 shows that while overseas, New Zealand citizens were involved in a wider range of occupational activities than when they were in New Zealand. This reinforces the perception that New Zealanders are highly regarded as employees overseas and are given the opportunity to work in occupations that they may have had little training or experience in before leaving this country (see total number engaged, Table 7).

Table 7: Employment activities of the November 2000 returnees, prior to leaving New Zealand, while working overseas and working in New Zealand, March 2001 (per cent)

Employment Activity	Prior	Whilst	Currently
Clerical/related work	7.5	11.8	6
Agricultural work	4.7	4.6	4.4
Sales/Service work	11.9	11.2	9.5
Professional	27.3	19.2	23.6
Administrative/Managerial	12.8	12.9	9.5
Self-employed	6.8	5.9	6.2
Heavy labouring/ construction	4.5	5.9	4.7
Household duties	11.4	10.4	16.2
Business owner	2.4	3.6	2.7
Multinational company worker	7.2	9.9	5.8
Unemployed	3.5	4.7	11.5
Total number engaged	572	921	550

Source: Return Migration Survey, 2000

The occupation with the highest percentage was professional, prior, while away and currently (Table 7). These professionals, however, appear more likely to work in other occupations while overseas. The activity that showed the highest percentage increase while people were away from New Zealand was clerical and related work with an increase of 4.3 percentage points (Table 7).

Remittances

Those returning in November 2000 were asked whether or not they had sent money back to New Zealand while working overseas. Over half (56%) had remitted money back to the country. Most of those sending money back had forwarded it to a savings account, a few for other debt repayment or to family. A very small proportion sent money back for student loan repayments (2%). In January, one substantial remittance was reported on the front page of the *New Zealand Herald* after a beachfront mansion sold for NZ\$8.3 million on the Internet (*New Zealand Herald* 2001, A1). The buyer was a 34 year old New Zealander currently working in the computer industry in the United States but intending to return to live in his new home sometime in the future.

Leaving New Zealand

When examining the reasons given for returning to New Zealand it is also necessary to appreciate the reasons given for leaving the country in the first place. The decision to come back is, for many, made before they leave and much return migration is expected. The process is merely the return of those who were classified as "migrants" on departure because they indicated on their departure cards an intention of being away from New Zealand for 12 months or more. The great majority of respondents (70%) in the November 1990 sample claimed that they planned to return within three years of departure and did (Table 5). These people would be better labelled "international circulators" rather than "permanent and long-term migrants" as their periodic absences and returns to New Zealand are planned at the outset (Lidgard 1993:110).

The Dunedin Study found similar results. For the 26 per cent of the 980 sample who were classified as emigrants most in this cohort were considered to be embarking on their OE (Milne *et al.* 2001:450). The most common destinations for these young people were the United Kingdom and Australia.

The desire to travel was given as the most important reason for leaving cited by 79 per cent of the respondents. A general desire for change was also

rated as important to extremely important by those returning when they left to go overseas (73%). In contrast, the poor economy in New Zealand was rated as not applicable or not at all important in the decision to leave by two thirds of the group. The loss of a job or student loan debt also both rated mainly as not applicable or not at all important in the decision to leave – 82 and 86 per cent respectively. Similar results were reported for the Dunedin study with very few leaving “for low tax rates (7%) or to escape debts (2%)” (Milne *et al* 2001:451).

The variable on which there was the greatest variation between the transtasman group and those going to all other countries was the desire to travel. Just over half of those returning from Australia in November 2000 gave this as their primary reason for their travel overseas compared with 84 per cent of those returning from other countries. As expected, the transtasman returnees also rated “desire for a change” at least 10 percentage points lower than those returning from other countries.

Although a slightly higher percentage of the transtasman returnees indicated that an economic cluster of reasons for moving overseas were important to extremely important to them it was still less than half of the group. For example, moving “for better job prospects” was indicated by 49 per cent returning from Australia, 48 per cent from “other” countries and 47 per cent from the United Kingdom while moving “for higher overseas wages” was rated as important by 43 per cent of returnees from all countries except the United Kingdom (42%). Thus, it appears that returnees to New Zealand at the beginning of the 21st Century had been “pulled” overseas just as strongly by non-economic as by economic factors.

Reasons for Return

Family ties were uniformly the most important reason for return in both surveys. Reasons given by returnees in 2000 for coming back were similar to those of a decade earlier. The majority came back because they have family in New Zealand (83%), friends (68%) and/or they like New Zealand’s physical environment (69%). Sixty-five per cent of the respondents felt they were “ready to return” and of those who marked it was applicable, 73 per cent felt it was important to extremely important that their children grew up in New Zealand. Family in New Zealand was slightly more important to the Australian returnees (88%) than to the returnees from the United Kingdom (83%). The desire for children to grow up in New Zealand was 21 percentage points more important for returnees from the United Kingdom (80%) than for those from Australia (59%). In contrast the economic variables scored very heavily as being “not applicable” in the rationalisation of return.

When the reasons for return were analysed by country of previous residence significant differences were found in the reasons given compared between those returning from the United Kingdom and Australia. Males returning from Australia and “other” countries mentioned economic reasons more frequently than those returning from the United Kingdom. The majority of returnees, however, expected to find suitable employment “at home”. Coming back to a “satisfactory job” was intended even if “employment” was not cited as an explicit reason for return (Bedford and Lidgard 1993). Clearly, for those people who return to New Zealand economic considerations have played a relatively minor role in both their decision to leave and their decision to return.

Feelings about Time Overseas

When asked to rate their feelings about their time away from New Zealand most of the November 2000 returnees (91%) felt positive (37%) to strongly positive (54%) about their overseas experience. Those returning from across the Tasman rated their positive feelings as slightly lower (84%) than those returning from the United Kingdom (92%) and other countries (91%). Only four per cent of the survey population indicated they had negative feelings about their experience (Table 8).

In response to the question about whether certain aspects of their last time overseas had been harmful or beneficial to them the respondents indicated that in most areas they felt their time away had been beneficial to very beneficial for them.

Financially, 61 per cent of the respondents felt that their time overseas had been beneficial to very beneficial for them while for nine per cent it had been harmful. For just over three-quarters of the group the experience in career terms had been beneficial to very beneficial. Over 80 per cent felt they had benefited socially from their overseas experience while the rating in terms of personal development was beneficial to very beneficial for almost 90 per cent of the survey group.

Table 8: Feelings of the November 2000 returnees about the harmful or beneficial effects of their time spent overseas (per cent)

Category	Very harmful	Harmful	Neither harmful nor beneficial	Beneficial	Very beneficial	Don't know
Finance	2	7	28	28	33	2
Career experience	-	3	18	40	36	2
Social	-	3	14	41	40	2
Personal development	-	1	7	27	62	2

In-Depth Interviews

Six in-depth interviews were undertaken to give added background and substance to issues identified in the postal questionnaire. All six interviewees lived in the Waikato region and ranged in age from mid twenties to early fifties. They had returned from Australia, the United Kingdom and France. All had worked while overseas and since their return to New Zealand.

The face-to-face interviews focused on the work and qualification experiences of the returnees. Some of them had gained qualifications while working overseas and in general confirmed that they gained valuable job skills. All the interviewees had worked in a number of jobs while overseas. One returnee went from teaching, to nannying, and then back again to teaching. Another went from doing engineering and electrical style work to driving trucks. Flexibility and the preparedness to engage in a wide range of employment opportunities overseas seem to be the key to New Zealand returnees maximising work experience.

The interviewees reinforced that the major reason for return to New Zealand was for family or lifestyle reasons, often in the face of higher incomes overseas. They returned to where they could be close to their families, with job finding being a secondary priority in terms of their location. Family support is very important for the returnees, with three either living with family or in their immediate vicinity. The other three returnees all had close family within the Waikato.

The words of a male interviewee in his twenties aptly describe the experiences of some of the interviewees since their return.

I worked for a while, but that job has since dried up. I've got a few jobs lined up once the summer comes. I'm helping out my family, doing free work. It keeps me busy. I made a date to come back [to New Zealand] and stuck to it. I wanted to live here in the long term – it's home. I would rather live here [New Zealand] than other places, for what it has – freedom, nature.

This is not the case for all returnees, however. Two of the interviewees in their mid twenties had either already returned overseas, or were likely to do so in the near future. These younger people appear likely to remain more mobile than some of the other interviewees who are older and more settled and have partners and homes in New Zealand.

Overall, the interviewees attached a great deal of significance to their home country, New Zealand. These people had lived away, gained life experience, job experience and qualifications, and returned home in order to use these experiences to enrich their future life. The full report of the in-

depth interviews including the interview schedule can be found in Gilson (2001).

Concluding Comment

It appears that a period of residence in either Australia or the United Kingdom remains as popular for the young working age Kiwi of the 21st century as it did for their parents. The historical linkages between New Zealand and its nearest neighbour (Australia) and former colonial ruler (United Kingdom) provide familiar institutions, language, cultural and social ties that perpetuate established patterns of movement (Lidgard 1992).

There are three major streams within the return migration flows to New Zealand. First, there is the proximate stream “shuttling” back and forth across the Tasman. Population has flowed freely between New Zealand and Australia since the beginnings of European settlement in Australasia. Although this movement has mainly been in a westward direction in the past few decades there has also been a counter flow east.

Second, there is the stream initiated by and preserving “colonial” and family ties in the United Kingdom. Since the Second World War the settler flows of families from the United Kingdom to New Zealand have been overtaken and replaced by the “temporary” flows of young, single New Zealanders going to the United Kingdom for a “working holiday” and young United Kingdom citizens holidaying and working temporarily in New Zealand.

Third, there is the more diffuse stream from all “other” countries. This stream is much smaller than the previous two but as the ethnic composition of New Zealand’s population changes the numbers in this stream continue to grow. Return migrants from Asia and the Pacific are becoming more prominent reflecting the return to New Zealand of recent immigrants who have taken out New Zealand citizenship and who have travelled off-shore as part of their strategy for maintaining economic and social connections in former homes.

These studies confirm that strong attachments to people and places in New Zealand play a significant role in the decisions made by New Zealanders to return “home”. Almost 75 per cent of the survey respondents had returned to the city/town/rural district in which they had lived before they left New Zealand. The attraction of the “old home area” was friends, relatives, familiar surroundings and, for a few, “the jobs back home”. Even when employment prospects did not appear to be particularly bright in the area, the presence of family offered the support needed to disregard this fact – at least initially. If suitable employment is not as readily available as expected, however, an

economic dimension becomes important. "Not coming back to any work is the hardest situation to deal with and all other items feed off this e.g. extra cash, new friends, house, car etc" (25-29 year old male).

The debate about "brain drain", like New Zealand's international migration flows since the 1960s, appears to be cyclical. The external migration figures for July 2002 showed that New Zealand citizen PLT arrivals were up 100 or 4 per cent compared to July 2001 (Statistics New Zealand, August 2002). For the July year, New Zealand citizen PLT arrivals were up by 3,400 (to 25,000) while PLT departures of New Zealand citizens was down 18,200 (29 per cent) to 44,200. It must be kept in mind that the potential exists for large uncontrolled flows of New Zealand citizens returning at any time.

As an eminent New Zealand historian asked at the *Knowledge Wave Conference*: "Is it a brain-drain or is it a New Zealand world-wide web, a well-placed global network ready to help New Zealand?" (Belich 2001:4). One such network of overseas New Zealanders can be found at <http://www.nzedge.com> where the organisers attempt to connect "the dots between the points of presence – nurturing the umbilical cord via storytelling, conversation and community" (<http://www.nzedge.com/hot/index.html>).

At present, global competition for the young working age population has enabled more young people than ever before to become part of a labour force with transnational careers and multi-local lives. These people are the current labour market "winners" and their movement is often circular. We contend that this phenomenon is better labelled "brain exchange" or "brain circulation" rather than "brain drain". Thanks to this circulation of highly skilled migrants both sending and receiving countries can benefit rather than one country benefiting at the expense of another (Saxenian 2002:28).

New Zealanders need to remember that fellow citizens are simply continuing to perpetuate a pattern of movement that has been an established part of "Kiwi culture" for decades. Rather than lamenting a loss they should be celebrating a gain (the new ideas, experience and money that returnees and expatriates contribute to New Zealand society). Proposed new legislation restricting the traditional two-year British working holiday visa for all Commonwealth citizens to one year was keenly watched in New Zealand as it could have spelt the end of the two year OE delivering "a sad blow to a New Zealand tradition" (Bingham 2002:A1). In May 2002, after the British Prime Minister had been lobbied by both the New Zealand and Australian Prime Ministers, it was announced that the revised version of the working holiday visa would retain the clause (*New Zealand Herald* 2002; British High Commission 2002).

In the words of four of the returnees in November 2000:

I think brain drain is a red herring. Young people return to NZ with better skills, rich experiences and mature outlooks - a huge benefit to NZ. A better way of improving things is not to stop the young people going but to encourage diverse people to come to NZ with easier immigration procedures etc. *(25-29 year old woman with an undergraduate degree who had returned to NZ from the UK)*

My employment and social experience in Britain has enhanced my personal and professional development which I feel has been an asset to both myself and my present employer in New Zealand *(25-29 year old woman with a postgraduate diploma returning from Britain.)*

Returned for a better life I hope for my family. I have achieved financial security while overseas otherwise I wouldn't have returned. Employment prospects appear rather poor, especially in my case, which is bewildering considering my experience. If I wasn't financially secure I would consider leaving again *(35-39 year old male, financial trader, returning after over 10 years in England)*

I was not looking forward to returning to New Zealand to live and find work after reading in the media (2000) about New Zealand's sad economy and the "brain drain". But since returning four months ago I have been pleasantly surprised and realise a lot of what I read was just media hype *(25-29 year old woman, with an undergraduate degree, returning from England, now living in Auckland).*

The significance of the return of its citizens still remains largely ignored in New Zealand in spite of the potential impact for the local labour and housing markets, education and health services. The current research on return migration is contributing to a better understanding of the implications of "brain exchange" for the country's labour market, services and social fabric. In addition, it is dispelling some of the myths associated with recurring debate on the "brain drain" and exploring the idea that much of New Zealand's talent will continue to shuttle back and forth across the Tasman and/or circulate into and out of countries in the Northern Hemisphere.

Notes

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1 Throughout the paper the sample and survey populations are referred to as "1990" and "2000" for simplicity, even though the samples refer to people who entered New Zealand in November 1990 and 2000, while the surveys refer to people who completed questionnaires in March – May 1991 and 2001.

2 This longitudinal investigation of the health, development and behaviour of 1037 children born in Dunedin during 1972-73 is detailed in Silva and Stanton (1996). Ninety-six per cent of the living sample participated in the "age-26" assessment held between March 1998 and July 1999 (Milne *et al.* 2001).