



Flight Training Survey Results

January 2026

Introduction

In November 2025, the Aviation Industry Association of New Zealand (AIANZ), surveyed its Flight Training Organisation (FTO) members to obtain qualitative insight on career pathways for pilot graduates. The survey focused only on New Zealand students, not overseas students. Of the ten FTOs surveyed, comprehensive results that could be analysed were received from six of these FTOs.

The survey results are intended to support the workforce actions of the Aviation Action Plan, currently being progressed by the Aviation Council. The questions posed were supported and endorsed by the Ministry of Education (MOE), and the Ministry of Transport (MOT). See **Appendix 1** for the Questions.

Context

Notwithstanding the Covid period, the commercial aviation industry in New Zealand has experienced sustained growth over the past decade, enabling trade and tourism, connecting New Zealanders to other parts of the world and supporting regions. Aviation activities also make an essential economic contribution in areas like agriculture, flight training and in the provision of social services for disaster and medical relief. The aviation industry contributes 5.6% of GDP and is worth NZD \$23 billion to the national economy.

Research by the AIANZ and the Ringa Hora Services Workforce Development Council (WDC) released at the end of 2024, shows this growth has increased demand for skilled aviation personnel, particularly pilots and engineers. It is estimated that approximately 100 additional pilots will be required annually to meet projected workforce demand.

The capacity of the tertiary education system to respond to this demand in pilot training is influenced by several structural factors. These include:

1. limits on Study Link support, which contribute to higher levels of student debt (the cap for loans is set at \$70,000 for two years when the cost of training is now approximately \$120,000 or more),

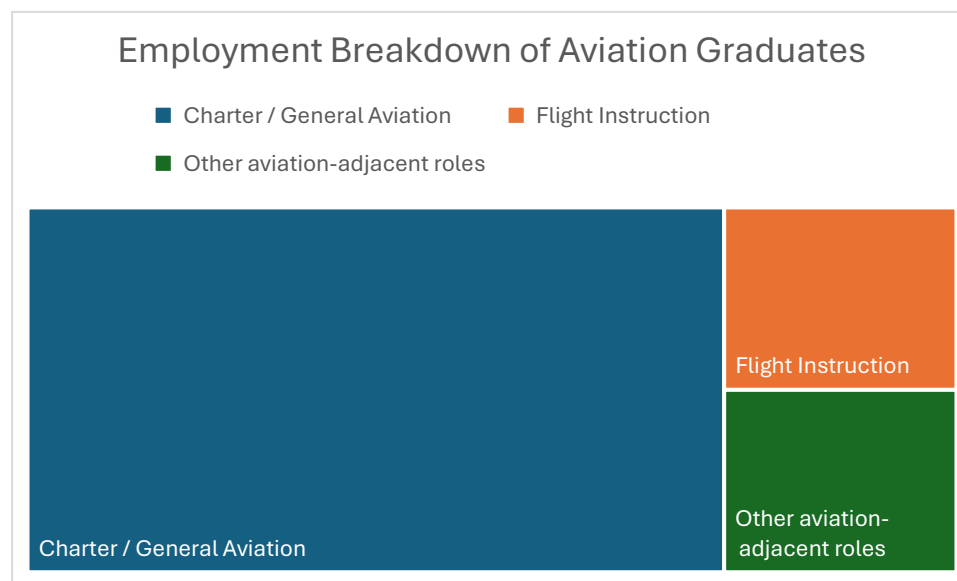
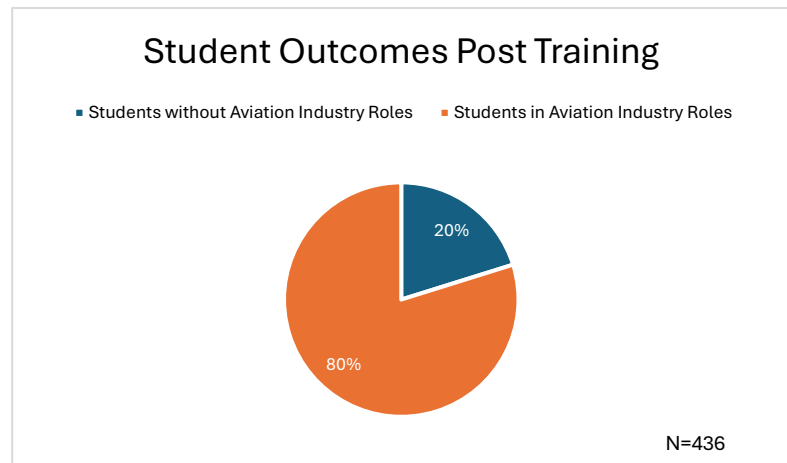
2. constraints in training and employment pathways that affect graduate retention within New Zealand,
3. and the application of interest on student loans for graduates who leave the country.

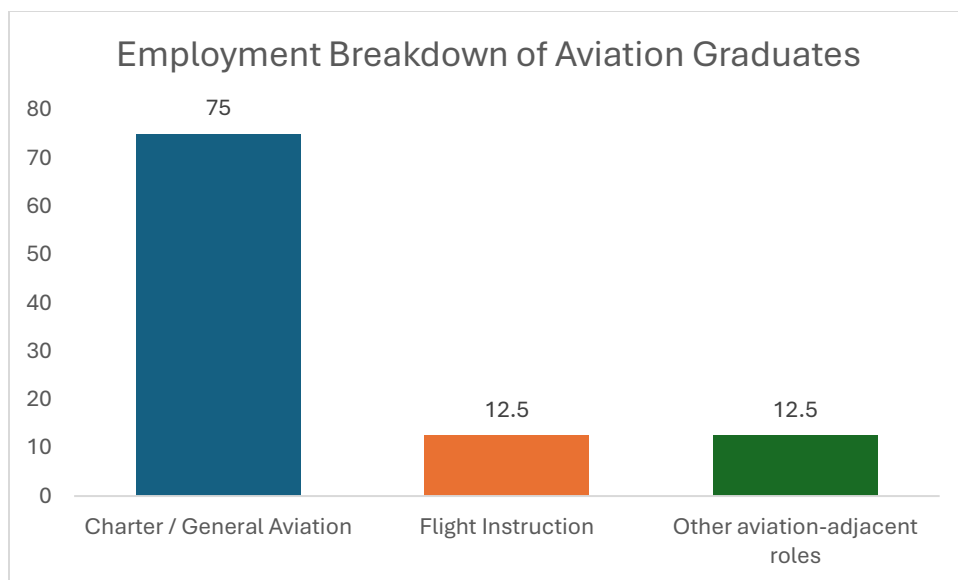
Data from AIANZ's survey of the FTOs provides insight into these dynamics, identifying both the strengths of current pilot training provision and the financial and structural factors shaping learner participation, completion, and early employment outcomes.

Data Analysis

From the FTOs that responded to the survey, over the past five years, 436 domestic learners have enrolled in and completed affiliated aviation training programmes. These data reflect aggregate participation and completion outcomes across participating training partners. Of these graduates, approximately 80 percent have secured

employment within the aviation industry. Among graduates who obtained aviation-related employment, the majority (75%) entered charter and general aviation roles, for example, agricultural aviation and tourism flight operations. A smaller proportion progressed into flight instruction or other aviation-adjacent occupations.





In relation to employment outcomes over time, survey data indicate that approximately 10 percent of graduates remain unemployed within six months of course completion. This figure declines to an estimated 5–7.5 percent within 12 months post-graduation, suggesting improved employment absorption over time.

FTOs consistently emphasised the financial dependence of aviation training provision on international students, reflecting both the high cost of programme delivery and the constraints imposed by current equivalent full-time student (EFTS) funding settings. International students, therefore, make up a substantial and stable proportion of enrolments across providers.

Although FTOs reported a modest increase in domestic participation, financial pressure remains the dominant factor shaping domestic student outcomes. In practice, cost burdens increasingly determine whether students can persist through to completion rather than academic capability or motivation.

One FTO reported that 15 of 82 enrolled students had withdrawn from training, with financial stress and the extended duration required to complete aviation qualifications cited as the primary reasons. A further 18 students required active institutional support after being unable to secure bank lending to meet outstanding tuition fees. These patterns indicate that, under current funding and financing arrangements, domestic participation in aviation training is structurally fragile and sensitive to personal financial capacity.

Financial constraints continue beyond training and directly shape early career pathways for graduates. Recent graduates reported significant dissatisfaction with the student loan framework, noting that accumulated debt is poorly aligned with the number of flight hours required for entry into the aviation workforce. As a result, domestic graduates increasingly pursue overseas employment and training opportunities to complete mandatory flight-

hour requirements. This reliance contributes to sustained overseas employment pathways, functioning as a substitute for training and early-career opportunities that are not currently available within the domestic aviation system.

Whilst training partners further observed that many of these graduates later return to New Zealand once experience thresholds are met, this pattern reflects structural necessity rather than individual preference. Overseas employment functions as an interim pathway to meet requirements that presently cannot be fulfilled in New Zealand.

Conclusion

The results of this qualitative survey of FTOs in New Zealand may be assessed as follows:

1. Most pilot graduates are moving into employment of some type in the aviation industry once they have completed their training and these roles are across the entire system.
2. High costs of training and financial stress are the main reasons that young New Zealanders are withdrawing from pilot training.
3. FTOs are increasingly dependent on overseas students to remain financially viable.
4. Some graduates go offshore to build flight hours to meet New Zealand requirements to fly commercially but often return home.

One of the key findings of this survey is that it debunks an anecdotal view that New Zealand pilot graduates are almost exclusively moving into careers as flight instruction and airline pilots. This research shows there are other pathways.

The research also debunks the myth that New Zealand pilot graduates are not gaining employment in the aviation industry, more than 80% are getting jobs.

What next?

The AIANZ is providing this paper to the Workforce Group on the Aviation Council and to the Ministry of Education, to support the next steps of the Aviation Action Plan. In the first quarter of 2026, practical solutions will be presented to Government to address the workforce shortages and training issues for pilots in the aviation industry. A separate paper on challenges facing the aviation engineering workforce will also be presented.

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January 2026

Appendix 1. Survey Questions.

How many NZ based student pilots funded by EFTS have graduated from your organisation in the past 5 years? To be specific, this is since January 2020 and should not include international students.

- 1. Of these pilots, how many gained roles in the aviation industry?*
- 2. Where were these jobs gained?*
 - a. Flight instruction*
 - b. Charter or general aviation e.g. agricultural pilot, tourism flight operator*
 - c. Military e.g. NZDF*
 - d. NZ based airline pilot*
 - e. Overseas based airline pilot*
 - f. Corporate e.g. executive jet services or similar*
 - g. Other*
- 3. If known, how many of these pilots have not been employed in the aviation industry after 6 months, 1 year or 2 years following graduation? In other words, they left the aviation industry within a short time after graduating. This could be those who found employment outside of piloting aircraft or outside the aviation industry entirely or went overseas.*
- 4. How does the composition of your domestic and international students compare between now in 2025 and pre-Covid in 2019?*