

Term Deposit Report

05 February 2021



Another year of low interest rates expected

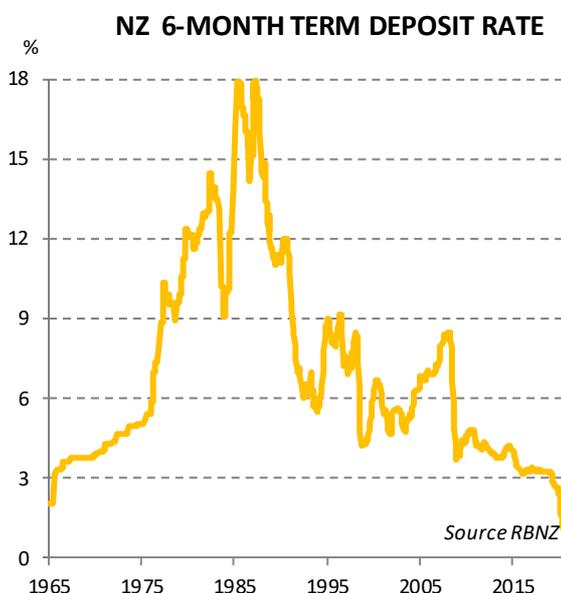
Low interest rates have been helping borrowers and frustrating savers over recent years. Term deposit interest rates have been steadily trimmed over the past year and are significantly below the average levels of the past 10-15 years. In fact, term deposit rates are now at the lowest level on records going back to the 1960s. Interest rates are expected to stay low for several years, and we could still see some declines from today's levels.

ASB's term deposit interest rates are [tabled here](#), and selected rates are shown below.

Term Deposit Rates	90-days	6 months	9 months	1 Year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years
10-year ave	2.83	3.46	3.51	3.58	3.79	3.97	4.14	4.27
Feb-21	0.35	0.80	0.75	0.75	0.80	0.90	1.00	1.00

Some important considerations are:

- **Term deposit rates are expected to remain low over the course of the year.** The better-than-expected performance of the economy over recent months is reducing the likelihood that New Zealand interest rates will get even lower, but higher interest rates are still a long way off. Term deposit interest rates are the lowest on records going back to the 1960s, and are expected to stay around current levels and could still dip slightly lower over the year ahead.
- **Inflation could erode all that return, even though inflation is low at present.** Consumer price (CPI) inflation has generally been within the lower half of the Reserve Bank of New Zealand's 1-3% target range over the past five years. CPI inflation is expected to remain around 1-2% p.a. for several years.
- Related to the inflation outlook, and the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we expect the RBNZ to keep the OCR at its current 0.25% setting over the year ahead. This is a key reason why we expect the return on term deposits to be very low.
- **Making sure you are paying the right tax rate** is important, and it's easy to check ASB has the right tax rate details for you.
- **Higher returns are possible** through focusing on longer-term investments and diversification into different assets with different risk profiles.
- It's always important that investors make sure investments suit their personal needs - **talking with an advisor can be a good idea.**
- **Safety of savings is important** – at times like now savers want to know their money is secure.



Snapshot and Outlook

Our view is that interest rates for most term deposits are going to stay very low for several years, and there is still a risk that some rates could dip even lower than today's levels over the course of the year.

At the time of writing, ASB's term deposit interest rates are largely between 0.35% and 1.00% for terms between 90 days and 5 years for term deposits over \$5,000. Over the past 10 years, term deposit interest rates have averaged over 2% to 3% higher than the current rates available for the various terms.

For the popular term deposit rates – short terms up to 1 year – a key influence is what the RBNZ does with the Official Cash Rate (OCR). The RBNZ adjusts the OCR to help it achieve its price stability (inflation) objectives. The RBNZ has a 1-3% target range for inflation and would like it to be around 2% per annum on average. Consumer price inflation (CPI) has averaged just over 1% per annum over the past 5 years. That's too low from the RBNZ's perspective. Furthermore, we expect CPI inflation to remain contained, even though the economy is recovering well from last year's shock.

Even though the New Zealand economy is making good progress, there are still plenty of challenges: if the economy struggles again, the OCR could get cut lower than the current 0.25% setting.

Another important move from the RBNZ is also likely to be a downward influence on term deposit rates this year. In December the RBNZ provided further support for the economy via its Funding for Lending Programme (FLP). This scheme allows banks to borrow from the RBNZ at the prevailing OCR. The RBNZ's intent is to keep the downward pressure on interest rates in the economy. The FLP means that banks can fall back on the FLP scheme to ensure they have enough funding if their deposit base was to shrink. In turn, this means banks may be more prepared to cut term deposit rates. Lowering banks' funding costs then means lending rates within the economy will fall further and help stimulate the economic recovery. But some of the cost of the scheme will in effect be borne by depositors.

For savers, the expectation that the OCR (and other influential interest rates here and abroad) will stay low over the coming years has major implications. People are rightly concerned about the significant income drop caused by the lower interest rates available today compared to earlier years. Inflation is low, but it's still there, eroding the real value of investment returns, including term deposit interest. In fact, the current 5-year term deposit rate of 1.00% p.a. is lower than what we expect CPI inflation to average over the next 5 years.

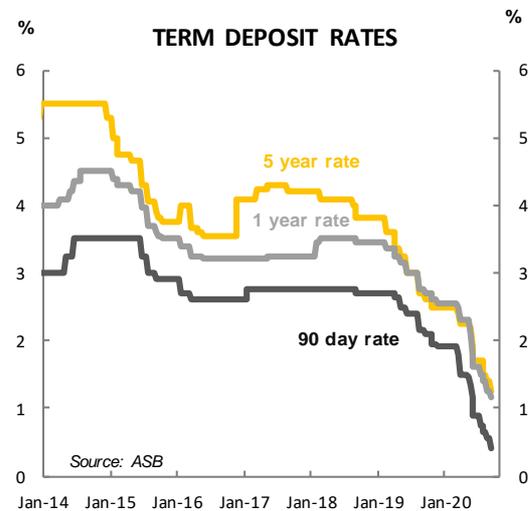
Returns on the longer-term investments (2-5 years) are typically higher than for shorter terms, but that is not the case at present (all rates for terms from nine months out to five years are between 0.75-1.00% at the time of writing). There's not much of a premium for locking money away for several years, which adds to the current challenge of generating income from term deposits.

Some risks for consideration

Interest rates are expected to remain low, leaving some investors frustrated for not locking in the higher long-term rates available in earlier months and years. However, with term deposits, funds are locked in, and only accessible in limited circumstances. This is an important consideration for investors, particularly when weighing up longer terms ([more here](#)). In other words, savers need to weigh up their personal circumstances and need for flexibility when considering what term is best for them.

Safety of your money

When financial markets are volatile like they have been this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many investors become understandably concerned about the safety of their savings. For term deposit customers, it is important to know that ASB is strongly capitalised and maintains a very conservative (high) level of liquidity. This enables us to safely withstand extended periods of market disruption and uncertainty. ASB's credit ratings reflect the independent opinion of three international rating agencies about the capability and willingness of ASB to repay its debts (which includes term deposits). ASB is rated on an international scale as 'strong to very strong'. The RBNZ's website has



information about credit ratings [here](#).

Check you are on the right track

It's worth thinking hard about the timeframe to invest for because the increase in return you can get for making a longer time commitment can make a difference. For example, the current interest rate on a six-month term deposit is 0.45% higher than the three-month rate (0.80% vs. 0.35% for deposits over \$5K).

ASB's term deposit interest rates are [tabled here](#). Higher returns are possible through longer-term investments and diversification into different assets with different risk profiles. But you need to be sure those investments suit your needs. Talking to an [ASB advisor](#) could help.

Check you are paying the correct tax rate

If you are a New Zealand tax resident and have supplied your IRD number but not your tax rate, the default rate is 33%. If you have not supplied your IRD number, then the non-declaration rate is 45%. You can use our [online tool](#) to confirm your Resident Withholding Tax (RWT) rate - it'll only take a few seconds.

The guide then allows you to update your tax rate online using FastNet Classic. If you are a non-New Zealand tax resident the default rate will be the withholding tax rate for your indicated country of tax residence.

Should you be in a term deposit or a term fund?

An ASB Term Fund is an alternative to a term deposit and may provide a better after-tax return than a term deposit offering the same rate, term and fees - if you're on a 30% or 33% income tax rate. [Find out more here](#).

A footnote on negative interest rates

Over the course of 2020, many people asked us questions along the lines of *"why is the RBNZ talking about negative interest rates and what does this mean for me?"* or even more bluntly *"are banks going to charge me for keeping my money?"*

It's important to note that even if the RBNZ cuts the OCR further and even sets a negative OCR, we don't expect negative retail term deposit rates. Improving economic prospects over recent months are reducing the likelihood the RBNZ cuts the OCR any further, in our view.

When we talk about negative interest rates, we are generally talking about the Reserve Bank of New Zealand setting a negative Official Cash Rate (OCR). If the OCR was negative, financial institutions would be required to pay interest for depositing excess reserves with the RBNZ. The ASB Economics team is not forecasting a negative Official Cash Rate setting any more, but we also cannot rule it out if the economy came under renewed pressure and slowed again. The Record of Meeting from the RBNZ Monetary Policy Committee for the November meeting reaffirmed earlier guidance that the OCR will remain at the current 0.25% setting until early-2021. However, the Committee noted that a negative OCR remains an option for the future. New Zealand banks are operationally ready for a negative OCR now. As highlighted above, we don't expect negative term deposit rates, but we do expect term deposit rates to remain very low over the year ahead, and we may still see some declines from today's levels.

If you are interested in our latest summary of the RBNZ's announcement and outlook, you can [read more here](#).

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