

experiences

OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
IN NEW ZEALAND

REPORT 2007
ON THE RESULTS OF THE NATIONAL SURVEY

New Zealand Government

Researched for the Ministry of Education by Deloitte.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

International students are a vibrant part of our education sector providing immense benefit not only to our economy but also to New Zealand education providers, educators and domestic students. The exposure we get from their overseas thinking helps raise New Zealand education standards, and the people-to-people connections established are important for young people as they increasingly operate in a global marketplace.

The current research was conducted on behalf of the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) in partnership with the Department of Labour (the Department), in order to monitor the health of the education and pastoral support provided to international students in New Zealand. The research builds on the previous survey of international students conducted in 2003 and provides the opportunity to understand the international students' experience of life in New Zealand. The Ministry and the Department were particularly interested in examining the changes since the 2003 survey in the following areas:

- the general characteristics of international students;
- the self-reported academic performance or success of international students;
- the satisfaction of international students with educational, pastoral and support services, living conditions and social services;
- students' experiences of working in New Zealand; and
- the future plans of international students, including their work plans.

METHODOLOGY

The survey instrument adopted in 2007 was largely consistent with the survey administered in 2003. An Advisory Group in consultation with the Ministry and the Department made a small number of changes to the 2007 survey, including new labour-related questions. These changes strengthened the robustness and integrity of the National Survey and did not significantly detract from the research team's ability to make comparisons between 2007 and 2003.

The survey comprised eight sections, examining the following areas:

- the factors influencing choice of New Zealand as a study destination;
- students' living arrangements, including homestays;
- students' educational and work-related experiences and self-reported academic progress;
- the availability of and satisfaction with institutional services and facilities;
- the availability of and satisfaction with sources of social support;
- social relationships of international students;
- life satisfaction; and
- students' future plans.

The survey instrument was available online and in hard copy in English, Chinese, Japanese and Korean. The online administration of the survey was used for the first time in 2007 and was the subject of a pilot to determine whether or not it was a suitable mechanism to administer the National Survey. It worked very effectively – and it is strongly recommended that this form of administration is adopted in any future conduct of the National Survey. The target sample was 3,000 international students representative of those enrolled in secondary schools, tertiary institutions (universities and ITPs), private training establishments and English language schools in New Zealand. Overall, 8,944 students were contacted to participate in the research, resulting in a final sample of 2,677 international students. The general characteristics of the sample are outlined below.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS SAMPLE

Overall, a well-balanced and robust sample of international students completed the National Survey in 2007. The sample's distribution across educational sectors was strongly correlated to enrolment patterns of international students in New Zealand. The sample included 1,136 university students (42%), 415 ITP students (16%), 659 PTE / ELS (25%) and 467 (17%) secondary school students. Of these, 1,365 were males (51%) and 1,306 females (49%). The mean age of respondents was 22.9 years in 2007. The majority of students resided in the North Island (75%) and had been in New Zealand for more than a year (53%).

Students from China (42%) were the largest national group of respondents, followed by students from Korea (11%) and Japan (7%). The remaining students came from a range of different countries. In total over 80 different nationalities were represented. The overwhelming majority (91%) of the international students surveyed were Foreign Fee Paying (FFP) students.

Thirty-five percent of international students surveyed had family members in New Zealand. Only 23% of the students surveyed had been in New Zealand for 12 months or less.

Ninety-four percent of international students surveyed had taken the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test, with the median score for students being 6.0. Students were asked to make a self assessment of their English language ability. The majority of students (52%) reported that their English reading abilities were average, 50% assessed their writing skills as average. Listening and speaking abilities were 'average' to 'good'.

Various financial sources were relied upon to support students' education in New Zealand. However, most students (72%) were supported by their parents. Twenty-three percent of students found payment for their education in New Zealand very difficult or extremely difficult.

KEY CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

The key research findings for each of the areas of inquiry in the survey are summarised in the table below. The table also profiles findings that may represent development opportunities in each area.

T 1.0 TABLE 1.0:
KEY CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

AREAS OF SURVEY INQUIRY	KEY FINDING	DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES
Making a Choice about Where to Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 64% of students identified New Zealand as their first choice of study destination • Those who did not choose New Zealand as first choice would prefer Australia, US or UK • Choice was influenced by safety, quality, recognition of New Zealand qualifications and cost • Students' own preference generally took precedence over family preferences • Travel and adventure, beautiful scenery and New Zealand lifestyle were significantly more important to European, South American, North American and Australian (ESANA) students than to Asian students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In AEI's 2006 International Student Survey, Australia was the country of first preference for 84% of international students studying at Australian universities • Scholarships, agents' recommendations and advertisements for study were not strong influencers of student choice

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sector-level differences showed that 2007 tertiary students placed significantly more importance on agents', friends' and teachers' recommendations. Tertiary students also viewed scholarships and financial support from employers or government as significantly more important in 2007 than in 2003. The quality of New Zealand education was also viewed as significantly more important in 2007 than in 2003. 	
Living Arrangements in New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 44% of students were either very satisfied or extremely satisfied with their accommodation arrangements • Most students paid between \$100 and \$300 per week in living expenses; 5% of students reported they paid more than \$500 per week in living expenses • 80% of students spend less than 5 hours per week doing housework • Homestay students were more satisfied with aspects of their living arrangements than students in other accommodation types • 66% of students in homestays were very satisfied or extremely satisfied with their accommodation; only 2% were not at all satisfied • Students from South America were the most satisfied with their accommodation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The least satisfying aspects of accommodation were lack of value for money, poor internet access and support provided • Chinese students were the least satisfied with their accommodation. In particular, Chinese and ESANA students were found to be significantly less satisfied with their accommodation in 2007 than in 2003 • The key sources of dissatisfaction were: location, heating and size of accommodation, rules and regulations and quality of food provided • Students who shared the home with other international students were generally less satisfied with living arrangements than students who lived with no other international students • PTE / ELS students in 2007 were significantly more satisfied with their overall accommodation experience than their 2003 counterparts
Education Experiences in New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The least challenging activities were understanding teachers, taking notes in class and completing assignments on time • Only 28% of students were not satisfied with the progress they are making with their studies • Secondary school and PTE / ELS students in 2007 were significantly more satisfied with the progress they were making in their studies than their 2003 counterparts. • Family interest in performance is high • A high percentage of students (79%) felt that the amount of work and speed of teaching was about right; 7% responded that teaching was too slow. • More PTE and ELS respondents assessed the course content and quality of instructors as excellent than students in any other group • Students in 2007 were generally more satisfied with the progress they are making in their studies than those in the 2003 survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most challenging academic activities were making oral presentations, taking exams and writing assignments • Only 33% of students believed that there are opportunities for other students to learn about their culture in class • Relative to other elements of cultural inclusiveness, students did not believe as strongly that teachers understood the problems of international students or that the teachers made special effort to help international students • In 2007 47% of students agreed that they 'feel included' in their class, whereas in 2003 59% of students agreed that they 'feel included' in their class



AREAS OF SURVEY INQUIRY	KEY FINDING	DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES
Services and Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 53% of students used agents to assist with arrangements to study in New Zealand (61% in 2003) and found them to be particularly good at choosing a place to study, translating and making travel arrangements• Evaluations of services and facilities provided by education institutions were good. Students rated the quality of library services, computing services, international student office, learning support, orientation services and recreational facilities highly• 41% of students felt that New Zealand represented good value for money as an overseas study destination (up from 36% in 2003) and 53% were likely to recommend New Zealand as a study destination (up from 44% in 2003)• PTE and ELS students gave the highest evaluation of New Zealand as good value for money• ITP students were more satisfied than university students with their agent experience but university students tended to give more favourable evaluations of the services provided by their institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Only 23% of students who used an agent were very satisfied or extremely satisfied with their services. 38% were moderately satisfied and 39% were dissatisfied with their services• Students knew the least about and were least satisfied with financial advisory services and 'buddy' programmes offered by institutions• Chinese students gave the least favourable response to the value for money question
Support or Help Available	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students in 2007 generally were more satisfied with the support they received than in 2003• Students are more likely to seek social and emotional support from their international peers than any other group• Staff in educational institutions are most likely to be asked for assistance with practical problems or language issues• New Zealand students are a good source of support for information needs such as assisting students to find their way around	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Very little support is perceived to be available through clubs or community organisations• Secondary school students were significantly more satisfied than tertiary students with the support they received. In particular, tertiary students in 2007 were found to be significantly less satisfied with the overall support they received than tertiary students in 2003
Relationships with People in New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 61% of international students would like to have more New Zealand friends• 34% of respondents reported that making New Zealand friends was difficult but only 42% felt they had tried their best to make friends• Secondary school students socialised more often with other international students compared to tertiary students or PTE / ELS students• Chinese students have significantly different perceptions of relationships than students from Other Asian countries. Specifically, Chinese students were less likely than Other Asian students to try their best to make New Zealand friends. Furthermore, Chinese students were more likely to have fewer New Zealand friends than students from other depth markets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 29% believed that New Zealand students do not seem interested in having international friends• 16% of students never spent any social time with New Zealanders and 23% said they never study with New Zealand students• Only 25% of international students reported that they had never experienced any discrimination from New Zealand students

AREAS OF SURVEY INQUIRY	KEY FINDING	DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES
Life in New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only 28% of students disagreed with the statement 'I am satisfied with my life in New Zealand' • Secondary students were the most satisfied group and ITP students least satisfied • The highest ranking aspects of life in New Zealand were banking and supermarkets • 74% of students knew their entitlement to work in New Zealand • 35% of international students were currently in part-time work mainly in hospitality or retail sectors • 47% of students identified that the purpose of part-time work was to meet living and tuition costs • Only 26% stated that the purpose of part-time work was to gain work experience related to their study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese students were the least satisfied nationality – this was both with respect to their overall life satisfaction in New Zealand and also the various aspects of their hometown in New Zealand • Students in urban centres tended to report lower levels of life satisfaction than those in less populated areas • The least satisfactory aspects of life in New Zealand were public transport, shopping and entertainment. However, 2007 secondary school and tertiary students found public transport significantly better quality than their counterparts in 2003. Shopping was viewed by secondary school and PTE / ELS students in 2007 to be of significantly better quality than that experienced by secondary school and PTE / ELS students in 2003. • Students had the most difficulty with finding work in New Zealand and making New Zealand friends • Only 6% of part-time workers indicated they did so to improve their English skills • 5% of students work more than 20 hours per week, in conflict with their student permit
Future Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16% of students intended to continue further studies in New Zealand • 61% of international students intended to apply for permanent residence in New Zealand • Despite their relative dissatisfaction with aspects of life in New Zealand, a large proportion of Chinese students (56%) proposed to stay in New Zealand and find employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 57% of tertiary respondents were aware of special work permits available to them • 48% of respondents stated that they intended to work in New Zealand on completion of their studies • 26% of students from ESANA countries intended to return home for further study while only 2% of Chinese intended to do this

The 2007 results of the National Survey indicate that for the most part international students have a largely positive experience of their education in New Zealand. Overall, academic programmes and institutional facilities received complimentary evaluations. Across all education sectors, students reported few academic difficulties and described their academic progress as average to good. Students were reasonably satisfied with their accommodation arrangements, and in those cases where it applied, homestay accommodation was deemed to be very satisfactory.

The research results in 2007 reinforced that social support was widely available to international students, but that sources of support used differed depending on what type of support was required. The 2007 results suggest that the majority of international students in New Zealand are relatively well integrated into New Zealand life, have thus adapted well and are generally satisfied with their experiences here. However, the research does suggest that more can be done to improve the level of contact between international and domestic students, with a large proportion of international students wanting more New Zealand friends and contact with New Zealanders in general.

Sensitivity to cultural differences was apparent in the classroom, and discrimination occurred only on an infrequent basis. However, it was concerning to report that only a quarter of the international students reported that they had never experienced discrimination from New Zealand students. It was more encouraging to see that greater proportions of students had never experienced discrimination from teachers, administrative or support staff at their institutions or from other international students.

Just over a third of the students surveyed indicated that they were currently in part-time employment. The sector with the greatest number of students working part time was the tertiary sector. The main reasons students gave for opting to work part time were to meet living and tuition costs but also to gain work experience either directly relating to their area of study or general work experience.

The 2007 research paints a similar picture of the experiences of Chinese students in the 2003 survey. Once again Chinese students tended to be the least satisfied with aspects of their accommodation, homestay arrangements and social support. They had the lowest levels of life satisfaction amongst country of origin groups – North America, Other Asia, Middle East and Pacific Islands – and were least satisfied with aspects of their academic progress. It was not surprising therefore that Chinese students were less likely to recommend New Zealand as a place of study and were also less likely to want more New Zealand friends and / or try their best to make New Zealand friends. However, by contrast Chinese students were the most likely to want to stay in New Zealand and find employment – 56% of Chinese students stated that their immediate intention was to find a job in New Zealand and 76% outlined that they intended to apply for permanent residence.

However, other country of origin groups portrayed the New Zealand education experience much more favourably. ESANA and Middle Eastern students were more likely to recommend New Zealand, in particular German and North America students viewed New Zealand very positively. These country of origin groups reported more cultural inclusiveness than Chinese or Other Asian countries, and ESANA students reported having minimal academic difficulties. ESANA students were highly satisfied with their life in New Zealand.

Similar to 2003, students in Auckland were less likely to see New Zealand as good value for money than those from other regions. The region with the highest proportion of students agreeing that New Zealand was good value for money was the rest of the South Island – this included all South Island centres excluding Christchurch. Furthermore, the 2007 survey found that students residing in Auckland, Wellington and the rest of the North Island were less satisfied with social support than those in Christchurch and the rest of the South Island.

The research found that students who had been living in New Zealand for longer (and were therefore potentially better assimilated into New Zealand society and culture) were more likely to perceive New Zealand education as good value for money and were also more likely to recommend New Zealand as a place to study. Furthermore, students who perceived New Zealand education as good value for money were students who did not have a high level of financial difficulty in paying for their education in New Zealand.

Those students who selected New Zealand as their first choice as a place of study were also more likely to recommend New Zealand as a place to study. The students who selected New Zealand as their first choice rated the quality of the services and facilities at their institutions higher than students who did not. Overall these students were more satisfied with the progress they were making in their studies and more satisfied with their life in New Zealand.

The New Zealand International Education industry, through the Education New Zealand Trust, has identified a number of 'depth markets' as part of a strategic approach to promotions. In 2007 these markets were South Korea, Vietnam, China and India, and to a lesser extent Thailand, Brazil, North America, Malaysia and Germany. The Ministry was also interested in data relating to the responses of students from the Middle East. However, analysis of the depth market data presented in the 2007 survey failed to provide large enough samples of the different depth markets to allow reliable and robust statistical analysis. It is important to note that the depth markets of Vietnam, Brazil, North America and the Middle East had fewer than 60 respondents. In fact, Brazil and the Middle East had fewer than 30 respondents in their respective sub-groups. Other South American nationalities (i.e. Chile, Colombia and Argentina) were grouped with Brazil to provide a meaningful aggregation and sufficient number for analysis ($n = 41$). However, Middle East respondents could not be robustly analysed in isolation.

Life satisfaction in New Zealand was also strongly correlated to students' self assessment of their progress in their studies, the number of New Zealand friends they had, and the level of the support they received. That is, students who had a higher self assessment of progress with their studies, more New Zealand friends and greater support were more satisfied with their life in New Zealand.

FUTURE RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

To ensure that New Zealand retains its ability to attract international students from a wide variety of international locations, it is important that it continues to develop an integrated, sustainable and forward-thinking approach to international education. The 2007 research from the National Survey finds that overall New Zealand is well regarded by international students; however, more focus needs to be centred on understanding and meeting particular target market needs. Chinese students in particular continue to be more dissatisfied than any other group with aspects of their education experience. Yet the research would suggest that a high percentage of Chinese students intend to stay in New Zealand and find employment, compared with students from Other Asian countries and from ESANA countries. Perhaps there is more to learn about the Chinese market.

Furthermore, although the 2007 research findings provide a comprehensive summary of the general feeling of international students studying in New Zealand, it is important to continue to undertake research which enables a greater understanding of all international students coming to our shores.

New Zealand, alongside Japan and Canada, has been recently described as one of the international student market's evolving destinations (Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007). These countries were profiled as attracting significant numbers of foreign students but operating in the 'shadow' of their more visible regional neighbours, China, the US and Australia respectively. In light of this, further research could investigate developing an action strategy to more successfully market our advantages, including having well-regarded institutions, safe environments and a reasonable cost of living.



The research findings suggest that other initiatives might be established by the Ministry, including those proposed below.

- The Ministry of Education and Education New Zealand may wish to examine the feasibility of establishing a special purpose fund for education institutions wishing to develop, implement and / or extend existing cultural awareness programmes in their institutions.
- The Ministry of Education may wish to encourage increasing interaction between local and international students by promoting strategic objectives in sector-specific Internationalisation Plans (i.e. support services, teaching, learning and curriculum development).
- The Ministry of Education in partnership with Education New Zealand could initiate a stocktake of what initiatives are currently being undertaken by education providers to assist cultural awareness in education institutions and publish case studies of those practices that are proving to be effective.
- Further market research should be carried out by the Ministry of Education on the expectations of Chinese students. A great deal of research focuses on Chinese students' experiences in New Zealand; however, little seems to address what expectations Chinese students have and why they choose to study in New Zealand. In particular, the research needs to understand why Chinese students' expectations vary markedly from other nationalities. A comparative qualitative study examining other student groups' ('depth market groups') expectations – including New Zealand students – would be useful in order to better understand satisfaction drivers for key markets.
- At a local and institutional level, institutions should be actively encouraged to explore ways in which the wider community and New Zealand students can be better integrated with international students. This may involve institutions developing programmes for assisting local students in gaining experience of international students, other cultures and cultural sensitivities.
- As in 2003 the research findings suggest that institutions need to promote the services and / or facilities available to international students. At a local and institutional level, there is an opportunity for institutions to improve the awareness of services. It is recommended that institutions evaluate where resources could best be applied. The results would suggest financial advisory services and buddy programmes would be positively received and these may not be difficult or expensive to implement.
- The Ministry of Education could initiate the development of a communication and cultural handbook to better educate all students – international and domestic. For example, a domestic and international students' handbook could be developed outlining the various cultural differences to expect.

The 2007 National Survey of International Students provides a comprehensive source of information about the experiences of international students studying in New Zealand. The data gathered is rich and this report reflects only a portion of the analysis that is possible with the survey responses. The Ministry contemplates further analysis of the survey data with a view to assisting with the further development of practices and policies to enhance New Zealand's reputation as a desirable place to study. The National Survey is a useful tool for gauging New Zealand's progress towards this goal.