



Education New Zealand

New Zealand's journey—

the case for providing an exceptional experience for international students

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“One of my lecturers helped me get back on track, in my second year I wanted to quit but he believed in me and helped me get through the entire course.”

The decision to study thousands of miles away from home in pursuit of a quality education is a courageous one for both students and parents.

It's often the first time a young student moves away from their family to live in a country and culture vastly different from the one they were raised in. Their parents may never have visited or will travel to their child's new host country.

Students like Ritika Bhargava who came to New Zealand at 18 to study physiotherapy. It was the first time she had left home and she was “pretty scared.”

Ritika has since opened a chain of physiotherapy clinics, won a Young Entrepreneur of the Year award and represented New Zealand in power lifting. Yet at times she wanted to give up.

“One of my lecturers helped me get back on track, in my second year I wanted to quit but he believed in me and helped me get through the entire course,” she said.

For students like Ritika, having the right support around them can be the difference between returning home feeling defeated or becoming life-long ambassadors for their host countries.

The international education sector is firmly in the ‘trust’ business. Parents trust us to have their children's best interests at heart, to keep them safe and well cared for, and to offer them a high-quality education that will set them up for future success.

At the heart of our international education sector's efforts to safeguard this trust is manaakitanga, a Māori value meaning hospitality, kindness, support; the process of showing respect and care for others. In New Zealand, we place great importance on manaakitanga, which is the reason behind the success of our student attraction programmes, which are built on welcoming visitors.

International students enrich our campuses, classrooms and communities. They bring the world to young New Zealanders who might not have the opportunity to travel. Furthermore, students who have a great time here will naturally go on to become lifelong ambassadors for New Zealand. As a country, we benefit enormously from hosting more than 120,000 students each year, a significant number for a country of only 4.7 million people. International education is New Zealand's fourth biggest export earner.

However, young people travelling to a new country to study can also be vulnerable, and without the proper infrastructure and services in place to support them, international students can feel isolated, under pressure, and at worst become targets for exploitation. It is a privilege to host international students, yet on occasions, this can be forgotten.

With the rapid growth of the international education sector, issues concerning the wellbeing of international students have emerged around the world. In 2016 and 2017, New Zealand saw a rise in issues such as poor performance at some education providers, student workplace exploitation, and issues with student mental health and wellbeing.”

These issues triggered an intensive look at the international student experience, starting from before students even apply to study, right through until after they graduate. It was agreed that in order for our international education sector to be sustainable, it is vital we focus on the total student experience—and launch a national response.

Government agencies reacted to these issues with a robust response and this work is ongoing. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority has taken strong enforcement action against education providers with quality

well, and feel welcome, valued and socially connected.

Education New Zealand (ENZ) has been implementing key elements of the Student Wellbeing Strategy, and championing the international student experience nationally. This has included substantial research projects to identify gaps and investment priorities, stakeholder engagement, and the identification and support of best practice programmes that improve the quality of the experience for international students. There is also an associated contestable fund, administered by the Ministry of Education, available for providers and regions to initiate programmes which will enhance the student experience. The fund will also support not-for-profit community organisations providing cultural and social services for international students.

Given students' experiences start well before they even get on a plane—with education agents, counsellors or online application processes playing an important role—ENZ is reviewing and refining our engagement with education agents and counsellors, including ensuring we supply them with high-quality, up-to-date, accurate information.

We're also focused on attracting more students to our regions. Our largest city, Auckland, has historically been the preferred option for international students, but we have many more cities and towns with valuable international education offerings. Smaller cities can also be a better match for some students' needs. Through our Regional Partnership Programme, we have been working across New Zealand to help the regions promote their unique educational experiences to prospective students. At the same time, we are looking at programmes to support local communities and international students to enjoy all the social and cultural benefits during their stay.

We are sharing personal stories and case studies to help New Zealanders understand the social, cultural, and economic benefits that international students bring to their campuses and communities, transforming them into international student advocates.



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issues. The Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students has been strengthened, and education providers are now also responsible for the quality of the agents they work with. There are tighter requirements around English language testing. Penalties against employers who fail to meet their employment obligations have also been increased.

A wide range of representatives from education, police and social agencies including New Zealand's Human Rights Commission came together to consider how best to ensure every international student who chooses to study in New Zealand has a world-class experience, feels included and knows where to go for support should they need it.

This led to the creation of the New Zealand Student Wellbeing Strategy for international students. The strategy has four themes: Economic Wellbeing, Quality Education, Health and Wellbeing, and Inclusion. The aim is that international students in New Zealand have adequate funds to live and study, receive quality education, and qualifications, are safe and

Given our geographical distance, Kiwis have always understood the need to be globally connected. The spirit of manaakitangi is what makes a small nation in the Pacific stand out on the global stage. I believe New Zealand is an example of what can be achieved when an open and coordinated response is launched that puts the student experience at the forefront. I look forward to seeing what we achieve as we continue this journey.

We want students to remember their time in New Zealand as having been transformative, both educationally and personally, giving them qualifications and experience that will put the world at their feet. To study abroad in any country is a brave decision, and we are committed to supporting those who choose to study in New Zealand, providing them with the best possible experience.

This content was paid for and created by Education New Zealand. The editorial staff of The Chronicle had no role in its preparation.

