

New Zealand ITP Sector

International Student Barometer 2015

Summary report

Overview

The International Student Barometer (ISB) is a global study that investigates the decision making, expectations, perceptions and experiences of international students.

Ten New Zealand Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs) participated in the 2015 ISB. 2015 marked the fifth time New Zealand ITPs had taken part in the Study, with previous waves in 2008, 2009, 2011 and 2013.

Each participating institution receives their own institutional-level results, allowing them to compare the experience of their students against national and global benchmarks. This report provides a high-level summary of results for the sector, highlighting areas where results for New Zealand differ notably from the global benchmark and where there are particularly noteworthy differences since the last wave of the study in New Zealand in 2013. Additional, more detailed analysis is available in the PowerPoint-format report provided alongside this report.

Methodology and sample profile

1. The 2015 New Zealand ITP ISB was conducted online between 13 April and 5 June 2015.
2. 1,972 international students from ten New Zealand ITPs participated in the survey (up from 1,192 in 2013).
3. The global benchmark comprises data from 41,201 international students at 91 ITP-like institutions around the world. Institutions selected to make up the global benchmark are current or former polytechnics, technical institutions and institutions deemed similar in nature to polytechnics. While the global benchmark does provide a valuable tool for comparing New Zealand results against, the diverse nature of institutions included should be kept in mind.
4. The 2015 New Zealand ITP student sample was heavily dominated by students from India (49%). This is a higher proportion than in the 2013 wave of the survey (where Indians made up 34%) and considerably higher than the 14% in the global benchmark group. The next largest group of students were Chinese (18%).
5. Almost a third (29%) of the sample was studying business and administrative studies. The next largest subject areas were engineering (14%), tourism and hospitality (11%), technologies (10%) and subjects allied to medicine (8%).
6. Almost two-fifths (37%) of the sample were studying at undergraduate (UG) level. Just over a quarter (26%) were postgraduate taught (PGT) students. The New Zealand sample comprised a lower proportion of both UG and PGT students than the global benchmark group (47% and 32% respectively) and a higher proportion of students doing other non-degree level studies and other courses.
7. Students were spread across years of study, with almost three-fifths (57%) in their first year or doing a single year or short course, almost a third in their final year (29%) and 14% in other years of study.

Pre-arrival and the student decision-making process¹

8. International students at ITPs in New Zealand were more likely to consider the country to be more important in their decision of where to study (53%) than the institution (40%). New Zealand was the first choice country for the majority (75%) of students. Consideration of other countries was relatively high, however, just under a fifth of students (17%) only considering New Zealand. Other countries most likely to be considered were Australia (42%), Canada (35%), the USA (34%) and the UK (20%).
9. Personal safety and institution reputation were the top factors for international students at ITPs in New Zealand when deciding where to study (94% of students rating these as important or very important in their decision). These were followed closely by specific course title, quality of research, earning potential, cost of living and cost of education (tuition fees) (all 93%). These results follow a similar pattern to the global benchmark group. One interesting difference in students' decision making is the higher level of importance that students in New Zealand placed on many factors, particularly work- and visa-related factors: 90% of international students in New Zealand considered opportunities to work while studying as important (13% above the global average), 90% considered opportunities for full-time work in this country following their studies as important (12% above the global average), 89% considered ease of getting a visa to study in this country as important (16% above the global average) and 86% considered the opportunity for permanent residency in this country as important (21% above the global average). Students in New Zealand were also considerably more likely than the global average to see proximity to their home country as important (63%, +16%) and reputation of an individual academic supervisor or professor (89%, +12%)².
10. Agents continue to play a key role in the decision-making process for students, with over half (55%) of the sample applying via an education agent (a similar proportion to the 54% in 2013). Agents were the most commonly cited influence in helping students choose their institution (59%), considerably ahead of the institution's website (31%), friends (29%) and family (24%).
11. The vast majority of students who used an agent or institution representative office overseas were happy with the service received, rating the service as either good (54%) or very good (35%). Students were most likely to feel that the agent was knowledgeable about the institution application process (91%), provided helpful services for their visa application (91%) and was not pushy or forceful with them during the application/enrolment process (89%). Students were less likely to feel that the agent reduced their overall costs (56%), described the institution accurately (80%) and provided helpful pre-departure orientation services (81%).
12. Satisfaction with the visa process was also generally high, particularly with immigration service on arrival at the border (95%) and support from their institution with the visa application process (91%). Students were slightly less satisfied with service levels from visa office staff in their home country (84%) and the time taken to process their visa (82%).

¹ Questions in this section were just asked of students in their first year of study so that the experience was still relatively recent.

² PGT and PGR students only.

Overall satisfaction and propensity to recommend their institution

13. Overall satisfaction with students' experience at their institution is high; 88% of international students at NZ ITPs surveyed were satisfied. This is, however, very slightly (1% - not statistically significantly) lower than both the global benchmark and the last wave of the study in New Zealand in 2013. Overall satisfaction varies by institution, with scores ranging from 78% to 92%. It also varies considerably by nationality with the highest levels of satisfaction found amongst South African (100%), Nepalese (98%) and Sri Lankan (96%) students, and the lowest satisfaction levels found amongst students from Saudi Arabia (76%), Japan (78%) and South Korea (79%)³. Satisfaction levels for students from New Zealand ITPs' two main source countries were 87% amongst Chinese students and 90% amongst those from India.
14. Almost eight out of ten (79%) international ITP students in New Zealand would recommend their institution to others thinking of applying there. This is slightly (3%) below both the global benchmark group average and the score from the 2013 study. Again there is considerable variation between institutions, with a reported range between 70% and 84%. Nationalities most likely to recommend their institution were students from Kenya, Papua New Guinea, Thailand (all 100%) and Fiji (95%). Those least likely to recommend their institution were Indonesian (50%), Japanese (50%) and South Korean (59%)⁴. 78% of Chinese students and 80% of Indian students would recommend their institution.

Arrival experience⁵

15. 92% of students in New Zealand were satisfied with their overall arrival experience, in line with the score from 2013 and slightly higher than the global average (89%).
16. Looking at the arrival experience in more detail, satisfaction levels were highest with the institution accounts/finance department (94%), meeting academic staff (93%), enrolment/academic registration (93%) and the formal welcome at the institution (92%). At least nine out of ten students were also satisfied with their institution orientation (91%), setting up a bank account (91%) and making friends from their home country (90%). Satisfaction was lowest with making friends from New Zealand (77%), social activities (78%), the condition of accommodation (83%) and local orientation – introduction to the local area (83%).
17. International students at ITPs in New Zealand were at least as satisfied as, if not more so than, the global average with most elements of the arrival experience. In particular they were more likely to be satisfied with setting up a bank account (+10%), the welcome/pick-up at the airport, railway, coach station (+6%), internet access at their accommodation (+5%), the institution accounts/finance department (+5%), making friends from their own country (+5%) and, despite relatively lower levels of satisfaction, making friends from the host country, i.e. New Zealand (+5%). The main area where New Zealand institutions seem to be

³ Analysis based on nationalities with at least 10 respondents. Please note that base sizes for South Africa (11), Sri Lanka (23), Japan (18) and South Korea (19) were relatively low so these figures should be treated with caution.

⁴ Analysis based on nationalities with at least 10 respondents. Please note that the base sizes for all of these nationalities were relatively low (Kenya – 16; Papua New Guinea – 10; Thailand – 10; Fiji – 21; Indonesia – 12; Japan – 14; South Korea – 17) so these figures should be treated with caution.

⁵ Questions in this section were just asked of students in their first year of study so that the experience was still relatively recent.

underperforming against the global benchmark is in social activities (-5%) for new arrivals, although they're also slightly behind on local orientation (-3%).

18. Despite what appear to be relatively high levels of satisfaction with many elements of the arrival experience in 2015, scores have actually fallen for many elements since 2013. Most noticeable drops in satisfaction have been with the local orientation (-7%), making friends from New Zealand (-7%), making friends from other countries (-6%) and social activities (-6%). On the flip side, there has been a 5% increase in satisfaction with institutions' accommodation offices.

Learning experience

19. 89% of students were satisfied with their overall learning experience, slightly higher (+2%) than both the 2013 score for New Zealand students and the global benchmark.
20. Satisfaction with many of the more detailed aspects of the learning experience was high. Students were most likely to be satisfied with academic staff whose English they can understand (94%), the virtual learning environment (Blackboard/WebCT/WebLearn/Stream/Moodle) (93%) and help to improve English language skills (if applicable) (92%). At least nine out of ten students were also satisfied with the subject area expertise of lecturers/supervisors, the quality of the lecture theatres and classrooms and learning technology (all 91%), as well as the quality of lectures, getting time from academic staff when they need it/personal support with learning, the quality of laboratories, studying with people from other cultures and the online library facilities (all 90%).
21. However, there are a number of elements with comparatively low levels of satisfaction, and these relate largely to employment/employability: 73% of students were satisfied with opportunities for work experience/placements as part of their studies, 73% were satisfied with advice and guidance on long-term job opportunities and careers from academic staff, and 80% were satisfied with learning that would help them to get a good job. As illustrated above, work-related factors appear to be particularly important to students at New Zealand ITPs when choosing their study destination, so this could be an area for focusing attention. Other areas of low satisfaction, relating specifically to postgraduate research (PGR) students, are opportunities to teach (70%) and confidence about managing a research project (79%)⁶.
22. Despite being low, satisfaction with opportunities to teach has actually increased 20% since 2013. Satisfaction in having confidence about managing a research project, however, has decreased 10%⁷. There are no other notable changes in satisfaction scores between 2013 and 2015.
23. There are also few notable differences between international students at New Zealand ITPs and the global benchmark in terms of satisfaction with elements of the learning experience. The one exception is PGR

⁶ Due to the low number of postgraduate research students included in the sample, these figures should be treated with caution.

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students in New Zealand being considerably less satisfied in having confidence about managing a research project (-10%)⁸.

Living experience

24. 88% of students were satisfied with their overall living experience, again very slightly higher (+1%) than the global benchmark score, but 3% lower than the overall 2013 New Zealand score.
25. Students were most likely to be satisfied with their institution's eco-friendly attitude to the environment (95%), the surroundings outside the institution (93%), the design and quality of the campus buildings (91%), the quality of the external campus environment (91%), feeling safe and secure (91%) and making friends from their home country (90%).
26. Compared to the arrival, learning and support experience, there are more living experience elements with relatively low levels of satisfaction. As in 2013, the key issue for students appears to be cost, with all elements related to cost showing low satisfaction scores: the opportunity to earn money while studying (61%), the cost of accommodation (63%), the availability of financial support (66%) and the cost of living (69%). Satisfaction was also low with a number of leisure/social-related elements: sports facilities (72%), social activities (76%), making friends from New Zealand (78%) and making good contacts for the future (79%).
27. Like the arrival experience, levels of satisfaction with many elements of the learning experience have dropped since 2013. Largest decreases have been with a number of the cost-related factors: the opportunity to earn money while studying (-10%), the availability of financial support (-9%), the cost of accommodation (-8%); as well as with sports facilities (-7%), making good contacts for the future (-7%), social activities (-6%), access to suitable accommodation (-5%), making friends from other countries (-5%) and making friends from New Zealand (-4%).
28. Despite low levels of satisfaction, international students at New Zealand ITPs were actually considerably more satisfied than the global average with the availability of financial support (+11%), the opportunity to earn money while studying (+7%), making friends from the host country (+6%) and the cost of living (+4%); these are obviously global issues. They were also more likely to be satisfied with internet access at their accommodation (+5%), making friends from their own country (+4%), and their institution's eco-friendly attitude (+4%). Elements of the living experience where New Zealand is most notably below the global benchmark were sports facilities (-7%), social activities (-5%) and transport links to other places (-4%).

⁸ As above, this score is based on a small number of postgraduate research students (14) so should be treated with caution.

Support experience

29. 89% of students were satisfied with support services overall, slightly higher than the global benchmark of 88% and slightly lower than the 2013 score of 90%.
30. Satisfaction with the vast majority of support services amongst those who used them is high - over 90%. Students were most likely to be satisfied with the chaplaincy or multi-faith provision (98%), student advisory service (97%), counselling (96%), IT and system support (95%) and personal tutors (95%). Students were least likely to be satisfied with the accommodation office (83%), the careers service (87%) and campus eating places (88%).
31. Satisfaction levels had increased since 2013 for a number of support elements, in particular campus eating places and counselling (both +7%) along with the finance office, accommodation office and student advisory service (all +4%). Satisfaction with the careers service, however, had fallen (-5%).
32. International students at New Zealand ITPs were at least as satisfied as, if not more so than, students globally on the majority of the support elements. In particular, they were more likely to be satisfied with their institution's accounts/finance department (+6%), catering (+5%), chaplaincy or multi-faith provision and the student advisory service (both +4%).

Future plans

33. Three-fifths of the ITP international students' future plans involved staying in New Zealand after their current programme of study. Just under half of students intended to stay in New Zealand for employment – either short term (10%), long term (22%) or migration/permanent residence (13%). More than one in ten intended to stay in New Zealand for further study, either at the same institution (11%) or a different one (4%). Almost a quarter (24%) of students were undecided what they will do following their study.

Concluding remarks

34. As this short summary shows, there are generally high levels of satisfaction amongst international students studying at ITPs in New Zealand. Almost nine out of ten international students were satisfied overall with their experience and almost eight out of ten would recommend their institution to others thinking of applying there. These scores, however, are slightly lower than scores in 2013 and, looking at the student experience in more detail, there have been considerable drops in satisfaction with a number of aspects of the arrival experience and the living experience, in particular with cost-related living elements. Ongoing monitoring to assess future trends may be beneficial.
35. Satisfaction levels vary noticeably by institution and student nationality and it's important for institutions to be aware of results for their own students. However at an overall level, areas with lowest satisfaction and those which could benefit from further attention tend to be around costs, employment/employability and social life; many elements of which are issues for international students globally, not just in New Zealand.

36. One particular point for New Zealand institutions to keep in mind is the relatively high importance of employment/employability factors – both during and after study – in the decision of many students who choose to study here. Focusing attention on aspects such as work experience/placements, learning that will help students' employability and careers advice will help avoid a mismatch between expectations and reality in this area.

Accompanying notes

Satisfaction questions in the International Student Barometer were asked using a four point scale: Very satisfied; Satisfied; Dissatisfied; Very dissatisfied. This report uses net satisfaction based on the percentage of respondents who were 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied'.