

New Zealand University 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.

All eight New Zealand universities participated in the 2015 ISB. 2015 marked the fifth time New Zealand universities had taken part in the Study, with previous waves in 2008, 2009, 2011/12 and 2013.

Each participating university 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 university ISB was conducted online between 13 April and 5 June 2015.
2. 6,188 international students from all eight New Zealand universities participated in the survey (up from 5,627 in 2013).
3. The global benchmark comprises data from 161,304 international students at 205 universities around the world.
4. Almost a third (29%) of the sample of international students in New Zealand was students from China; this was slightly higher than the proportion of Chinese students in the global benchmark group (22%). The next largest nationality groups were American (8%), Malaysian (7%) and Indian (6%).
5. Almost a quarter (23%) of the sample was studying business and administrative studies. The next largest subject areas were engineering (10%) and biological sciences (10%), followed by social studies (6%) and mathematical and computer sciences (5%).
6. Over half (55%) of students were studying at undergraduate (UG) level. Around a fifth each were postgraduate taught (PGT) (20%) and postgraduate research (PGR) (22%) students. The New Zealand sample comprised a higher proportion of UG and PGR students than the global benchmark group (45% and 14% respectively) and a lower proportion of PGT (35%).
7. Students were spread across years of study, with just over two-fifths (41%) in their first year or doing a single year or short course and almost a third each in their final year (28%) or other years of study (31%).

Pre-arrival and the student decision-making process¹

8. Views on whether it is the institution or the country that is more important in the decision of where to study were split with almost half (49%) of students feeling that it was the institution and 44% feeling it was the country. This might be seen to represent a lower 'institutional brand strength' and a higher 'country brand strength' for New Zealand compared to the global benchmark where the institution was seen as most important by 58% of students and the country by 36%.
9. New Zealand was the first choice country for almost two-thirds (65%) of the sample. Consideration of other countries was relatively high, however, with only around one in ten students (11%) not considering any other countries. Other countries most likely to be considered were Australia (42%), USA (41%), the UK (33%) and Canada (25%).
10. University reputation (93%) and personal safety (92%) were the top factors for international students at New Zealand universities in deciding where to study. These were followed closely by research quality (91%), earning potential (90%), specific programme title, cost of living and cost of education (tuition fees) (all 89%). 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 several work- and visa-related factors: 77% of international students in New Zealand considered ease of getting a visa to study in this country as important (10% above the global average), 74% considered opportunities to work while studying as important (6% above the global average) and 68% considered opportunities for permanent residence in this country as important (12% above the global average). PG students in New Zealand were also considerably more likely than the global average to see reputation of an individual academic supervisor or professor as important (86%, +7%).
11. The university website helped almost two-fifths (39%) of students' decisions to choose their institution, slightly higher than the influence of education agents/consultants (34%) and higher than friends (29%) and family (27%).
12. A quarter of the sample (25%) applied via an education agent (a similar proportion to the 27% in 2013), although as you may imagine, use of agents varied considerably by nationality – highest use amongst students from Cambodia (53%), India (52%), Russia (40%) and Malaysia (38%) – and level of study – 39% of PGT students applied via an agent compared to just 21% of UG students.
13. 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 (60%) or very good (27%). Students were most likely to feel that the agent was not pushy or forceful with them during the application/enrolment process (91%) and provided helpful services for their visa application (88%). Students were less likely to feel that the agent reduced their overall costs (57%), provided helpful pre-departure orientation services (74%) and described the university accurately (77%).
14. Satisfaction with the visa process was also generally high, particularly with immigration service on arrival at the border (93%) and support from their university with the visa application process (87%). Students

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

were slightly less satisfied with the time taken to process their visa (78%) and service levels from visa office staff in their home country (76%).

Overall satisfaction and propensity to recommend their institution

15. Satisfaction amongst international students at New Zealand universities is generally high: 90% of international students surveyed were satisfied with their institution experience overall. This is in line with the global benchmark and is a 2% increase since the last wave of the study in New Zealand in 2013. Overall satisfaction varies slightly by institution, with scores ranging from 88% to 93%. It also varies somewhat by nationality with the highest levels of satisfaction (amongst nationalities with at least 30 responses) found amongst Sri Lankan (98%), Tongan (96%), British (95%), Nepalese (95%) and Brazilian (94%) students. Lowest levels of satisfaction were amongst students from Saudi Arabia (80%), Cambodia (82%), Iran (83%), Taiwan (84%) and South Korea (84%)².
16. Just over eight out of ten (81%) international students at university in New Zealand would recommend their institution to others thinking of applying there. Again, this is a 2% increase since the last wave of the study in 2013. While equally as satisfied as the global benchmark group, however, students are slightly less likely (-2%) to recommend their institution. Average institution scores range from 76% to 88%. There is also considerable variation by nationality. Students most likely to recommend their institution were those from Tonga (97%), Solomon Islands (97%), Fiji (96%), Papua New Guinea (95%), Philippines (92%) and Samoa (91%). Those least likely to recommend their institution were students from Hong Kong (66%), Russia (71%), Saudi Arabia (71%), Iran (71%) and Singapore (72%)³.

Arrival experience⁴

17. 89% of students in New Zealand were satisfied with their overall arrival experience, equal to the global average and very slightly (+1%) higher than the satisfaction score in 2013.
18. Looking at the arrival experience in more detail, satisfaction levels were highest with the university accounts/finance department (93%), meeting academic staff (90%) and the accommodation office (89%). Satisfaction was lowest with making friends from New Zealand (71%), internet access at students' accommodation (76%), local orientation – introduction to the local area (81%), understanding how their course of study would work (82%) and social activities (82%).
19. International students at university 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 the welcome/pick-up at the airport, railway, coach station and setting up a bank account (both +8%). They were slightly less likely than the global average to be satisfied with internet access at their accommodation and local orientation (-4%)

² Analysis based on nationalities with at least 30 responses.

³ Analysis based on nationalities with at least 30 responses.

⁴ Questions in this section were just asked of students in their first year of study so that the experience was still relatively recent.

20. There is little change in satisfaction with elements of the arrival between 2013 and 2015, the most notable difference being a 6% fall in satisfaction with local orientation.

Learning experience

21. 87% of students were satisfied with their overall learning experience, again in line with the global average and very slightly (+1%) higher than the satisfaction score in 2013.

22. Satisfaction with many of the more detailed aspects of the learning experience was high – 90% or above. Students were most likely to be satisfied with the subject area expertise of lecturers/supervisors (94%), confidence about managing a research project (93%)⁵, the virtual learning environment (Blackboard/WebCT/WebLearn/Stream/Moodle) (93%), the online library (93%) and the physical library (92%).

23. Elements with comparatively low satisfaction all related to employment/employability: 66% of students were satisfied with opportunities for work experience/placements as part of their studies, 70% of PGR students were satisfied with opportunities to teach, 70% of students were satisfied with advice and guidance on long-term job opportunities and careers from academic staff, and 77% were satisfied with learning that would help them to get a good job.

24. Despite being relatively low, satisfaction with these employment/employability elements has increased since 2013: opportunities to teach increasing by 4% and learning that would help students get a good job, opportunities for work experience and careers advice all up 3%. Other notable increases in satisfaction were feedback on coursework/formal written submissions (+4%) as well as explanation of marking criteria, fair and transparent assessment and language support (all +3%). There are no notable decreases in satisfaction scores between 2013 and 2015.

25. Satisfaction levels of international students at New Zealand universities were largely similar to those globally. PGR students in New Zealand appear slightly more satisfied, however, with confidence about managing a research project and guidance in topic selection (both +3%) and students in New Zealand are less satisfied with opportunities for work experience/placements (-4%), careers advice (-3%) and, for PGR students, with opportunities to teach (-4%).

Living experience

26. 88% of students were satisfied with their overall living experience, very slightly higher (+1%) than both the global benchmark score and the 2013 score for New Zealand.

27. Students were most likely to be satisfied with feeling safe and secure (94%) and the surroundings outside the institution (93%). There were also high levels of satisfaction with the quality of the external campus environment (92%) and their institution's eco-friendly attitude to the environment (91%).

⁵ PGR students.

28. 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 (53%), the cost of accommodation (54%), the cost of living (55%) and the availability of financial support (60%). Satisfaction was also low with making friends from New Zealand (72%), transport links to other places (73%), internet access at students' accommodation (76%) and making good contacts for the future (76%).
29. Satisfaction with the availability of financial support had decreased 5% between 2013 and 2015. Satisfaction with the opportunity to earn money while studying had also fallen slightly, down 3%. There were increases in satisfaction levels, however, with immigration and visa advice from their institution (+6% to 87%) and internet access in students accommodation (+3%).
30. Despite relatively low and decreased satisfaction with the availability of financial support, international students at universities in New Zealand were more satisfied than the global average with the availability of financial support (+5%). They were also more satisfied with visa advice (+3%). However they were less likely to be satisfied with transport links (-9%), living costs (-8%), internet access in their accommodation (-4%), the cost of accommodation (-4%) and transport between institution locations (-3%).

Support experience

31. 89% of students were satisfied with support services overall, in line with both the global benchmark and the 2013 score for New Zealand.
32. Satisfaction with almost all support services amongst those who used them is high - over 90%. Students were most likely to be satisfied with the Students' Union, the student advisory service, chaplaincy or multi-faith provision and disability support (all 95%), followed by university clubs/societies and personal tutors (both 94%). Students were least likely to be satisfied with campus eating places (79%) and the accommodation office (86%).
33. Positively, there was a large increase in satisfaction with the careers service between 2013 and 2015 – up 10% to 91%. There were also more modest increases in satisfaction with institutional international offices and, despite satisfaction remaining relatively low, with campus eating places (both +3%).
34. Satisfaction levels amongst international students at New Zealand universities were generally similar to students globally, although slightly lower than the global benchmark on campus eating places (-3%).

Future plans

35. Almost half (46%) of the international students' future plans involved staying in New Zealand after their current programme of study. Around a third (34%) of students intended to stay in New Zealand for employment – either short term (12%), long term (15%) or migration/permanent residence (8%). Just over one in ten intended to stay in New Zealand for further study, either at the same institution (10%) or a

different one (2%). Almost a fifth (17%) of students were undecided what they will do following their study.

Concluding remarks

36. As this short summary shows, there are generally relatively high levels of satisfaction amongst international students studying at New Zealand universities, and satisfaction scores for New Zealand are on par with or slightly above the global benchmark on many aspects of the student experience.
37. Overall satisfaction levels have increased slightly since 2013. Students' propensity to recommend their university has also increased slightly and four-fifths of students would recommend their institution to other students thinking of applying there
38. While this is a positive result, it does still leave around a fifth of students who would not recommend their institution. Understanding the reasons behind this and working to address them is important for both individual institutions and at sector level.

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'.