

'Chinese Student Research indicates progress – but still room for improvement'

Education New Zealand: Media Release 30/04/07

"Industry led research on the experiences of Chinese students in New Zealand shows that considerable progress has been made – but there is still room to improve", says Robert Stevens, Chief Executive of Education New Zealand¹.

Robert Stevens was speaking on the release of the just completed education industry funded research report "The Experiences of Chinese Students in New Zealand". The research, which was undertaken by the University of Waikato, was commissioned by Education New Zealand and funded by the Export Education Industry Development Fund that is generated by the Education Export Levy.

"We have come a long way from the difficult times of 2003/04, when New Zealand was criticised by the Chinese for the performance of our education system in meeting the needs of Chinese students" says Robert Stevens. "However, improving the student experience is always a work in progress – and the fact that the industry has supported and funded this research shows that institutions are keen to learn what the perceptions are, what progress has been made, and where the priorities lie. This report will be an excellent resource in helping providers in their quest to maintain our high standards."

Highlights of the report include:

- post 2003, twice as many students had New Zealand as their first choice destination, compared with those that came here before 2003;
- satisfaction with the teaching and learning environment was high;
- there was concern about the length of time needed to complete study, especially to get their English to a satisfactory level;

¹ Education New Zealand is an umbrella/pan-industry not-for-profit trust that is governed by the education sector peak bodies that are committed to an 'NZ Inc' approach to the export of New Zealand's educational services.

- most students wanted a tertiary qualification;
- 73.8% of students had used pathways and attended institutions in different sectors as part of their study (eg language school – university);
- the first order decision was to study abroad, and this was usually made by the Chinese students parents. The second order decision was selection of country – and the key factors in choosing a study destination were fees and costs (51.3%) and quality of education (42.5%);
- issues around dissatisfaction were primarily related to the students own experiences versus expectations; and
- students still found it difficult to integrate in the New Zealand way of life.

“This report is a valuable body of work that will help institutions in their process of maintaining our high standards” says Robert Stevens. “The recommendations in the report will be taken seriously – in fact many have already been taken on board by the industry. For example, Education New Zealand has a current project underway to give objective information on comparative costs of education between countries, and we are also undertaking an educational pathways research project jointly with the Department of Labour. Institutions continue to improve their own systems and professional development, and support networks and initiatives. Twinning programmes are increasing in number and scope, and recent New Zealand Government funded initiatives are supporting this institution led work.”

“Over half (53.8%) of students noted that they wanted to stay on and work for at least some time in New Zealand, whilst 42.5% expressed an interest in living in New Zealand. We believe that study as an international student is an excellent precursor to further work and residency in New Zealand – the students can “hit-the-ground-running” as a Kiwi resident as they are already familiar with the country, they have had a chance to know whether they would like it here, and they are usually at the front end of their working lives so they have a lot to contribute”.

Conclusion

“This research report is just one of many steps that have been initiated and undertaken to improve the experience of Chinese students, and ensure that they have the information they need” says Robert Stevens. “At this very moment there are currently ten leading Chinese education agents in New Zealand, seeing for themselves the excellent state of the education opportunities that New Zealand offers. The Government has an education counsellor in China, and the education

relationship between China and New Zealand has improved remarkably. Most importantly, institutions continue to lift their game. They know they compete on a global market, and that responsiveness to the students is critical. This report will give them further guidance as they ensure that their educational offering is the best it can be'.

ENDS

For more information about this statement, or the report, contact:

Robert Stevens

Chief Executive, Education New Zealand

TEL: 04-917-0531
Cell: 021-472-079
E-MAIL: robert.stevens@educationnz.org.nz

Stuart Boag

Communications Director, Education New Zealand

TEL: 04-917-0539
Cell: 027-664-6092
E-MAIL: stuart.boag@educationnz.org.nz

KEY OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTARY FOLLOW

Experience versus Expectation

'The report highlighted the relationship between experience and expectation' says Robert Stevens. 'For example, many students welcomed the opportunity that study in another country gave them to be away from parental influence and more relaxed about how they lived, but were then disappointed with themselves that they hadn't studied hard enough or had become diverted with leisure activity. Factors like this are beyond the easy control of institutions, yet have a huge influence on students self satisfaction.'

Integration and Assimilation

'Many students also noted the difficulty in integrating into the New Zealand way of life and study, and in making new friends' says Robert Stevens. 'One of the realities of having such large numbers of students from China over the past few years has been that Chinese students have many peers, and thus there is not the same impetus to have to expand networks. Students from most other countries integrate well because they expect it, work hard at it, and in practical terms have to integrate as there are not so many of their peers about. Chinese students can make Kiwi and other friends and integrate well, but both sides have to work hard to make it happen. Students coming to New Zealand now are much better prepared as to what it will take to succeed and make the best of their time here, and with Chinese student flows at a more sustainable level, the overall quality of the experience will continue to improve'.

Future Aspirations

'The study contained a number of very interesting findings relating to post study aspiration' noted Robert Stevens. 'Over half (53.8%) of students noted that they wanted to stay on and work for at least some time in New Zealand, whilst 42.5% expressed an interest in living in New Zealand. Interestingly, analysis of the last 10 years of students from China shows that currently 25.4% have actually stayed on to work, and 17.6% have become residents. We believe that study as an international student is an excellent precursor to further work and residency in New Zealand – the students can "hit-the-ground-running" as a Kiwi resident as they are already familiar with the country, they have had a chance to know whether they would like it here, and they are usually at the front end of their working lives so they have a lot to contribute. We are pleased that our immigration policy recognises this, and we are

confident that the pathways to further work are much better defined and more accessible to well qualified student applicants’.

Decision Factors

‘The fact that quality and value are the key influences in deciding where to study come as no surprise’ says Robert Stevens. ‘We are very pleased that given these considerations, New Zealand has become first choice for a lot more students – the fact that we do deliver both quality and value is getting better known. We noted with interest that international rankings play an important part in decision making (16.3% factored this in). New Zealand has a higher percentage of its Universities on the THES Top 500 Universities of the World and the Shanghai Jiao Tong Academic Rankings than any other country in the world – we are keen to ensure that this is more widely known. New Zealand also compares very well in the PISA study and other international comparisons.’

‘Interestingly, feedback from other international students (2.5%) and friends and relatives (5%) were not key influences, whereas perceptions about safety, living environment and host country attitudes all scored around 25%. This will help inform both institutions and our generic promotion efforts’.

Students Perceptions on how they are perceived

‘Many students were concerned that they were only perceived through negative publicity, and that this had an impact on how New Zealanders related to them’ says Robert Stevens. ‘The reality is that Chinese students have made an enormous contribution to New Zealand, educationally, culturally and financially. Frankly, New Zealand institutions would be the poorer without them. We believe that the media in New Zealand have made tremendous progress in understanding the nature and scope of the international education environment, but we are always concerned when negative stories founded on unsubstantiated anecdote are given undue prominence. This doesn’t help either our academic reputation or journalistic integrity’.

For more information about this commentary, or the report, contact:

Stuart Boag

Communications Director, Education New Zealand

TEL: 04-917-0539
Cell: 027-664-6092
E-MAIL: stuart.boag@educationnz.org.nz