

# Colombia

## Market Profile 2011 - 2012

May 2011



## 1. Introduction

With a population of 44 million, Colombia is the third-most populated country in Latin America. In recent years, sustained growth of the Colombian economy has attributed to an increase in domestic security and inflation being kept under control.

Colombia is home to nearly 9 million 15-24 year olds, 97.9% of whom are literate - one of the highest rates in the region. With the exception of Brazil, more Colombian students study abroad than those from any other Latin American country.

An international education is highly valued in Colombia. Students and business people across the country are interested in improving their English language skills and, although local undergraduate degrees are popular, students look to study overseas for English language and postgraduate courses.

The Colombian government strongly supports internationalisation of the education system. One of the main components of this process is the *Programa Nacional de Bilingüismo* (National Bilingual Program), created in 2004. The goal is to make Colombian citizens fluent in English and English to be the Colombian second language. This program is for students, and it also focuses on language teachers' skills to improve student results.

Colombian students who can afford it have access to a good number of private bilingual schools. Many institutions offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) program while others have accreditation from the USA and UK associations, with a strong intercultural orientation.

Mainly due to its geographic proximity, the USA has traditionally been favoured as a study destination. However, in the last 10 years countries like Australia, Canada and the UK have become increasingly popular.

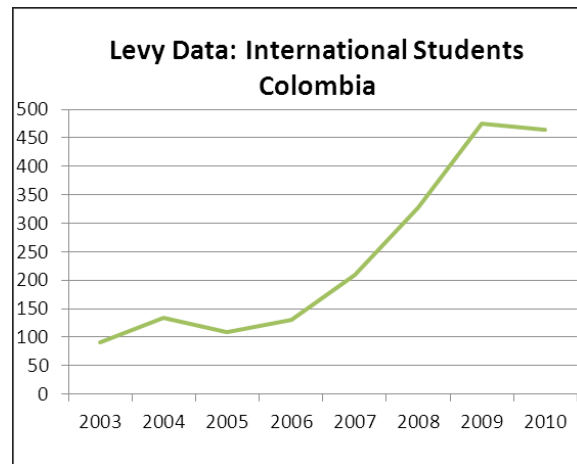
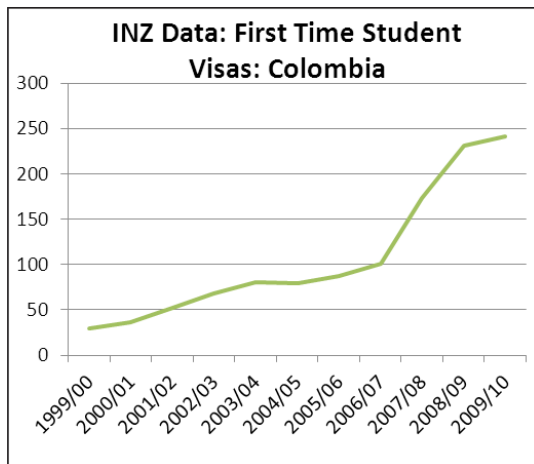
Colombia is an agent-focused education market and agents play an important role in the decision-making of students and their families. New Zealand institutions must establish solid and long-term relationships with education agents in Colombia.

A list of New Zealand Specialist Agents in Colombia, including full contact details, is available at: [www.newzealandeducated.com/nzsaco](http://www.newzealandeducated.com/nzsaco)

Colombia does not have a national education agent association as other countries in South America do. There was an attempt in the past, when ANEX - *Asociación Nacional de Empresas de Estudios en el Exterior* (National Association of Education Advisors), tried to establish common procedures and goals for the promotion of exchange programs in the market, but the association didn't last. There have been recent rumours about an attempt to re-launch the association.

The distance and lack of direct flights between Colombia and New Zealand are a barrier to New Zealand being a popular study destination.

The Colombian market is very sensitive to visa procedures. It is important to promote New Zealand as a country with non-discriminatory student visa policies and one which provides a safe, welcoming environment for young Colombians.



\*The Department of Labour (Immigration New Zealand) and The Ministry of Education provide regular updates to the Visa and Export Education Levy Statistics. The latest statistical information can be found at [www.educationnz.org.nz/policy-research-stats/statistics](http://www.educationnz.org.nz/policy-research-stats/statistics)

## 2. Local Education System

Colombia’s education system is divided into preparatory school, basic and medium education, and tertiary education.

Basic and Medium education consists of:

Education Type	Years of Study
<i>Preescolar</i> (Child Studies)	1 (minimum)
<i>Educación Básica Primaria</i> (Primary Basic Education)	5
<i>Educación Básica Secundaria</i> (Secondary Basic Education)	4
<i>Educación Media</i> (Medium Education)	2

Tertiary education consists of:

Postgraduate Courses	post PhD
	PhD
	Master
	Specialisation (professional technician, technological and/or professional specialisations)
Undergraduate Education	professional level (university programmes)
	technological level (technical programmes)
	professional technician level (professional technician programmes)

Higher and Further Education institutions can be categorised into:

- Technical/professional institutions: Those that are officially approved to offer occupational training programmes of a practical nature. They specialise in particular areas..
- Higher and Further Educational institutions: Those with official approval to develop occupational training programmes, academic programmes for professions, and programmes of specialisation.
- Universities (public or private): Those that are already recognised universities, as well as those institutions where activity is based on university-level criteria.

### 3. General Advice for New Zealand Education Providers

The Colombian market is sensitive to discrimination against its students. It is important to promote New Zealand as offering a safe, non-discriminatory and welcoming environment.

Agents promoting New Zealand highlight:

- the country's quality of life
- New Zealand's natural environment
- the low cost of life and education
- quality of education
- possibilities for sport and adventure.

There is no New Zealand Embassy or Consulate in Colombia. The Embassy in Santiago, Chile issues visas to Colombian students.

In addition to education fairs and events promoted by education agents and private organisers, many secondary schools and universities have their own events supporting an overseas education.

Some agencies in the country are very competitive, and sometimes being represented by one agency will mean not making business with another.

### 4. Sector-Specific Advice for New Zealand Education Providers

#### 4.1 Undergraduate and Postgraduate Courses

Colombian students access tertiary education following a state examination.

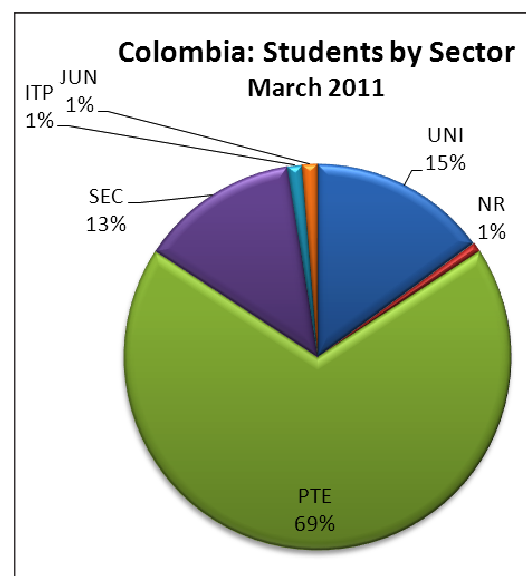
The costs of higher education are high and are comparable to costs in the UK.

The government plans to increase the number of registrations through more credit, better management of state institutions, and promotion of vocational and technical education.

There are around 1 million students registered in higher education institutions; 82% are in universities, and 18% are in vocational and technical education institutions.

New Zealand's main competitors in the tertiary education sector are:

- USA - traditionally, the most popular study destination, although it has stringent visa regulations.
- Australia - fast becoming a larger competitor having the added advantage of offering the opportunity to study and work.



(UNI=Universities; NR=Not Recorded; PTE=Private Training Establishments; SEC=Secondary; ITP=Polytechnics; JUN=Junior (Primary, Composite, Contributing, Intermediate))

- UK – the third-most popular destination, favoured for offering quality in education and its proximity to Europe.

### **Education Credits**

There are two main organisations in the country responsible for providing education credits for students choosing to undertake their undergraduate or postgraduate studies abroad:

- **ICETEX** (Colombian Institute of Educational Credit and Technical Studies Abroad) is a government entity that promotes Higher Education within Colombia and abroad through educative credits for the population with low economic possibilities but with good academic performance.
- **Colfuturo** - (Foundation for the Future of Colombia). Colfuturo originated from the initiative of public and private sectors. It offers financial support for Colombian students with good academic performance who look for postgraduate courses abroad. The quality of the programme chosen by the student is part of the selection criteria.

### **Internationalisation**

The government supports the idea of the internationalisation of education in Colombia.

#### **4.2 Vocational and Technical Qualifications**

Vocational and technical qualifications are popular. There are many programmes offered locally. There are promotional campaigns on radio, television and internet promoting the concept of technical qualifications

#### **4.3 Secondary Schools**

Canada and the USA are New Zealand's main competitors in the secondary school sector. With the Colombian government's incentive for internationalisation and bilingual programmes, students and their families have a very positive attitude towards the experience of a semester or year of high school overseas. Some schools in the country welcome international exhibitions, to give their students information about programmes abroad.

Agreements with local schools could be a good option for New Zealand education providers.

#### **4.4 English Language**

Institutional and government policy has increased the level of English required for graduation, and this is driving Colombians to seek intensive English programs abroad. The concept extends to all levels and education sectors, from secondary schools to technician and professional levels.

The National Bilingual Program, focused on Colombian citizens being fluent in English, is aimed at students and language teachers.

At the 2010 Expoestudiante (a large education fair), 50% of visitors were looking for language courses, while 20% were focused on undergraduate options.

## **5. Future Trends in the Market**

Due to stable growth of the Colombian economy and increasing domestic security, the Colombian education sector has grown significantly.

Opportunities exist in all education sectors, but New Zealand providers should be prepared to fight for their space in a market that is already filled by the USA, Canada, Australia and the UK.

The National Bilingual Program, organisations like ICETEX and Colfuturo, and government support create a promising market for an overseas education.

## 6. Competitor Activity and Statistics

### UK

The British Council Colombia has been extensively promoting UK education in Colombia for ten years. It regularly visits local institutions and holds presentations. It has developed a large-scale countrywide project in English Language Training (ELT) consultancy with the Ministry of Education. Due to the high demand for English Language skills, the British Council Colombia's main focus is on ELT. The Education UK Exhibition has been going for seven years and has 1,000 visitors annually.

### Australia

Australia has had significant growth as a destination for Colombians. However, its participation in the technical and vocational market has diminished due to visa-related matters. In the secondary school sector, its participation is almost inexistent.

In 2010, 4,186 Colombian students enrolled in Higher Education courses, while 28,358 enrolled in language courses. Australia's work permits for language students (students can work if enrolled in a 12-week course) are a strong selling point.

### USA

The number of Colombian students studying in the USA in the 2008/2009 academic year and 2009/2010 year remained stable - 7,013 and 6,920 respectively. Therefore, although more Colombian students are seeking to study abroad, increasingly they are choosing destinations other than the USA.

## 7. Key Dates (Including Public Holidays and Term Dates)

Some schools, depending on the region in Colombia, follow the northern hemisphere academic year. However, most follow the southern hemisphere academic year like New Zealand does.

### Main National Holidays

New Year's Day	1 January
Ephiphany*	6 January
St Jose*	19 March
Easter (Friday and Sunday)	March or April
Labour Day	1 May
Corpus Christi (changes from year to year)*	May or June
St Peter and St Paul*	29 June
Independence	20 July
Boyaca Battle	7 August
Our Lady*	15 August

Race Day*	12 October
All Saints	1 November
Cartagena's Independence*	11 November
Immaculate Conception	8 December
Christmas Day	25 December

\*Celebrated on the following Mondays

Up to date information about local Public Holidays can also be found at [www.worldtravelguide.net/columbia/public-holidays](http://www.worldtravelguide.net/columbia/public-holidays)

## 8. Visiting time recommendations

The best times to visit Colombia are around its education fairs and agent workshops.

### Education Fairs and Agent Workshops

Relevant education fairs happening in Colombia are:

- *Expo Cursos en el Exterior* (organised by FPP Media Group, [www.fppmedia.com](http://www.fppmedia.com)) - two fairs, the first in March/April and the second in September/October.
- *Expoestudiante* (organised by BMI, [www.bmimedia.net](http://www.bmimedia.net)) - two fairs, the first in March/April and the second in September/October.

There are also education fairs sponsored by local education agencies.

## 9. Helpful Hints

- Personal relationships among providers of education are hugely important.
- Providers need to be aware of local sensitivities to a commercial approach to education promotion, particularly on universities campuses.
- Care should be taken when travelling in Colombia, more information can be found on the Safe Travel website at [www.safetravel.govt.nz/destinations/colombia.shtml](http://www.safetravel.govt.nz/destinations/colombia.shtml)



[www.educationnz.org.nz](http://www.educationnz.org.nz)

