

Satisfaction high in Canada

ACCORDING to a student satisfaction survey conducted by the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) last year, international students are finding Canada an increasingly expensive place to study, although 90 per cent said that they were satisfied with their study abroad experience.

The results of the survey, which canvassed 1,700 students at colleges and universities across the country, were released at the CBIE conference in Ottawa in November last year and showed that tuition costs for international students had increased by 38 per cent since 1999, while accommodation costs had increased by 13 per cent and food costs by five per cent.

In response to rising living and tuition costs, students taking part in the survey recommended wider access to off-campus work rights, in line with many other student destinations.

The survey also revealed that 40 per cent of respondents had not picked Canada as their top destination of choice. Jim Fox, President of CBIE, said, "Too many students still see our country as an afterthought. And it's telling that there's been virtually no change in this statistic over the past five years."

Improvements in US visa system claim

Earlier this year, US officials from the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of State held a press briefing in an attempt to increase worldwide confidence in US visa policies and publicise improvements made in the application process.

According to officials, the average rate of visa issuance had decreased from 74 days to 14 days, while only 2.2 per cent of all applications were subject to additional scrutiny. Accusations that Muslim or Arab students were subject to discrimination were also refuted. "America is still a welcoming society with an open borders policy and our policies are not country specific," said a spokesperson at the briefing.

This follows anecdotal and statistical evidence that international students are continuing to avoid the USA in favour of other education destinations. The annual "Open Doors" statistics for 2003/2004 showed a decrease of 2.4 per cent in international students in US higher education institutions compared to the previous year.

The report, published by the Institute of International Education (IIE) in November last year, showed the first drop in international student enrolments in the USA since 1971/1972. Each of the USA's top five student provider countries experienced a decline in undergraduate enrolments last year with Chinese students decreasing by 20 per cent, Indians by nine per cent, Japanese by 14 per cent, Koreans by one per cent and Canadian students by three per cent.

Many universities and higher education institutions have been reporting increased difficulties for certain nationalities in obtaining a student visa, as well as lengthy delays for those that are eventually successful.

Arlene Spencer, Director of International Student and ESL Programs at Fulton-Montgomery Community College in Johnstown, NY, said, "Some countries have always been tough to get student visas – China for example – but usually we can be successful with a handful of students. But this year, it has been almost an across the border denial

for students from China, various African nations and even some countries in South America that have never been a problem."

Beth Burford, from Eastern Washington University in Cheney, WA, added that increased costs for international students may also be having an effect on

enrolments. "Tuition at many state supported schools has increased 20 per cent to 30 per cent (or more) over the past few years," she explained. "Since few international students receive or are eligible for financial aid (in the USA), they must shoulder the extra expense themselves."



Full name: Education Wellington International (EWI)

Year established: 1996

Organisation's main role: to promote the capital city of New Zealand as an education destination offering diverse and quality study opportunities in a vibrant and well-serviced environment.

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What plans do you have for the future?

Using NZ international education branding as well as Wellington branding, we will continue to update Wellington marketing material, as resources permit, for use off-shore in conjunction with members' own institutional branding and profiling. We are promoting and facilitating a more strategic and cost-effective approach to marketing off-shore by helping to set up joint marketing groups for targeted provider countries where this is likely to pay dividends in the medium term (three to five years).

How do you work with agents?

We appreciate the importance of making face to face connections and encourage our members to visit their key markets at least once a year, possibly in conjunction with an education fair. We also create programmes for in-bound agents and media groups coming to Wellington – visits to campuses or schools, and an unforgettable experience of what our capital city and region has to offer.

What have been your biggest achievements?

For a relatively small region – population of 411,000 – we have been able to attract and satisfy the expectations of over 7,000 international students in both 2003 and 2004, from a starting base of some 1,300 students. This represents a raw increase of 438 per cent since 1996. We have increased membership numbers from 24 to 56 in an eight-year period.

Australian visa changes affect students

FROM APRIL this year, the Australian visa assessment levels for a number of countries will be reduced after a review of the student visa programme showed that visa approval rates had continued to rise while non-compliance levels had decreased.

The change means that students from Argentina, the Bahamas, Barbados, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Estonia, Hungary, Israel, Jordan, Macau,

Paraguay, Peru, Poland, the USA, Uruguay and Venezuela will be subject to lower English language and financial requirements when applying for a student visa (see *Language Travel Magazine*, September 2001, pages 6-7).

In November last year, the assessment levels for the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovak Republic and Slovenia were all reduced to level two across the education sectors, and agents

in these countries welcomed the move. Jody Yurkowsky from Lideris Education Centre in Latica said, "I do believe that the more relaxed Australian visa requirements will mean that Australia becomes increasingly accessible as a study destination for Latvians. Nevertheless, the considerable cost of travel to Australia means that it may still remain somewhat exclusive for the time being."

New Zealand universities continue to attract students

ACCORDING to the latest statistics from Education New Zealand, the number of students studying in universities in New Zealand increased in 2004 compared with 2003, despite the large losses experienced by the language school sector in the same period.

While figures for 2004 were an estimate at the time of going to press, the statistics showed that numbers of international university students grew by 25 per cent last year, while language school students fell by 27 per cent. Many language schools have been noticing a severe decline in the number of Chinese students over the last two years (see *Language Travel Magazine*, March 2004, pages 22-23) and universities have also experienced a decrease in students from this major market, particularly for their non-degree programmes.

"Our aggregate numbers in degree programmes increased by 35 per cent [in 2004], while numbers in preparatory programmes – English language and foundation programmes – dropped by 30 to 40 per cent," said Les Brighton, International Director at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch. However, Brighton believes that the decrease in students from China merely reflects a return to

more sustainable levels following the "absolutely huge interest from China over the past three years". He said, "We expect the proportion [of Chinese students] to drop steadily, alongside steady growth in other markets."

Increased competition from other student destinations; an increase in the value of the New Zealand dollar making programmes more expensive; an increase in the number of university preparation programmes in China; and negative publicity regarding a small number of incidents regarding Chinese students in New Zealand have all been cited as factors contributing to the decrease in the Chinese student market over the last few years.

However, for the university sector at least, any decreases in this market have been offset by increases from other markets. Brighton said that US, Korean, Japanese, Malaysian and Middle Eastern students all increased in numbers last year and added, "The difficulties that the students are having in gaining entry to the USA, and the feeling that the student experience there is less positive – particularly for those with a Muslim family name – has also been a significant factor [in encouraging more students to study in New Zealand]."

Work rights in Malaysia

International students starting their studies in Malaysia this year will be able to work part-time throughout their course, according to an announcement by the Malaysian Minister of Higher Education, Datuk Dr Shafie Mohd Salleh.

The Home Affairs Ministry is also working out plans to issue students with identification cards so that authorities can keep track of their working history and prevent abuse of the system.

Top nationalities abroad

According to a German study carried out by the Federal Statistical Office at the Ministry for Education and Research, German students were the third largest nationality to study abroad in 2002. The largest nationality group undertaking education overseas in the same year was Korean students, followed by the Japanese.

The study also found that 15 per cent of all German students spent at least one semester overseas, while the most popular destinations were the UK, the USA and Switzerland.

Scottish initiative expanded

Scotland's First Minister, Jack McConnell, has announced plans to offer international students on HND programmes in Scotland

the same rights as university students, in an expansion of an initiative allowing international students to stay and work in Scotland for two years after completing their studies. The Minister also promised universities and colleges in Scotland extra funding to help them support international students.

The Fresh Talent Initiative was first announced last year (see *Language Travel Magazine*, March 2004, page 6) and includes the setting up of the Relocation Advisory Service in Glasgow, which was officially opened in January.

China targets cheats

A device able to detect mobile phone telephone signals from within 50 feet is now being used in exam rooms in China to track down students who use their phones to cheat on college entrance exams.

Last year more than 100 people retaking the college entrance exam in China were caught using mobile phones to get answers, according to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. The Ministry of Education has since banned mobile phones from exam rooms and those caught cheating are banned from ever retaking the exam.

Students in Cyprus

Measures introduced to control the number of

foreigners seeking political asylum in Cyprus have resulted in schools and colleges reporting a decrease in foreign students of up to 90 per cent, according to the *Cyprus Mail*.

Since February last year, students from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, China and Sri Lanka have had to get their visa from a Cyprus Consul and undergo an interview with the Cyprus police in their country of residence, rather than apply for an entry visa on arrival in Cyprus. However, Demetris Christoforou, President of the Cyprus Association of Private Tertiary Educational Institutions, said that the majority of students were unable to attend their interview as the policemen did not remain in the country for more than a few days.

ACT, Inc acquires testing programme

US-based ACT, Inc, has bought out Campus Group International Educational Services, an Australian company that administers the Global Assessment Certificate to students (GAC).

The GAC – an English medium university preparation programme – will now be administered by ACT Education Solutions, alongside the Global English Certificate and the Global Graduate Preparation Programme.