

# Making up for lost time in NZ

Education providers in New Zealand report that on the back of a successful 2008, student numbers from a wide range of markets have picked up, while PhD students are increasingly drawn to New Zealand because of a domestic pricing policy. **NICOLA HANCOX** reports.

New Zealand is currently riding high in terms of its international student intake and Robert Stevens, Chief Executive at Education New Zealand (EdNZ), ventures that this trend looks set to continue well into 2009. Data relating to first-time student visa issuance reveals a 16 per cent incline in 2007/2008. And Stevens is buoyant about the prospect of further growth, nudging New Zealand back towards its boom years of 2001 and 2002.

"While New Zealand is already punching above its weight in the international education industry, we have not reached our full capacity or potential in this area," states Stevens. Data released by New Zealand's Ministry of Education (MoE) indicates that, comparatively speaking, when the total number of international students enrolled at a tertiary institution was compared to the country's population, foreign students represented a substantial 4.93 per cent of the total populus, making it the second most successful recruiter of international students behind Australia with 8.27 per cent (see grid below).

China had once been a robust source market for New Zealand's international education industry and although it hasn't delivered numbers quite like those recorded in the early half of the noughties (the number of Chinese students applying for a first time student visa dipped from 15,858 in 2002/2003 to an all time low of 2,225 in 2005/2006) it is beginning to show signs of resurgence. "International student numbers decreased in 2006 and 2007 but remained stable in 2008," notes Beth Knowles, International Services Director at Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology (CPIT). "China remains our biggest source market," she acknowledges; a notion shared by Bruce Graham, International Director at Massey University in Palmerston North, although he muses numbers are significantly less than in previous years.

Figures released by EdNZ in November last year also show that Chinese visa approvals had increased by as much as 93 per cent from 2006 to 2008. "The number of Chinese students in New Zealand is back on the increase after several years of decline," observes an EdNZ spokesperson. "The drop in the NZ dollar combined with a renewed confidence in New Zealand as a quality education provider have put us back on the road to recovery in China."

However, EdNZ also observes that there has been an upward trend in almost every other source country, not just China, and notably, the number of Indian students is most certainly on the rise. "Students from India are coming to New Zealand in increasing numbers, with more than twice as many students from India arriving in 2007/2008 compared with the previous year," says the EdNZ spokesperson.

Anatole Bogatski from AIS St Helens – an international independent degree provider based in Auckland – agrees and reasons that New Zealand's more relaxed approach towards immigration laws has been advantageous. "The Indian increase is the result of favourable New Zealand immigration rules and a tightening in the immigration rules for Indian students in Australia," he states.

Graham has also witnessed a swelling in other markets. "Ninety per cent of all other countries in our top 15 have increased," he states, forecasting Germany, Korea and Middle Eastern countries set to deliver in terms of student numbers in 2009. Meanwhile, Knowles indicates that both India and

Saudi Arabia are the ones to look out for.

There are some distinct programme trends where subject area is concerned and Bogatski notes that Business and IT continue to attract a healthy amount of international students. He also relates that revised programming is helping to sustain this interest. "We have introduced new graduate diploma, postgraduate diploma and degree programmes across our range of business, IT and tourism/hospitality," he enthuses.

Meanwhile, Graham observes that they too have expanded their offerings to help appeal to as wide an international audience as possible. Students can now choose from electives including Veterinary Science, Equine Science, Aviation, Food Technology, Design and Engineering. "All have proved attractive to international students," he says. While at CPIT, courses that combine English language tuition with a smattering of vocational training – thus preparing students for a specific trade – lend real diversity to the international student market. "We are fortunate that we can combine English learning with a tasting of vocational learning and these programmes have proved

popular," observes Knowles. She also notes that those keen to utilise their working holiday visa can take advantage of the university's barista (the name given to a coffee house employee) training programme.

According to EdNZ, another notable trend is an increase in the number of students opting to continue their PhD studies in New Zealand. "This is part due to New Zealand's policy which allows international students to pay domestic fees for PhD tuition. This makes New Zealand very affordable, and students are also attracted to the research environment at the universities here," explains the spokesperson.

The way in which providers market themselves is pivotal to the success of tertiary programming and according to the educators canvassed for this article, many rely on education agents to feed the market. "Our biggest source of students are our offshore recruitment agents and we value our business relationship with them highly," notes Knowles.

Bogatski agrees and says, "Our main channel has always been and remains the agent channel." Meanwhile, Graham moots that the media can have a positive effect on student enrolment numbers. He relates that sports personalities may soon be using their celebrity status to help plug New Zealand as a study destination. "We have a number of cricket players currently in the New Zealand cricket team who are contemplating using their support to promote Massey in key markets such as India," he says.

Country	Population	International university enrolments	International students per 1000 population
Australia	21,487,000	177,760	8.27
<b>New Zealand</b>	<b>4,286,000</b>	<b>21,136</b>	<b>4.93</b>
UK	61,186,000	237,765	3.89
Canada	33,432,000	90,000	2.69
USA	305,682,000	623,805	2.04

Student data sources: Open Doors (USA), AEI (Australia), Various (Canada), UKCOSA (UK) and MoE (NZ). Population data from the United Nations

