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# NZ expectant

The New Zealand ELT industry is unified and expectant of immigration reform however student numbers remain steady. AMY BAKER reports.

## Study pathways

Education New Zealand and Immigration New Zealand released a joint study into pathways taken by international students through New Zealand's education system this year.

The study focused on analysis of 95,000 students who began their studies in the country between 1999/2000 and 2001/2002 and revealed that over half (52 per cent) studied English language at some point, making it the most common study sector overall.

Chinese students were the most likely to study in multiple sectors, such as English language and then university. Almost two-thirds (64 per cent) of students went to the country for one type of education only, 35 per cent of whom went for English language training.

In further analysis of a smaller sample of students (47,000), 27 per cent of students were revealed to stay on in New Zealand to work or reside. Those students who had studied in the English language sector and then at university were the most likely to do so and the most typical nationalities staying on in the country were Chinese and Korean.

Meanwhile, a global benchmarking study into student attitudes is being funded by EdNZ and coordinated by English New Zealand, the ELT sector body. "This is potentially a very powerful tool for [the sector] in terms of its ability to understand the student experience in New Zealand compared with that in other countries," says Stuart Boag at EdNZ.

There is cause for optimism in New Zealand, although many providers report static student numbers last year or a slight increase at best. Previous political schisms in the industry no longer exist and there are macro-initiatives in place designed to boost the appeal of New Zealand as a study destination.

Rob McKay, Chairperson of English New Zealand, relates that if immigration changes occur, it is reasonable to think that the outlook is "extremely good for those committed to quality". He states that aside from currency fluctuations that are beyond the industry's control, "the other most important issue is the need for competitive immigration settings and this is something that can be fixed – we are making some headway in this crucial area".

Previous immigration reform has failed to ignite the English language teaching market. Work rights for those students who gain IELTS level 5 were amended last year so that students could reach that level once in the country. However, English language providers report no change to business because of this. Darren Conway at Languages International in Auckland says that the rule was being applied anyway in some circumstances. "The change was just a formalisation of policy dressed up to look like a significant concession," he states.

Easier visa rules for more countries seem to be what the industry needs as well as more widely available work rights. Stuart Boag at Education New Zealand (EdNZ) acknowledges that when immigration policy is cumbersome, the result is "a major bottleneck and constraint" in terms of incoming students.

Nevertheless, New Zealand as a study destination clearly appeals to a fairly diverse range of nationalities, with Saudi Arabian students, Brazilians and Swiss all big student nationalities after the top four spots taken by Japanese, Korean, Chinese (number-one in 2004) and Taiwanese. However, compared with other destinations, the range of student provider countries is more limited, with the top nine provider countries accounting for 80 per cent of all students in New Zealand.

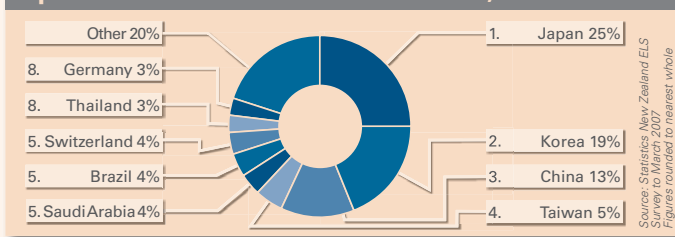
Reflecting the most typical enrolment patterns across language schools in the country, Barry Bolton at International English Institute in Christchurch points to Japan, Taiwan and Korea as his most important student markets and says there has been no change to this formula for the past four years. Chinese students have dwindled across the country since 2003's peak for a variety of reasons including competition elsewhere and onward study opportunities.

Two providers point to a slight dip in business from Japan while Cleve Brown at Worldwide School of English also notes that Korean enrolments waver depending on the comparative currency rate with the Australian dollar. Other providers point to Saudi Arabia, New Caledonia and Switzerland as of particular importance to them.



PHOTOGRAPH: TOURISM NEW ZEALAND

## Top student nationalities in New Zealand, 2007



To maintain and build bookings, most schools point to the importance of agencies in the recruitment chain. "Agents continue to be about 85 per cent of all referrals to WWSE. I don't see that changing in the near future at all," says Brown. Conway adds, "The reality is that as the most geographically isolated of all major English language destinations, we will always depend heavily on agents to channel students towards us."

Among other ongoing initiatives (see box), Boag explains that under the auspices of EdNZ, which represents all education export sectors, a research project is being carried out into immigration policy benchmarking. "This is part of our ongoing advocacy around entry barriers," he explains.

And McKay explains that previous antagonisms between EdNZ and English New Zealand have subsided, meaning common interest to achieve united goals. Problems were caused by the government's decision to enlist EdNZ as recipient and distributor of an education export levy (tax) when the market was "suffering stress". Now, there has been a unanimous membership decision to engage positively with EdNZ, says McKay. "We can add real value to EdNZ and work towards a win/win outcome for everyone."