

New Zealand Universities

The International Student Barometer
2011

Executive Summary

Background

The International Graduate Insight Group (i-graduate) is an independent benchmarking and research service, delivering comparative insights for the education sector worldwide. **The International Student Barometer (ISB)** is the largest annual study of international students in the world. More than 700 universities and colleges in 22 countries have adopted the ISB, collecting and comparing feedback from over 1,000,000 students to date. All levels and years of study are covered, from first year undergraduates to final year doctoral students.

The **ISB** enables New Zealand universities to examine the perceptions and experience of international students by tracking and benchmarking their experience alongside global measures.

The ISB covers comprehensive areas of the international student experience from decision-making to arrival, learning, living and support aspects of their study and life experience at the university. Comparison is provided against an ISB benchmark group of 202 universities.

This report summarises the key findings of the New Zealand ISB 2011, highlighting areas of excellence and points for improvement. Comparisons are also made with 2007 and 2008.

I feel New Zealand is better than other countries in terms of environment and people...I will strongly recommend NZ to those people who want to apply.

Methodology

The New Zealand ISB 2011 is a study of international students studying in New Zealand, independently administered by i-graduate in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Education New Zealand Trust, with comparative data from 2007 and 2008.

The globally comparable ISB question-bank contains a core of standard benchmarked elements which allows for global and national benchmarking and year-on-year analysis.

Consultation with the Ministry of Education and Education New Zealand Trust developed an ISB instrument which incorporated local New Zealand adaptations and terminology, and reflected the institutional structure of the 6 participating universities in New Zealand. The adapted online survey was run in March - May 2011 to capture opinions of the international student cohort. New Zealand findings were aggregated, analysed and benchmarked against the Global ISB benchmark and reported back in August 2011.

Each university received a link to their ISB survey, which was adapted to each institution to include their faculties/departments, accommodation, and support service terminology. The international student population of all years and levels of study was contacted via email and invited to complete the online questionnaire. Responses were then centrally aggregated and analysed and benchmarked against the ISB global and national indices.

The question-bank for the core elements remains consistent through the periodic 'waves' of the ISB to ensure year on year comparative data and the same method of data collection was used when universities implemented i-graduate surveys in 2008 and 2009.

Response and Summary

There were 6 universities that took part in the International Student Barometer New Zealand 2011, out of a total of 8 universities in New Zealand. Over 26% of international students in New Zealand study in universities.

Results of the 6 participating universities were aggregated into a New Zealand benchmark group and findings compared against the global ISB aggregated data of 202 universities worldwide.

New Zealand Universities ISB response:	ISB Global response:
Number of Universities: 6 Total responses: 5,886 (approx. 45% response rate) By nationality: 27% China, 10% Malaysia, and 8% USA, 8% India By level: 59% Bachelors, 22% Masters, and 15% Doctoral	Number of Universities: 202 Total responses: 175,253 By nationality: 21% China, 4% Malaysia, 4% USA, 8% India By level: 44% Bachelors, 39% Masters, and 12% Doctoral
New Zealand Universities outperform against the Global ISB Benchmark	New Zealand Universities underperform against the Global ISB Benchmark
Arrival	Arrival
Accommodation condition First night University orientation Welcome Bank account Host friends	Finance Office Internet access
Learning	Learning
Performance feedback Course organization Quality lectures Careers advice Employability	Technology
Living	Living
Financial support Visa advice Earning money Safety	Transport links Internet access Living cost
Support	Support
Faith provision Halls welfare Counselling Accommodation office	Finance office Catering

Decision-making and Pre-arrival

Other countries considered and applied to:

- 46% of students who studied in New Zealand considered studying in America when selecting a university (+8% vs 2008), 43% considered Australia (-8%), 35% the UK (-10%) and 23% considered Canada (-5%)
- In terms of applications - 11% applied to Australia, 6% America, 6% UK and 3% Canada

In comparison to international students studying in other countries, international students studying in New Zealand -

- Were more likely to rate the visa process as being important to them (75% vs. 65% ISB)
- Were more likely to rate long-term employment in this country as being an important factor in deciding to study here (74% vs. 63%). This has also increased by 15 percentage points since New Zealand ISB 2008.
- Were more likely to say that a personal recommendation was important in their coming to study here (73% vs 67%)
- Indicated that friends, parents, university website and agents are top influencers on decision-making – agents are more influential on New Zealand students than the benchmark comparison (22% say an agent helped them choose their institution vs. 18% in the ISB), university website less influential than at other universities (28% vs 40% ISB)

The USA is the main alternative destination considered by New Zealand students and this has also increased by 8 percentage points since 2008. Consideration of the UK has dropped by New Zealand international students by 10 percentage points and Australia is also down 7 percentage points. While consideration of the USA is high, stated applications to an alternative country are highest to Australia (11%) and only 6% say they applied also to an institution in the USA. 75% of international students who study in New Zealand say that they applied to no other countries.

In terms of what are most important to international students in their decision-making, the highest in importance are the core aspects of teaching quality, institution reputation, qualification reputation, personal safety and the reputation of the education system in New Zealand. When we compare against the global ISB index, overall these most important aspects are comparable with the benchmark, however personal safety is rated as more important to New Zealand international students than the benchmark group. Another aspect to note is that visa process is more important for international students in New Zealand (75% rated it as important or very important, compared to 56% in the ISB global index).

In terms of influencing factors, the top factors are friends, parents, university website and agents. More international students in New Zealand said that an agent helped them to choose their university (22% vs. 18% in the ISB). The university website is cited less (28% vs. 40% ISB) and university league tables are also cited less as helping international students choose their university (4% vs. 14% ISB).

Arrival

Overall, international students were 88% satisfied with the arrival experience at their university in New Zealand, compared with 86% in the ISB.

Areas of excellence

- ✓ **Accommodation condition on arrival – 82% satisfied (+5% vs. ISB)**
- ✓ **First night (getting to where I would stay) – 86% satisfied (+6% vs. ISB)**
- ✓ **University orientation – 89% satisfied (+3% vs. ISB)**
- ✓ **Welcome – 82% satisfied (+8% vs. ISB)**
- ✓ **Bank account – 91% satisfied (+17% vs. ISB)**
- ✓ **Host friends – 73% satisfied (+3% vs. ISB)**

International students in New Zealand are more satisfied than the comparator group of universities with social integration aspects of the arrival experience, including being able to make friends with fellow students from their country of origin as well as making local friends from New Zealand.

The condition of the accommodation on arrival, when compared to the ISB benchmark, is making a good impression on international students, reflected in high levels of satisfaction.

Setting up a bank account appears to work more smoothly in New Zealand than in other countries where it can often be a problem for international students when they first arrive.

Universities are also working well to provide orientation sessions, and helping international students settle in from the start. Welcomes and airport pick-ups appear to be working well for international students arriving in New Zealand.

Areas for improvement

- **Internet access – 74% satisfied (-5% vs. ISB)**
- **Finance office – 84% satisfied (-3% vs. ISB)**

Comparing 2011 findings against previous waves' data for 2007 and 2008, most aspects of the arrival experience have either remained stable or increased in satisfaction levels. Most improved are accommodation office (+16%), host friends (+15%), and making friends from other countries (+14%). Satisfaction with the internet access has decreased (-6%), which may in part be due to rising expectations for internet connectivity among current international students as technology advances and becomes increasingly vital in the everyday lives of students.

Learning

The learning experience in New Zealand outperforms the ISB benchmark across a spectrum of areas, in particular the organisation of the courses, the performance feedback, the quality of the lectures and also in the practical dimensions of work experience, careers advice and employability.

Areas of excellence

- ✓ **Performance feedback – 87% satisfied (+4% vs. ISB)**
- ✓ **Course organization – 87% satisfied (+4% vs. ISB)**
- ✓ **Quality lectures – 91% satisfied (+3% vs. ISB)**
- ✓ **Careers advice – 70% satisfied (+3% vs. ISB)**
- ✓ **Employability – 80% satisfied (+4% vs. ISB)**

Areas for improvement

- **Technology – 85% satisfied (-3% vs. ISB)**

High levels of international student satisfaction with the learning experience are reassuring and most elements outperform or are on a par with the ISB index.

While the technology infrastructures (PCs, networking) have higher satisfaction ratings in the 2011 study compared with 2007 (+5%), it remains below the ISB global benchmark.

Living

Overall, the living experience in New Zealand is slightly above the ISB global index (87% satisfied).

Areas of excellence

- ✓ **Financial support – 66% satisfied (+8% vs. ISB)**
- ✓ **Visa advice – 84% satisfied (+7% vs. ISB)**
- ✓ **Earning money – 57% satisfied (+5% vs. ISB)**
- ✓ **Safety – 91% satisfied (+2% vs. ISB)**

Areas for improvement

- **Transport links – 73% satisfied (-9% vs. ISB)**
- **Internet access – 73% satisfied (-7% vs. ISB)**
- **Living cost – 55% satisfied (-3% vs. ISB)**

For transport links to other places, satisfaction levels are unchanged since 2008, and New Zealand universities remain at a disadvantage compared to some universities in other competitor destination countries, with satisfaction ratings falling short of the ISB global benchmark. Internet access in student accommodation could be an area that would be more within universities' abilities to make improvements. Indeed there has been some improvement since 2008 (+4%), however, compared to the global ISB, New Zealand universities lag 7 percentage points behind the benchmark.

Safety rates of high importance to students coming to study in New Zealand, so it's very reassuring to see a strong rating in this area (91% for the New Zealand average). Looking within the data, it's perhaps useful to see the least satisfied group with safety are students from South Korea (83% satisfied). Perceptions of safety show variation by demographic which can be useful to prompt further enquiry.

When we consider economic aspects of the international student experience, New Zealand is on a par or slightly below the global benchmark. For cost of living, satisfaction in New Zealand is 3 percentage points below the ISB average. For accommodation cost, the score is on a par.

Satisfaction with the cost of living in New Zealand has dropped since 2008 (-3% points). In comparison to 2008, students are also less satisfied with the cost of accommodation (55% satisfied, -3% points) and the opportunity to earn money whilst studying (57% satisfied, -8% points), although this remains strong against global comparisons. Communicating realistic expectations of living costs in New Zealand to manage expectations could be key to maintaining levels of student satisfaction in this area.

For social integration aspects, overall New Zealand outperforms the ISB global index. When it comes to making local friends satisfaction ratings are 72% vs. 69% in the ISB global comparator group. The most satisfied nationalities for making friends in New Zealand are from Fiji (96%), Singapore (88%) and Samoa (90%), whereas students from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Philippines and South Korea express lower satisfaction with the ability to make local friends here (43%, 36%, 52% and 56% respectively).

International students in New Zealand are feeling more satisfied than in 2008 about making friends with students from other countries (+5% points to 86%) and experiencing the local culture in New Zealand (+7% points to 82%). Satisfaction has also improved since 2008 for making friends with NZ students (+5% to 72%).

Support

Overall, the support services in New Zealand achieve high satisfaction scores. Of the 15 support services measured in the study, 11 outperform the ISB global index.

Areas of excellence

- ✓ **Faith provision – 95% satisfied (+4% vs. ISB)**
- ✓ **Halls welfare – 90% satisfied (+4% vs. ISB)**
- ✓ **Counselling – 92% satisfied (+3% vs. ISB)**
- ✓ **Accommodation office – 82% satisfied (+3% vs. ISB)**

Areas for improvement –

- **Finance office – 84% satisfied (-2% vs. ISB)**
- **Catering – 76% satisfied (-1% vs. ISB)**

It appears that international students feel well supported across a range of service in New Zealand. In particular the faith provision, halls welfare, counselling services and accommodation offices attracted high satisfaction ratings.

Areas for improvement include the finance office and the student canteens/ on-campus eateries, which are slightly below the ISB average.

Recommendation and Summary

Compared to 2008, international students in New Zealand are now more likely to recommend their institution to others that are thinking of applying (+8% to 79%). This is comparable to the ISB global index. However, only 28% would actively recommend their university in New Zealand, whereas 33% in the global index are active advocates. In New Zealand, 51% would recommend 'if asked', making a larger passive recommending group than the global comparison.

While in most areas the New Zealand index performs well compared to the global ISB, more work can be done to turn passive advocates into active advocates of the New Zealand experience. There are diverse views that come through from different nationality groups, and differences between levels of study. Doctoral students are least likely to recommend their experience (74%); whilst Bachelor (undergraduate) students are most likely to recommend their experiences in New Zealand (80%). 79% of Master's level students in New Zealand would recommend their university.

While recommendation scores are up, there is still room to improve. While most scores in learning, living and support are on a par or above the ISB average, there are a few areas of concern –

- Students are becoming less satisfied with both accommodation cost (-3% to 55%) and living cost (-3% to 55%).
- Satisfaction with earning money whilst studying has dropped (-8% to 57%), but remains ahead of the global ISB.

However, international students in New Zealand are feeling more positive about making friends from other countries (+5 to 86%) and experiencing local culture (+7% to 82%). Compared to the ISB global index, integration aspects perform well. Safety and visa advice also perform well against the competitor destination countries.

Core learning elements are performing well, although more can be done to meet expectations around technology and internet access. Support services are meeting expectations, and the arrivals experience is very positive with welcome arrangements and orientation sessions that compare favourably within the worldwide context.