

New Zealand School Sector

International Student Experience Survey 2015

Summary report

Overview

The 2015 School Sector International Student Experience Survey was commissioned by Education New Zealand to investigate the decision making, expectations, perceptions and experiences of international students aged 16+ studying in New Zealand secondary schools. First conducted in New Zealand in 2012, 2015 marked the second wave of the survey here.

Each participating school receives their own school-level results, allowing them to compare the experience of their students against the national benchmark. This report provides a high-level summary of results for the sector, highlighting areas where there are particularly noteworthy differences since the last survey in 2012. Additional, more detailed analysis is available in the PowerPoint-format report and data files provided alongside this report.

Methodology and sample profile

1. The 2015 New Zealand School Sector International Student Experience was conducted online between 25 May and 10 July 2015.
2. 2,162 international students aged 16+ participated in the survey (up from 1,871 in 2012). These students were studying at 91 secondary schools around New Zealand.
3. The majority of the sample (78%) were studying at state schools, although there were also proportions at independent (14%) and integrated (8%) schools. Almost four-fifths (78%) attended a co-ed school.
4. The vast majority (87%) of the sample were international fee-paying students while 11% were on an organised exchange programme/school visit.
5. Just over a third (36%) of students were Chinese. The next largest nationality groups were Japanese (16%), German (10%), South Korean (7%) and Thai (6%).
6. The sample comprised a mix of year of study with almost a fifth (18%) in Year 11, almost half (46%) in Year 12 and just over a third (36%) in Year 13.
7. 55% of the sample was female, 42% was male and 3% preferred not to say.

Selecting a school¹

8. As in 2012, the most important factors for international students at New Zealand secondary schools in deciding where to study were the opportunity to improve language skills by studying in an English speaking country (97%), feeling safe (94%) and how people would behave towards students (as international students) (89%). These were followed by the academic reputation of the school (83%), the opportunity to

¹ To ensure that the experience was still relatively recent, questions in this section were only asked of students who started at their current school in the last six months.

go to a university or other institution in another country after this school (83%), the cost of living (82%) and cost of education (80%).

9. Students were most likely to have applied to their school because their parent/guardian (45%) or an education agent/representative (31%) encouraged them to go.
10. Education agents play a key role in the decision-making process for students, with three-fifths (60%) of the sample applying via an education agent. Education agents/consultants were the most commonly cited influence in helping students choose their school (59%), followed by the school website (37%). Just under a fifth of students said that they were helped by previous students from their school (18%), current students at their school (17%) and a printed document/guide from the school (17%). Almost a fifth (18%) of students had visited their school before they (or their parents) selected it.
11. The vast majority of students who used an education agent were happy with the service received, rating it as either good (59%) or very good (29%). Most students' education agents have a contact in New Zealand (at least 61% - 28% of students didn't know) and most (70%) students still have contact with their agent after starting at their school.

Overall satisfaction and likelihood to recommend their school

12. Satisfaction amongst international students at New Zealand secondary schools is generally high. Unchanged since 2012, 94% of international students surveyed were happy or very happy with their experience at their school.
13. Students on organised exchange programmes/school visits were slightly more likely to be happy than international fee-paying students (97% compared to 93%). Levels of happiness vary considerably by school, with scores ranging from 67% to 100%². Happiness also varies somewhat by nationality with the highest levels of happiness found amongst students from France (100%) and Indonesia (100%) and lowest levels amongst students from South Korea (87%)³.
14. Three-quarters (75%) of international students at secondary schools in New Zealand would recommend their school to others thinking of studying there: 33% would definitely recommend it, while 42% would probably recommend it. This overall recommendation score has fallen ever so slightly (-1%) since 2012. The proportion of students who would definitely recommend their school, however, has fallen slightly further (-3%).
15. Students on organised exchange programmes/school visits were more likely than international fee-paying students to recommend their school (84% compared to 74%). Large variations exist between schools, with a reported range⁴ between 52% and 94%. There is also considerable variation by nationality. Students

² Amongst schools with at least 15 respondents.

³ Analysis based on nationalities with at least 15 responses. Please note that Indonesian respondents were studying at a very small number of schools which may mean the score reflects more about the schools than about the nationality more generally.

⁴ Amongst institutions with at least 15 respondents.

most likely to recommend their school were those from Indonesia (100%)⁵ and France (94%). Those least likely to recommend their school were students from Japan (62%), Taiwan (62%) and South Korea (68%)⁶.

16. Responses to an open-ended question about why students wouldn't recommend their school were largely about too many international students studying there and about difficulties making friends with New Zealand students. For example:

"Because [school name] has way too many internationals. The Kiwi students are already annoyed of them so it is very hard to find Kiwi friends."

"Because the New Zealanders are not interested in getting to know the internationals. There are too many international students at this school because they accept everyone and they just want your money".

17. Almost nine out of ten students (88%) agreed that they were happy with their life in New Zealand. A slightly lower proportion felt that so far they have got the important things they want from life in New Zealand (82%), feel welcome in New Zealand (81%) and would still choose New Zealand if they could make their study decisions again (77%). Just over seven out of ten students (72%) felt that most people they had met in New Zealand had wanted to get to know them better. All of these scores have increased slightly since 2012.

Starting a new school

18. 81% of students were happy with their first few days at their school, slightly lower (-2%) than in 2012.

19. Looking at starting at the school in more detail, students were most likely to be happy with being welcomed into the school (e.g. by teachers) (91%) and understanding their timetable (90%).

20. Students were least likely to be happy with opportunities to meet other students/make friends for the first time (84%). This was backed up in many students' open comments on starting at their school, for example:

"some of the students just ask you two question like what's your name is and where you come from and that's it.. so it was quite hard at the beginning to make kiwi friends"

"I remember how it was hard to get to know native students in the first couple of weeks and I felt like the school could have done a better job to encourage Kiwi students to come to us (like a tutoring system)"

21. There is little change in satisfaction between 2012 and 2015 with elements of starting at the school.

⁵ As above, please note that Indonesian respondents were studying at a very small number of schools which may mean the score reflects more about the schools than about the nationality more generally.

⁶ Analysis based on nationalities with at least 15 responses.

Learning experience

22. 92% of students were happy with their experience of learning at their school, very slightly (+1%) higher than in 2012.
23. Satisfaction with many of the more detailed aspects of the learning experience was high. Students were most likely to be happy with the technology, e.g. computers (93%), the library (93%), the classrooms (93%), the ability of teachers (93%), teachers' knowledge of subjects (92%), fair marking of students' work (90%) and support from teachers (90%). Students were least likely to be happy with internet/wifi access (81%) and advice about university/polytechnics and career options (82%).
24. Again, there has been little change in students' satisfaction with their learning experience since 2012. The biggest difference has been a 4% increase in satisfaction with the library.
25. The majority of students (90%) were happy or very happy with the choice of subjects they have at their school.
26. Over a third of students found being taught in English difficult (32%) or very difficult (3%).

Living experience

27. Overall, 92% of students were happy with their current living arrangements, in line with the level of satisfaction in 2012. Students living at home with their family were most likely to be happy (97%), followed by those living with a caregiver/guardian (93%) or with a host family (homestay) (92%). While less common, students living in a hostel/student apartment were least likely to be happy with their living arrangements (80%).
28. Looking at more detailed elements of the living experience, students were most likely to be happy with making friends at school with people from other countries (94%), help from their homestay family with other issues (93%), the quality of accommodation (92%), the relationship with their homestay family (92%), the area near to the school (91%), the school being environmentally friendly (91%), the location of their accommodation (90%) and rules and regulations in their accommodation (90%).
29. Students were least likely to be happy with the school bus service (79%), making friends at school with people from New Zealand (80%) and the facilities for religious worship (81%).
30. Again, a number of the open comments about students' living experience related to difficulties in making friends with New Zealanders. For example:
- "After a few weeks of school, I was shocked when I realize why I couldn't make very close friends with New Zealand students. [School name] is a school who's got a very high number of international students, always coming and leaving; and as a result, kiwi students, and sometimes teachers, just doesn't see us any more. We are just 'another one' who's going to leave anyway, and I think that's why they doesn't really want to make friends with us."*

“NZ students tend to ignore international students who are shy, do not speak English well,... I know it is not their faults but I hope this problem can be solved someday.”

31. There have been some increases in satisfaction with a number of elements of the living experience since 2012, in particular with sports facilities (+5%), opportunities at school to experience the culture of New Zealand (+5%), social events organised by schools (+4%), internet access at school (+4%), internet access in accommodation (+4%), social facilities at the school, e.g. school grounds (+4%) and worship facilities (+4%).
32. Despite comparatively low satisfaction with making friends at school with people from New Zealand, 84% of students indicated that they had at least one close friend who was a New Zealander. Students were more likely, however, to have at least one close friend from the same country as them (94%) or from another country (92%).
33. The vast majority of students felt that they had been treated positively by groups of people (teachers, other school staff, other international students, New Zealand students and other people in New Zealand) since coming to New Zealand. There were, however, some reports of negative treatment from each group, most notably from New Zealand students where 14% of international students felt they had been treated negatively or very negatively.
34. While the majority of students hadn't experienced any bullying by others at their school, 6% reported experiencing bullying themselves and 11% reported seeing others being bullied. Of those who had experienced bullying, only a third had reported it to someone at their school, almost two-thirds (68%) of whom were happy with the way that the school responded.
35. There doesn't appear to be any significant issues with perceptions of safety, with the vast majority of students feeling safe in their accommodation (98%), in the classroom (98%) and in the school grounds (95%). Slightly lower proportions, however, felt safe on public transport (90%) and in public spaces (88%).

Support experience

36. 93% of students were happy with support services overall, ever so slightly lower (-1%) than in 2012.
37. Satisfaction with all support services amongst those who used them is high - over 90%. Students were most likely to be happy with support for different religions/beliefs (100%), disability support (100%), help with their problems/counsellor (98%), help with using IT equipment (97%), advice on being healthy/school doctor or nurse (97%) and support for international students (97%).
38. Satisfaction has increased at least very slightly with all services since 2012, in particular with disability support (+10%)⁷, IT support (+4%), support for different religions (+4%) and the school canteen (+4%).

⁷ Please note that the base size for disability support is relatively low. 34 in 2015 and 21 in 2012.

Future plans

39. Just over a quarter of students (26%) indicated that they planned to stay in New Zealand after leaving their current school; although another quarter (26%) didn't know. Of those who planned to stay in New Zealand, almost two-thirds (63%) planned on going to university.

Concluding remarks

40. As this short summary shows, overall there are generally relatively high levels of satisfaction amongst international students studying at New Zealand secondary schools. The majority of students are happy with their experience at their school (94%), happy with their life in New Zealand (88%) and would recommend their school to others thinking of applying there (75%). Satisfaction is very much in line with the last survey in 2012.

41. While this may be seen as a positive result, it does still leave a number of young students who are unhappy with their school and life in New Zealand. Understanding the reasons behind this and working to address them is important for both individual schools and for the sector as a whole.

42. One particular area that may warrant attention is students' arrival at their school, students being considerably less satisfied with this than with their learning experience, living arrangements and with support services. Another, arguably more difficult, area – likely starting with students' arrival but going well beyond this – is improving integration between international and New Zealand students (maybe more of a challenge at schools with large numbers of international students) and making international students feel more welcome in New Zealand (including in the wider community).

43. While most of this report focuses on international students as a whole, there is undoubtedly considerable variation in satisfaction between different groups of students – students at different schools, of different nationalities, etc. Drilling down into the results further will help in understanding the expectations and experiences of different groups and in ensuring that New Zealand schools are an attractive option for international students.

Accompanying notes

Satisfaction questions in the School Sector International Student Experience Survey were asked using a four point scale: Very happy; Happy; Unhappy; Very unhappy. Unless otherwise specified, this report uses net satisfaction based on the percentage of respondents who were 'very happy' or 'happy'.

As a sector-level summary report, this report is based on overall data from the 2,162 students who participated in the survey. As some other deliverables from the survey designed to be used more at the institution level use institutional averages, there may be some slight differences between figures in them and this report.