Success Factors and Barriers in School Provision for International Students
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Appendix A: Success Factors and Barriers in School Provision for International Students study – School Interviews
Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to the Ministry of Education for providing the database on international student enrolments 2003–2012, and to the staff at schools who took part in the interviews, which were undertaken by Judy Thorpe and Marie Cameron. Our thanks also to Robyn Baker for her review of this report, and Christine Williams for formatting.
Summary

In 2012, 14 percent of primary and intermediate schools and 62 percent of secondary and composite schools enrolled international students. Enrolments in 2012 were 15,645, lower than the 20,935 enrolled a decade earlier. Primary and intermediate school enrolments had declined more than secondary.

This small study for Education New Zealand looks at the drivers, success factors and barriers for New Zealand schools in relation to the recruitment of international students. It analyses national data to show patterns of enrolment 2003 to 2012, and the experiences and views of a cross section of 19 schools.

Main findings include:

- Schools value both the additional income that international students bring, and their widening of New Zealand students’ cultural experiences.
- High decile schools are most likely to attract international students and to have rebounded back since 2006, when enrolments were at their lowest.
- Quite a few schools have enrolled fewer than 10 international students over the whole of the last 10 years.
- Our estimate of the numbers likely to have been consistently recruiting international students and be currently interested in recruiting them is
  - 257 secondary or composite schools (52% of New Zealand total)
  - 61 intermediates (50% of New Zealand total)
  - 274 primary schools (14% of New Zealand total).
- Four things appear key to school recruitment of international students:
  - Word of mouth – positive experiences of students, families, agents.
  - Agents
  - Relationships
  - School location.
- Primary schools are most reliant on agents and word of mouth, with little ability to invest in their own marketing or school development. Intermediates are more active in their marketing, and development of relationships; they are also dependent on one or a few agents. They are keen to diversify the countries they recruit from. Secondary schools are more actively involved, and less reliant on a single agent or small number of agents. Most schools would welcome more government support for more targeted relationship development and to work more collectively.
Introduction

The Government’s Leadership Statement for International Education (2011) includes the aim of increasing international student secondary school enrolments by 2 percent a year. Education New Zealand asked NZCER to undertake a small study of the drivers, success factors and barriers for New Zealand schools in relation to the recruitment of international students.

International student numbers in New Zealand schools were 20,935 in 2003, but had declined to 15,645 by 2012. The decline has been most marked in primary and intermediate schools (from 5,277 in 2003 to 2,536 in 2012).

Secondary school enrolments of international students dropped from 15,658 in 2003 to 10,323 in 2006, then rebounded between 2006 and 2011 to reach 13,423, still not as high as in 2003. 2012 figures showed a small decline to 13,109. Sixty-two percent of New Zealand’s 494 secondary or area schools continue to enrol international students (308 in 2012, somewhat less than the 337 in 2003).

Ministry of Education data on Education Counts show 458 primary and intermediate schools enrolling international students in 2003; this had declined to 288 schools in 2012. That is only 14 percent of the 2000 primary and intermediate schools in New Zealand in 2012.

Analysis of exchange rates and enrolment numbers in schools (Ministry of Education, 2012), shows that the increased value of the New Zealand dollar appears to be a factor in the decline in recruitment from South Korea, which had contributed just under a third of international students to New Zealand schools in 2003. Exchange rate changes seem to have had less effect on recruitment from China and Germany.

Nonetheless, in 2012, South Korea remained the dominant source of international students in primary and intermediate schools. Two-thirds of these students were from South Korea. Japan was the source for another 9 percent, China for 6 percent, and Saudi Arabia, 4 percent. Chinese students made up a higher proportion of the international students in secondary schools: a quarter. South Korea and Japan accounted for 15 percent each.

The purpose of this study is to provide additional insight into New Zealand school recruitment of international students.

The study has two aspects:

1) Analysis of a database supplied by the Ministry of Education, based on the Export Education Levy, which includes school names and numbers of international students at each school from 2003 to 2012. The database does not include source countries for each school and year. It contains somewhat fewer numbers of schools than are given in the data tables on Education Counts.

We have analysed this database to get more insight into patterns over time in relation to school characteristics. We found that most schools tended to have steady, fluctuating or declining enrolments, with few showing consistent increases.
2) Interviews with school principals or the person who has most responsibility for international students.

From the Ministry of Education database, we identified a set of schools that have had different patterns of international student recruitment over the last 10 years, to provide a good cross-section of school experiences over the period.

We aimed to have 20–24 interviews completed. The interviews were conducted largely by phone between mid-June and 10 July. We were able to complete 19 interviews, with some replacement of schools in the original sample that declined to take part. The short time-frame precluded some schools from taking part, where staff responsible for international students were not available in the time frame—this mainly affected the number of secondary schools we had planned to include, and illness precluded one scheduled interview.

The 19 schools included in the study provide a good range of experiences in recruiting and providing for international students. They include 8 primary schools, 5 intermediate schools, and 6 secondary schools.

The interview schedule we used was sent to the schools ahead of the interview. We are grateful to Mary Camp of Education New Zealand for her feedback on the draft interview schedule, and ensuring we had feedback from members of Education New Zealand’s Schools Sector Reference Group within a tight timeframe. The interview questions are attached to this report.

We analysed the interview responses to identify common themes, both within each schooling level, and across the three schooling levels.

This report starts with the big picture, before charting New Zealand schools’ experience with recruitment of international students. It ends with a discussion of the patterns and themes and their possible implications for ongoing recruitment of international students, that also draws on Australian studies of agent and student perceptions of their decision making in relation to choice of country and school.

**Patterns over time – the national picture**

The Ministry of Education database contained 1055 schools that had enrolled international students at some stage over the period 2003–2012. We removed 38 schools that had closed over the period, and 4 special schools. Preliminary analysis showed quite a different pattern for the Christchurch schools, affected by the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes, so we also removed these 114 schools. That left 903 schools.

We analysed patterns in the number of international students separately for secondary and composite schools, intermediate schools, and primary schools.
Secondary and composite schools

While there are fewer secondary and composite schools taking international students in 2012 than in 2003, the numbers have fluctuated somewhat since 2007.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2003</th>
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<td>312</td>
<td>308</td>
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<td>307</td>
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The median number of students per school is lower in recent years: 20 in 2003; 14 in 2006, and 15 in 2012. Some schools are recruiting larger numbers, so that the average number of international students in 2012 was 32 students, close to the average number of 33 students in 2003. The four figures that follow show on the top row, the distribution of students across schools (on the left), and the overall numbers of international students in secondary or composite schools over the period (on the right). The bottom row shows the national picture with the inclusion of ACG New Zealand International College, which had a very large recruitment of international students in 2003.

Figure 1 - International Students in New Zealand Secondary Schools 2003-2012
Fifty secondary schools do not appear to actively recruit international students: the total number of enrolments (which may be the same student for some years) each has had over the 10-year period is less than ten. This suggests that their enrolment of international students is due to individual student mobility and students approaching the school. Most of these schools had rolls of less than 600 students. Two-thirds were decile 1–4 schools.

By contrast, the secondary schools more consistently enrolling international students over the period tend to be larger and higher decile. Among these schools, high-decile schools enrol higher numbers of students, and decile 7–10 schools as a whole have tended to increase their numbers of international students since 2006 more consistently than decile 1–6 schools.

Figure 2 - International Enrolments: Secondary Patterns by Decile
ACG NZ International College is causing the large amount of movement seen in decile 7 secondary schools.

Figure 3 - International Enrolments: Secondary Patterns by Decile

Deciles 4 to 7 Combined

Decile 4
Decile 5
Decile 6
Decile 7

Deciles 4 to 7 Separately

Excluding ACG International

ACG NZ International College
Intermediate schools

The number of intermediates enrolling international students in any one year has declined since 2003. There were 122 intermediates in 2012; 60 had international students, or 49 percent of the total.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>International Students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
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<td>2011</td>
<td>65</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>60</td>
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The median number of students per intermediate is lower in recent years (6 in 2003; 4 in 2006, and 2 in 2012). Because some schools do have large numbers, the average is higher, though still trending downwards: an average of 14 students per school in 2003, 15 students in 2006, and 11 students in 2012.

Figure 4 - Patterns of International Student Enrollment in Intermediate Schools

Twenty-three intermediates each enrolled less than 10 international students in total over the 10-year period, leaving 61 of the 84 intermediate schools on the database that were more active. Only one intermediate with a roll of less than 200 took international students consistently. Decile 1–4 intermediates are over-represented in the group who do not appear to actively recruit international students.

High-decile intermediates have greater numbers of international students, and do not show the same pattern of decline as low-decile and medium-decile intermediates. Most high-decile intermediates are also large intermediates (rolls of 350 or more).
Figure 5 - International Immediate Enrolments - Patterns by Decile

Deciles 1 to 3 Combined

Deciles 4 to 7 Combined

Deciles 8 to 10 Combined
Primary schools

The number of primary schools enrolling international students in any one year shows the greatest decline since 2003, compared with secondary and intermediate schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>International Students</th>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>371</td>
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<td>2011</td>
<td>239</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>228</td>
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The median number of students per school has also markedly declined (4 in 2003; 1 in 2006, and 0 in 2012). There was an average of 7 students per school in 2003, 4 students in 2006, and 3 students in 2012.

Figure 6 - Patterns of International Student Enrolment in Primary Schools

198 primary schools have had less than 10 enrolments each over the 10 years. They are more likely than those who have more enrolments than this to have rolls of less than 200, and to be low decile.

As with secondary and intermediate schools, higher decile primary schools are more likely to enrol higher numbers of students; they also tend to be larger.
Overall patterns

Schools are more likely to be attracting international students if they are high-decile; and large. High-decile secondary schools are the group that has rebounded most since 2006. While high-decile intermediate and primary schools have fared better than other intermediate and primary schools, their 2012 student numbers are lower than in 2006.

It is worth noting the effect of ACG International on the trends over time using 2003 as the baseline. This single secondary school accounted for more than 3000 students in 2003, but less than half of this in 2012. Nonetheless, this means that this one school is accounting for more than a tenth of the total international student enrolment in New Zealand secondary and area schools.

Schools likely to be actively interested currently in international student recruitment total:
• 257 secondary or area schools (52% of New Zealand total)
• 61 intermediates (50% of New Zealand total)
• 274 primary schools (14% of New Zealand total).

Themes from the Interviews

There are some common themes across the schools, even though the approach to recruitment of international students also differs in relation to school level, and associated with that, size and resources.

Common themes

International students were valued for the additional income they provided schools, and also for the widening of New Zealand students’ cultural experiences. Some schools also saw New Zealand students and homestay families forging personal links across cultures, which they thought would enhance their ability to take advantage of a globalised economy. Several schools were providing languages such as Mandarin and Korean that were simultaneously meeting local student needs (including students from immigrant communities) and international student needs.

Most of those interviewed mentioned three things that were key to their recruitment of international students:

‘Word of mouth’—positive experiences of students, families, and agents. Schools that had been running international student programmes for some time were most able to leverage this, with some having alumni networks. Schools were keen to ensure that international students could make friends, and participate in the full life of the school, including contributing aspects of their own culture. They were keen to ensure that international students would improve their English language skills, while not losing their own language and culture. Schools were also keen to keep good links with parents.

Schools also thought that positive experiences or perceptions of New Zealand as a country were important, such as its safety and quality of life, as well as the quality of its education.  

Agents – schools that had steady enrolments or had been able to increase them spoke of reliable agents, and the importance of finding (or being found) and maintaining good relationships with good agents, who were linked to continuing sources of students. Others with more fluctuating or decreasing enrolments spoke of being reliant on agents coming to them, or uneven experiences.

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1 In 2012 Australia surveyed international students in Years 11 and 12: factors influencing their decision to study overseas were to improve their English (72%), gain experience living and studying in another country (71%), improve their overall studies (56%), improve their chances of entering a good university in Australia (50%) and obtain a better quality of education than is available at home (50%). (Australian Education International (2013), International Student Survey 2012 Overview report).

Some thought that agents looked to match students from a given country with a school that already provided for such students (whether local or international), which could make it difficult to widen the country sources for a school. Some had experience of agents visiting a number of nearby schools to seek the school offering the lowest cost, suggesting that some agents may not see their role as including the growing of numbers of international students recruited so much as placing particular students.

**Relationships** – the schools found recruitment easier and more reliable where they could develop and then maintain good relationships, particularly with agents, or those who provided other sources of students. Examples of the latter include the development of ‘sister school’ relationships with schools overseas, sometimes with an agent playing a key role; and local relationships, such as with a Korean church, or other local schools working at a different level (so, primary schools could benefit from having a good relationship with a local high school whose own international students had younger siblings).

Schools that were pro-active in seeking international students found more value in targeted marketing, often using or starting from existing relationships, than general marketing opportunities, such as education fairs. However, education fairs could help identify potential new relationships, or maintain existing ones. The cost of education fair attendance made it an unsure investment for some schools; others could not afford international travel even to maintain existing or revive former relationships. Schools were conscious too that maintaining good relationships involved senior school leadership as well as the staff whose roles centred on international students in the school.

A further aspect was also apparent:

**Location** – Some schools were able to leverage off their location without additional marketing—for example, Auckland schools had the benefit of a large city with a range of tertiary education institutions, and immigrant communities. This offers pathways from secondary school and additional sources of students. For example, the recent arrival of Saudi Arabian tertiary students resulted in one primary school close to a university enrolling Saudi Arabian students without any marketing or strategy on its part. It did have a reputation of catering for international students, and like most of the primary schools interviewed, had ESOL teachers and an ongoing ESOL programme. The existence of immigrant communities has also been the source of homestays, where students or their families want continuity rather than experience of ‘Kiwi’ families. Other schools mentioned some difficulty providing students with Kiwi homestays, where their New Zealand families were themselves from other cultures, or where families had both parents employed.

Other schools have used their provincial locations to emphasise ‘Kiwi’ experiences, particularly in the outdoors. Some are in locations where there is active support from local government to market the area. Others found useful their membership of ODENZ (Outdoor Education New Zealand, a collective of 23 schools). Those who had experience of collective approaches to build the profile of their area were positive about such work.

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2 The 2012 Australian survey of Year 11 and 12 students found that about half were influenced in their choice of school by agents, and 40% by recommendation of friend or relative.
Primary Schools

All but one of the seven primary schools interviewed are reliant on agents and word of mouth, and do not participate in education fairs or marketing events overseas. Several have advertised in Korean language newspapers, but had not found that a worthwhile investment. Korean students were a mainstay in most of these schools.

Several had links with intermediate or secondary schools in their area, and mentioned that this allowed them to recruit siblings of students enrolled at the secondary school.

Most of the schools had ESOL teachers; some also had Mandarin and Korean language programmes, sometimes for their New Zealand students. The existence of such programmes is not always matched by the nationality of new students.

Most of these schools did not seek large numbers of international students. They wanted numbers they could accommodate within existing classrooms and infrastructure. They did not have sufficient funds to invest in any further infrastructure, particularly when student numbers were uncertain or had declined.

These primary schools did not arrange homestays; their students lived with their parents. So the schools did not need the additional infrastructure evident in the secondary schools. One school had hosted groups of students for 3–4 week stays, and had been able to arrange homestays with parents of the school’s New Zealand children for that time.

While several schools thought the requirement for children under the age of 10 to live with a parent was justified, citing previous experience where students living in home-stays or with agents had difficulty in school because of homesickness or insufficient support, others questioned this requirement. Some had seen enrolments fall after this requirement came in, particularly where agents had also provided home-stays. Those who questioned this requirement thought that it would not be given the same weight in other cultures, where children could often live with grandparents or other family members and not their parents. And they cited the lack of such a requirement in the two countries seen as competing most with New Zealand for international students, Australia and Canada.

Several schools mentioned immigration requirements to show proof of funds to cover an education plan as a barrier to students coming for more than a year or two.

Intermediate Schools

The intermediate schools were more invested than most of the primary schools in recruiting international students. As well as having ESOL provision, they organised home-stays, and were more active in developing or maintaining relationships with agents, and seeking new sources of students. They are more likely to travel overseas to recruit and maintain relationships.

One had a long and strong relationship with an agent who provided after-school classes in Korean to ensure they continued to remain in step with the Korean curriculum. Another intermediate looking to reverse a drop-off in Chinese student numbers was hoping to provide after-school Chinese
language classes to make the school more attractive, but needed sufficient enrolments first in order to do so. Several intermediate schools noted competition between intermediates for students, which was a hindrance to collaboration (for example, on providing home-language classes). Several had students coming for short-term visits.

Most were reliant on their existing South Korean links and agents; several thought they would be in a better position to increase student numbers from South Korea if the New Zealand requirement for parental accompaniment below the age of 10 was lowered to below the age of 9. The intermediates were actively seeking to diversify the countries they recruited from. One intermediate that drew students from three other Asian countries had sister schools in two of the countries, and reciprocal teacher visits, which helped establish and maintain relationships. The others thought they needed more government support, such as location marketing for clusters of schools, and support to develop relationships with agents and other sources of students.

**Secondary Schools**

Secondary schools tend to have students from a wider range of countries than primary or intermediate; they have wider networks overseas, travel regularly to maintain these networks and market, and are more likely to be involved in local organisations or school clusters promoting their area as a destination for international students. Sister city relationships also help.

They are less reliant on an individual or small number of agents. They promote themselves more, with a growing use of social media and the Internet, such as posting material on an international agent database. They are more conscious of the material they make available online, since they find students, parents, and agents using these sources more to make choices or narrow down the field. They usually have developed a good pool of homestay families.

They are more conscious than primary and intermediate schools of competition from other countries, particularly Australia and Canada. Several felt that these two countries provided more government support in the way of incentives, immigration requirements, and support for individual schools.

They understand that many of their students come to New Zealand secondary schools as a way to not only improve their English, but to access New Zealand tertiary education. One school noted that while they had maintained their numbers of international students, it was becoming more difficult to do so, and they were accepting students who needed more support than previous students to get them to the level where they could access university.

However, secondary schools also find themselves catering for students who do not expect to stay in New Zealand for the whole of their secondary education. This was recently noticeable when Germany came into line with the rest of the EU in having four rather than five years of secondary education. This resulted in fewer students coming for the whole of their secondary education, but more coming for a ‘gap year’; benefiting a provincial secondary school, where an Auckland school found itself having to recruit more students since its German students stayed less long.
Several of the directors of international education commented on the importance of a school investing in order to attract students; and on the importance of school principals travelling to maintain or build relationships overseas.

Provincial secondary schools feel they need to counteract agent preferences for cities and single sex schools. Single-sex schools noted that this could be a difficulty in their recruitment, where countries did not have such schools; it was not a difficulty however in recruiting Thai students.

**Discussion**

The trends over time in international student enrolments, and what schools say about their experience in recruiting international students suggest several observations and questions.

1. Primary school enrolments of international students are trending downwards, with some exceptions among high-decile schools. It seems likely that active interest in taking international students is becoming more limited to schools in locations that appeal to international students and their families, which can offer ESOL programmes and have good agent support, and which have links to intermediates or secondary schools, though it is not clear whether international students are seeking pathways over time within linked schools.

   Most of the primary schools we spoke to were highly dependent on their agents, and on Korean students. They were not in a position to undertake more active marketing or investment, and would need more support if they were to increase or maintain student numbers.

2. Intermediates are in a similar situation as primary, though some are more active in marketing and networking, and seeking to establish ongoing relationships in other countries. Nonetheless, they too are highly dependent on agents.

3. Secondary schools also depend on agents, but are more actively marketing and involved in location or other collective approaches to developing new relationships and countries to recruit from. Schools that are maintaining numbers are having to put more work into this than previously.

4. Most of those we spoke with in schools would welcome more government support. Individual schools were pleased with Education New Zealand’s approach to more regional marketing. They would also welcome more support in the way of targeted relationship development, and for them to work more collectively. There was an awareness of the limitation of individual schools to undertake and fund the promotion and pathways across schooling levels they see as needed to attract a wider range of international students.

5. In the face of the competition they sense with Australia and Canada, some schools raised the question of alignment of immigration and other policies, such as allowing younger students to attend New Zealand schools if they lived with a family member other than a parent.
6. We are struck by how central the role of the agent is in international student recruitment, and wonder if or how Education New Zealand could work with them to increase international student enrolments.
Appendix A: Success Factors and Barriers in School Provision for International Students study – School Interviews

1. What factors assist your school to recruit international students?
   - Has that changed over the last few years?

2. What makes it difficult for your school to recruit these students?
   - Has that changed over the last few years?

3. How does the school recruit international students?
   - If you actively recruit, how do you go about it?
   - Are there particular countries that you recruit from?
   - What resources do you use inside the school?
   - What resources or support do you use outside the school?

4. Are you able to recruit the number of international students you would like to recruit?
   - If yes, why do you think this is?
     What has been particularly important in enabling you to do so?
   - If no,
     Why do you think this is?
     What would need to change for you to recruit more international students?

5. How important is it for your school to have international students?

6. Do you have any other comments or observations from your experience about what helps or hinders the recruitment of international students in New Zealand schools?