Reviving international education
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National will revive New Zealand’s international education sector as part of our plan to rebuild the economy and get it working for all New Zealanders. Supporting international education to recover will boost export revenue, create job opportunities, and strengthen global connections that will drive economic growth in New Zealand.

Before the pandemic, international education was New Zealand’s fifth largest export earner, contributing $3.7 billion to the economy and supporting at least 6,000 jobs.¹ Last year, the sector’s contribution to New Zealand’s GDP was down significantly, delivering only $0.8 billion.

New Zealand has been in recession, the cost-of-living continues to rise faster than wages, and mortgages are unaffordable. It’s critical we get sectors that can bring in much-needed export earnings like international education back on their feet as soon as possible.

Reviving international education is also vital for our tertiary education institutions. The revenue raised from higher international fees allows our universities, polytechnics and other tertiary institutions to provide better quality education and services while keeping costs down for domestic students.

International education also strengthens our connections with the rest of the world, making it easier for New Zealanders to succeed on the global stage, exposing young people to new ideas and perspectives, and creating international networks that can drive future economic growth and opportunity back home.

National’s plan to revive international education

1. Fast track visa processing for international students who pay an additional fee.
2. Increase the hours international students are able to work each week from 20 to 24.
3. Expand work rights for international students and their partners to make New Zealand a more attractive destination for international students.
4. Diversify the countries Education New Zealand recruits international students from.

¹ Education New Zealand - link & link.
1. Fast track visa processing

Students often have time sensitivities when deciding where to study, given that most courses worldwide have a fixed start date. If students face lengthy delays waiting for a decision on their visa applications, they may choose to study elsewhere, and New Zealand misses out on someone who would have otherwise studied here.

For many of the international students that New Zealand is seeking to attract, delays in visa processing are a more significant barrier than cost. Currently, 90 per cent of applications are processed within 44 weekdays, despite a target of 30. Delays to visa processing are making New Zealand a less attractive destination for international students.

To speed up processing and reduce delays, National will introduce a priority visa processing system, allowing international student visa applicants the option of paying an additional fee to fast-track their application. For standard applicants who pay the priority processing fee, Immigration New Zealand will aim to process visas within two weeks, rather than the current target of 30 weekdays.

Priority processing will enable students who are willing to pay for the additional cost of fast-track processing to receive a faster response, so they can organise their arrival and arrangements in New Zealand with greater certainty. For other applicants, National will aim to return to historic visa processing speeds, with 90 per cent of all applications decided within 30 days.

2. Allow students and partners to work more while studying

Currently, most international students in New Zealand are allowed to work a maximum of 20 hours part-time each week to support themselves while they study. This is lower than some of the countries we compete with in international education, including Australia where international students are allowed to work up to 24 hours each week.

To make New Zealand more competitive when it comes to attracting international students, National will increase the current limit on part-time employment hours from 20 to 24.

This change will align our visa settings more closely with our international competitors and allow students to better support themselves while studying in New Zealand. It will also support small businesses in sectors like hospitality, who have been struggling to keep their doors open in recent years due to shortage of workers.

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2 Immigration New Zealand as of 19 September 2023
3. Expand work rights for international students and their partners

One of the primary factors prospective international students will consider when choosing where to study is whether they will be allowed to find employment in their destination country once they have completed their studies.

International students in New Zealand already have a range of post-study work rights based on the type and length of the qualification they have completed. National will expand some of these work rights to make New Zealand a more attractive destination for international students.

Another barrier to attracting international students to study in New Zealand, particularly higher-level qualifications or students studying in areas of skills shortage, is the lack of work rights for their partners. These are exactly the type of students we need to be attracting to New Zealand. To address this barrier, National will allow partners of international students undertaking higher level qualifications or studying in areas where New Zealand has a skill shortage to work while their partner is completing their studies.

Providing international students with more certainty about their future employment opportunities and allowing their partners to work while they are studying will help to revive international education while also easing areas of skill shortage in the workforce.

National will:

- Give partners of international students studying a degree level 7 qualification or higher open work rights while they are studying.
- Increase post-study work rights for level 8 post-graduate diplomas from one year to two years.
- Constantly review the list of sub-degree courses that are eligible for post-study work rights and add qualifications that better reflect New Zealand’s skill shortages.
- Ensure international students studying sub-degree courses in these eligible areas of skills shortage receive minimum post-study work rights of 12 months and allow their partners to work while they are studying.
- Ensure international students who have studied in New Zealand in areas of skill shortage have a pathway to residence.

4. Diversify the countries Education New Zealand recruits from

Our over-dependence on a few countries for international students was highlighted in a recent report that found New Zealand was in the bottom three nations for the diversity of our international student population, with 80 per cent of our international students arriving from just nine countries in 2022. This has not occurred by accident as Education New Zealand, a Crown agency that employs 100 staff to recruit students, has focused its recruitment on Asia.

While we will continue to welcome and foster New Zealand’s excellent relationships with Asian nations, it has become apparent that our competitor countries have successfully recruited students from a greater range of countries while we have been left behind in taking advantage of new opportunities.

National will make it a strategic priority for Education New Zealand to diversify its recruitment efforts for international students. We will aim to extend our reach to a broader spectrum of countries in order to help our international education sector to become more resilient in the face of unforeseen risks and challenges.
GET OUR COUNTRY BACK ON TRACK

PARTY VOTE National

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