

## The Pastoral Needs of International Students in New Zealand Secondary Schools

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### Abstract

A study of some 400 international students reveals that they are, on average, modestly successful in coping with the challenges of settling into the local school and peer community. While they receive support from other overseas-born students, many teachers, and some local peers, their integration into the peer community remains thwarted by the perceived attitude of local peers. These findings form a background of current research evidence against which the potential of specific pastoral care provisions can be explored and developed.

### Introduction

Educating foreign fee-paying students, also referred to as international students, is a major export industry for New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2001, 2002a). In 2001, there were some 52,700 such students in all levels of our education system. The number of international students at secondary school in New Zealand has increased dramatically, from 1749 in 1993 to 8732 in 2001, with 53% of those in Auckland (Ministry of Education, 2002b). Of the international students in primary and secondary schools in 2001, the vast majority came from Asia (9711), and in particular from China (3554), Korea (2622) and Japan (1422). The current study is concerned with international students at secondary school level, and in particular those in the Auckland area. While their presence poses multiple challenges to our education system (Evans, 2002; Moore, 2002; Ward, 2001), this study focuses specifically on personal adjustment and peer relationships, and the implications this has for the development of pastoral care provisions.

Colleen Ward's literature review on the impact of international students on domestic students and host institutions (2001) provides an excellent, comprehensive overview of the issues involved and research evidence pertaining to them. She notes that most of this research data relates to countries beyond New Zealand, and to students in tertiary settings. While her data suggests that there are close parallels between the New Zealand experience and that in other western countries, it is important to have local and current

data on which to base recommendations and programmes concerning pastoral care in our local schools. One important New Zealand study on secondary schools by Aston (1996) found that international and local students largely failed to integrate at the peer level; 70% of international students had co-nationals as best friends rather than locals (11%). This situation is commonly found in overseas studies as well, and has prompted a strong interest in the development of cross-national interaction (Donn & Schick, 1995; Ward, 2001). As Colleen Ward states, "The literature reveals that (intercultural) contact is associated with a number of positive outcomes: psychologically, socially and academically" (2001, p. 12). The Ministry of Education has made a major contribution to shaping the conditions under which such intercultural relationships may be fostered in its *Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students* (2002c). However, this Code is limited in its ability to focus on specific pastoral care provisions and how these may be fostered.

The present study focuses on gathering recent data on the experience of international students in selected secondary schools where they are present in sizeable numbers. I set out to ascertain the status quo in terms of the challenges faced by these students, the quality of their peer relationships, and the pastoral care provided by schools. Ultimately, the aim of the project is to use these findings to provide impetus and focus for the development of pastoral care provisions, with particular reference to the Peer Support programme (1995), peer relationship activities, and the role of school counsellors. This issue is discussed further in the companion article to the present one, titled "The Peer Support programme and pastoral care of overseas-born students" (Everts, 2003). Both studies are part of the Pastoral Care for Overseas-Born Students (PCOS) project, established in 2001 within the Counsellor Education Programme of the School of Education at the University of Auckland, with the aim of improving pastoral care provisions for migrant and international students in New Zealand schools.

### **The international student survey: methodology**

Six secondary schools in the Auckland region participated in the survey, representing co-educational, single-sex, and private schools. Survey questionnaires were developed by the PCOS research team in consultation with school staff, and administered in accordance with the University of Auckland's ethical requirements. A total of 399 international students are included in the analysis. Their characteristics are summarised below. While found at all form levels, most (65% of the sample) are, as expected, in the senior school. Note that female students outnumber males at all class levels.

**Table 1: Form level and gender distribution (n = 399). NA = no answer**

			Gender			Total
			male	female	NA	
Form level	form 3	Coun	9	18		27
		% of Total	2.3%	4.5%		6.8%
	form 4	Coun	16	22		38
		% of Total	4.0%	5.5%		9.5%
	form 5	Coun	20	32	2	54
		% of Total	5.0%	8.0%	.5%	13.5%
	form 6	Coun	46	62	4	112
		% of Total	11.5%	15.5%	1.0%	28.1%
	form 7	Coun	68	74	5	147
		% of Total	17.0%	18.5%	1.3%	36.8%
	NA	Coun	6	12	3	21
		% of Total	1.5%	3.0%	.8%	5.3%
	Total	Coun	165	220	14	399
		% of Total	41.4%	55.1%	3.5%	100.0%

While a wide range of countries and parts of the world are represented, the distribution pattern in this sample is generally similar to that described in the 2001 Ministry of Education statistics. Fully half (52%) of respondents come from Hong Kong/China, with a further 21% from Korea. All others make up very minor groupings.

**Table 2: Country of origin (n = 399)**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Pacific Islands	12	3.0	3.0	3.0
	Hong Kong/China	206	51.6	51.6	54.6
	Taiwan	21	5.3	5.3	59.9
	Korea	84	21.1	21.1	81.0
	South Africa	1	.3	.3	81.2
	Europe/North America/Australia	8	2.0	2.0	83.2
	Othe	63	15.8	15.8	99.0
	NA	4	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	399	100.0	100.0	

When ascertaining length of residency in relation to the form level of respondents, there is a very clear pattern – 81% of respondents are relatively new to New Zealand,



having been here for less than two years, and 93% for less than three years. This is consonant with the fact that so many are here in the senior school to complete their secondary education.

**Table 3: Years in New Zealand by form level (n = 399)**

			Form level						Total
			form 3	form 4	form 5	form 6	form 7	NA	
Years in NZ	up to 2 yrs	Count	24	30	45	98	111	16	324
		% of Total	6.0%	7.5%	11.3%	24.6%	27.8%	4.0%	81.2%
	2 yrs to 2 yrs 11 mons	Count	3	6	2	8	25	1	45
		% of Total	.8%	1.5%	.5%	2.0%	6.3%	.3%	11.3%
	3 yrs to 3 yrs 11 mons	Count		2	2	1	4	1	10
		% of Total		.5%	.5%	.3%	1.0%	.3%	2.5%
	4 yrs to 4 yrs 11 mons	Count			2		3		
		% of Total			.5%		.8%		1.3%
	5 yrs to 5 yrs 11 mons	Count				3	2		
		% of Total				.8%	.5%		1.3%
	6 yrs to 6 yrs 11 mons	Count				1	1		
		% of Total				.3%	.3%		.5%
	7 yrs to 7 yrs 11 mons	Count			1				
		% of Total			.3%				.3%
	NA	Count			2	1	1	3	
		% of Total			.5%	.3%	.3%	.8%	1.8%
Total	Count	27	38	54	112	147	21	399	
	% of Total	6.8%	9.5%	13.5%	28.1%	36.8%	5.3%	100.0%	

**Table 4: Years at a particular school by form level (n = 399)**

			Form level						Total
			form 3	form 4	form 5	form 6	form 7	NA	
Years at school	.00	Count	27	24	37	79	67	14	248
		% of Total	6.8%	6.0%	9.3%	19.8%	16.8%	3.5%	62.2%
	1.00	Count		14	9	21	54	3	101
		% of Total		3.5%	2.3%	5.3%	13.5%	.8%	25.3%
	2.00	Count			4	7	17	1	29
		% of Total			1.0%	1.8%	4.3%	.3%	7.3%
	3.00	Count			2	2	4		8
		% of Total			.5%	.5%	1.0%		2.0%
	4.00	Count				2	4		6
		% of Total				.5%	1.0%		1.5%
	NA	Count			2	1	1	3	7
		% of Total			.5%	.3%	.3%	.8%	1.8%
	Total	Count	27	38	54	112	147	21	399
		% of Total	6.8%	9.5%	13.5%	28.1%	36.8%	5.3%	100.0%

The length of time respondents have spent at the specific school was plotted in relation to their form level. The strong preponderance of newly arrived students, mostly in the senior school, is matched by the fact that 62% of respondents have been at the school in question for less than one year, while a further 25% have been there for between one and two years.

**The international student survey: questionnaire data**

The first question concerns respondents' self-reported level of conversational English, related to form level. Sixty-five percent of all respondents consider the level of their conversational English to be within the middling to reasonable range. By contrast, some 5% rate their conversational English as non-existent or very poor, while 14% rate it to be very good or fluent. Many of those who regard their English as very poor or below par are in forms 5 or 6, where the curriculum demands a fair level of linguistic sophistication. There is no way of knowing from this data how consistent such student ratings are with what might have been allocated by teaching staff.

**Table 5: Conversational English level by form (n = 335). 1 = can't talk with others; 7 = English is fluent; NA = no answer; 64 students at one school were not asked this question**

			Form level					Total	
			form 3	form 4	form 5	form 6	form 7		NA
Conversational English	1	Count			1	1	1		3
		% of Total			.3%	.3%	.3%		.9%
	2	Count	1	3	4	4		1	13
		% of Total	.3%	.9%	1.2%	1.2%		.3%	3.9%
	3	Count	5	3	1	16	6	2	33
		% of Total	1.5%	.9%	.3%	4.8%	1.8%	.6%	9.9%
	4	Count	8	11	14	34	36	7	110
		% of Total	2.4%	3.3%	4.2%	10.1%	10.7%	2.1%	32.8%
	5	Count	4	9	15	26	51	4	109
		% of Total	1.2%	2.7%	4.5%	7.8%	15.2%	1.2%	32.5%
	6	Count		1	2	8	25	1	37
		% of Total		.3%	.6%	2.4%	7.5%	.3%	11.0%
	7	Count		1	2	3	4		10
		% of Total		.3%	.6%	.9%	1.2%		3.0%
NA	Count			5	4	8	3	20	
	% of Total			1.5%	1.2%	2.4%	.9%	6.0%	
Total	Count	18	28	44	96	131	18	335	
	% of Total	5.4%	8.4%	13.1%	28.7%	39.1%	5.4%	100.0%	

Students were then asked to think back to when they first arrived at school, and to rate how easy or hard they found a range of tasks. The most striking finding in the table below is that, in most respects, respondents rate their initial ability to adjust to different aspects of being in New Zealand as around the "OK" mark. While this may be seen as an acceptable rating, it is not a clearly positive one. Within the academic area, as expected, rather more students in the sample (25% of respondents) found it fairly hard or very hard to study in English, compared with 14% who found it fairly easy or very easy. In a similar vein, though to a lesser degree, more students (29% of respondents) found it hard rather than easy (20%) to understand lessons. In contrast, considerably more students (37% of respondents) found it easy rather than hard (17%) to complete homework. Asking for help was a positive experience. Markedly more respondents found it easy to ask for help from teachers and other students (38%), compared with those who found it hard (14%).

**Table 6: Difficulty level of issues at first arrival (n = 399); 64 students at one school were not asked the question about getting on with other international students**

Summary	Very easy	Fairly easy	OK OK	Fairly hard	Very hard	NA NA	Total Total
Studying in English	10 2.5%	45 11.3%	240 60.2%	81 20.3%	17 4.3%	6 1.5%	399 100%
Understanding lessons	11 2.8%	70 17.5%	199 49.9%	90 22.6%	24 6.0%	5 1.3%	399 100%
Go to teacher for help	34 8.5%	118 29.6%	181 45.4%	44 11.0%	12 3.0%	10 2.5%	399 100%
Go to students for help	52 13.0%	102 25.6%	182 45.6%	47 11.8%	9 2.3%	7 1.8%	399 100%
Get homework finished	48 12.0%	98 24.6%	180 45.1%	52 13.0%	14 3.5%	7 1.8%	399 100%
Get on with Kiwis	25 6.3%	49 12.3%	141 35.3%	107 26.8%	65 16.3%	12 3.0%	399 100%
Get on with international students	84 25.1%	107 31.9%	118 35.2%	15 4.5%	4 1.2%	7 2.1%	335 100%
Get on with own country students	219 54.9%	75 18.8%	83 20.8%	10 2.5%	6 1.5%	6 1.5%	399 100%
Overcome homesickness	66 16.5%	51 12.8%	203 50.9%	40 10.0%	26 6.5%	13 3.3%	399 100%
Getting used to Kiwi culture	39 9.8%	80 20.1%	187 46.9%	60 15.0%	23 5.8%	10 2.5%	399 100%

In terms of their wider adjustment to being in New Zealand, somewhat more respondents found it easy to get used to Kiwi culture and overcome homesickness



(about 30% for each) rather than hard (21% and 27% respectively). As expected, getting on with students from their own country was easiest (70% of respondents rated it as fairly easy to very easy), followed by getting on with other international students (57%). Getting on with Kiwis was easy for only 19% of respondents, and 16% regarded it as very hard – the most negative of all ratings in the question.

A small but noteworthy number of students (some 5% of respondents in each instance) found it very hard to study in English, understand lessons, overcome homesickness, get used to Kiwi culture and, most of all, get on with Kiwi peers. It is not known to what extent such students have multiple problems, or whether different ones have different types of problem. They are, however, of concern to those responsible for pastoral care.

Students were also asked what had been strange or difficult for them as an international student in their current school. When organised into response categories, a number of themes stand out. Of all the issues that are experienced as strange or difficult, language is, not surprisingly, the single most common item mentioned by international students (93 responses), together with the associated academic expectations (49 responses). In contrast, the school's expectations and its general orientation do not stand out as being of particular concern to respondents.

**Table 7: Issues that have been strange or difficult (n = 335).**

**"Miscellaneous" includes the answer "no difficulties"; 64 students at one school were not asked this question**

Strange/difficult	Mentioned		Not mentioned		Total	
	frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%
School set-up	14	4.2	321	95.8	335	100.0
School expectations	14	4.2	321	95.8	335	100.0
General orientation	8	2.4	327	97.6	335	100.0
Academic expectations	49	14.6	286	85.4	335	100.0
Language	93	27.8	242	72.2	335	100.0
Cultural difference	22	6.6	313	93.4	335	100.0
Staff attitude	27	8.1	308	91.9	335	100.0
Kiwi student attitude	82	24.5	253	75.5	335	100.0
Personal friendship	13	3.9	322	96.1	335	100.0
Miscellaneous	115	34.3	220	65.7	335	100.0

In the social and personal arena, cultural differences in themselves are not rated as a theme of major concern (22 responses). Staff attitudes are seen as somewhat more

problematic (27 responses), but it is at the peer level that the most striking ratings occur. While it is clear that personal friendships are plentiful (only 13 responses noted this as a problematic issue), Kiwi student attitudes are the second most commonly cited issue as being strange or difficult (82 responses).

The flavour of meaning that may be found in these response tendencies is represented in the following verbatim statements, drawn randomly from all the schools in the sample:

*Some students have wrong understanding about international students.*

*Some people have negative impressions on all the international students just because a small portion of international students misbehaved (due to not being appropriately supervised).*

*I found the lessons strange when I was not used to the way of teaching in New Zealand.*

*Don't make national student meeting so often because if the students go to the meetings every week, some Kiwi students will laugh at them.*

*International student teacher kept changing my timetable so I was confused.*

*Sometimes teachers speak too fast; they just read without spelling the words.*

*It was hard to overcome homesickness when I first came here but it's easy now.*

*The school is fairly big which also means that there are more students but the work is quite okay and socialising isn't too hard.*

*People don't like Chinese people.*

*Some people (Kiwis) don't understand that we are not good in English.*

*I can't understand why we don't get a car.*

*Though the school has a helper/teacher for Chinese/Koreans, there is no one for Japanese students; Japanese teachers/helpers are needed.*

*The school has too many Asian people; I cannot study English properly.*

*Too many teacher's strikes; good to play but wasting our money; cannot ask questions about study.*

*We (Taiwanese/Chinese students) are bullied and teased by Kiwi kids ... it is so*



*unfair to us; I wonder how they will think and feel if they were treated like this in a new country; I think they believe that Asians are not deserved to be treated as human beings.*

Students were then asked how often certain more serious problems had happened to them at school. Being hit or physically hurt is not rated as a common event for respondents: 83% report that it has never or rarely happened to them, while 10%, representing students at all levels of the school, note that it has sometimes happened to them. (See Figure 1)

Respondents were then asked how often their property had been damaged. They indicated that property damage occurred at about the same rate as being hit: 80% report that it has never or rarely happened, while 10% report that it has sometimes happened, mostly at form 5 and 6 levels. (See Figure 2)

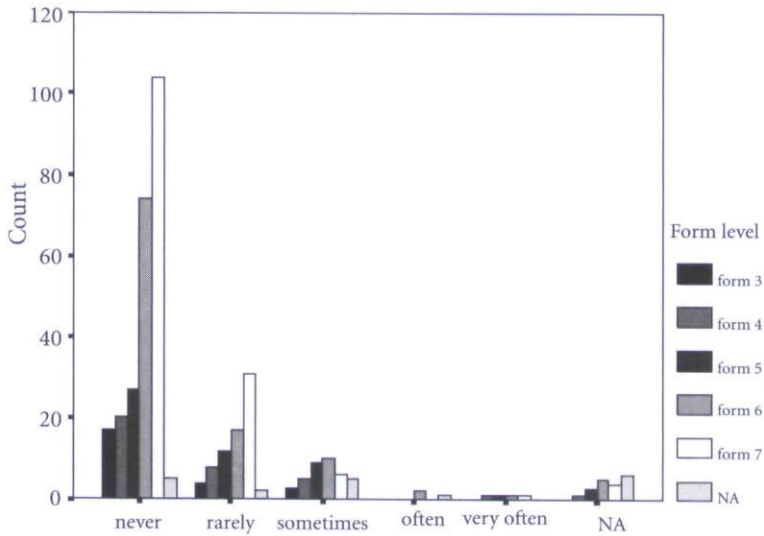
Thirdly, the international students were asked how often they had been sworn at or insulted at school. They report that verbal abuse occurs more frequently. While 65% of respondents report that it has never or rarely happened, 19% say it has sometimes happened and, surprisingly, it is far more prevalent at seventh form level than being hit or having their property damaged. (See Figure 3)

Lastly, students were asked how often money had been demanded of them at school. They report that having money demanded of them is less prevalent for international students than being sworn at: 76% report that it has never or rarely happened to them, while 13% say that it has sometimes happened to them – most strikingly so at form 6 and 7 levels. (See Figure 4)

Students were asked what had been done so far that had helped them feel welcome and at home in the school. Individual respondent statements were arranged into meaningful themes, as represented in the table below. While the schools' general orientation is mentioned reasonably often as being of help in making international students feel welcome and at home (29 responses), the schools' organisational set-up, general and academic expectations, cultural orientation activities, and language provisions do not rate highly with international students as being particularly helpful.

By contrast, it is at the personal and social level that the greatest perceived help has been provided. Staff attitudes rate as the single most prominent contribution to helping international students feel welcome and at home (84 responses). This is

**Figure 1: Frequency of being hit or physically hurt, by form level (n = 385); 14 students at one school were not asked this question**



**Figure 2: Property damage by form level (n = 385); 14 students at one school were not asked this question**

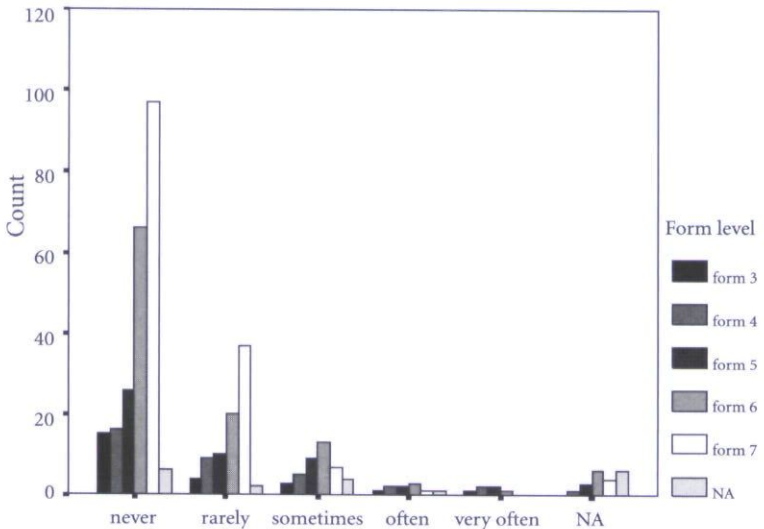


Figure 3: Verbal abuse (being sworn at or insulted) by form level (n = 385); 14 students at one school were not asked this question

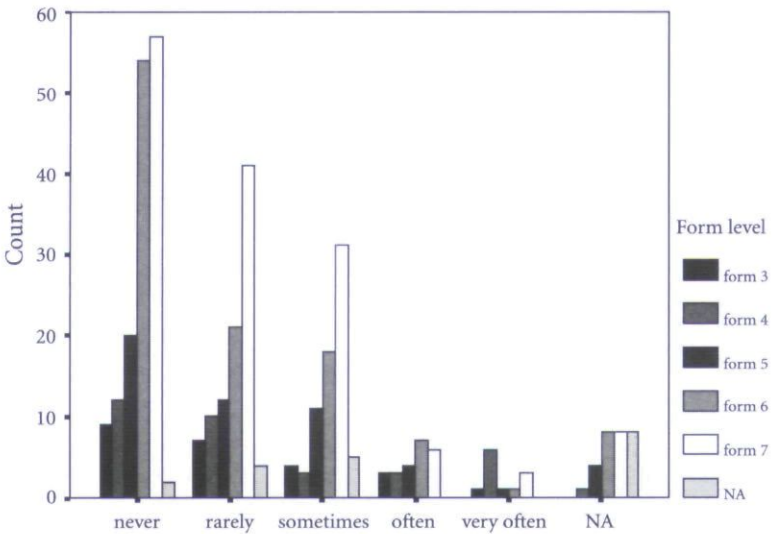
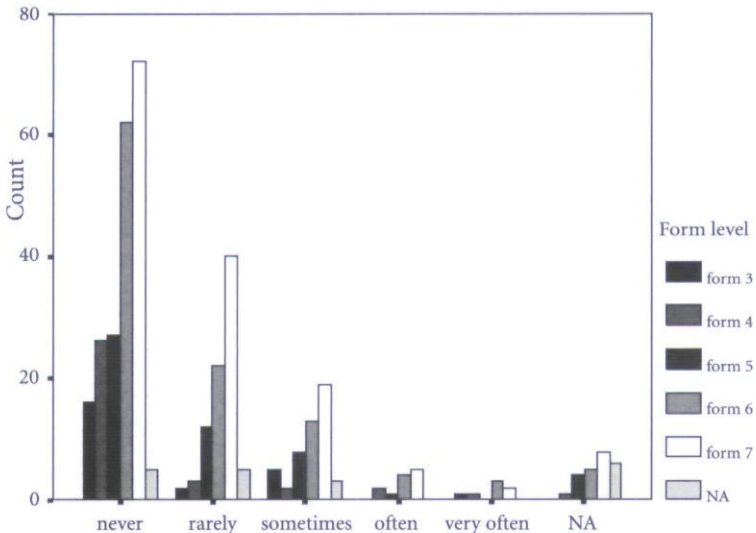


Figure 4: Having money demanded, rated by form level (n = 385); 14 students at one school were not asked this question





followed by the attitude (40 responses) and personal friendship (36 responses) of Kiwi students. While this survey did not target the students' homestay situations specifically, individual responses indicate that this has been a very positive influence on a number of occasions.

Somewhat disconcertingly, 56 respondents considered that nothing had been done by the school to make international students feel welcome and at home. When these are subtracted from the total number of responses, 286 items or acts of helpfulness have been cited by these international students.

**Table 8: Help provided by the school (n = 399); "Disagrees" refers to the answer "nothing has been done"**

Help provided	Mentioned		Not mentioned		Total	
	frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%
School set-up	11	2.8	388	97.2	399	100.0
School expectations	7	1.8	392	98.2	399	100.0
General orientation	29	7.3	370	92.7	399	100.0
Academic expectations	12	3.0	387	97.0	399	100.0
Language	7	1.8	392	98.2	399	100.0
Cultural difference	24	6.0	375	94.0	399	100.0
Staff attitude	84	21.1	315	78.9	399	100.0
Kiwi student attitude	40	10.0	359	90.0	399	100.0
Personal friendship	36	9.0	363	91.0	399	100.0
Miscellaneous	92	23.1	307	76.9	399	100.0
Disagrees	56	14.0	343	86.0	399	100.0

A random selection of responses from all the schools in the international sample follows, which adds substance to the themes noted above:

*My host family taught me the Kiwi way of living; they treat me as a daughter of their family; take good care of me; let me feel at home; I love my host mother.*

*The New Zealand people are really nice and friendly, and the students of X are really open-minded and like to make new friends and share their culture.*

*People from X have been friendly and helping me all the time; they always invite me to everything they do.*

*Nothing – most of the people don't know that I am an international student, especially the teachers; they could give more support if they knew that I am an international student.*

*Computer.*

*Everything done in New Zealand is normal and has been adopted into my life.*

*My caregivers/homestay had helped me so well.*

*Playing for the school soccer team and made new friends.*

*Studying hard.*

*Friendliness; smiles.*

*X homestay; my homestay mother; my homestay held a birthday party for me; they are okay; very kind; take good care of me; cook Asian/nice food for me.*

*The Kiwi teachers in our school are very friendly.*

*Some of the teachers try to make me feel better, but still some, not all.*

*Many international students from different cultures; it's fun to have a friend from other countries.*

*I like everything in X, many great teachers and great environment.*

*Some Kiwi friends are very kind and nice to me and to other international students but normally about 70% just don't like us.*

*Some good Kiwi students like Korea and respect our opinions.*

*When I got lost, the people I asked were friendly and smiling and they told me how to get to my classroom.*

Finally, students were asked what more they thought schools could do to make them feel welcome and at home. In terms of general themes, respondents consider that schools can make improvements in a number of ways. Within the organisational structure of the school, they recommend that changes be made in the general orientation programme as it pertains to international students (40 responses), augmented by changes in academic expectations and language provisions (32 responses each). Much less need is seen for changes in the general set-up and expectations of schools (15 and 13 responses respectively).

At the personal and social level, the most prominent suggestion concerns an improvement in provisions for the recognition and honouring of cultural differences (50 responses), supported by changes in staff and Kiwi student attitudes (33 and 31 responses respectively). Less emphasis is placed on the need to enhance personal friendships (18 responses).

Again, there is a somewhat concerning statement by 45 respondents, who consider that there is nothing schools can do to improve the way they make international students feel welcome and at home. When these are subtracted from the total number of responses, 338 suggestions for improvement have been cited by the international students in this survey.

**Table 9: Further forms of help by schools suggested (n = 399); "Disagrees" refers to the answer "nothing"**

Further help suggested	Mentioned		Not mentioned		Total	
	frequency	%	frequency	%	frequency	%
School set-up	15	3.8	384	96.2	399	100.0
School expectations	13	3.3	386	96.7	399	100.0
General orientation	40	10.0	359	90.0	399	100.0
Academic expectations	32	8.0	367	92.0	399	100.0
Language	32	8.0	367	92.0	399	100.0
Cultural difference	50	12.5	349	87.5	399	100.0
Staff attitude	33	8.3	366	91.7	399	100.0
Kiwi student attitude	31	7.8	368	92.2	399	100.0
Personal friendship	18	4.5	381	95.5	399	100.0
Miscellaneous	118	29.6	281	70.4	399	100.0
Disagrees	45	11.3	354	88.7	399	100.0

A random selection of responses from all the schools in the international sample include the following:

*Having more opportunity (for Kiwi students) of learning other cultures.*

*Library needs more new books and computers.*

*I hope a teacher can take international students to visit other places in Auckland (at weekend) – but not too expensive.*

*I'd like to be a Kiwi's friend but I think they don't want it so just make Kiwi friends and get help for improving English.*

*Establish a student to talk to international students on confidential basis.*

*The school should explain to the students why the rules are as they are because it is very difficult to understand things like uniforms, essays, assemblies, etc. when there was no use for those in your home country.*

*I think we must study together with Kiwi students; studying English is hard but we need that.*



*Give me more work.*

*Should have some more international students, like 50 people.*

*More friendliness; ask other students to respect us; make Maori students more polite and kind; more help and care about our lives; more assistance for getting on with Kiwi (other country) friends; I think maybe they should talk with us more.*

*Offer more activities/opportunities to interact with Kiwi students.*

*Some teachers don't like international students; their attitudes to us are not very good.*

*Have a nice person in the school (e.g., teacher, friend).*

*Keep helping the international students to get over their problems, such as English or trouble with Kiwi students.*

*More assistance on study (e.g., seminar, homework-help centre, buddy system, Kiwi study-friend); teachers can write more on the board for spelling; teachers to be patient.*

*Need a space/drop-in centre where you can get to know Kiwi friends, get some help for English, and can ask questions about subjects.*

*We paid money for studying here, not for being bullied ... occasionally, I would fight back when they (Kiwi kids) hit me, but I normally ended up being punished by the Dean ... the Dean seemed to consider it all my faults.*

*I feel upset/uncomfortable/unfair when those Kiwi students who harm us or make our lives difficult were sent free after talking to the Dean; I'm sure there will be no change after this survey at school.*

## **Discussion of the results**

### **Characteristics of the respondents**

The international students in this survey are quite distinctive in character. Most have been in New Zealand for a short time and, with two-thirds of them in the senior school, have clearly come to complete their secondary education. They hail from a wide range of countries, similar to that reported by the Ministry of Education (2002b). Half come from China/Hong Kong, with a smaller cohort from Korea; others are small in number. Thus, most come with high expectations, reasonable English, and a need to adapt rapidly in order to meet academic expectations within a short time. In addition, many schools find that international students arrive with little back-

ground in New Zealand education, placing considerable responsibility on the school as it settles them in. Integration procedures must therefore begin right at the start of the year, include a variety of activities, and aim at rapid integration.

### Issues faced by international students, and help provided

The results of this study must be viewed with some caution, insofar as many Asian students are inclined to be polite and stress the positive rather than the negative. Given that, almost half of the international students in the present sample describe themselves as having been modestly successful ("OK") in facing a wide range of challenges during the initial period of their stay in a New Zealand school. A further 30% found it easy, while 21% found things hard. At the outset language, academic expectations, studying in English, understanding lessons, and cultural differences all created significant stress, especially if students started off at a more senior level in the school. However, most found the orientation programme of some help; going to staff and other students for help was easy; homework was manageable; and Kiwi culture in general did not take too long to get used to. At the time of the survey, most regarded their English as being adequate.

At a social and personal level, much initial support was derived from the presence of other students from their own country, from further international students and, to a lesser extent, from the positive attitude of most teachers and some Kiwi peers. This gives cause for satisfaction to schools, their staff and students. In terms of issues that are potentially serious, international students reported physical violence and damage to their property to be rare, especially in the senior school. Having money demanded of them was similarly uncommon although, where it did occur, it happened mostly in the senior school. While still relatively uncommon, verbal abuse happened more often than the other problem behaviours, and did so particularly at seventh form level. Verbal abuse may well be a significant, though less obvious, channel through which intercultural conflict is expressed and handled.

Against this positive general picture, respondents noted a number of trends that are of concern. While there were notable exceptions, Kiwi student attitudes were considered by far the most common problem experienced by international students – and many respondents did not mince words in detailing their discomfort. In this respect, little appears to have changed over the last seven years, since Aston (1996) reported his findings on intercultural relationships – in spite of our accumulation of experience over that time. To a lesser extent, the attitudes of some staff were experienced as problematic and in need of improvement. Finally, about one in twenty international



students experienced severe problems with studying in English, understanding lessons, overcoming homesickness, and getting on with Kiwi peers. Little reference was made by respondents to the availability or helpfulness of more specialised forms of help in such instances.

Putting these findings together, then, can it be said that schools provide adequately for the pastoral needs of international students? Clearly not, especially if schools aspire to providing more than a minimal level of such care during the initial critical stage of a student's sojourn in their school – which coincides with the importance of developing good peer relationships during this phase of adolescence. Seventy percent of respondents are, at best, modestly successful in coping with the many challenges they face during that period. When asked to evaluate what schools have done to help them cope, respondents provide considerably more suggestions on how school provisions could be improved than they have points of commendation for help received (338 versus 286 responses). The traditional reluctance of Asian students to express negative opinions, together with the number of students who did not answer either of these questions, reinforces the strength of this point.

In summary, the findings of this survey indicate that international students have strong feelings about the need for schools to improve their provisions for pastoral care and academic integration. Three areas stand out for them. Most prominently, they seek an improvement in the attitude of many Kiwi students, and in particular their recognition of and respect for cultural differences. Beyond this, they note the need for support for some teachers in helping them overcome attitude problems. Finally, while not directly within the scope of this study, respondents suggest that schools improve their orientation programme for international students, modify their academic expectations, and enhance their provisions for language training or support.

### Implications for the development of pastoral care provisions

Much of what the results of this study indicate highlights the importance of preventive activities, in particular during the initial weeks and months of an international student's sojourn in the new school. Appropriate pastoral care and peer support during that time can prevent the development of more serious behavioural problems – like bullying or physical violence between culturally different groups of students. Early and effective pastoral care can also prevent the development of more severe emotional problems (such as anxiety, withdrawal, or depression) in those students who have identified themselves as at risk during this early settling-in phase. Such pastoral care is something for which the school as a system must take responsibility, and is something that requires contributions from both staff and students. There are



three themes that have emerged from the results of our survey, and which need to run through such preventive work – information, inclusion, and integrity.

*Information* is needed about each other's cultures and customs, as the foundation of positive relationships. This is relevant for students, staff, and members of each school's wider community. In addition, accurate information about how international, migrant and local students experience each other is necessary if a school's pastoral care programme is to be targeted appropriately. The information obtained from our study's international students is part of what can be included in a programme that aims to make all parties understand each other. We have not, however, surveyed Kiwi students or staff on their perceptions of the relationship between international students and locals; this is obviously necessary for us to complete the picture.

The second theme is concerned with developing programmes and activities that facilitate *inclusion* rather than distance and exclusion. International students (and new immigrant ones, for that matter) clearly wish to be included further in the normal peer group, to have more good personal friends among the locals, to be accepted on the same basis as anyone else, and to feel more at home here. This is enhanced by the normal priority placed on peer relationships by adolescents. The "OK" (i.e. modestly adequate) relationship between international and Kiwi students at first arrival sits alongside the uncomfortable observation that Kiwi student attitudes are seen as the second most difficult issue encountered by international students. While others from the international student's own country, and international students from elsewhere, are seen as the most powerfully immediate sources of support, Kiwi peers should also be drawn in as soon as practicable. The best way to shape a positive attitude towards new international arrivals in Kiwi students is through direct and constructive involvement in shared peer group activities – a finding that is strongly reinforced by research on peer support (Everts, 2002) and the inclusion of international students (Ward, 2001).

The third theme to emerge from this survey concerns *integrity* – the sincerity, the commitment, and the consistency with which integration activities are undertaken. There is much that is highly commendable in what respondents note in this survey about the integrity that a proportion of staff, peers and homestay families bring to their work with international students. Yet in each case there are reports about inadequacies in the school's personnel and provisions that detract from its positive achievements. Some specific staff members, some specific homestay families, and some specific local peer groups need to be better informed about international students, and supported in developing more positive integration activities with them.

The Peer Support programme offers a ready-made, proven and cost-effective

framework for welcoming new arrivals into the school, and has operated strongly in most New Zealand high schools over a number of years. It, and associated activities, have the potential to make a major contribution to the pastoral care of international students. However, as indicated in our evaluation of the Peer Support programme (Everts, 2003), it needs to be extended in its content and organisation if it is to meet the needs of international and recently arrived immigrant students. These concerns are discussed further in that study, which constitutes a follow-through of the issues raised in the present study.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

This study of some 400 international students provides a picture of the initial personal settlement experience of such students at secondary school. On average, they regard themselves as having been modestly successful in coping with the challenges involved. In the process, they received support from other overseas-born students, from most teachers and from some local students. More serious behavioural problems were relatively uncommon. The most difficult issue faced by international students remains the perceived attitude of local peers and, to a lesser extent, of staff. These findings suggest that, formal structures and regulations aside, there has been no significant improvement over the last seven or more years in the effectiveness with which international students are integrated into the community of their local peers. This is disappointing and worrisome. The caring and helpfulness shown by many staff and some local students is gratifying, but not enough. The current reported absence of more serious behavioural problems is a relief, but again not enough. The modest success in coping with settlement by international students is hardly reason for celebration.

As they have over the years, and in other countries, international students want a change in attitude from their local peers and from some staff. They want recognition of and respect for cultural differences. Above all, they want to be accepted members of the local peer community, like any other adolescent. Put together, there is a need to make significant improvements in school-based pastoral care provisions for international students in terms of the information made available, integration activities utilised, and the integrity with which these activities are carried out. The means whereby these goals can be achieved are clear, as noted by Colleen Ward (2001). They are also close at hand, as investigated in the article on the Peer Support programme (Everts, 2003). What is needed is for specific programmes and activities to be put into operation judiciously by caring and skilled locals, both adult and peer. There is no better time for this than now.

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## Acknowledgements

This project is supported by research grants from the University of Auckland's Research Committee (grant no. 3601097/9215) and from each of the high schools involved.



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