

**December 2021**

**To:** Productivity Commission

**Re:** Immigration, productivity, and wellbeing issues paper

**From:** Christchurch Educated

Christchurch Educated is a network of over 60 education providers based in Christchurch city and the Canterbury region. Christchurch Educated members span across all education sectors including Schools, Universities, ITPs, PTEs and English Language Schools.

Christchurch Educated welcomes the opportunity to respond to the study and work visa categories in the Productivity Commission Immigration, Productivity, and Wellbeing Issues paper.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the international education export sector, particularly in terms of border closures, suspended visa processing and the lack of a clear recovery plan.

This is troubling, as the sector is crucial to the wellbeing of our society in a variety of ways, offering increased cultural intelligence and diversity, research and technical innovation, regional GDP contribution, essential skills, and much more.

## 1. Post-study work rights

Work rights is an important factor towards attracting international students to New Zealand. Therefore, we do not support the removal of post-study work rights as this would compromise New Zealand's global competitiveness as a study destination. Graduates with New Zealand qualifications are motivated employees, helping to build a productive work force.

There is already differentiation in post-study work rights and further differentiation in post-study work rights may provide a useful mechanism to help prioritise work rights for groups that are likely to offer benefit to New Zealand and particular regions.

We suggest that any changes should be positive for priority groups, rather than removing rights for other groups. Priority groups may not solely be by level however (currently level 7 and above) may align with acute long-term industry and regional needs (which may include sub-degrees in certain areas i.e. health) and incentivise higher level study i.e. Masters and PhD.

It should be noted that recent research by Universities New Zealand shows that international students do not take jobs away from New Zealanders and a larger proportion do not take up post-study work rights.

## 2. Regional needs, a skilled workforce, and alignment with industry

There seems to be disproportionate focus on Auckland in the application of issues and the development of future policies for New Zealand and its regions. The issues which are Auckland based should not be applied unilaterally across all of New Zealand.

Due to New Zealand's changing demographics including declining birth rates and aging population, many of the regions face acute short-term and long-term skill shortages. International students are part of the solution to meet a region's talent requirements. The numerous study to work migration pathways support the placement of international graduates into regional job positions.

The Regional Skills Leadership Groups can provide direction/guidance on regional capacities and industry needs. International education stakeholder groups like Christchurch Educated and Education New Zealand should work alongside the RSLGs to ensure good alignment between regional training and employer needs.

While Christchurch Educated providers (i.e. the University of Canterbury, Lincoln University, Ara Institute of Canterbury, National Trade Academy etc) already offer programmes catering to regional needs, a robust immigration system must be in place to support these efforts. For example, immigration settings should support diversification and must align with other government agencies efforts to build new markets. New Zealand must incrementally build its global footprint in order to remain relevant and competitive.

### 3. Global Citizenship

Global Citizenship is one of the goals of the [international education strategy](#). For this goal to be achieved, it is essential that New Zealand is a welcoming host for international visitors, students and migrants.

Cultural intelligence is essential for dealing with a complex and changing world and cultural diversity is a key element for creating prosperous communities (Greater Christchurch 2050).

New Zealand domestic students develop higher cultural intelligence whenever there is diversity within the classroom. The diversity of background, experience, education and thought of international students enriches the New Zealand education system and society more broadly.

International visitors, students and migrants bring global connections, research links and economic partnerships to New Zealand.

The research output from New Zealand universities is significant with affiliates in 160 countries from 160 different institutes. This research has a huge impact on New Zealand's global profile/footprint and reputation.

Study pathways which aid international students to transition from the schooling system through to tertiary education and into employment is becoming increasingly important. These pathways support the long-term sustainability of the sector. Therefore, pathway visas are most welcome.

### 4. Addressing your questions relating to students:

***24 Are the current criteria for obtaining post-study work rights satisfactory? What criteria should be added or removed (and on what basis)?***

- In general, yes, but they may be supplemented with additional benefits where there are acute regional industry needs (regardless of qualification level).

**25 To what extent should international students have rights to work in New Zealand?**

- In-study work rights should remain the same or improve. These are essential to mental and economic wellbeing, sense of place, and connection to New Zealand.
- Post-study work rights are earned as part of students' commitment to New Zealand. They offer desirable skills – including multicultural skills and knowledge – to employers.
- Further consideration should be offered to sub-degree level graduates whose study programmes align with acute regional industry needs.
- Work rights is an important factor towards attracting international students to New Zealand. Therefore, the removal of post-study work rights would severely compromise New Zealand's global competitiveness as a study destination.
- The international education industry creates many jobs for New Zealanders. New Zealand must remain globally competitive in order to attract the best and brightest international students to our shores.
- International students do not take jobs away from New Zealanders. Only a lesser proportion of them remain in New Zealand after completing their studies.

**26 Should visa applicants who have gained a New Zealand qualification receive a special preference for residence?**

- Yes. A New Zealand qualification demonstrates a commitment and connection to New Zealand, so they should receive preference over other applicants.

**27 Should there be any restrictions on the kinds of sectors or occupations students can work in during or after study? Why, or why not?**

- Once they are in New Zealand, international students should have access to the same opportunities as domestic students.
- Any concerns relating to worker exploitation should be addressed by enforcing employer compliance and providing international students with the appropriate information on their work rights.
- Post-study work in acute regional industry shortage areas could be incentivised with extended visa periods.

**28 Should the level or nature of qualifications that students are studying affect work rights during or after study? Why, or why not?**

- As part of the pastoral care that we promise to offer international students, they should have access to the same opportunities as domestic students during their studies.
- International post graduate research students are making a significant contribution to New Zealand's research and innovation endeavours. Increasing the length of post-study work rights for these students should be considered. However, we caution that these should be positive changes (for example, making it easier to stay for longer) for priority groups, rather than removing rights for other groups.
- The specific needs of the regions mean a more nuanced approach to work rights should be applied regardless of the level of study.