

EMPLOYER PERCEPTIONS OF HIRING INTERNATIONAL GRADUATES

FINDINGS FROM A STUDY INTO
THE VALUE OF INTERNATIONAL
GRADUATES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE
OF NEW ZEALAND EMPLOYERS

JULY 2019

ThinkNew®



THE CHALLENGE

THERE IS LIMITED AND FRAGMENTED ENGAGEMENT WITH NEW ZEALAND EMPLOYERS ON THE VALUE THAT NEW ZEALAND EDUCATED INTERNATIONAL TALENT CAN ADD TO BUSINESS. AT THE SAME TIME, A SERIOUS SKILLED TALENT SHORTAGE IS BEING EXPERIENCED BY EMPLOYERS.

A key focus of Education New Zealand's role is to ensure international students receive a high quality experience while living and studying in New Zealand.

A 2017 study highlighted employability as a priority area for improvement in the international student experience i.e. underperformance in the area of work experience and career opportunities means that some students and their parents are not getting the expected or desired return on investing in study in New Zealand.

If the employability experience for international students is not improved, there is the risk that New Zealand will become less attractive in a globally competitive market for international students.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FINDINGS FROM A NATIONAL QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISE (SME) EMPLOYERS AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF HIRING NEW ZEALAND EDUCATED INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS.

PRIORITIES FOR THIS STUDY

- To understand the New Zealand SME business environment.
- To understand hiring practices and pressures for New Zealand SMEs.
- To understand the perceived and real structural barriers to hiring New Zealand educated international graduate students.
- To gain a deeper insight into the value proposition for New Zealand small and medium-sized enterprise employers to employ New Zealand educated international graduate students.
- To articulate the value of New Zealand educated international graduate students and their benefit to business.

Education New Zealand (ENZ) worked in close collaboration with research partner TRA to develop a robust research methodology. The study included a literature review, employer and expert interviews including with two iwi-owned businesses, proposition validation interviews with employers and students, and a co-creation workshop with employers and experts.

KEY FINDINGS

- International graduates tend to be seen as a risk by those employers who haven't hired them before, yet they are seen as an asset by those employers who have hired them. This highlights the potential value of employers telling their stories to others in order to normalise the hiring of international graduates, and to influence employer hiring behaviour.
- In a New Zealand cultural context, earned success is highly prized. Some business owners stereotype international students as getting an easy ride through life with support from wealthy families.
- Evidence of earned success in a Kiwi workplace significantly helps international graduates' future employability.
- Demonstration of soft skills in addition to academic grades also helps international graduates' employability.
- 'Fit' in the workplace is particularly important to SME employers as they are well aware of how a negative attitude can quickly sour the mood (and productivity) of their whole team.
- Businesses reported significant benefit in the two-way cultural exchange that occurs when employing international graduates.
- New Zealand employers generally believe in the value of diversity, but there are other types of diversity they think of first before thinking about hiring for international multi-culturalism (i.e. women, Māori and Pasifika, and LGBTQI).

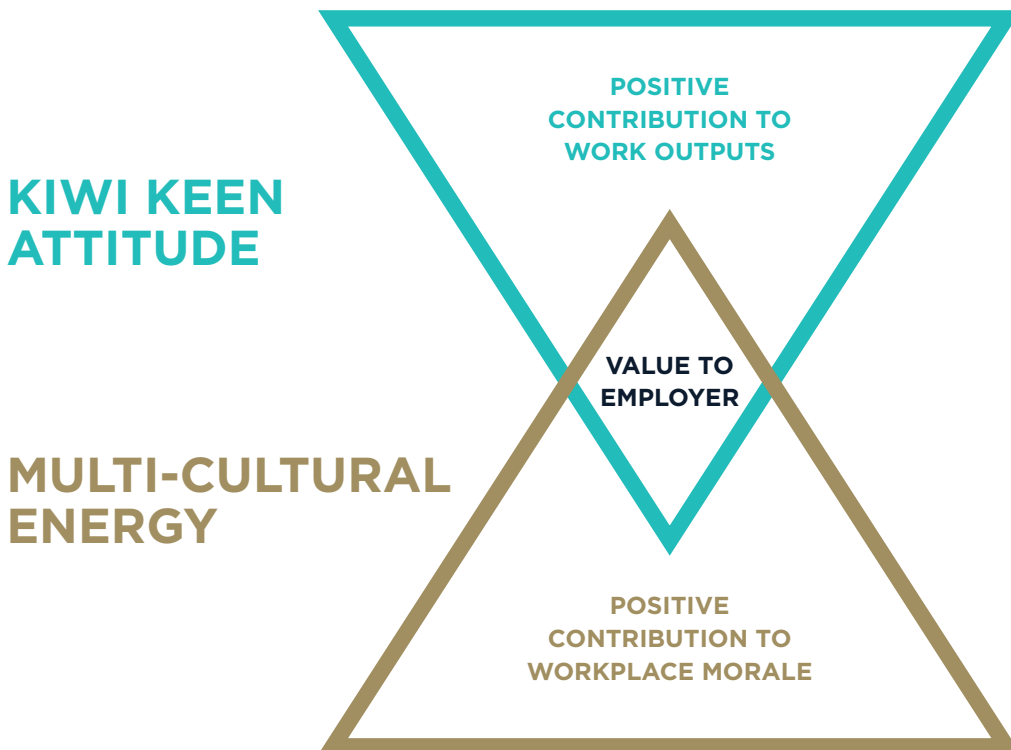
REDEFINING THE VALUE OF INTERNATIONAL GRADUATES IN THE EYES OF EMPLOYERS

The study tested several broad value propositions with employers and found that the more direct the business benefits, the stronger the value proposition is for employers. The two core concepts to emphasise with employers are a **positive contribution to work outputs** and a **positive contribution to workplace morale**.

The first concept highlights international graduates' earned success in being unafraid to take on the challenge of study in a new country and solve new problems, adapting to Kiwi culture and persevering in attaining a new qualification or language.

The second concept aims to reposition the perceived risk of an international graduate not fitting in, by highlighting the benefits of multi-cultural energy and new perspectives that international graduates bring to the workplace.

Employers are more likely to believe in the benefits of hiring international graduates if they hear about them from other employers, rather than through stories told from the students' perspective. It is also important that international graduates understand how to highlight their work eligibility and skills when applying for jobs with Kiwi employers.



WHO ARE ‘NEW ZEALAND EDUCATED INTERNATIONAL GRADUATES’?

Throughout this report, where we refer to ‘international graduates’ we are referring to people who are not New Zealand citizens but who have graduated at degree level or higher at a New Zealand educational institution.

They may have started their New Zealand education at secondary school, or at tertiary level, or may have completed post-graduate study at a New Zealand educational institution.

We found throughout the study that employers sometimes mistake international graduates as new migrants forgetting that in fact international graduates will often have lived in New Zealand for 3+ years while they studied. They may not be citizens, but they are established members of the community.

For example, an employer we interviewed in the Northland region said that one of the reasons she wanted to start a business in Northland was to provide employment opportunities for Northlanders. It changed her perspective on what qualifies as a Northlander when she considered that an international graduate from NorthTec has effectively been a Northlander for 3+ years already.

As a result, we recognise the need to avoid terms like ‘migrant’ or ‘foreign’ when describing international graduates and favour terms like ‘locally educated’ or having ‘a multicultural perspective with a local lens’ to reinforce that they have been ‘locals’ for the duration of their study.

A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO OUR INSIGHT PARTNER TRA

**EDUCATION NEW ZEALAND
COMMISSIONED INSIGHTS AGENCY
TRA TO ADDRESS OUR CHALLENGE
ON INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE
EMPLOYABILITY.**

TRA uses understanding of human behaviour and culture to identify opportunities for organisations to better serve peoples needs.

While TRA make extensive use of research, data analytics, strategy and planning tools, the distinguishing feature of their work is their knowledge of human behaviour.

TRA worked in close collaboration with the Student Experience team and others at Education New Zealand to develop a robust research methodology and a strategy to influence employer hiring behaviour based on the insight surfaced in the study.

tra.co.nz mainframe.tra.co.nz

The logo for TRA, consisting of the letters 'TRA' in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font. The letters are slightly tilted to the right.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

REPORTS INCLUDED IN THE STAGE 1 LITERATURE REVIEW

- *New Kiwis Employers' Survey*, New Zealand Immigration and Auckland Chamber of Commerce, 2018
- *Beyond the economic: How international education delivers broad value for New Zealand*, Education New Zealand, 2018
- *Impacts of Temporary Migration on Employment and Earnings of New Zealanders*, MBIE, 2018
- *Understanding New Zealanders' perceptions of international education*, Education New Zealand, 2018
- *Australian Education International*, Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, 2018
- *Stuff.co.nz Misled and feeling unemployable: Gap between student hopes and job chances in IT 'never wider'*, 2018
- *The Employability of International Student Graduates*, Hobsons Insights, 2016
- *International Student Experience Project*, ATEED, Education New Zealand, 2017
- *Graduate employability: whose responsibility?* Deakin University, 2018
- *Education New Zealand ThinkNew Brand Strategy*, Education New Zealand, 2018
- *International Student Employability: The role of internships*, Charles Darwin University, Readygrad, 2018
- *New Zealand International Education Strategy 2018-2030*, New Zealand Government, 2018
- *Innovation in Employability*, AusTrade, 2019
- *The Listening Project SME*, TRA, 2015

PROPOSITION VALIDATION INTERVIEWS

Three employers and two international students were interviewed at the TRA offices in Auckland to identify the strongest proposition. All participants selected the same proposition as their preferred option.

EMPLOYER AND EXPERT INTERVIEWS

Fieldwork conducted from December 2018 to February 2019.

In-depth interviews with twelve SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) conducted face to face or over video call or phone.

SMEs were from Auckland, Tauranga, Nelson, Dunedin, Christchurch and Whangarei.

We interviewed SMEs in the following industries – accounting, construction, STEM, IT, human ergonomics, design, early childhood and tech. We also interviewed two iwi-owned employers.

The hiring decision maker was spoken to and the SME must have hired a graduate in the last 12 months or be open to hiring a graduate within the next 12 months.

Spread of business size (10-100).

In-depth interviews with six experts:

- 2x hiring policy experts
- 2x transition from university to employment or tertiary educator connections experts
- 4x macro economic benefits of hiring for diversity experts

EMPLOYER CO-CREATION

Employer and expert interviews informed the development of initial value proposition options.

A 2.5 hour co-creation with eight SMEs was conducted on the 24th January 2019 at TRA offices in Auckland.

Co-creation SME employer participants were different to those interviewed.

The co-creation was used to evaluate, prioritise and further develop the value propositions.

Industries represented in the co-creation were IT, engineering, accounting, energy/utilities and dentistry.

The hiring decision maker was spoken to and the SME must have hired a graduate in the last year or be open to doing so within the next year. They must have also expressed finding it somewhat difficult to find the right talent to hire at graduate level.

Spread of business size (10-100).



CONTENTS

12

**EMPLOYER CONTEXT
UNDERSTANDING THE
PROBLEMS FACED BY
NEW ZEALAND SME
EMPLOYERS**

30

**WHAT RESONATES
WITH EMPLOYERS
UNDERSTANDING HOW
THE UNIQUE
COMPETENCIES OF
INTERNATIONAL
GRADUATES CONNECT
WITH EMPLOYERS**

46

**EMPLOYER VALUE
PROPOSITION
REDEFINING THE VALUE
OF INTERNATIONAL
GRADUATES IN THE
EYES OF NEW ZEALAND
EMPLOYERS**

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEMS FACED BY NEW ZEALAND SME EMPLOYERS





THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING THE EMPLOYER'S POINT OF VIEW

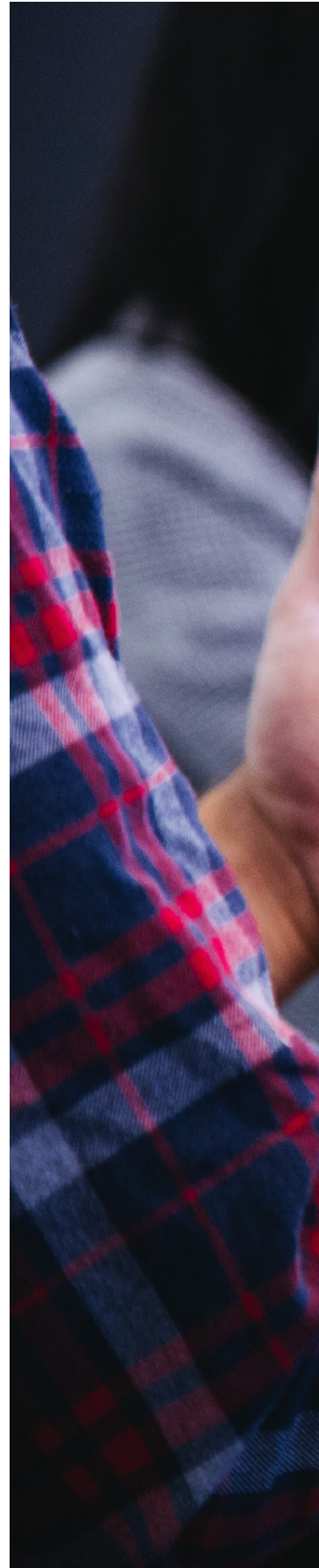
IN ORDER TO TRULY CONNECT AND RESONATE WITH SMEs IN NEW ZEALAND, WE MUST UNDERSTAND THEIR WORLD, THEIR CONTEXT AND THEIR POINT OF VIEW.


WHY WE HAVE FOCUSED ON SMEs

- SMEs comprise over 97 per cent of business enterprises in New Zealand. They play a key role in the New Zealand economy, employing over 584,000 people (30 per cent of the workforce) and contributing 28 per cent of New Zealand's GDP.
- Larger businesses have more complex hiring policies (often predetermined by offshore global mandates), and therefore are harder to influence.

WIDER CONTEXT FOR SMEs

- There are key differences between sectors, largely around supply and demand/labour shortage markets. For instance, the tech sector has an oversupply of graduates but shortage of skilled seniors.
- While New Zealand employment levels are higher than they have been, many employers also acknowledge the struggles that Kiwi graduates face when seeking employment.
- Some employers have been known to exploit both new migrants and graduates e.g. unpaid internships, under the counter cash employment.



A person wearing a red and blue plaid shirt is seated at a wooden desk in a meeting room. Their hands are raised and gesturing as if they are speaking or explaining something. On the desk in front of them is an open notebook with a green cover and a black smartphone. In the background, another person is partially visible, and a laptop is open on the desk. The scene is dimly lit, focusing on the person in the foreground.

These are all key considerations to take into account when developing the strategy.



SURVIVAL AMIDST FIERCE COMPETITION

TENSIONS IDENTIFIED IN TRA'S 2015 SME LISTENING PROJECT:

- Working on the business vs in the business
- Being time poor
- Cashflow
- Red tape and compliance
- Recognition and acknowledgment
- Managing personal life vs business life

"If it was easy, everybody would be running a business."


SME BUSINESS OWNER

"One wrong hire is a big deal. We're weighing up a lot of risk with each additional salary we have to pay."

SME BUSINESS OWNER

"Primarily, all a business cares about is survival and mitigating risks to survival. If you want businesses to pay attention, you need to frame your issue as a survival issue."

EXPERT FROM REGIONAL ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT AGENCY



SUCCESS ALWAYS LOOKS EASY

... TO THOSE WHO WEREN'T AROUND WHEN IT WAS BEING EARNED

Beating the odds and surviving amidst fierce competition is hard work.

In New Zealand, our pioneering heritage plays a role in our collective psyche today. We value and admire those who work hard to earn their success and we are quick to criticise those who seem to have got an easy ride to success.

Within this cultural context, SME decision makers are looking for evidence that graduates have done the hard yards to earn their success.

**SOME SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS
STEREOTYPE INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS AS GETTING AN EASIER
RIDE THAN OTHERS, DUE TO FAMILY
WEALTH.**

"It took years of risk and hard work to establish my business from nothing, so it's disappointing when we don't get that kind of commitment from the grads we hire."

STAFF CAN MAKE OR BREAK A SMALL BUSINESS

IN ALL OF TRA'S UNDERSTANDING OF SMEs AND THEIR WORK-LIFE WORLD, A KEY THEME THAT AROSE WAS 'THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RIGHT STAFF'.

"It is very difficult to select new staff and we can only go by their general attitude to start them on a trial basis and reassess them after a few months."

CONSTRUCTION

"If you have one little ounce of doubt as to whether you should employ them, then don't employ them as you will regret it down the track."

FINANCIAL ADVISOR

"Poor staff can dramatically alter your business for the worse, especially when it is so difficult to sack or manage them out of the business."

BEAUTY THERAPY

"My staff are some of the best things about my business and sometimes the worst."

LAW FIRM

SMEs felt much more confident about hiring international graduates that had some kind of work experience in a New Zealand workplace, be that a part-time job, an unpaid internship or volunteering. It's about demonstrating commitment and evidence that you can perform in a Kiwi workplace.



THE IMPORTANCE OF 'FIT'



In larger companies, one wrong hire is less likely to affect the morale of the entire workplace. Smaller workplaces have a more fragile workplace morale.

SME employers are well aware of how a negative attitude can quickly sour the mood (and productivity) of their whole team. Therefore they are concerned about testing out 'company fit' with any prospective hires. Does their personality fit with the overall brand and ethos of the company?

There is another level of concern again if the graduate role is a customer-facing role. Although graduates are likely to be given training before they are working with customers on their own, it is only worth investing in such training if the employer can be confident they will have the right attitude and temperament for this.

THIS CAN BE DIFFICULT FOR INTERNATIONAL GRADUATES TO PROVE IF THEY ARE NOT USED TO SOCIALISING WITH KIWIS.

"Cultural fit is very important to us. We hire on cultural fit first, then team fit, then job fit."

"We like to get potential grads to come for a beer with us to see how well they get along with the rest of the team."

EMPLOYERS IN GENERAL ARE LOOKING FOR SOFT SKILLS

- 'Interpersonal skills'
- 'Self-motivated/self-starter'
- 'Verbal communication'
- 'Energy/enthusiasm'
- 'Adaptable, flexible attitude'
- 'Team player'
- 'Willingness to learn'

Identified as the most important attributes by employers.

LinkedIn – 59% interviewing innovations are around soft skill assessments.

Here again, SMEs felt much more confident about hiring international graduates if they had some kind of work experience in a New Zealand workplace. Be that a part-time job, an unpaid internship or volunteering.

"We would rather hire for the right attitude and train for the necessary skills."

GAINING WORK EXPERIENCE IS FAR EASIER SAID THAN DONE FOR INTERNATIONAL GRADUATES

STUDENT INSIGHT

Feeling included (not isolated) is key to a young person's development. However, it is harder when you are in a foreign city and requires specially designed support mechanisms to encourage human connections. Augmenting digital connections with shared human connections will be critical for long-term positive outcomes.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Look for ways to leverage our shared human interests such as food, sport and travel to enable students to connect quickly with people like themselves, beyond the borders of their nationality, course of study or tertiary institution.

IF EXPERIENCE WORKING IN LOCAL TEAMS IS WHAT EMPLOYERS WANT, THEN HOW MIGHT WE ENCOURAGE LOCAL EMPLOYERS, LOCAL VOLUNTEER ORGANISATIONS AND LOCAL CLUBS TO BE INCLUSIVE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS... AND HOW MIGHT WE ENCOURAGE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IF THESE OPPORTUNITIES WERE MORE AVAILABLE?



BARRIERS AROUND EMPLOYING MIGRANT WORKERS

IMMIGRATION PROCESS

66% said that difficulties relating to issues/delays with work visa processing was a barrier to hiring migrants.

VISA LENGTH IS SOMEWHAT OF A BARRIER

Would you employ a migrant if they had less than 12 months on their work visa?
Yes 38%; No 35%; NA 27%

COMMUNICATION

59% reported that communication problems affected their performance in the job (speaking, not so much writing or reading).

CULTURAL

22% of respondents reported that migrants experienced difficulties adjusting to New Zealand workplace norms.

PREVIOUS NEW ZEALAND WORK EXPERIENCE

Nearly 50% of employers consider New Zealand work experience 'important' or 'very important' when recruiting migrant staff.

HOWEVER, POST-HIRING PERCEPTIONS ARE POSITIVE

87%

of employers rated the migrants they are currently employing as 'very good' or as 'excellent' which is similar to last year's findings.

59%

of employers reported migrant workers remained in their jobs for 12 months or more, consistent with the previous year's survey. When we asked whether migrant staff stayed in their jobs for longer or shorter periods compared to other employees, 68 per cent of employers reported that it was about the same and 12 per cent reported that migrant workers stayed longer.

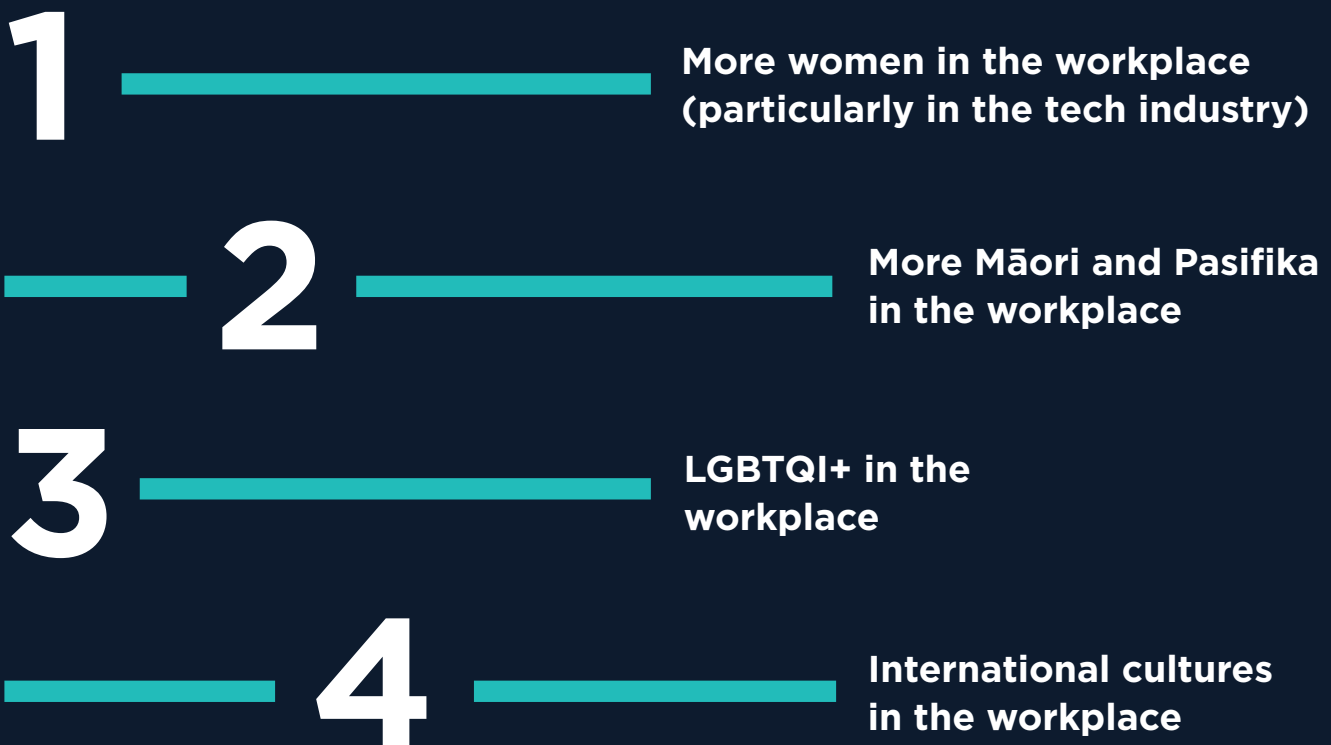


Our interviews with SMEs who had hired international graduates were generally positive about it, some were particularly positive about it.

“Migrants often need a break and if you give them that break they need I have found them to give back in loyalty.”

Source: New Kiwis Employers' Survey, New Zealand Immigration & Auckland Chamber of Commerce

DIVERSITY PRIORITIES OF EMPLOYERS



Qualitatively, we heard from employers that there are other types of diversity they think of first, before thinking about hiring for international multi-culturalism.

This matches up with how much air-time these different types of diversity get in mainstream media i.e. the more employers hear these issues talked about, the more they are perceived as a priority.

IWI EMPLOYERS: FOCUSING ON SUSTAINABLE WELLBEING AND DEVELOPMENT OF IWI MEMBERS

Iwi are the largest social units in Aotearoa Māori society. The Māori-language word iwi means “people” or “nation”, and is often translated as “tribe”, or “a confederation of tribes”. The word is both singular and plural in Māori. There are 75 iwi in New Zealand.

In 1840, when the British Crown gained sovereignty in New Zealand, a treaty was signed by Māori rangatira, or chiefs, and representatives of the British Crown.

Since then, historical claims have been made against the Crown for breaches of the treaty when the Crown didn't uphold one or more articles of the treaty.

Historical settlements give three kinds of redress to the claimant iwi group:

1. An historical account of the treaty breaches and Crown acknowledgment and apology.
2. Cultural redress (e.g. changing place names).
3. Commercial and financial redress (e.g. property, money or a mixture of both).

Commercial and financial redress has been used to establish iwi owned business entities.

Today, many iwi are significant players in their local economies providing employment and contributing to local (and often regional) economic development. So the purpose of iwi today is generally to focus on the sustainable wellbeing and development of their people and their regions. Ngāi Tahu, for example echoes this intergenerational commitment to whanau “Mō tātou, ā, mō kā uri ā muri ake nei ... For us and our children after us”.

Iwi trusts (as opposed to their commercial arms) have objectives that go beyond maximising financial returns. In order to achieve these wider social and cultural objectives, it is important that the investments held by their commercial arms perform to their maximum potential.

Iwi owned businesses include property investment, primary industries, tourism, and more.

The combined wealth of the nation's 75 iwi groups was almost \$9b in 2018.

While most iwi have programmes and scholarships to get iwi members employed in their businesses, their hiring policy tends to be based on getting the right person for the job. In line with a business purpose of developing their own people, they see the strategic benefit of hiring those outside the iwi to bring new skills and knowledge to their iwi members.

There are obvious reasons why export and tourism businesses may hire multilingual graduates but the iwi employers we spoke with described other benefits of hiring international graduates that are further explained on the next page.

IWI-OWNED BUSINESSES BELIEVE IN THE VALUE OF MULTI-CULTURAL EXCHANGE

AS PART OF THIS RESEARCH PROCESS, WE INCLUDED INTERVIEWS WITH HR DECISION MAKERS FROM TWO IWI-OWNED BUSINESSES.

These employers were involved in both tourism and export, so bi-lingual capability was useful, but not the only benefit they had seen from hiring international graduates.

Both agreed that the international graduates they had hired demonstrated perseverance, held long tenures, and worked hard to earn their success. A more pronounced benefit they saw in international graduates was that of cultural exchange.

Their overall business purpose is to move the iwi forward. Hiring from outside the pool of iwi members is part of this. They want to bring in new skills and perspectives that contribute to improved iwi outcomes. There is an expectation that this comes from a two-way cultural exchange – the energy and cohesion generated when those outside the iwi open themselves to learning about the Tikanga Māori perspective and te reo (Māori) language, and when iwi members open themselves to learning new cultural perspectives, new languages, and gaining new experiences.



“Sharing of cultural values and language benefits our team by creating deeper connections and cohesiveness. It’s a morale boost and helps us be a more tolerant business. It helps us all look outward.”

**IWI-OWNED BUSINESS
EMPLOYER**

SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

INTERNATIONAL GRADUATES TEND TO BE SEEN AS A RISK BY THOSE WHO HAVEN'T HIRED THEM BEFORE, AND YET ARE SEEN AS AN ASSET BY THOSE WHO HAVE HIRED THEM.

- While New Zealand employers generally believe in the value of diversity, hiring for cultural diversity is not top of the diversity priority list.
- Evidence of earned success in a Kiwi workplace significantly helps international graduates' employability.
- Demonstration of soft-skills in addition to academic grades also helps international graduates' employability.
- In a New Zealand cultural context, earned success is highly prized.
- Survival defines the setting for our international graduates' employability problem.
- 'Fit' in the workplace is important – SME employers are well aware of how a negative attitude can quickly sour the mood (and productivity) of their whole team.

QUALITATIVE SEGMENTATION OF NEW ZEALAND EDUCATED INTERNATIONAL GRADUATES

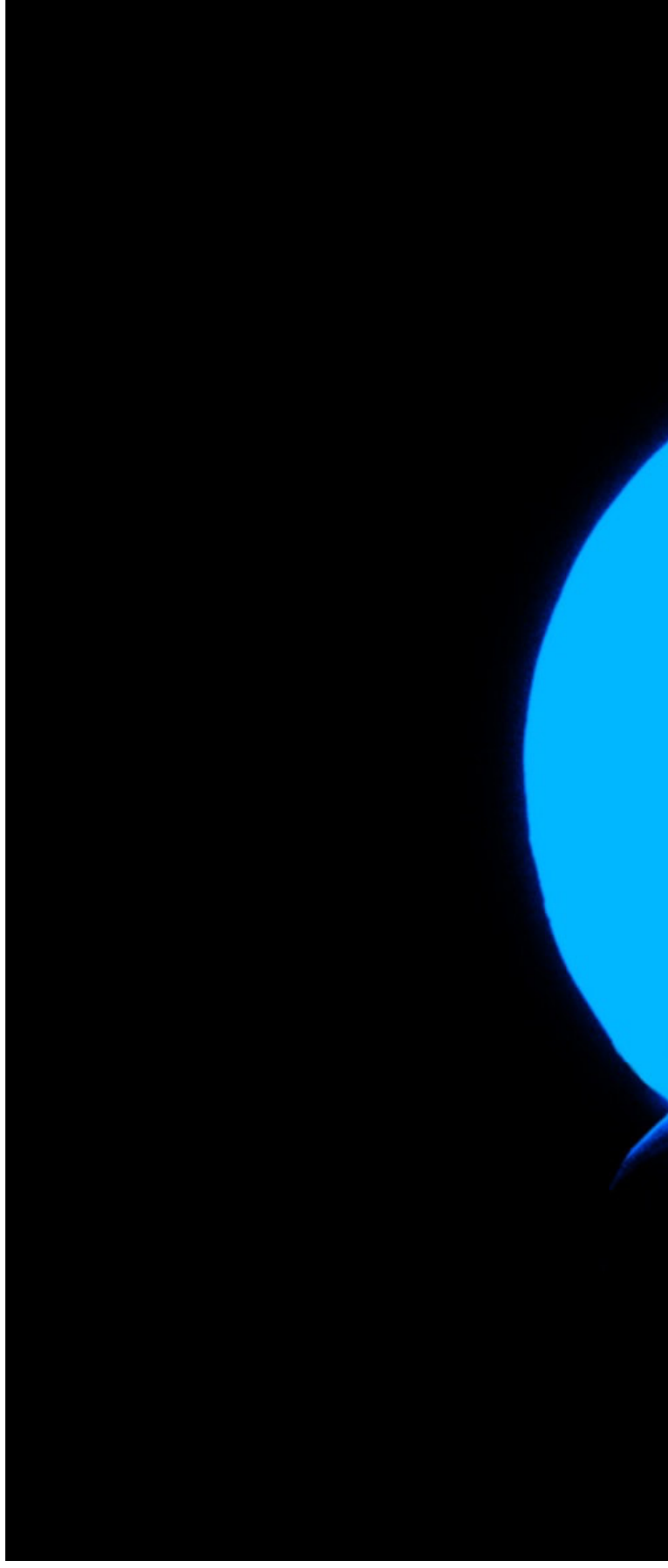
EMPLOYERS WHO HAVE HIRED INTERNATIONAL GRADUATES DESCRIBED FOUR DIFFERENT TYPES.

The international students we interviewed agreed that an internship experience helps them to be seen as an asset to New Zealand employers as well as global employers.



Note: See page 15 for why 'earned success' is so important to New Zealand employers

**UNDERSTANDING HOW THE
UNIQUE COMPETENCIES OF
INTERNATIONAL GRADUATES
CONNECT WITH EMPLOYERS**





THE LITERATURE REVIEW GAVE US MANY POSSIBLE ANGLES TO EXPLORE WITH EMPLOYERS

- International students play a key role in growing the New Zealand economy.
- International students are able to bring more diverse / unique perspectives to the table that lead to innovation and growth for business.
- New Zealand is a global leader in cultural inclusiveness and is more progressive than other countries in terms of diversity and leadership.
- International students possess not only IQ and EQ but CQ – which is vital for growing businesses.
- International students are ‘gutsy’ and are ‘battlers’ having gone through education in another country.
- International students share the same core values as Kiwis, they just approach/express it in a different way e.g. ingenuitive, connected to nature, respectful.
- The current ‘Think New’ student value proposition is grounded in education and relationships with teachers.

SEVERAL BROAD AREAS OF VALUE WERE IDENTIFIED IN THE DESK RESEARCH AND INTERVIEWS WITH SMEs AND EXPERTS

THESE AREAS SPLIT INTO TWO GROUPS

Those with a more direct benefit to the individual company.



Those with a more macro benefit to the community/nation.



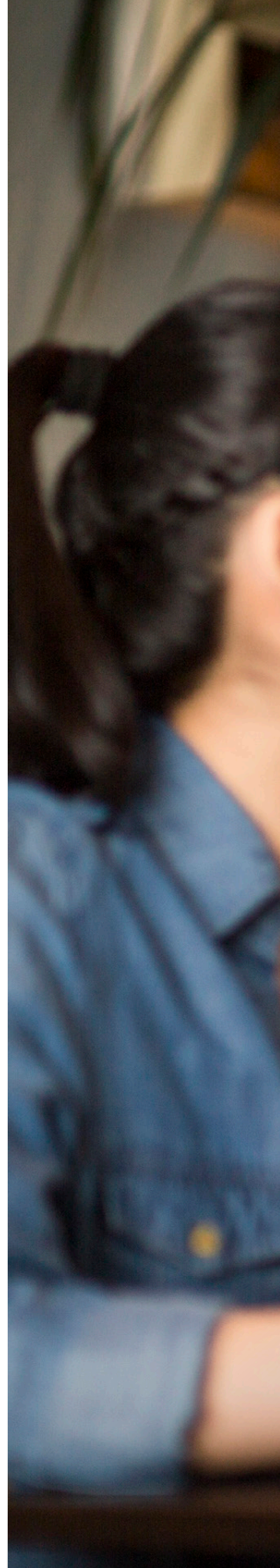
WE FOUND THAT THE CLOSER TO DIRECT BUSINESS BENEFITS, THE STRONGER THE VALUE PROPOSITION IS FOR EMPLOYERS.

IT TAKES DETERMINATION AND PERSEVERANCE TO GRADUATE IN ANOTHER COUNTRY

It is costly to travel all the way to New Zealand and to pay for tuition fees plus accommodation. International students have the emotional challenge of being away from family and friends back home. There is also a language barrier to overcome and a new culture to open yourself up to. Not to mention confronting racism in some cases.

'Keen' was the word that kept surfacing when employers described qualities that are important in a prospective graduate hire.

In the eyes of employers the 'easy ride' perception was dispelled when graduates could demonstrate their earned success and teamwork through part-time work, volunteering or involvement in teams and clubs in parallel to their study.





GUTSY, DRIVEN, WILLING AND EAGER
ARE SOME OF THE WORDS USED
TO DESCRIBE THE KEENNESS OF
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO
PERSEVERE, IMPROVE THEMSELVES AND
IMPROVE THEIR EMPLOYER'S BUSINESS.

CULTURAL-EXCHANGE HAS AN
ENERGISING EFFECT IN THE
WORKPLACE THAT CREATES
THE CONDITIONS FOR
CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION.





THE ENERGISING EFFECT OF MULTI-CULTURALISM IN THE WORKPLACE

Exposing yourself to different cultures opens you up to lots of new experiences.

Learning new words and customs; trying new foods and drinks.

These little experiences might not contribute directly to doing better business, but the cumulative effect of new experiences is a vibrancy and energy permeating staff morale.

IT'S IN OUR NATURE AS HUMAN BEINGS TO BE EXCITED AND ENERGISED BY NEW EXPERIENCES.

GRADUATING HERE IN NEW ZEALAND GIVES INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS A LOCAL LENS ON TOP OF THEIR MULTI-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

While someone at a graduate level can't be said to have 'global experience' (they haven't worked in multiple countries), they do gain a multi-cultural perspective on life by opening themselves up to Kiwi culture.

Graduating here also means they often have 3+ years to gain a local lens, knowing as much as a Kiwi graduate about how their field of study works here in New Zealand.

A student's 'local lens' is enhanced significantly by internship experiences where they can apply their soft skills in teamwork with local and multi-cultural team members.

GRADUATING IN NEW ZEALAND AND EVIDENCE OF EARNED SUCCESS THROUGH INTERNSHIPS, VOLUNTEERING, INVOLVEMENT IN UNIVERSITY CLUBS ETC. SIGNIFICANTLY REINFORCES THE 'LOCAL LENS'.



HOW DOES THIS PLAY OUT IN THE REAL WORLD?

THE FOLLOWING PAGES SUMMARISE
THE EXPERIENCES OF SOME OF THE
EMPLOYERS AND INTERNATIONAL
GRADUATES WE SPOKE WITH.



EMPLOYER PORTRAITS



KAREN **CO-OWNER OF AN** **ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANCY**

Karen and her husband started their business in 2003. They spotted an opportunity to provide specialist ecological reports on storm water flows for local councils and property owners looking to subdivide.

It's taken them many years of hard work and financial risk to establish their business, so when considering hiring a graduate, they are looking for evidence that they have the same keen attitude, willingness to get stuck in, and that they're likely to persevere.

Although they have fewer than six staff at any one time, they are always on the look out for graduates with potential. This is because they prefer to train new graduates in their specialist approach to the job rather than take on ecologists who consider themselves experienced, but probably haven't done the type of work they do.

They get lots of applications from international graduates, but the ones who make it through to an interview are always those who have had some kind of work experience in a relevant field (including volunteering work). This is because they need proof that they are team players and will pull their weight in a small team. They need to prove that their verbal communication is sufficient to participate effectively with local New Zealand teammates, because on the job they'll have to stand their ground against big burly Kiwi construction workers who may not be so tolerant of an unusual accent.

Not knowing the graduates work rights is a red flag. They have found that it takes at least 12 months to get a graduate trained up to the point that they are positively contributing to work output, not costing them time and resources in training. Therefore they want their 12 months training investment to return a five year productive tenure.

Because the work they do is very specific to the New Zealand landscape, an international graduate would really have to go to extra lengths to prove that they were keen to learn about New Zealand geography and plant life, and that they are keen to open themselves to Kiwi culture and construction site humour. In return, Karen admits that she got into the field of science because she's curious by nature and enjoys the cultural diversity we have in New Zealand because it creates opportunities to learn from other cultures, and that stimulates her curious mind.



WAYNE

OWNER OF A SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT COMPANY

Wayne's business develops software that automates business processes. It's taken a long time to develop the software, and a lot more time to build up their sales funnel to where they're at today with clients all over the world.

He finds they get lots of job applications. Some from domestic students, but the majority are from international students and migrants seeking a job in New Zealand. Lots of applicants may seem like a good thing, but he finds it's hard to pick out the ones with real potential. He says that people in the IT industry aren't very good at selling themselves. Their attitude and passion doesn't come through in their CV's so it's hard to know if you're overlooking what might be great talent.

The business once had a good relationship with a computer science lecturer who pointed them to good talent, but that lecturer has since moved to Australia and they've now lost that connection to the university.

It's a small company, so everyone needs to pull their weight. Wayne is all too aware of the importance of this after having an employee with a particularly bad attitude that really negatively affected the morale, and consequently the productivity, of the whole team. Therefore he's wary of hiring someone who may not be a good fit for his company. Although he does enjoy having a diverse team (and in the New Zealand tech sector it's becoming a necessity) he certainly sees the advantage a graduate will have if they can demonstrate how they've localised themselves through internships, volunteering and participation in local teams. A multi-cultural perspective with a local lens is valuable to him.

STUDENT PORTRAITS



DAVID STUDENT

David grew up in Bangkok. His parents were concerned about negative influences from growing up in a big city. So, at 16 he was sent to complete his secondary education in Invercargill, and then in Tauranga.

He went on to begin medical school at the University of Auckland. He gradually lost interest in pursuing a medical career and his grades began to slip. This became a turning point where he realised he needed to take action if his investment in international education was to pay off. He switched courses to follow his interest in IT, and also did some volunteering with Red Cross and as a UniGuide. This led to an opportunity to enter a Microsoft coding competition which saw him working in a team with Kiwi classmates who introduced him to the university coding club. He formed relationships with both domestic and international students and eventually became the leader of the club. This opened up further internship opportunities, one of which got him a foot in the door at an IT company where he is now a full-time employee.

He says that if it wasn't for the chance circumstance that saw him enter the coding competition he may well have graduated with grades but no practical experience and no industry connections. His hope is that in future this isn't left to chance for international students. He wishes that he and his parents were told from the outset that his chances of employment would be greatly improved if he was to seek involvement in university clubs and look for internship opportunities rather than purely focusing on his studies.

Today he works in a culturally diverse team of coders and has taken up Brazilian jujitsu thanks to a Brazilian colleague. He enjoys sharing his own Thai food with his workmates as much as he enjoys trying new dishes from other cultures that his workmates bring in. He says these experiences make the workplace a lot more fun and really boosts the team's motivation to carry on with what can be quite tedious coding work.



LUCAS **STUDENT**

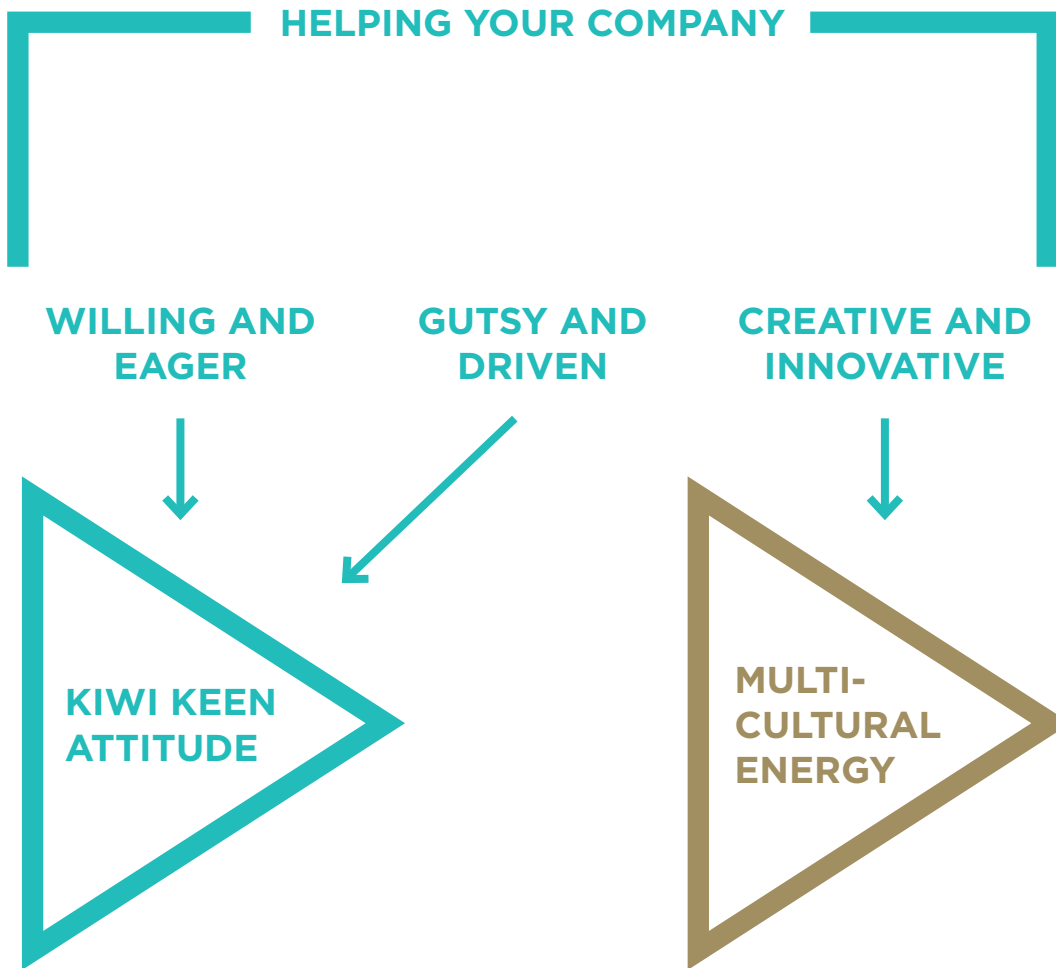
Lucas grew up in Brazil, and was attracted to New Zealand because of the standard of living, safety, strong economy and overall quality of life. In 2016, Lucas enrolled in Southland Institute of Technology's Post-Graduate Diploma in IT.

That March he accepted a temporary job cleaning the floors at a local dairy factory to earn extra money while he studied. His manager saw that he was reliable and hard-working and moved him to the production line. While on the factory's production line Lucas noted people were sometimes using pen and paper for jobs that could be more efficiently done electronically.

He offered to help management improve their systems. Over a weekend he created a prototype for new software. They weren't expecting that! After they saw what he was able to do he asked to be promoted. He ended up being hired full time as a software engineer. Now he oversees all of the company's IT and develops and implements new applications.

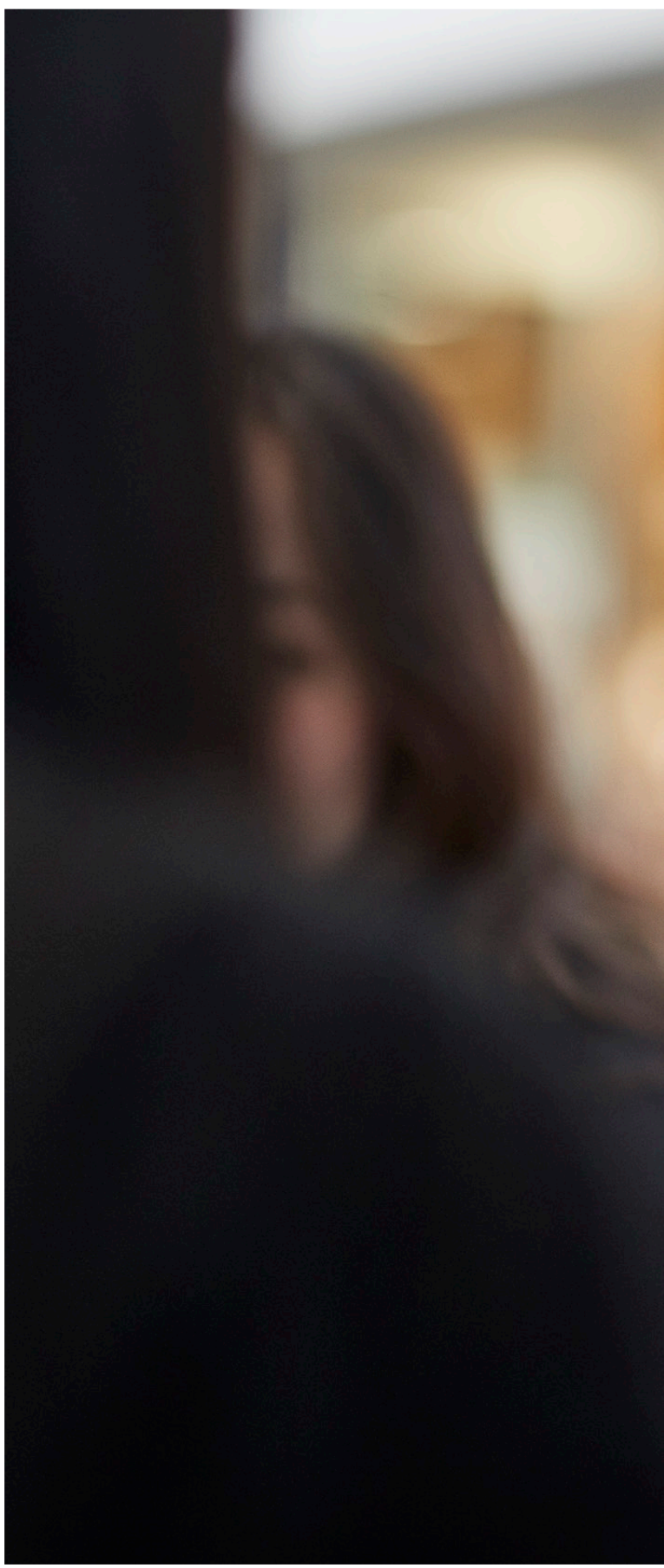
Lucas is also training to be a life guard and contributes to his community through church activities.

IN SUMMARY





REDEFINING THE VALUE OF INTERNATIONAL GRADUATES IN THE EYES OF NEW ZEALAND EMPLOYERS





WHAT THIS MEANS FOR REDEFINING THE VALUE OF INTERNATIONAL GRADUATES IN THE EYES OF NEW ZEALAND EMPLOYERS

PERCEIVED RISK

International graduates get an easy ride and won't have the perseverance to stick it out long enough to contribute positively to work output.



International graduates' language and cultural differences will only create difficulties with their 'fit' in the workplace.



REPOSITIONING

The untold story from employers who have hired international graduates and have seen first-hand the determination and perseverance international graduates have contributed to their work.

International graduates, if given a chance, can add a multi-cultural perspective to the workplace that will positively contribute to workplace morale.

TWO CORE CONCEPTS TO EMPHASISE

KIWI KEEN ATTITUDE

POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO WORK OUTPUTS

'Keen' is an essential quality that Kiwi employers are looking for in all graduate hires.

In a New Zealand cultural context 'Kiwi Keen Attitude' means:

- Earned success; persevering against the odds to improve yourself and improve outcomes for employers.
- Adaptability; being unafraid to take on new challenges and solve new problems.

The concept of 'Kiwi Keen Attitude' debunks the myth that international students get an easy ride by telling their story of earned success in adapting to Kiwi culture and adding long-term value to Kiwi businesses.

In this way, they possess the same 'keen' quality that's expected of Kiwi graduates.

MULTI-CULTURAL ENERGY

POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO WORKPLACE MORALE

'Fit' with the existing team is a predominant motivator that steers employers towards hiring 'people like us'.

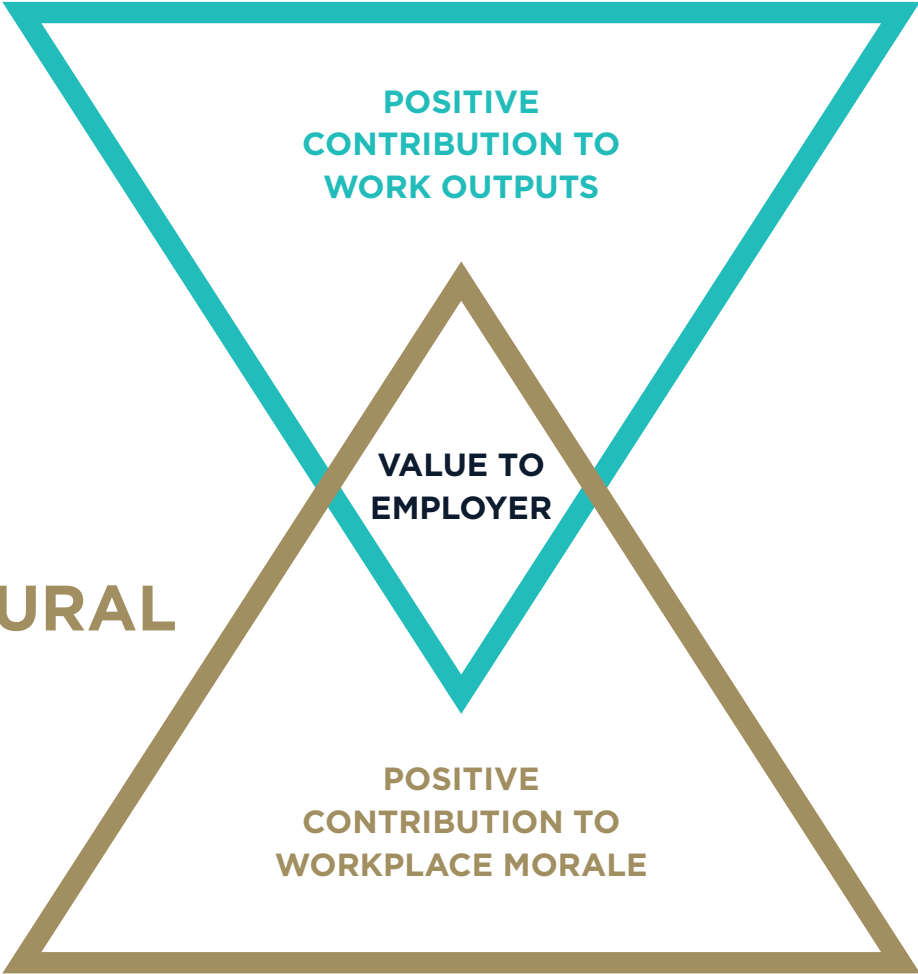
This mono-view overlooks the benefit of hiring 'people not like us'.

The concept of 'Multi-Cultural Energy' means new perspectives and new experiences that enliven a workplace - in between actual work getting done.

THE DUAL VALUE TO NEW ZEALAND EMPLOYERS

KIWI KEEN ATTITUDE

MULTI-CULTURAL ENERGY



DEFINING PARAMETERS FOR THE CORE VALUE CONCEPTS

WHAT IT IS

- The Kiwi work ethic
- Positive contribution to work outputs
- Earned success
- Determination
- Perseverance
- Parity with Kiwi graduates



WHAT IT'S NOT

- Us vs Them comparison to Kiwi graduates
- Keen to work for lower pay
- Only keen for work experience before leaving New Zealand

WHAT IT IS

- Positive contribution to workplace morale
- Energy gained from exposure to new experiences
- Enhancer of team cohesion
- Enhancer to team productivity



WHAT IT'S NOT

- 'Global perspective' is not a credible claim a graduate can make
- Token diversity
- A distraction to getting the work done

NORMALISING HIRING INTERNATIONAL GRADUATES BY TELLING EMPLOYER STORIES, NOT STUDENT STORIES

Employers are more likely to believe in the benefits of hiring international graduates if they hear about it from other employers facing similar business problems.

Hearing about it from the students or from Education New Zealand is likely to get the response “well of course they’d say that!”

Building on the statistic that 87 per cent of employers rate the migrants they are currently employing as ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’, there is a high probability of finding employers who can talk about international graduates being ‘Kiwi keen’ and adding ‘multi-cultural energy’ to their workplace.

How might we incentivise and enable employers to tell these stories about international graduates to other employers?



Employers have more empathy with other employers than they do with job-seeking graduates.



HOW MIGHT THESE LEARNINGS BE APPLIED TO EFFECT CHANGE?

BY LOOKING AT THE PROBLEM OF GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES WE GAINED SOME CRUCIAL CLUES AS TO HOW WE MIGHT ADDRESS THE PROBLEM.

- Although legislation to improve post-study work rights had been changed, employers hadn't been made aware of the changes or how those changes could benefit their business.
- A channel to reach employers is the CVs of international students.

HOW MIGHT WE GET STUDENTS TO HIGHLIGHT THEIR WORK ELIGIBILITY ON THEIR CV?

- Rather than attempting to tell the student's story directly to employers, we discovered it would be more effective to get employers who have hired international graduates to share their success stories with other employers.
- Regional development agencies regularly engage with local employers.

HOW MIGHT WE DEVELOP A TOOL KIT THAT MAKES IT EASY TO SHARE THESE EMPLOYER SUCCESS STORIES?

- Universities have relationships with larger employers, but relationships with SMEs tend to be through chance friendships with particular lecturers.

HOW MIGHT WE MAKE IT EASIER FOR SMEs TO TAKE PART IN INTERNSHIP PROGRAMMES?

- Parents and guardians of international students often discourage them from getting involved in university clubs or having part-time jobs for fear it will distract from their study.

HOW MIGHT WE COMMUNICATE THE VALUE OF INTERNSHIPS TO STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS AT PRE-ARRIVAL STAGE?

REDEFINING THE VALUE OF INTERNATIONAL GRADUATES

KEEN TO EARN THEIR SUCCESS,
ADDING MULTI-CULTURAL
ENERGY TO YOUR WORKPLACE.







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