

# Hon Chris Hipkins

MP for Remutaka

Minister for COVID-19 Response

Minister of Education

Minister for the Public Service

Leader of the House



21 May 2021

Independent Tertiary Education New Zealand  
Quality Tertiary Institutions  
English New Zealand  
Universities New Zealand  
Te Pūkenga  
Schools International Education Business Association  
International Education Association  
New Zealand International Student Association  
Independent Schools of New Zealand

Dear International Education Peak Bodies representatives,

Thank you for meeting with me on 11 May 2021 to discuss your concerns for the sector, ongoing restrictions at the border, and the future of international education in New Zealand.

This Government is committed to international education and values its contribution to New Zealand and its regions. I know the last 16 months have been a very difficult time for you all. The impact of COVID-19 on your sector has been immediate and ongoing. I note the many concerns you face, including loss of revenue and specialist international education professional capability, loss of global market share, and provider viability concerns. I also appreciate that some parts of the sector have been impacted more than others.

International education is one of many sectors facing challenges. Despite these challenges, our education system remains strong, buoyed by increasing domestic enrolments. I note that New Zealand is one of only a few countries whose providers have remained open for in-person delivery during most of the COVID-19 period, and whose international students have been able to enjoy a campus education alongside domestic learners. I am confident that our reputation as a country for our effective handling of COVID-19 will sustain us through this transitional period.

Over the last year, we have focussed on delivering interventions to sustain parts of the sector while it transitioned in response to pandemic developments. We provided \$20 million to state and state-integrated schools, targeted assistance of \$10 million to 22 private training establishments, and delivered hardship grants of \$0.9 million to support 3,963 students. We cancelled the Export Education Levy through to December 2021, while maintaining services funded by the Levy. We also secured the approval for two priority cohorts (totalling 1,250 international students) to re-enter New Zealand while border restrictions remain in place.

However, the domestic and global disruptions resulting from COVID-19 are more severe and longer-lasting than we anticipated a year ago. The Government will remain committed to its strategies for protecting people in New Zealand, including elimination of COVID-19 in our communities. As a result, there is likely to be limited re-engagement with countries in which we have high levels of trust and confidence and those pursuing similar Elimination Strategies to New Zealand through most of 2021.

There is therefore an opportunity, while border restrictions are in place, to accelerate the 'high quality, high value' strategic shift signalled in the International Education Strategy. This Government has committed to the achievement of these goals by 2030, and I do not want to see them set them

aside in a rushed rebuild of the sector we had in place. I am less concerned about numbers of students than about the quality of the experience and education we can offer them, and the value they bring to our institutions and communities, and to New Zealand as a whole. My immediate priorities for international education are briefly set out below.

First, to provide you with as much direction and certainty as possible, I am revising the International Education Strategic Recovery Plan to provide a roadmap for the transition. I expect the roadmap to set out the expected outlook for the next few years, including the Government's objectives and priorities for resetting the sector, and how we will work together with you on the rebuild. This will be supported by a policy statement establishing what 'high value' means and what type of value we would like to prioritise. Officials will engage with you in May and June of this year.

Second, we will continue to support the return of students while borders restrictions are in place. I welcome the sector's assistance on getting the approved 1,250 students back in New Zealand by July 2021. To support their re-entry, we have recently ringfenced MIQ places for 400 of these students in June 2021. Depending on the outcomes of this group MIQ booking, further ringfencing of MIQ places for international students could be considered. I also support the preparedness planning you are doing across subsectors, and with government agencies, to get the sector "ready to go" when border restrictions ease to increase student inflows. While we cannot promise students any specific timeframes for entry in 2022, it is important that we are ready to act quickly when the opportunity arises.

Offshore online education provision offers new opportunities for diversification, and I am supportive of students currently committed to eventual study in New Zealand being able to commence tertiary study offshore. At the same time, we need to ensure we continue to deliver high quality international education onshore in New Zealand.

Alongside border work, another key priority for me for the next 12-24 months is reviewing policy settings to aid the reset. This includes considering the future of international education in primary and intermediate schools and ensuring work rights for international students are appropriate, particularly at the sub-degree level. I have asked officials to develop advice on these issues. Once my Cabinet colleagues and I have considered this advice over the coming months, I will look to publicly consult on options.

Finally, thank you for the energy you all have put into supporting the education providers you work with, and the international students that we continue to have here in New Zealand. I am encouraged by the collaboration shown to date and I invite you to share this letter with your member organisations. I plan to speak to a wider sector audience about international education in June and will also issue a statement of support at that time.

In the meantime, my officials and I look forward to continuing to work with you and your sector to progress some of the immediate priorities for international education.

Yours sincerely



**Chris Hipkins**  
**Minister of Education**