

# Arriving and Thriving: Supporting International Students to Succeed - a 'Students First' Symposium

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## Transcript

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**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:00:15] Kia ora, everyone. My name is Judyth Sachs. I'm the Chief Academic Officer of Studiosity. It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you New Zealanders and particularly the panel. This is our third New Zealand webinar and it's our second New Zealand one only. So those of you that have returned to the Studiosity webinars, welcome back. Those who are the new ones, I hope you keep coming to them. So what I'd like to do, we have a very esteemed panel today for our webinar. We have a Vice Chancellor. We have Deputy Vice Chancellor, we have a Head of a student international office and most importantly we have an international student. I'm going to let them introduce themselves and I will get them to indicate to them, to the audience what their responsibility is around international. I think it's appropriate for me to invite the Vice-Chancellor of AUT University, Professor Damon Salesa. So, Damon, can you introduce yourself, please?

**Prof Damon Salesa** [00:01:18] Tēnā koutou katoa. My name is Damon Salesa, I'm the Vice-Chancellor of the Auckland University of Technology, AUT, Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau and I oversee the university, of course, and that includes the international mission of the university.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:01:35] And you have some experience being an international student and having international responsibilities. Can you just indicate that a bit too?

**Prof Damon Salesa** [00:01:42] Yes, so I did my PhD overseas in the UK and then went from there as an international student to work on staff on faculty at the

University of Michigan for 10 years. So have had a diverse as well as done a lot of time in the universities in the Pacific, though not on staff.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:02:04] Thank you. Christopher.

**Christopher Carey** [00:02:08] Kia ora, my name is Chris Carey. I'm the Executive Director of Global Engagement at Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa Massey University. We're a unique university in New Zealand in that we have three full-scale campuses in Auckland, Palmerston North and in Wellington. So I'm responsible for all of our international student recruitment, all of our international mobility programmes, as well as all of our university partnerships around the world. And I was an international student in Belgium for a year. From the U.S. Live and work in New Zealand now.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:02:44] Very cosmopolitan. Stephanie.

**Stephanie Milam** [00:02:48] Yeah, sure. So I'm currently a Masters student at the University of Waikato, Kia ora. I'm Stephanie, and I'm current getting a Masters of Management in Agribusiness. I am from the United States. I'm from California, and in my previous undergrad at Hamilton College in New York, I also studied abroad in New Zealand at the University of Auckland. So it was during 2020, so it got cut short, unfortunately, but it was definitely a wonderful experience and it got me interested enough to come back here. So. So yeah, that's me.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:03:21] And finally, Professor Milam.

**Prof Jennifer Milam** [00:03:26] Hi, tena koutou katoa. I am Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic at the University of Waikato. I am responsible for all our academic portfolio, which includes all of the student experience. And although I'm not responsible for international recruitment, the minute they arrive, I'm responsible for every aspect of their journey with us until they graduate.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:03:52] Thank you. And look, I'm going to just change the questions a bit because I want us given that as students first, and you've all been international students. Well, and I have been an international student too, I was an international student in Michigan. So Stephanie, what's it like for you now to be an international student?

**Stephanie Milam** [00:04:11] Sure. Can you hear me okay? Okay, sure. So as an international student at the University of Waikato, I would say it's actually been a pretty seamless process. It really feels like I'm one of the students of the general population, which is pretty amazing that they're able to accomplish that. You don't really feel like an outsider, you feel very integrated, especially into the culture of the campus, by your professors, by your clubs. So especially working with the Waikato Management School, I found there's been a lot of just big efforts made to make sure you feel welcome, a part of the community, all that kind of stuff. And I know for my peers that aren't, you know, native English speakers or coming from my region, I know that they've put in a lot of effort and

a lot resources. So for example, last week we had a international students kind of day and parade. And so that involved, you now, all kinds of different cultures of international students on campus coming together. And doing a parade, doing a cultural market. So there was lots of stands and shops and henna. And I think a lot of universities in New Zealand and especially at the University of Waikato really make a big effort to make sure that they meet you with who you are and where you're at and connect you to other members of that community. So I'd say that's part of what makes it so seamless is there's a big emphasis on getting to know you, your culture and connecting you with people so that not only do you feel like you're not alone but you also have people that you're learning from. And getting to know kind of their way of life in that one, in that sense as well, so.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:05:40] Chris, you went to Belgium. French and Flemish speaking.

**Christopher Carey** [00:05:46] Yes, I did an MBA program there about, I don't know, 15 years ago, fully English speaking program, about 50 students from 27 different countries. So yeah, it was, I would say we were a little bit more self-contained as we were all a little bit older than your typical demographic in an VA programme, so. Being able to connect with so many different people from around the world forming this close-knit community was an amazing experience We still keep in touch to this day. I've been to weddings in Malta to Portugal to Turkey to to you name it. And I think those connections that you make as an international student are lifelong, and that network that you establish is vitally important to who you will be and where you will end up in the world. One of my MBA connections is one of the main reasons I got an opportunity here in New Zealand.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:06:47] Damon, you also had an international experience with a PhD, slightly different from undergraduate and postgraduate, but it's still a different sort of experience. What was your experience like?

**Prof Damon Salesa** [00:06:58] I think that's absolutely right Judyth, the kind of postgraduate experience in particular is quite different, not just because of the age but the scale of programs. Mine was a research program obviously, I should probably be proper and say it was a DPhil rather than a PhD, but that does risk isolation for instance in ways that are particularly if you're doing studying in an area which isn't sort of based on a collective like lab or a research group. So it was different, I was at a very old, I was at Oxford, so it was a particular kind of campus, very different to where I'd come from. So it almost like a complete cultural shift for me. It involved a whole range of challenges that I probably hadn't anticipated around that kind of cultural, a cultural, a culturalization, so that was interesting. And I really enjoyed it as well. Unlike Chris, I suspect mine was in the pre-social media days. So it took a lot more effort to sort of stay connected to people after that. I think it can appear a lot less of a struggle now. But again, it was transformational. It changed my view both of the world and it changed me. And so I'm very encouraging of those kinds of experiences although I know not everyone can access them. It's important that we get as

much value out of them, not just for those who study internationally but those who are not international, but study alongside them, who I think they also get an internationalisation experience.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:08:34] Jennifer, have you got an international student story to tell?

**Prof Jennifer Milam** [00:08:39] I do. I was an international student in Italy at the University of Pisa and then again at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in France and then that was as an undergraduate and then as a graduate student and then most recently I did some executive education at INSEAD in France. All of those were different and have really contributed to my understanding of different cultures. So in Italy, I lived with a family. That was a really wonderful experience and enhanced my language acquisition, which is part of the purpose. And in France, I lived at the Ecole Normale I lived in a dorm, which was also great, full immersion into another culture. And at INSEAD, which was really recently, just a few years ago, that social media connection has been a really key aspect of staying connected with other people who are in those classes with me. So like Chris, I'm socially connected with all of these people who are in Russia or in Australia, in Germany and other parts of Europe. And it's just really expands your horizons. And that's what I'd like to see us do for our international students and our domestic students here.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:10:02] So, can I stay with you? While you don't have direct responsibility for international, you have a sensitivity towards the international student experience. So, what particular initiatives happen at Waikato to support international students? I loved hearing about the carnival, that carnival-esque celebration of diversity in international students sounds both important symbolically, but also culturally and politically.

**Prof Jennifer Milam** [00:10:34] Yeah, so at the University of Waikato, we actually, the sense of belonging is really important to us for all of our students. We have, when you combine our Māori, Pacific and international student cohorts, that's well over 50% of our student population. So we're really multicultural. And I think that is a important part of the way that students learn tolerance, and about difference. And it's really built into the way that we include students in social activities. So we work really closely with our student union around the kinds of events that Stephanie was talking about. So from the first time they arrive on campus, we have a pōwhiri, I'm sure Damon has that as well and Chris too, where they are welcomed into our community culturally, according to Māori traditions. And that is a really important way that we create a sense of belonging for all our student cohorts. But that's also then continued with the kind of highlighting of, we have international language weeks regularly. So a recent one was around Papua New Guinea language. And those are highlighted and celebrated across the university. In orientation week, we actually have a really fun event that's called a 'Great Race', which mixes up our international students and any domestic students who want to come along. And it's a way for them to meet people very quickly. So we're continually looking for ways to create a sense of belonging for our international students. And then also to have them have

unique experiences that are part of New Zealand culture. So Māori and Pacific exposure to traditions and culture is a way of us learning from each other. So I do have responsibility for international students once they get here. I just don't have responsibility for recruitment.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:12:43] Right, thank you. Chris, what happens at Massey?

**Christopher Carey** [00:12:48] Yep, so I'm responsible for the international recruitment for the university. One of our approaches right now is, and I think it's not inconsistent from other New Zealand universities is we've been heavily reliant on two main geographies, over the past while, we're all looking to diversify our international student base. So I think every university is really stressing that geographical diversification, but also program diversification and degree-level diversification. So we're all really focused on that because we want a good mix of students across academic disciplines at different levels. So that's one of the main areas that we're focused on from a recruitment standpoint. However, when those students finally do get to the university, the care and support does not specifically sit within my team, but it sits in an adjacent team. And we don't have specific counsellors for international. We see you know providing supports for success to our students as central to our mission, so everybody works with domestic and international. We do have a couple people that have an international focus but it's just one team that supports all of our students across all three of our campuses in Auckland, Palmerston North and Wellington. So that's how we manage.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:14:06] So how many international students would you have in total as a number but also as a percentage?

**Christopher Carey** [00:14:13] We've got about 4,000 international students right now total. As a percentage it's just under 20% because it's actually a little bit lower than that, even, but when you consider the fact that if we talk about enrolled full time students, Massey has a much different demographic than a lot of the other universities. We have a lot of online programs. We have a lot of working professionals, so our demographic is typically much older and not as many students study full-time.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:14:45] And on campus.

**Christopher Carey** [00:14:46] Yes, exactly.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:14:48] Jennifer, I didn't ask the number of international students at Waikato.

**Prof Jennifer Milam** [00:14:53] Uh, so we're 23% international, um, in terms of head count, that probably we have about 13,000 students, so. We can do the math, probably. Not a mathematician.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:15:14] And Damon what about at AUT?

**Prof Damon Salesa** [00:15:17] So we're about 18% of our Fs, slightly higher in head count. And actually, the three New Zealand universities here are the three least traditional in terms of their composition. So Waikato, Massey, and AUT all have a higher proportion of people who are working and studying, who are older. And then, of course, AUT's unique difference in that we're the most urban university in the country. We're literally a stone's throw from Queen Street, and then we're the only university at scale in South Auckland, which is the kind of diverse beating heart of Auckland's future. And similarly to what Massey and Waikato would say, but probably ratcheted up even further is we have extraordinary diversity. So even without our international students, the majority of our students are Asian, Pacific and Māori. And then you add international students into the mix, we're already a diverse university, already with a high degree of people who don't speak English as a first language. So it's this beautiful ferment of diversity. And so that exact question that both Jennifer and Chris have spoken to about how you honour the differences that people bring into the university, but also build the kind of solidarity and belonging, that is essential to... To be well and to thrive as a student and to grow. And so that is a great challenge to have. It does involve the kind of events that makes, it means that you have to put students at the centre of all the decisions. It does mean because many of the challenges international students face are the challenges that domestic students face, particularly in diverse universities like ours, but there are also distinct, distinctive ones. And so I think you're doing both the kind of across-the-board universal generalist approach, but also standing up specific services that meet the needs of international students, particularly at those kind of tension points, you know, which is around arrival, around the kind of moments of choice and selection, moments of isolation that all students might experience, but when you're very far from your whanau or your family, it can be heightened. So. So very much that's our approach to, both... Treat students as students, as having a deep commonality, but also recognise their differences and give them room to both have those recognised and celebrated.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:17:58] International education and recruitment of international students has become a highly politicised voice in Australia and New Zealand, with governments putting caps on the number of students and creating perverse outcomes as a result of that. So in Australia, like New Zealand, international students provided sources of extra revenue, and that extra revenue was used for all sorts of value enhancing strategies and interventions in New Zealand and Australian universities. What then do you see the challenges being around the politics of international, and what are governments wanting to do by putting caps on the number of students that can be recruited? So Damon, can I ask you again, because you're at the sort of the top of the apex as the decision maker, but also the intermediary with government.

**Prof Damon Salesa** [00:18:55] And I guess I also hold another role, and I work closely with Chris in this role, as I chair the Universities New Zealand International Committee. So we share a common position around that. We understand just how critical, perhaps even more critical for New Zealand than for Australia, because New Zealand needs to attract talented, capable people to our nation for us to collectively thrive. So, international education should be



something that we collectively celebrate in New Zealand. Particularly at universities where there are high value students like Stephanie, you know, people who bring enormous amounts of value and potential into New Zealand. So the argument for international education, particularly amongst the universities but across the board is strong. I think it's important that we conduct this process in a way that supports New Zealand's understanding about the value of that and make sure that we communicate that, that people have an opportunity to understand not just the dollar value of education, which can be overemphasised, but the actual value, the number of fantastic New Zealanders who've come in as international students. Stephanie won't want to go home, she'll want to stay here, and she'll meet a great family in Waikato that will, or a great opportunity in Waikato that keep her here. And that's exactly what we want as a nation and I think. What worries me is as we politicise it, that the key thing around politicisation is to put it up as an issue that can be opposed. And I think it's in all of our interests to see it as a bipartisan issue, to conduct it in a way that's ethical, sustainable, transparent, fair, just. Where the value is openly communicated to all people. And I think, certainly here in Auckland, where the majority of international students come and stay, the value of international education to the city of Auckland is enormous. It's almost incalculable. And so the Mayor and the City has stood very strongly with it. I'm sure it's no different, whether it's Palmerston North or Wellington or Hamilton, that the value is strongly supported by business, by government, and I think the key to staying away from the kind of controversy we saw in Australia is focusing on those sorts of values, as well as the value of international education, and that's why this panel is great. Just reminding people that we're in this for a really sustainable, ethical, and long-term benefit to everyone, not just the students or the universities, but the whole of New Zealand.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:21:46] And the public message of benefit to the committee, benefit to this society and the value, not only economic value, but social and cultural value is something that's not really talked about much in Australia. And so what is it about New Zealand that make you have this sort of holistic, humanistic approach rather than a purely ideological political approach?

**Prof Damon Salesa** [00:22:09] Well, part of it is that the kind of tension points where international education engages with people outside the education sector. And I think what had happened in Australia is that some people's engagements had become increasingly negative. There was a perception that these international students were taking the places of Australian students, or they were taking accommodation of Australians. And I think we have to work to remind people this isn't true. We have purpose-built student accommodation. They're certainly in Auckland, but across New Zealand, they're actually supporting investment in housing. They particularly support industries that have struggled to actually get people to work in. And so I think as long as we can make it clear and sort of remove some of those tensions, and maybe learn a little from Australia, particularly I think in what proportion of a university could optimally be international, and I think that we just need to be mindful of those learnings. And I know Jennifer and Chris have thought deeply about this as well.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:23:17] Chris or Jennifer, do you want to make a comment to add to what Damon has said?

**Christopher Carey** [00:23:24] Sure, I'll go ahead. I think, you know, the way New Zealand has structured our green list, which is our critical skill shortage list. A lot of the universities are creating programmes which align directly to the critical skill shortages across New Zealand. And if you look at the number of skilled labour shortages that we have across the country, and you look at our number of international students, there's kind of a direct correlation about how we could fill that labour gap in the future. And why not educate and train them before we provide them the opportunity to get those jobs in the future? So I think New Zealand has done a really good job about articulating that to the public that yes, we have a bit of a shrinking demographic of the New Zealand population and the best way to meet the needs of our future workforce is to educate and train them here in New Zealand and then push them into the labour force from there.

**Prof Jennifer Milam** [00:24:19] Yeah, I mean, I've moved to New Zealand only in the last year. And I have, from Australia, where I was for 30 years, I definitely notice a difference here. There is not, there's a real welcoming for students from around the world into the university. I think there is a smaller percentage of international students overall. But what we have seen in the recent years has been a shift from international undergraduate enrolments to post-graduate enrolments. And it's exactly what Chris has said. It's very much aligned to meeting the needs of New Zealand. And it is important that there is a cultural aspect of that education, which I think New Zealand universities are very well set up to support. So we're not just providing that pathway into employment, into careers that domestically we're having problems filling in New Zealand, but we're also creating future citizens who want to contribute and give back to New Zealand. And it's really important that universities, I know as universities, we believe that. So it's important that we continue to communicate that value to government and to wider society.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:25:45] Once again, there's an altruism there that is in contrast to what we, you experienced in Sydney and other places. Look, this is about students first, so let's get back to the students. Stephanie, can you just take us through your sort of, the whole cycle of recruitment experiencing and probably now graduating and deciding what you want to do next. So how well were you supported as a student? And when you had issues, to what extent was the university proactive in supporting you?

**Stephanie Milam** [00:26:26] Sure. So I'd say in regards to both recruitment and now being on site here in New Zealand, they've done a phenomenal job, at least at the University of Waikato. And I'm sure from what it sounds like, honestly, at most universities in New Zealand. So starting out, you know, getting involved with the application process, learning about programmes, I would say there's phenomenal resources online that were the starting point, but it's not just that it's also the people behind them. So having the ability to call know, international



offices, whether that's in regards to payments, whether that's, in regards, to what's needed on applications, what's expected on site. There's been a lot of transparency and a lot of very informative background that I think was very beneficial coming in. And then simultaneously, you know, once you hit the ground here, there's a pretty amazing sense of online and in-person integrated sort of community and connections that they try to build and make sure that you feel like you where you're going, what you're doing. You know, who's around you and what you need to get there. And so there's, I know at least for us, 'go and connect'. It's an online platform for international students. And so the whole idea behind it, I believe it was started by previous students. The idea is to essentially get international students connected together. So you can start to familiarise faces, names, where people are from. And then in that you find groups that you connect with. So people that like to go out and play volleyball. People that like to go out and explore bars in town, people that liked to study together and find rooms around campus that are new and exciting. There's all kinds of subgroups that are developed on these platforms that are really encouraged for people to connect, get to know one another, and really start to make those kinds of relationships on campus. Then once you get in person, they also do a very good job of making sure, you know, no matter where you're from, you have somebody to connect with both in the community on campus and also externally. So I know. After our welcome pōwhiri, which is the Māori welcome, we also had essentially this connection of resources booklet, and they went over each and every one with us. So I don't necessarily look it, but I come from a Colombian background as well as American. And so for me, it was kind of interesting to see as a Latin student, you know, what are the resources? Who are the people around? And sometimes in New Zealand, there's a fair amount and sometimes there's not. And so it was really cool to hear about cultural centres nearby. So I know that for me there's a Colombian centre and it was really exciting to hear about that and be able to call them and connect with them. Same goes for a lot of my friends, so my friends from Bangladesh as well as China. There are student unions on campus that are there for them as well and then as well in Hamilton which is the city surrounding University of Waikato. They try to make sure you know that you have people to talk to, people to connect with, what cultural events are going on, so I know we attended a - there was a Philippine market and so there was a lot of like food and music and clothes, and I wouldn't have known about those if it weren't for the efforts of the university. So I would say, you know, finding ways to make sure that students are not only coming here and welcomed on a personal level, they also have external resources in the community that they can rely on. So I'd say that was a very, very seamless transition, you know coming from the United States and being a little overwhelmed at first. Simultaneously, I live off campus currently, but back at the University of Auckland, I lived in campus housing. So I think I've kind of had a well-rounded look at both sides of the coin. And yeah, very much so. Finding resources that connect people with their community as well as encourage them to learn about others, I would say has been hands down very well done.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:30:03] Wow, did you pay her to say that Jennifer?

**Stephanie Milam** [00:30:05] Thank you.

**Prof Jennifer Milam** [00:30:06] No, I didn't.

**Christopher Carey** [00:30:11] She's paying her later.

**Prof Jennifer Milam** [00:30:14] I will say that she texted me earlier to say, do you want me to answer anything? How do you want me to answer questions? I just wrote back one word. Stephanie, what was it?

**Stephanie Milam** [00:30:23] Honestly.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:30:28] So you come at least being able to speak English, you understand English speaking European type mores. What's it like for a student for whom English is a second, third or fourth language being an international student?

**Stephanie Milam** [00:30:43] Sure, so I was actually very pleasantly surprised, at least to hear from my peers' experiences as well as my own observations, because I came from a very small undergraduate college in the United States. There was maybe 1,800 people on campus. It was very, very tiny. So I was very accustomed to professors really putting in effort to make sure that you understood material, that you're going along on the correct pathways. And I was so surprised to see that here at a bigger university, and especially from all the professors, whether they were from New Zealand originally, from international backgrounds, very much so, I would say, the professors really make an effort to get to know your name, get to your face, get to where you're coming from, and oftentimes even adapt curriculums to make sure that you understand it even better. So at least in my Masters of Management Agribusiness courses, I have a professor who is essentially teaching us on budgets and farming and all this stuff. But what he did was he made sure to sit us down, ask us where we were from, what our names were, and what our goals were for what we wanted to learn. So some of us were coming to fill, you know, let's say roles in dairy, because dairy is a very big industry here. I know for him, he started to develop budgets that we could learn for the cashflow process of dairy farms. Then he found out, for example, I'm interested in horticulture or viticulture. He really made an effort to make sure that he knew he could adapt the programme so that I got to understand the resources that were relevant to that topic. And when it came to language, I would say all of the professors make sure that you have access to slides ahead of time, that you can have access to resources if you need to translate, but simultaneously that you have an actual comprehensive in-person understanding, which I think is the most important part because if you're sitting in class and somebody's speaking and you can't really keep up, it's a bit hard to actually retain that information. But I think professors really make sure that one, they are understood and they try to make sure that whether that's a visual, an example. Or actually the words they're using. Simultaneously, they do follow up with you and make sure that, let's say you've missed class. Let's say that you maybe look a little wide-eyed in class at the moment, because you don't fully understand. They will actually follow up and speak to you personally, which I think is a really amazing benefit to have. And once again,

coming from a small liberal arts, I just never expected that at a big university. But I would say I had that in Auckland, I had the University of Waikato. So once again it seems to be a University of New Zealand thing and not just. Particular to one specific kind of hub. I don't know if that answers the question.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:33:10] But I know that and that's fantastic because what I'm hearing is that you're being given a very personalised experience Professors who are culturally sensitive, but who actually want to ensure your success.

**Stephanie Milam** [00:33:24] Yes.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:33:24] This is postgraduate so smaller classes Very motivated students. Would it be the same for undergraduate students?

**Stephanie Milam** [00:33:33] I would definitely say so, at least in my experience. University of Auckland, we still had bigger courses, but definitely still felt that involvement. I personally got to know my professors in a way that was pretty amazing considering all the resources that they had and all the students they had. But yeah, I would say at least for me, undergrad for sure, it looks like Chris might have something to say as well.

**Christopher Carey** [00:33:57] Yeah, I would just say one of the key metrics in the QS World University rankings is staff to student ratio. And we do it really well here in New Zealand with a pretty low ratio where you know, students do get to connect with their academic staff a lot more than they would in a place like the US at a large public university where there's 800 students in a lecture hall. Here in New Zealand it's different than that. And it's why all eight New Zealand universities rank in the top 2% of universities worldwide.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:34:26] So given that you've got the screen at the moment, what's the international student experience like at Massey and how do you support students to get that sense of belonging and that sense wellbeing and safety?

**Christopher Carey** [00:34:39] Yeah it's it's a little bit different for us because we are much more decentralised with three different campuses so we have to have three different operations for three different groups of students. You know in an ideal world we'd have a lot more resource to bring all international students to one campus for for some amount of time but it's just not realistic. So we do have a whole range of activities that we do as part of our orientation process. We have over 200 different student clubs that students can join, our different recreation centres, also do a lot of different sporting events to bring students together. Yeah, there's lots of different ways that we do it, but it is a bit of a different experience than what Stephanie would have gotten at Waikato.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:35:28] Damon, what happens at AUT? Once again, a very different sort of university, an urban metropolitan university.

**Prof Damon Salesa** [00:35:35] And I think probably if you'd asked me a year or two years ago, the thing that we would have collectively been wanting to talk about was the immigration process and how that could be very challenging both for students, prospective students and universities. And, yeah, we have seen significant improvements. It is one of the risks or the challenges within the New Zealand sector is ensuring that people have the same pace and transparency that they might experience if they applied to another country. But we have seen really big changes in the last year and a half, particularly through, we've just stood up an online system which appears to be touch wood, going well, adept. So I think it's great to not just solely be talking about that because that would be the piece that would have preoccupied us previously. I think the thing that captures a lot of what Stephanie said and what Chris has said is that spirit of manaaki or welcome. That every university, indeed New Zealand, tries to perform that as a welcome to foreigners, to new people. And while we obviously don't get that perfect every time in all ways, that's certainly an aspiration that we hold high at AUT. So, you know, we of course begin with a pōwhiri process. We have a whole range of experiences which are designed like that. You know, AUT is very well known for its student experience. It's one of the things that we know is deep in our reputation and that our students speak about, so we're very protective of that. And that's for all students. But it does mean that because we have a similar but a different challenge to Massey, we have three campuses as well, spread across 30 kilometres of Auckland, ensuring that there is a kind of consistency of experience and student service across those three campuses is challenging, but I think we do a good job of it. So much like what we've heard, that's what we would hope. We'd hope all our student speak as Stephanie does, of their experience. But it is particularly challenging if English is not your first language. It is particularly challenging if it's your first time away from home. If you're facing all the problems that a young person or a younger person might have, but also facing them in a different environment. And so we do have to take that element of manaaki or care very, very seriously. And it does require extra attention to make sure that students know how to reach out and that you're very responsive when an issue is made visible to you. So those are what we try to roll out and. And I think the students report, as Stephanie has around Waikato, that we do a pretty good job. And certainly the surveys show very high rates of student satisfaction.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:38:36] Jennifer, do you want to add anything?

**Prof Jennifer Milam** [00:38:38] Yeah, just that I would I would agree that we have high rates of student satisfaction in New Zealand universities across the board. It's something pastoral care at any university is really important to us and we are conscious as we grow all universities are in New Zealand experiencing growth with our international numbers. And we don't want to lose that sense of personalisation and pastoral care. So that's something we're working on right now as a university is how do we maintain the kind of support that we have prided ourselves on as we grow? So, you know, there are various ways that we're looking to better support international students who are coming in with additional needs because they are so far away from family, because they have language needs. But one of the things that I think I see here at Waikato is that

our student union really works very hard on that as well. So that's something that they take as an important responsibility. So it's not just on us as a university, it's on the whole community of staff and students.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:40:03] So can we pick up on that language issue? Because for many students, they do the IELTS. I assume the New Zealand University's use IELTSs. They do it 6 to 12 months before they arrive. When they do it, they get the required threshold point. Six to 12 month without having spoken or written English, you go back. So what sort of supports are being offered to students particularly in their language and in particular around being successful in academic English. Jen, you've got the screen.

**Prof Jennifer Milam** [00:40:37] Yeah, thank you. So we do have programs in academic English to help support students once they get here. We are looking at it differently now though. So we have four credit papers or courses that students can enrol in or be asked to enrol in to support them to acquire better English because when they get here it's found that the language isn't quite at the level we need. But we found recently that we aren't getting actually enough students into those papers because it's an extra burden on top of the other papers that they're taking. So we're really shifting that to a workshop approach that is more responsive and more proactive in terms of going out and working with our international students to bring them into workshops. To get that kind of support rather than being enrolled in a specific paper.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:41:39] OK, so in many respects, it's up to students to have agency over doing that and then finding a way to fitting it into their schedule.

**Prof Jennifer Milam** [00:41:49] No, so that has been the problem that we have found, is that faculty would basically suggest to a student that they go take a paper, right? And what we would find is that the students, some would, but a lot wouldn't because it's extra burden on top of those papers. So we're now switching that to a workshop approach, a proactive workshop approach where we are actually going out and and working with students, finding students, giving them the information that they need, that that's a service available to them in a more proactive way than we have in the past.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:42:32] Okay. Chris, what's happening at Massey?

**Christopher Carey** [00:42:34] Yeah, they're very similar at Massey. We also have our Pathway College for those students that don't meet the requisite requirements. We now have Massey University College right here on our campus where students can take the requisites courses that they need to skill up for the English that is required. But I think it is clear with the New Zealand international education growth strategy and all of us being challenged by the government to almost double our enrollments by 2034, we are seeing students come in some of which have a much lower level of English than what we've been accustomed to in the past. So it is incumbent upon us as universities that if those students are making it in that we are providing the relevant services to upscale their English while they're studying with us.



**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:43:25] Damon, I know that you're at the top of the apex, but I imagine chairing that committee that you chair, you would have some insights into the challenges of language.

**Prof Damon Salesa** [00:43:36] Absolutely and I think Chris and Jennifer have summed up both the challenge and its sharpening both in terms of the problem is becoming more evident but also the scale of it is going to increase as New Zealand becomes more ambitious and that's exactly the way we'll be approaching it and how we're approaching it at AUT is we've got a pathway college for those where it's a known challenge, we have an internal English language deliver to support those who may have underestimated the level of English they need to be academically successful. But the commitment is very deep. I mean, none of this works if students don't have a great learning experience and particularly a great leaning outcome. And so I think, you know, certainly on our end and what I've seen across the sector is a deep commitment to this. And it is often the case that, you know within highly specialised disciplines, all students, including first language English students, are finding challenges. We're seeing challenges around academic literacy from those for whom English is a first language. So, you know, this is something that we have to think about more deliberately. Certainly at AUT, I've implemented a course which is now available across different iterations, which is called Uni 101, which is about the kind of the essentials for a successful academic career at university. And those essentials define success at university much more than many other things, but they're often not taught explicitly. They're assumed, often they're picked up implicitly in middle-class English-speaking homes. So given that that's not the majority of our homes at AUT, we try to make those things explicit. We try to actually teach them. And English language is one of them, but many other thing are about. Student efficacy, like time management, about understanding how to write to or speak to a staff member, how you go about accessing support services, how you understand and access your grades, you know, those sorts of things. And now, of course, it's about AI literacy. These sorts of things have to be built into a successful student career. And English language is one of them, but it's not the only one. And as I mentioned earlier, many of our students, nearly half at AUT of our domestic students come from households which don't speak English. So the idea that it's just an English, an international challenge is not true, certainly at AUT.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:46:22] We've got a question from Anita. Do New Zealand universities currently have different exit strategies for undergraduate and postgraduate international students for employment and do they align with any government pipelines if any? Throw that back to you again, Damon.

**Prof Damon Salesa** [00:46:39] I think Chris actually answered that question really well earlier around the Green List. So the identification the government has made of high demand, big shortage professions and careers. And each of us is trying to align our offer to fit that. And it's going to be different depending on where you are. It remains an enduring; to make international education sustainable and to make it attractive, you do need to keep this at the front of



your mind. I mean, there are many courses you could offer without a cap, but then you could, there's no market or labour demand that fit them. So certainly in our thinking, we think through what are the programmes that deliver great outcomes for all students, including international students that meet a need in New Zealand. And so there's both a government response and I know there's a university response. And certainly at AUT, where almost all of our students are expected to do a work placement while they're studying. It's an acid test. If there are no work placements, then there won't be any jobs, and if there's no work placements, then we won't offer programmes in that area. So there is a strong alignment both at the undergraduate and the graduate level.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:47:55] Chris, do you want to make a comment further to the one that you made previously and on top of Damon's comment?

**Christopher Carey** [00:48:00] No, no, I mean, we've got a we've got an academic business development team at Massey who's out there in the market looking at all the different degree programmes that students actually want. They're even going so far as to talking to international partners overseas to find out what kind of critical skills they need in their countries as well and what kind degree programmes are of interest to their students. So we're definitely trying to align our offerings to a) what New Zealand needs, but also to what our students actually want to study.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:48:35] That sounds good. Sort of a Dorothy Dixier. Why are students deciding to come to New Zealand and what programmes seem to be the most popular? And I'll let you fight out amongst yourselves who wants to take that question on first.

**Prof Damon Salesa** [00:48:55] OK, there was silence, so I'll take it. And a lot of it is connected to, as Chris has shared, that the majority of New Zealand's international students at university come from two, he used the word geographies, but two countries, essentially two student markets. And so a lot of it is connected to what is seen as desirable and attractive coming out of those, as well as where it meets New Zealand's reputation and quality. So that often means in some markets it's business, it's kind of predictable programmes, business and science and engineering, computer science. It is not as diverse as the universities would want. So our kind of desire is to broaden that base so that we can, so everyone can have that quality experience of international students, as well as international students having one. The first part of that question was why people choose New Zealand and we would all love for New Zealand to be the first on everyone's list, but we know it isn't quite that way. I think Stephanie's probably unusual. She picked New Zealand and then came back for more, yes, twice. Part of the challenge for New Zealand is, yes, we are seen as a very safe, high-quality location, but we're not the first in many people's minds. So we have to do a bit more work collectively to make sure New Zealand's better understood, particularly given the strength of, the previous strength in Australia. And then that we're competing with nations that are much larger than us and that have a much more visible presence in the world than us. So a lot of it is New Zealand has a very strong offer because all those things are true. We have great

universities. The entire system is of great quality. We have places to live. We're very welcoming of different groups. Students have a great experience, there are great employment outcomes, it's a degree that you can take anywhere in the world, but that overall visibility of New Zealand isn't quite where we would like it to be and so there's a bit that we have to collectively do as a nation but also as a group of universities to build our profile because we ride to some extent alongside New Zealand Inc as a whole and in other ways we drive New Zealand Inc forward that New Zealand's universities are world famous, but that's what I see as the biggest challenge, particularly as we move into new markets and new opportunities. There is a kind of risk aversion in New Zealand to some places, which Chris knows I've been very, I've questioned government. There are many more people who would like to come and study in New Zealand, particularly from nations where it's become quite difficult in the immigration sense. So, we could do better in a few sort of emerging markets.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:51:56] Chris, you've got the responsibility of international student recruitment. So what's the sense that you've got both nationally for New Zealand, but also specifically for Massey?

**Christopher Carey** [00:52:11] Um, yeah, as, as Damon alluded to, we're never going to compete directly with the likes of the big four when it comes to how we, we can brand ourselves and build that New Zealand brand awareness globally, the US the UK, Canada, and Australia, they just have infinitely larger budgets than we do. And so we've got to show our unique value proposition in markets where we can operate and where we get our government department, Education New Zealand, who's responsible for the brand internationally to be able to engage for us meaningfully. For Massey, I think, you know, we're coming up on our 100th birthday. You know, we've historically been known as an agriculture veterinary. Kind of what, uh, people would see as a large public land grant university in the U.S. That it has extension that's out in regions. But you know, we've differentiated over time. We're now, I wouldn't say we're comprehensive because we don't offer some of the engineering programmes and medicine for instance, but we have a wide degree of offerings and getting those different programme offerings out into the market has been something that we're focused on. We're not just an ag university. We also have a comprehensive business school. We have great humanities programmes. We've got a great creative art creative arts campus down in Wellington. So we do offer a lot. So that's been that's been our challenge is to get people to know Massey for more than just what it has historically been known for.

**Prof Jennifer Milam** [00:53:51] Yeah, I think Damon and Chris have already covered a lot of it. I think the safety has been a big issue, so we're a safe choice, especially at the undergraduate level. We know that a lot the reason why families send students here from around the world is that you do get a world-class education, but it's also one of the safest countries in the world to send your child to. Now that we're seeing a shift between undergraduate versus postgraduate. That pipeline to a job and immigration is really important for students that we're attracting into the university. So, one of the things that we saw this year is when education was greenlisted, we had a rise in the number of

students who are applying for education degrees. And that's great because we have a shortage of teachers regionally and we can help fill that as a university. At the same time, we had to manage our growth because like Damon said, if you can't have placements, then there are no future jobs. So when that started to tip over into being a challenge for us in terms of placing students, we had manage the levels of growth in one area. But so I think the reasons for choosing New Zealand, first of all, it's that we do offer great education, world-class education at all of our universities. High levels of student satisfaction at all of our universities, and then at the same time for undergraduates, we're a safe university, and the students that I meet that come from around the world also are very connected to the environment, so that's another thing that we offer as a country, and then, at the other end, in the postgraduate student attraction, it is related to jobs and immigration.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:55:48] Thank you. We've got a question from Naseem, which is an interesting picks up on some of the points that all of you were making. How do you strike a balance between capping student numbers and having long-term sustainable numbers as opposed to doubling student numbers over the years? Here's an example. In the construction programmes at Massey, we have over 80 PhD students and well over 200 master's students. Over 90% are international students, but the current industry market is tight. They've come to New Zealand because of ranking, but also because of jobs and residency. And then he says, I won't prod or they won't prod where they go after getting their Kiwi passports. Any any comments or observations about Nassim's observations?

**Prof Damon Salesa** [00:56:40] I was waiting for the home court to speak up, Chris. And this is a classic problem because it's not, it is about sustainability and building long pathways. At a time, universities are institutions of the long term, but many industries are cyclical or there are short-term economic downturns. And if you're not careful and mindful about these things, you just enter into a cycle of endlessly chasing your tail up and down through these kind of industry cycles. And we know that construction is probably at the forefront of those and we, across the New Zealand universities, we do a lot of construction and engineering. So part of it is to think about the sustainability. Part of it too is to also, as we know students come for the jobs and residency, as Nassim said, we also need to acknowledge that universities do tremendous amounts of research. They do most of the research in New Zealand And that has been undervalued in New Zealand, and that research contribution that PhD students in particular, but also other research graduate students do, is absolutely central to New Zealand's long term future. So I think that's a part I would add to this. I think there is a risk that if we get it wrong, we just fuel an exit pipeline. But we also know that only a proportion of international students actually ever intend on staying in New Zealand. So it isn't the case, it's a one for one. It may be that the bigger problem is we need more of those international students to stay than are currently staying, but it will be discipline and industry specific.

**Christopher Carey** [00:58:27] Yeah, and just one quick point, and I know Naseem well. But yes, absolutely. Like we need to do it sustainably. But at the

same time, we've been provided an opportunity by the New Zealand government to grow and all the conditions are in our favour right now because New Zealand has not made bad policy decisions like all the other anglophone University destinations. So we've got to capitalise that. So we got to get some growth right now. But yes. As we grow, we need to do it sustainably, make sure that we have enough student experience, we have an accommodation so that we don't lose the social licence going forward. So yes, sustainability is key.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [00:59:07] Stephanie, I'm going to give you the last word. You've got three very important people in the audience on the panel. What's one piece of advice that you would give to improve students' experience, the international student experience?

**Stephanie Milam** [00:59:23] It is a it is definitely a big question. I think, I think honestly, I would say harnessing the momentum you already have to continue these types of programmes and the involvement and I think you know going back to Waikato student union. And how much effort is given between the university and the student union side to collaborate in order to make sure that you're meeting students where they're at. I think they've really done a good job of holding cultural hours, so for people that have prayer practises or that have time where they want to spend expressing their cultural identity, those are being held for having ongoing check-ins. So I know that the student union has tonnes of resources that are developing, just kind of, you know, engaging. How are students doing both on an international and domestic level? You know, what's going wrong? What's going well? How can we bring more integration into your experience to make sure you feel a part of the community? So I would say, you rolling momentum forward and continuing to collaborate and make sure that you prioritise what is great about all of your universities, which is: developing leaders and making sure relationships are connecting between staff, students and the land itself. I'm not sure if that's a very, you know, well put answer.

**Prof Judyth Sachs** [01:00:33] Fantastic. That's fantastic. And look, we've run out of time. And I'm just going to reflect the comments, particularly of Anita. Thanks. It was a great session. And I wish you all a wonderful day and look forward to us talking again sometime. Thank you very much.

**Prof Jennifer Milam** [01:00:49] Thank you, have a great day. Thanks so much Judyth for organising.

**Prof Damon Salesa** [01:00:55] Ngā mihi.