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# Pathway Student Visa Evaluation

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FINAL REPORT

July 2018

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**MINISTRY OF BUSINESS,  
INNOVATION & EMPLOYMENT**  
HĪKINA WHAKATUTUKI

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## Executive Summary

Immigration New Zealand, in consultation with the international education sector, has developed the Pathway student visa (Pathway visa). This visa is for international students wishing to study more than one course or programme of study, at one or more providers, in New Zealand.

The objectives of the Pathway visa are to:

- provide efficiency gains for Immigration New Zealand and the international education sector
- offer education providers an additional advantage when promoting New Zealand as a study destination
- increase the retention of high-quality international students.

The Pathway visa was piloted from 7 December 2015 to 30 November 2018 with an interim evaluation completed in August 2017. This final evaluation is based on findings from surveys of international students and immigration advisers, interviews with education providers, immigration officers and peak bodies<sup>1</sup>, and analysis of administrative visa data.

### **Number of students being issued Pathway visas is increasing but remains low compared with the number of all eligible students**

The number of students issued a Pathway visa is increasing. From December 2015 to July 2017, 1,253 students had been issued a Pathway visa and this had increased to 2,586 by April 2018. This is not surprising as the visa has become better known. Some education providers believe this trend will continue.

However, 2,586 is a small proportion (16 per cent) of the total number of international students who were eligible to apply for the visa during this period (15,880).

### **Awareness of the Pathway visa among immigration advisers and students is low**

Only one in five immigration advisers who provided advice on student visas applied for a Pathway visa for a client. However, offshore exempt student advisers were significantly more likely to have applied for this visa than licensed immigration advisers.

Lack of demand was the most common reason for immigration advisers not applying for Pathway visas. However, lack of awareness and not knowing enough about the visa requirements were also barriers to using the Pathway visa.

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<sup>1</sup> Peak bodies are organisations representing providers in different education sectors

Only one-quarter of eligible non-Pathway visa students<sup>2</sup> surveyed had heard of the Pathway visa. Students who had used the Pathway visa had most commonly found out about the visa through an immigration adviser. Eligible students, who knew about but had not used the visa, had found out about it from Immigration New Zealand's website.

**Half the students on a Pathway visa are studying at university, but the visa is also attracting students from India studying at institutes of technology and polytechnics**

A larger proportion of students from India who were eligible for the Pathway visa had used the visa than students from China.

Most students from India were studying at institutes of technology and polytechnics (ITPs) as part of their pathway, whereas students from China were most likely to be studying at university.

Pathway visa students were asked in the online survey if they chose to study in New Zealand rather than another country because of the Pathway visa. Students from India or those studying at ITPs were more likely than those from China or those studying at a university to say that the visa had influenced their choice.

Most students study at one education provider along their whole pathway.

**The Pathway Visa is working well for students doing a pathway including a level 7 or higher qualification<sup>3</sup> but concerns exist about high-school students transitioning**

One aim of the Pathway visa is to retain high-quality international students, in particular, students wanting to do a course of study that includes a degree or higher-level qualification. This group includes students studying at high school in New Zealand and staying on to study degree programmes.

The Pathway visa is being used by students doing degree or higher-level qualifications, and most interview participants indicated that the Pathway visa was attractive for students who want to study a degree or higher-level qualification. Three-quarters of Pathway visa students were using the visa to do a pathway of study culminating in a level 7 or higher qualification.

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- 2 Two online surveys were undertaken; the first survey was of Pathway visa students (those who had used the Pathway visa), and the second survey was of eligible non-Pathway visa students (those who were on a student visa who would also have been eligible to be on a Pathway visa).
  - 3 The New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) is divided into 10 levels, and covers a range of qualifications from certificates to doctoral degrees. The levels are based on how complex the learning is, with a level 1 certificate the least complex.

However, the analysis of administrative data on Pathway visas issued showed that no Pathway students had undertaken a course of study at school and then transitioned to studying for a higher qualification in New Zealand. In addition, interview participants had significant concerns about the suitability of the visa for this pathway of study. One of the main concerns was that school students do not necessarily know what they want to study at university before they finish high-school.

A quarter of non-Pathway students<sup>4</sup> surveyed who had heard about the visa said they did not use the visa because they did not know what they wanted to study after their first course.

Interview participants also expressed concerns about the pastoral care of high-school students in the transition period between finishing school and starting at a tertiary provider. Schools were reluctant to take responsibility for students during this period as it could require the provision of a high level of pastoral care.

### **The Pathway visa is a potentially important marketing tool but is only one reason students are attracted to New Zealand**

Another aim of the Pathway visa is to offer education providers an additional advantage for promoting New Zealand as a study destination. This was certainly considered one of the main advantages of the Pathway visa for education providers. However, most marketing has involved promoting the visa to agents and putting information in newsletters, with only a few providers proactively marketing the visa.

The small number of Pathway students and the lack of comparative data means it is not possible to be definitive about whether the Pathway visa has retained students who might otherwise not have studied in New Zealand or not stayed on after their first course. However, findings from the online survey of students show that the Pathway visa is an important factor in their decision to choose New Zealand but it is not the only factor.

Only one-quarter of Pathway visa students surveyed said they had chosen to study in New Zealand rather than in another country because of the ability to obtain a Pathway visa. The reputation of the education provider, cost of study and living, and lifestyle in New Zealand were the top three reasons for students choosing to study in New Zealand. However, 71 per cent of students also said that being able to getting a Pathway visa was 'very important' or 'important'.

Peace of mind and the fact the Pathway visa made it easier for students to study the courses they wanted were the most important reasons for students choosing to apply for the Pathway visa.

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<sup>4</sup> These are students who would have been eligible to apply for a Pathway Visa but who did not

### **Pathway visa should be retained but could be simplified and more flexible**

The Pathway visa was generally viewed positively by students and participants in interviews. Pathway visa students who participated in the online survey were given the opportunity to make comments about the Pathway visa, and half of those who commented made positive comments about the visa and studying in New Zealand. Responses included how the visa had given them peace of mind and improved their study experience in New Zealand. In addition, most interview participants thought it would be a setback if the visa was not retained beyond the pilot.

However, participants in interviews suggested ways the Pathway visa could be improved if it were to be made permanent. This included simplifying the Pathway Visa application process, including having templates and guidelines to help all parties, as well as endorsing certain pathways or programmes. Another suggestion was that pathways to higher degrees should be more flexible and not be course-specific.

# Contents

Executive Summary .....	iii
<b>1. Introduction to the evaluation.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Context.....	1
Content and structure of this report .....	1
Pathway visa aims to contribute to the government’s goal of increasing the value of the export education sector .....	2
Pathway visa is restricted to eligible education providers and specific study pathways.....	2
The Report is based on administrative visa data, online surveys and interviews .....	3
There are limitations to what questions the Evaluation can answer .....	3
Interim evaluation in 2017 assessed the pilot’s implementation and informed potential process improvements.....	3
<b>2. Uptake of the Pathway visa is increasing but awareness of the visa is low .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Number of students issued Pathway visas is increasing but remains low compared with number of eligible students.....	5
Most Pathway students are studying at one of 10 education providers.....	5
Use of the Pathway visa is low among immigration advisers.....	6
Lack of demand and knowledge of the Pathway visa are common reasons for immigration advisers not using the visa .....	7
Knowledge of the Pathway visa is low among students, and immigration advisers are a main source of information .....	7
Interview participants mixed on whether awareness of the Pathway visa had increased.....	9
<b>3. The Pathway Visa attracts Chinese students studying at Universities and Indian students studying at institutes of technology and polytechnics; it is not being used to transition from school to higher degrees .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Students from China are the largest group using the Pathway visa, but the Visa is attracting a relatively high proportion of students from India.....	10
Most Pathway visa students are enrolled for two programmes of study and the majority are doing their whole programme with the same provider.....	11
Half the Pathway visa students include a university in their pathway, although most students from India study at an institute of technology or polytechnic (ITP) .....	12
Most common pathway is from level 3 or 4 to level 7 .....	13
Few eligible school students use the Pathway visa, and no Pathway visa students are transitioning between school and level 7 or higher .....	14
The Pathway visa is creating new opportunities .....	15
One in 10 students is no longer on a Pathway visa, but most students remain in New Zealand .....	16

<b>4.</b>	<b>Pathway visa is generally working well but some risks and difficulties exist .....</b>	<b>17</b>
	Uncertainty about the pathway of study is a major barrier to uptake of the Pathway visa .....	17
	Concerns exist about the suitability of the Pathway visa for high-school students transitioning to degrees.....	18
	Pathway Agreements are generally working well but concerns exist about pathways from schools to other providers.....	19
	Students are generally positive about the Pathway visa but some have difficulties applying for, or on the visa .....	19
	Changing a pathway of study while on the Pathway visa is problematic for students .....	21
	Other difficulties experienced with the Pathway visa .....	22
<b>5.</b>	<b>Pathway visa is an important marketing tool but is only one reason students are attracted to New Zealand.....</b>	<b>23</b>
	Pathway visa is a potentially important marketing tool for education providers .....	23
	Some students are choosing to study in New Zealand because of the Pathway visa .....	24
	Reputation of the education provider, cost of studying and living in New Zealand, and lifestyle are the most important reasons for choosing to study in New Zealand.....	25
	Peace of mind and ease of study were the most important reasons for choosing a Pathway visa .....	25
	The majority of students are being funded by their parents and the majority plan to stay on in New Zealand after completing their studies.....	26
<b>6.</b>	<b>The Pathway visa should be retained but it can be improved .....</b>	<b>28</b>
	Most interview participants thought it would be a setback if the visa was not retained.....	28
	Views were mixed about the eligibility criteria should the visa be retained.....	28
	Participants appreciated the support from Immigration New Zealand but suggested further support .....	29
	Operational and data issues continue .....	30
	Other suggestions for improving the Pathway visa if it is retained .....	30
	<b>Appendix 1: Method used for this evaluation .....</b>	<b>32</b>
	<b>Appendix 2: Additional information about the participants in the online surveys .....</b>	<b>35</b>



## Tables

Table 2.1: Top Pathway visa education providers (April 2018 and July 2017).....	6
Table 2.2: Proportion of immigration advisers who had applied for a Pathway visa .....	6
Table 2.3: Reasons immigration advisers had not used the Pathway visa – survey of immigration advisers.....	7
Table 2.4: How students heard about the Pathway visa – online survey of Pathway and non-Pathway students .....	8
Table 2.5: Other comments about the Pathway visa – online survey of non-Pathway visa students.....	8
Table 3.1: Nationality of students issued a Pathway visa (December 2015 to April 2018) .....	10
Table 3.2: Proportion of eligible students using the Pathway visa, by nationality (as at April 2018).....	11
Table 3.3: Number of courses students with a Pathway visa were enrolled in, by nationality (as at April 2018) .....	12
Table 3.4: Type of education provider Pathway students were studying at (as at April 2018) .....	13
Table 3.5: Pathway visa students’ transitions between New Zealand Qualification Framework level qualifications (as at April 2018).....	14
Table 3.6: Proportion of eligible students using the pathway visa (as at April 2018).....	15
Table 3.7: Visa type for students no longer on a Pathway visa but still in New Zealand (as at April 2018).....	16
Table 4.1: Reasons students chose not to use the Pathway visa – online survey of non-Pathway visa students.....	17
Table 4.2: Difficulties students experienced applying for the Pathway visa – online survey .....	20
Table 4.3: Difficulties students experienced while on the Pathway visa – online survey.....	20
Table 4.4: Other comments about the Pathway visa – online survey of Pathway visa students.....	21
Table 4.5: Reasons students were no longer on a Pathway visa – online survey .....	21
Table 5.1: Whether students chose to study in New Zealand rather than another country because of Pathway visa by nationality – online survey.....	24
Table 5.2: Proportion of students saying that reasons for choosing to study in New Zealand were ‘very important’ and ‘important’ – online surveys .....	25
Table 5.3: How students are funding their studies – online survey.....	26
Table 5.4: Students’ plans – online survey of students.....	27
Table A2.1: Country of origin of Pathway students – online survey (sample and respondents) .....	35
Table A2.2: Country of origin of non-Pathway students – online survey (sample and respondents) .....	35
Table A2.3: Types of education providers Pathway and non-Pathway students had attended – online survey .....	35

Table A2.4: Importance of various factors in choosing to study in New Zealand – online survey of Pathway visa students .....	36
Table A2.5: Importance of various factors in choosing to study in New Zealand – online survey non-Pathway visa students.....	36
Table A2.6: Importance of various factors in choosing to apply for a pathway visa – online survey of Pathway visa students.....	37

## Figures

Figure 5.1: Whether students chose to study in New Zealand rather than another country because of the Pathway visa by provider type – online survey.....	24
Figure 5.2: Importance of various factors in choosing to apply for a Pathway visa – online survey .....	26

# 1. Introduction to the evaluation

## Context

Immigration New Zealand, in consultation with the international education sector, has developed a Pathway student visa (“Pathway visa”). This visa is for international students wishing to study more than one course or programme of study, at one or more providers, in New Zealand. Student visas were previously limited to a single course or programme of study.

The Pathway visa became available from 7 December 2015 and was originally implemented as an 18-month pilot with eligible providers and particular study pathways. In October 2016, Immigration New Zealand’s Operating Systems Integrity Committee agreed to extend the pilot by 12 months to 6 June 2018. The Pilot timeframe was extended from 18 months to 30 months because of the initial slow uptake of the Visa and consequential concern that there would be insufficient data to effectively assess how well the Pilot is working. The pilot was further extended in early 2018 to 30 November 2018.

An interim evaluation was completed in August 2017 to assess the implementation of the pilot and inform potential process improvements.

## Content and structure of this report

This Final Evaluation Report triangulates<sup>5</sup> findings from: surveys of international students and immigration advisers; interviews with education providers, immigration officers and peak bodies<sup>6</sup>; and analysis of administrative data, to provide information on: how well the Visa is working; the extent to which it is attracting students to study in New Zealand; and suggested changes to the Visa if it is made permanent.

The report is structured around the five main findings:

- uptake of the Pathway visa is increasing but awareness is low (section 2)
- the Pathway visa attracts Chinese students studying at Universities and Indian students studying at institutes of technology and polytechnics; it is not being used to transition from school to higher degrees (section 3)
- the Pathway visa is generally working well but risks and difficulties exist (section 4)
- the Pathway visa is an important marketing tool but is only one reason students are attracted to New Zealand (section 5)
- the Pathway visa should be retained but it can be improved (section 6).

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<sup>5</sup> Triangulation involves using multiple information sources to validate research findings.

<sup>6</sup> Peak bodies are organisations representing providers in different education sectors

## **Pathway visa aims to contribute to the government's goal of increasing the value of the export education sector**

The objectives of the Pathway visa are to:

- provide efficiency gains for Immigration New Zealand and the international education sector
- offer education providers an additional advantage when promoting New Zealand as a study destination
- increase the retention of high-quality international students.

Pathway visas also potentially contribute to the International Education Agency's work programme and its aim to increase retention of high-quality international students, by developing coherent pathways and progression between the secondary, English language and tertiary sectors.

## **Pathway visa is restricted to eligible education providers and specific study pathways**

To qualify for entry to the pilot, education providers had to be a school, university or provider that holds a category 1 or 2 rating under the New Zealand Qualifications Authority's external evaluation and review framework and has a minimum 90 per cent global student visa approval rate over a 12-month period.

One aim of the Pathway visa is to attract and retain high-quality international students. All consecutive programmes of study that demonstrate progression are eligible to be included in the pilot with the exception of the following pathways<sup>7</sup>:

- Any English language programme of study to any tertiary sector Level 1–4 Certificate on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF)<sup>8</sup>; and
- All pathways within and between tertiary sector NZQF Levels 1–4 Certificates; and
- Secondary school to any tertiary sector NZQF Levels 1–4 Certificates.

Pathway visa holders are entitled to study at up to three consecutive programmes of study, offered by qualifying education providers, either within their institution or in conjunction with other qualifying education providers.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/opsmanual/#59600.htm>

<sup>8</sup> The New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) is divided into 10 levels, and covers a range of qualifications from certificates to doctoral degrees. The levels are based on how complex the learning is, with a level 1 certificate the least complex.

## **The Report is based on administrative visa data, online surveys and interviews**

This final evaluation used a mixed-method approach, including analysis of administrative data on visas issued, surveys of students and immigration advisers, and interviews with immigration officers, education providers and peak bodies (14 interviews in total).

Where possible, the methods were chosen to allow the triangulation of data to meet evaluation objectives.

Appendix 1 further details the methodology for this evaluation, and Appendix 2 contains more information about the participants in the online surveys.

## **There are limitations to what questions the Evaluation can answer**

There are significant limitations to the questions this evaluation can answer. Immigration New Zealand's application management system does not capture information about whether students have met the requirements for their subsequent course or successfully transitioned from one education provider to another. However, we have been able to capture information on students who had a Pathway visa terminated and the reasons for this (for the 2017 calendar year only). The online survey of students on a Pathway visa also captured information about students no longer on a Pathway visa and the why.

The evaluation is also limited in its ability to provide evidence on how well the visa is achieving its objectives of efficiency gains and retention of high-quality international students because of the relatively short timeframe since the pilot's implementation and the lack of a clear comparison group.

Uptake of the Pathway visa has been slow, and 30 months may not be sufficient time to assess whether the visa has increased the retention of high-quality students. In addition, efficiency gains (for example, saving Immigration New Zealand processing time) may be realised only in subsequent years when numbers on the Pathway visa have increased and students no longer need to apply for another visa.

Without a clear comparison group, it is difficult to determine whether students would have studied in New Zealand or furthered their study beyond a single course as a result of the Pathway visa. However, in this report we include results from a survey of students who were asked whether their decisions to study and stay in New Zealand were influenced by the Pathway visa.

## **Interim evaluation in 2017 assessed the pilot's implementation and informed potential process improvements**

The interim evaluation in 2017 combined results from interviews and analysis of administrative data to provide an initial analysis of who was using the visa and how well it was working. The interim evaluation found that uptake of the Pathway visa was low, particularly among school students, and the main barrier was the visa requirement to commit to a specific pathway of study. Lack of understanding of the Pathway visa was also a barrier for both students and education providers.

The interim evaluation also found that most students were using the Pathway visa to study at one provider and most Pathway Agreements<sup>9</sup> were based on existing relationships. A significant concern about Pathway visas was the transition period between courses and providers and the need for pastoral care during that transition period, particularly of younger students. Support from Immigration New Zealand, including workshops, more communication and templates, were the main suggestions for improving the Pathway visa.

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<sup>9</sup> To ensure a student's pastoral care needs are met, qualifying education providers who intend offering an education pathway in conjunction with one another must enter into a formal agreement called a Pathway Agreement.

## **2. Uptake of the Pathway visa is increasing but awareness of the visa is low**

### **Number of students issued Pathway visas is increasing but remains low compared with number of eligible students**

The number of Pathway visas being issued is increasing. In July 2017, 1,253 students had been issued a Pathway visa and this had increased to 2,586 by April 2018. This increase is perhaps not surprising as the visa becomes better known. Some education providers said they believed this trend would continue.

However, the 2,586 Pathway visas issued between December 2015 and April 2018 is a small proportion of the total number of international students who were eligible to apply for the visa during this period (15,880). This proportion (16 per cent of all eligible students used a Pathway visa) has not increased significantly since the 2017 interim evaluation (15 per cent).

For the purposes of comparing actual Pathway visa holders against total eligible students, those eligible to use the Pathway visa were deemed to be those international students who had had more than one standard student visa issued in the period since December 2015 and were studying an eligible course at an eligible provider.<sup>10</sup> It does not include students doing consecutive years of a bachelor's degree, but it does include those doing consecutive years of a master's degree or doctorate.

### **Most Pathway students are studying at one of 10 education providers**

Most students (89 per cent) are studying at least part of their pathway at one of 10 education providers. Table 2.1 shows that about a half the students were studying at one of three providers in their pathway, a private training establishment (PTE), university, or institute of technology and polytechnic (ITP). Only one PTE (PTE 2) was not included in the 2017 top 10 education providers. PTE 2 has increased its share of Pathway visa students from 2 per cent to 5 per cent.

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10 Pathway visa regulations state that breaks between consecutive programmes of study must not be more than 16 weeks. However, our population of those eligible to use the Pathway visa includes those who may have had a break of more than 16 weeks between courses because we were not able to identify those students in our data. The population of those eligible also includes students who took longer than 20 weeks to complete their English language course. Pathway visa instructions also state that students from countries with a decline rate of 20 per cent or more must complete their English course within 20 weeks and this would primarily apply to students from India. However, the population of eligible students contains less than 1 per cent of students from India who are studying a level 3 or 4 qualification.

**Table 2.1: Top Pathway visa education providers (April 2018 and July 2017)**

Provider	April 2018		July 2017	
	Number of Pathway visa students	%	Number of Pathway visa students	%
PTE 1	511	20	257	21
University 1	423	16	171	14
ITP 1	306	12	175	14
University 2	219	8	112	9
University 3	194	8	86	7
University 4	155	6	96	8
ITP 2	154	6	79	6
PTE 2	124	5	30	2
University 5	113	4	47	4
University 6	92	4	68	5
<b>Total No.</b>	<b>2,586*</b>		<b>1,253</b>	

Note: ITP = institute of technology and polytechnic; PTE = private training establishment.

\* This is the number of all Pathway visas issued from December 2015 to April 2018.

## Use of the Pathway visa is low among immigration advisers

Around one in five advisers who provided advice on student visas had applied for a Pathway visa for a client in the previous three months (see Table 2.2). Offshore advisers were significantly more likely to have applied for this visa than were licensed immigration advisers.

**Table 2.2: Proportion of immigration advisers who had applied for a Pathway visa**

Adviser type	%
Offshore exempt student advisers	35
Licensed immigration advisers	15
Lawyers	8
Onshore advisers	14
Offshore advisers	32
<b>Total %</b>	<b>21</b>

Note: N = 355 (all respondents, excluding those who had not provided advice on students visas in the last three months).



## Lack of demand and knowledge of the Pathway visa are common reasons for immigration advisers not using the visa

Immigration advisers who had not used the Pathway visa were asked why they had not applied for the Pathway visa. Table 2.3 shows that lack of demand or suitable applicants was the most common reason for not having applied for a Pathway visa (44 per cent mentioned this reason unprompted).

Lack of awareness and not knowing enough about the visa requirements were also barriers to using the Pathway visa among immigration advisers. Almost one in five advisers said they had not used the Pathway visa because they did not know enough about it, and this was higher among offshore student advisers where a third had not used it for this reason. One in 10 immigration advisers had not heard of the Pathway visa.

One interview participant said some advisers might be reluctant to promote the Pathway visa because they would lose the commission from subsequent visas.

**Table 2.3: Reasons immigration advisers had not used the Pathway visa – survey of immigration advisers**

Reason	%
<b>No demand/suitable applicants</b>	44
Education provider partners aren't part of the Pathway visa pilot	22
Don't know enough about Pathway visa requirements	19
Haven't heard of a Pathway visa	12
More work/more complicated than applying for a standard student visa	10
<b>Poor previous experience/had visa declined</b>	2
<b>Total No. = 278</b>	

Note: Reasons in bold were mentioned unprompted. Reasons not in bold were offered as possible response options in the survey.

## Knowledge of the Pathway visa is low among students, and immigration advisers are a main source of information

The interim evaluation found that there were mixed perspectives on how well aware students were of the Pathway visa. Some participants said students eligible for the Pathway visa were well aware, but others said few students were aware of the Pathway visa.

Students' lack of awareness of the visa was confirmed by results from the survey of eligible non-Pathway visa students for this evaluation, where only a quarter of students said they had heard of the visa.

Pathway visa students and non-Pathway visa students (who would have been eligible) were asked in the online survey how they had heard about the visa. Table 2.4 shows that over half of students who had a Pathway visa had heard about the visa through an immigration adviser compared with only about one-third of non-Pathway students. On the other hand, almost half the non-Pathway students had heard about the visa through the Immigration New Zealand website.

**Table 2.4: How students heard about the Pathway visa – online survey of Pathway and non-Pathway students**

How students heard about the visa	Pathway students (%)	Non-Pathway students (%)
Education agent or adviser	54	32
Immigration New Zealand website	33	49
Education provider	16	13
Friend	10	24
Other internet sites	6	7
Family	4	4
<b>Total No.</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>98</b>

Note: Non-respondents are excluded from this and subsequent tables.

Non-Pathway students who participated in the online survey were given the opportunity to make any additional comments about the Pathway visa. One-quarter took up that opportunity and their comments were grouped into the categories shown in Table 2.5. Most commonly, students said they had never heard about the Pathway visa and did not know what it was (41 per cent). One-quarter said that it would be good to have better publicity and information about the Pathway visa. A few also said they had wished they had known more about the Pathway visa.

**Table 2.5: Other comments about the Pathway visa – online survey of non-Pathway visa students**

Comment	N	%
Never heard of the Pathway visa/don't know what it is	43	41
Need better publicity/information about the visa	27	26
The Pathway visa is useful/positive	19	18
There are requirements that make the visa difficult to use	6	6
Wished I had known about it	3	3
Other	14	13
<b>Total No.</b>	<b>105</b>	

Note: 105 students responded to the survey but they could provide more than one comment. Therefore percentages sum to more than 100 per cent.

## **Interview participants mixed on whether awareness of the Pathway visa had increased**

Views were mixed on whether awareness of the Pathway visa had increased over the last year. Participants generally thought that awareness of the Pathway visa had increased, particularly among immigration advisors. Agents were more educated about the Pathway visa and requests from agents to promote the Pathway visa had increased. However, a couple of participants indicated that some agents did not understand how the Pathway visa operates, so were referring students who did not meet the criteria.

Greater awareness of the Pathway visa was a significant reason given for why education providers had seen an increase in student numbers using the Pathway visa:

[E]xternal parties are understanding it more and seeing it as an opportunity even if the growth is slow.<sup>11</sup>

However, a couple of participants mentioned awareness was low, particularly among students, and some participants questioned how well agents were informing students about the Pathway visa. Awareness of the Pathway visa was even lower among school students:

Students don't know anything about anything to do with immigration ... it's absolutely been zero interest from [school] students. It's been agents who've actually asked about it.

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<sup>11</sup> All quotes in this report have been taken from interviews and responses to the online surveys.

### 3. The Pathway Visa attracts Chinese students studying at Universities and Indian students studying at institutes of technology and polytechnics; it is not being used to transition from school to higher degrees

Data on students issued a Pathway visa was extracted from the immigration data warehouse of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. This data included demographics, institution of study, course and level of study, and pathways of study. In addition to analysis of this data on Pathway visa students, this chapter also includes analysis of students who have been issued more than one standard student visa since December 2016 and would have been eligible to use the Pathway visa but were not doing so<sup>12</sup>. All tables in this Chapter are based on the analysis of administrative data.

#### Students from China are the largest group using the Pathway visa, but the Visa is attracting a relatively high proportion of students from India

Research shows that students from China were more likely than those from India to leave their study with a bachelor's degree, whereas those from India were more likely to leave their study with a sub-degree certificate or diploma qualification.<sup>13</sup> Given that the aim of the Pathway visa is to attract students who are studying on pathways that lead to a diploma or higher-level qualification, it is not surprising then that a high proportion of students from China are using the Pathway visa. Table 3.1 shows that students from China are the largest group using the Pathway visa (42 per cent).

**Table 3.1: Nationality of students issued a Pathway visa (December 2015 to April 2018)**

Nationality	N	%
China	1,095	42
India	431	17
Thailand	123	5
Vietnam	93	4
Other	844	33
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,586</b>	<b>100</b>

12 The online survey was sent to a sample of this population.

13 MBIE. (2018). *Immigration and Labour Market Outcomes of International Students*. Wellington: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. [www.mbie.govt.nz/publications-research/research/migrants--economic-impacts/immigration-and-labour-market-outcomes-march-2018.pdf](http://www.mbie.govt.nz/publications-research/research/migrants--economic-impacts/immigration-and-labour-market-outcomes-march-2018.pdf)

However, Table 3.2 shows that, when looking at those who were eligible to use the Pathway visa, proportionally fewer students from China were using the Pathway visa than from India (12 per cent compared with 30 per cent). In addition, relatively higher proportions of students from Thailand and Vietnam are using the Pathway visa than the proportion overall.

**Table 3.2: Proportion of eligible students using the Pathway visa, by nationality (as at April 2018)**

Nationality	Pathway students	All eligible students*	% of eligible students using Pathway visa
China	1,095	9,034	12
India	431	1,425	30
Thailand	123	491	25
Vietnam	93	339	27
Other	844	4591	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,586</b>	<b>15,880</b>	<b>16</b>

Note: \* Eligible students include non-Pathway visa students as well as Pathway visa students.

### **Most Pathway visa students are enrolled for two programmes of study and the majority are doing their whole programme with the same provider**

The Pathway visa is issued to international students wishing to study more than one course or programme of study or for consecutive years within the one course.<sup>14</sup> Table 3.3 shows that more than three-quarters of students were studying two courses. However, nearly all students from India were studying two courses (94 per cent) whereas a higher proportion of students from China were studying three courses (16 per cent compared with 1 per cent of Indian students).

Around three-quarters of Pathway students were studying their whole course of study at one education provider.

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14 In most cases, students need to apply for a new student visa each year. Students may be able to get a visa for the full length of their course, up to a maximum of four years, if they are studying at an education provider that has an agreement with Immigration New Zealand to offer length-of-course visas or if they are on a scholarship.

**Table 3.3: Number of courses students with a Pathway visa were enrolled in, by nationality (as at April 2018)**

Nationality	Number of courses being studied			N
	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	
China	6	78	16	1,095
India	5	94	1	431
Other	13	70	17	1,060
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2,586</b>

Note: Those studying one course are likely to be doing so for multiple years.

### **Half the Pathway visa students include a university in their pathway, although most students from India study at an institute of technology or polytechnic (ITP)**

Research shows that a higher proportion of students from India compared with those from China were studying at ITPs (34 per cent compared with 16 per cent). Students from China on the other hand, were more likely than those from India to be studying at university (38 per cent compared to 10 per cent).<sup>15</sup>

Table 3.4 shows that most students from India on a Pathway visa were studying at an ITP (85 per cent) whereas 71 per cent of students from China were studying at a university. In contrast, only 8 per cent of students from China were studying at an ITP and 9 per cent of Pathway students from India were studying at a university.

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15 MBIE. (2018). *Migration Trends and Outlook 2016/2017*. Wellington: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. [www.mbie.govt.nz/info-services/immigration/migration-research-and-evaluation/trends-and-outlook/2016-17](http://www.mbie.govt.nz/info-services/immigration/migration-research-and-evaluation/trends-and-outlook/2016-17)

**Table 3.4: Type of education provider Pathway students were studying at (as at April 2018)**

Provider	China (%)	India (%)	Other (%)	Total (%)
School	13	0	17	12*
PTE	39	7	41	35
ITP	8	85	12	23
University	71	9	55	54
<b>Total No.</b>	<b>1,095</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>1,060</b>	<b>2,586</b>

Notes:

ITP = institute of technology and polytechnic; PTE = private training establishment.

Column percentages sum to more than 100 per cent as students may have attended more than one provider.

\* The proportion of Pathway students studying at a school is lower here than in the interim evaluation. This is because students studying school-level qualifications at a private training establishment were mistakenly coded as 'school' not 'PTE' students in the interim evaluation.

## Most common pathway is from level 3 or 4 to level 7

All consecutive programmes of study that demonstrate progression are eligible to be included in the pilot with the exception of the following pathways:

- Any English language programme of study to any tertiary sector Level 1–4 Certificate on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF); and
- All pathways within and between tertiary sector NZQF Levels 1–4 Certificates; and
- Secondary school to any tertiary sector NZQF Levels 1–4 Certificates.

Table 3.5 shows the courses students were transitioning between in their pathway. About one in 10 students with a Pathway visa was recorded as undertaking only one course on their pathway. It is likely that these students were studying consecutive years of the same qualification. They have been recorded as such in the table. Where students were recorded as having three courses, the table records the lowest qualification and the final highest qualification.

The most common pathway was from a level 3 or 4 qualification to a level 7 or higher qualification, with nearly two-thirds of students issued a Pathway visa undertaking this pathway. This pathway is most likely to include an English or foundation studies course through to a degree qualification. One in 10 students was using the Pathway visa to undertake their whole course of study within a school.

**Table 3.5: Pathway visa students' transitions between New Zealand Qualification Framework level qualifications (as at April 2018)**

First Course	Final course	N	%
School	School	237	9
Level 3 or 4*	School	67	3
Level 3 or 4*	Level 3 or 4*	148	6
Level 3 or 4*	Level 5 or 6	148	6
Level 3 or 4*	Level 7+	1,579	61
Level 5 or 6	Level 7+	111	4
Level 7+	Level 7+	254	10
Other pathways	Other	42	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,586</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: \* 'Level 3 or 4' includes those studying qualifications below NZQA level 3.

Percentage columns may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

### **Few eligible school students use the Pathway visa, and no Pathway visa students are transitioning between school and level 7 or higher**

Table 3.6 shows the number of students who were eligible to use the Pathway visa (including both non-Pathway and Pathway students). It does not include students who were doing consecutive years of a level 7 qualification.<sup>16</sup>

Only 8 per cent of students who were studying for consecutive years for a school-level qualification were using the Pathway visa. In contrast, a third of those studying a level 3 or 4 qualification followed by a level 7 or higher qualification were using the Pathway visa.

No students who had transitioned from school to a level 7 qualification had used the Pathway visa.

<sup>16</sup> The population of eligible students also includes a small proportion of students who were studying their highest qualification first followed by a lower qualification, as this may have been a data entry error.



**Table 3.6: Proportion of eligible students using the pathway visa (as at April 2018)**

Heading	Heading	Pathway students	All students*	% of eligible students using Pathway visa
School	School	237	2,808	8
School	Level 7+	0	433	0
Level 3 or 4	School	71	71	-
Level 3 or 4	Level 3 or 4	148	148	-
Level 3 or 4	Level 5 or 6	148	1,210	12
Level 3 or 4	Level 7+	1,580	4,768	33
Level 5 or 6	Level 7+	111	588	19
Level 7+	Level 7+	254	4,366	6
Other pathways	Other	35	1,492	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,586</b>	<b>15,880</b>	<b>16</b>

\* Eligible students include non-pathway visa students as well as pathway visa students.

## The Pathway visa is creating new opportunities

A few interviewees mentioned that the Pathway visa is providing some students an opportunity to come and study in New Zealand who might not have been able to otherwise. It is also offering education providers opportunities to create pathways of study. This was particularly the case for students from countries who, as a result of the impacts of Rule 18 of the Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2013,<sup>17</sup> might have difficulty getting a student visa to come to New Zealand to study English. The Pathway visa gives them the opportunity to do a short course in English and then transition to their main programme of study:

It seems to work really well in some of the high-risk markets where the students are almost at an English language equivalency but just need a short English language programme to give them the entry requirements and a [New Zealand] certificate of English is just the perfect pathway for them.

[T]he opportunity that it creates for some students to come and study in [New Zealand] [who] wouldn't be allowed the chance to come and study otherwise.

17 Rule 18 specifies that students applying for student visas from countries that have a student visa decline rate of more than 20 per cent must now provide an external English language test result, such as from the International English Language Testing System, as evidence of their English language competency: New Zealand Qualifications Authority. (No date). *NZQF Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2013* (version 4). [www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/legislation/nzqa-rules/nzqf-related-rules/programme-approval-and-accreditation/8/18/](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/legislation/nzqa-rules/nzqf-related-rules/programme-approval-and-accreditation/8/18/)

One education provider also mentioned that they had students with New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade scholarships on Pathway visas.

### **One in 10 students is no longer on a Pathway visa, but most students remain in New Zealand**

One in 10 Pathway visa students who responded to the online survey was no longer on a Pathway visa at the time of the survey but the majority were still in New Zealand. When asked what visa these students were currently on, most said a standard student visa.

Analysis of the administrative data of students issued a Pathway visa since December 2015 similarly showed that one in 10 students was no longer on a Pathway visa but three-quarters were still in New Zealand. Table 3.5 shows that the majority of these students (66 per cent) were in New Zealand on a standard student visa with one-quarter on a post-study work visa.

**Table 3.5: Visa type for students no longer on a Pathway visa but still in New Zealand (as at April 2018)**

<b>Visa type</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Student visa	135	66
Post-study work visa	58	28
Other	11	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>100</b>

## 4. Pathway visa is generally working well but some risks and difficulties exist

This chapter brings together data from interviews and the online survey where questions were asked about the difficulties students and education providers had experienced. It also includes analysis of administrative data on Pathway visas that were terminated in 2017. Many of the issues participants raised in the interim evaluation were reiterated by those interviewed for this evaluation.

### Uncertainty about the pathway of study is a major barrier to uptake of the Pathway visa

The interim evaluation showed that the main perceived barrier to students using the Pathway visa was the need to commit to a specific pathway of study in advance. This was also the most commonly given reason in the survey of eligible non-Pathway students as to why they had chosen not to use the Pathway visa (25 per cent). Other frequently mentioned reasons included that the Pathway visa had not been suggested to them as an option by their education provider or immigration adviser (20 per cent and 18 per cent respectively) (see Table 4.1).

Sixteen per cent had not used the Pathway visa because they had only enough funds for their first course of study. A few providers in the interim evaluation mentioned that providing evidence of funding for the whole pathway was a barrier, especially for students from India.

**Table 4.1: Reasons students chose not to use the Pathway visa – online survey of non-Pathway visa students**

<b>Reason students did not use the Pathway visa</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
I was not sure what I wanted to study after my first course	24	25
My education provider did not suggest it as an option	19	20
My agent did not suggest it as an option	17	18
I only had enough funds for my first course of study	15	16
My education provider was not on the list of approved Pathway education providers	8	8
I did apply for a Pathway visa but was not approved for this visa	6	6
<b>Student visa was sufficient for what I needed</b>	7	7
<b>Not sure how Pathway visa worked</b>	5	5
Other	12	13
<b>Total No.</b>	<b>96</b>	

Note: Reasons in bold were mentioned unprompted. Reasons not in bold were offered as possible response options in the survey.

## Concerns exist about the suitability of the Pathway visa for high-school students transitioning to degrees

Most interview participants indicated that the Pathway visa was attractive for students who wanted to study a degree or higher-level qualification. It is particularly attractive for those students who do not quite meet the entry requirement for a bachelor's or master's degree and need to undertake an English language or foundation studies course.

It really attracts those students who haven't passed their language requirements at current stage, but wish to obtain a student visa for tertiary study.

However, significant doubt exists as to the attractiveness of the Pathway visa for high-school students wanting to study a degree-level qualification in New Zealand. One of the main reasons is that school students do not necessarily know what they want to study after they leave school.

Our students are just focused on high school and they haven't really looked to see – to look ahead to what university they're going to.

Perhaps, as a result, no high-school students have used the Pathway visa to transition to a degree (see Table 3.5).

A couple of participants mentioned that education providers have concerns about students transitioning from high schools to study higher-level qualifications because there is no entry level required for English language if they have achieved a National Certificate of Education Achievement (NCEA) level 3 certificate and university entrance.<sup>18</sup>

However, a few interviewees felt potential existed to promote a “school to degree pathway” more widely as a way of retaining students who might otherwise go overseas to study after school. One participant mentioned that this pathway was attractive to parents because they know what study path their children will take. Another participant mentioned that this pathway was useful only where the international student was being recruited into year 13 at school:

Because if a student is recruited at a lower level they wouldn't be given a conditional offer by us and they wouldn't be given a pathway to come to university because there's just too many unknowns about whether they'd do that.

A couple of interviewees also mentioned that having a university pathway, without needing to be specific about the type of degree, would make the Pathway visa more attractive to school students who had not yet decided on their specific course of degree-level study. Having greater flexibility would avoid students needing to apply for a variation of their visa conditions.

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18 New Zealand Qualifications Authority. (No date). *NZQF Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2013* (version 4). [www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/legislation/nzqa-rules/nzqf-related-rules/programme-approval-and-accreditation/8/18/](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/legislation/nzqa-rules/nzqf-related-rules/programme-approval-and-accreditation/8/18/)

## **Pathway Agreements are generally working well but concerns exist about pathways from schools to other providers**

Education providers generally said that their current Pathway Agreements<sup>19</sup> were working well but only a couple of providers had entered into new Pathway Agreements in the previous year. Others said that developing new Pathway Agreements was not a priority or that there were no providers to pathway with, because they were not approved to take Pathway visa students or they were not seen as being of sufficient quality.

Several concerns were raised around establishing Pathway Agreements with other education providers, most commonly, who takes responsibility for students in the holiday period between studying at different providers. Again, this had been a major concern expressed by providers in the interim evaluation. This was a particular concern when establishing Pathway Agreements for Pathway visa students moving from schools to other providers, as – given the young age of the students concerned – it could require quite a high level of pastoral care:

The biggest hiccup was what to do from the end of year 13 until they started the year in March and it was very much seen by the university that we would continue being responsible for students and we just said no, we couldn't do it.

We've only got an agreement with [a language centre]. We've made a decision not to go to schools ... we identified the pastoral care ... as a potential issue with schools.

A couple of participants also said that universities were reluctant to enter into a large number of Pathway Agreements with individual high schools.

## **Students are generally positive about the Pathway visa but some have difficulties applying for, or on the visa**

One in 10 students who had been issued a Pathway visa indicated in the online survey that they had difficulties applying for the visa (9 per cent) and a similar proportion mentioned that they had difficulties while on the Pathway visa (9 per cent). These students were asked what difficulties they had experienced applying for the Pathway visa or while on the Pathway visa. Participants in interviews were asked similar questions.

Table 4.2 shows the difficulties when applying for a Pathway visa were primarily around delays in the processing of visas or the lack of clear information about the Pathway visa or where to obtain information.

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19 To ensure a student's pastoral care needs are met, qualifying education providers who intend offering an education pathway in conjunction with one another must enter into a formal agreement called a Pathway Agreement.

**Table 4.2: Difficulties students experienced applying for the Pathway visa – online survey**

<b>Difficulty when applying for pathway visa</b>	<b>N</b>
Delays in processing visa	8
Lack of clear information or poor communication	7
Other difficulties with obtaining Pathway visa	7
Other	3
<b>Total No.</b>	<b>25</b>

Note: Five students who had difficulties did not respond to this question.

While the majority of interviewees said they were not aware of any difficulties students had experienced applying for the Pathway visa, a few mentioned that some students were very confused about what a Pathway visa entailed and some mistakenly ticked or did not tick the Pathway visa box on the form. Immigration officers also mentioned that some students ticked the Pathway visa box but provided only one offer of place or did not tick the Pathway visa box but provided multiple offers of place. These findings support the need for a clearer distinction between a Pathway visa and other student visas in application forms.

About half of the students who said they had difficulties while on their Pathway visa raised issues unrelated to the visa, mainly concerns about work and accommodation (see Table 4.3). The main difficulty students experienced while on the Pathway visa were difficulties around needing to obtain a variation of their visa conditions when they changed courses, education providers or locations.

**Table 4.3: Difficulties students experienced while on the Pathway visa – online survey**

<b>Difficulty while on the Pathway visa</b>	<b>N</b>
Variation of conditions difficult process/changing courses	6
Visa process	3
Lack of clear information about conditions of visa	2
Other	14
<b>Total No.</b>	<b>25</b>

Note: Four students who reported difficulties did not respond to this question.

About a third of students took up the opportunity to make general comments about the Pathway visa. Table 4.4 shows that half made positive comments about the visa and studying in New Zealand. These included comments about how the visa had given them peace of mind and improved their study experience in New Zealand:

For me [the] Pathway visa is really helpful. I feel thankful I can hold this visa which can make me feel very peaceful.

Fifteen per cent said that applying for the Pathway visa was difficult or that there was confusion around the requirements. One in 10 suggested that some of the requirements of the Pathway visa should be changed and this included being more flexible about the course of study and issues around changing pathways.

It will [be] more convenience if it would not have the limitation with major. [With] Pathway visa [I] could not change the school and major.

Around one in 10 made general comments related to work conditions.

**Table 4.4: Other comments about the Pathway visa – online survey of Pathway visa students**

Other comments	N	%
Positive comments	62	53
Applying for visa difficult or confusing re requirements	18	15
Comments re work	14	12
Change requirements of Pathway visa	11	9
Need for greater publicity around Pathway visa	6	5
Other	12	10
<b>Total No.</b>	<b>117</b>	

Note: 117 students responded to the survey but they could provide more than one comment. Therefore percentages sum to more than 100 per cent.

## Changing a pathway of study while on the Pathway visa is problematic for students

Table 4.5 shows that the main reasons students were no longer on a Pathway visa were because their visa was cancelled because the student had changed their provider or course or their visa had expired.

**Table 4.5: Reasons students were no longer on a Pathway visa – online survey**

Reason no longer on Pathway visa	N
My Pathway visa was cancelled because I changed my course or education provider	17
My Pathway visa has expired	14
My Pathway visa was cancelled because my education provider cancelled my enrolment	2
My Pathway visa was cancelled because I did not want to study anymore	1
Other	6
<b>Total No.</b>	<b>40</b>

Note: Six students who were no longer on a Pathway visa did not respond to this question.

A few education providers mentioned difficulties for students while on the Pathway visa, which all related to situations where the student changed their course or did not meet the requirements for subsequent courses. Dealing with changes to pathways of study was also raised as a pastoral care concern for students:

When a student fails ... their first programme in the pathway, it's always a difficult situation as well. We need a lot of care at this stage to talk to students and make them understand what is the next step if they want to remain in their studies.

Analysis was undertaken of termination notices received for Pathway visas by the Palmerston North Immigration Branch. In 2017, 1,406 Pathway visas were issued but only 35, a very small proportion (2 per cent), were terminated. Most of these visas were terminated because the student withdrew (mostly to return home), attend another provider or pursue alternative visa options. Only four were terminated by the education provider because of non-attendance or poor academic performance.

## **Other difficulties experienced with the Pathway visa**

Education providers, immigration officers and peak bodies were asked if they had experienced difficulties with the Pathway visa. Most had experienced some difficulties or had concerns, including:

- that the Pathway visa had resulted in more work for them, particularly in terms of monitoring and tracking Pathway visa students
- lack of consistency in advice from Immigration New Zealand
- students changing their pathway to study at another education provider<sup>20</sup>
- concerns about what to do if students on a Pathway visa did not meet performance or behavioural standards
- the inability for students to follow a pathway between English language courses or undertake an English language course of longer than 20 weeks<sup>21</sup>
- that education providers would, in some cases, like a pathway to providers that are not approved providers.

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20 This is likely to be a concern for those on general student visas as well.

21 This applies only to students from a country with a visa decline rate of more than 20 per cent (as set out in Rule 18 of the Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2013) and studying towards a qualification at levels 5–8.



## **5. Pathway visa is an important marketing tool but is only one reason students are attracted to New Zealand**

The objectives of the Pathway visa are to:

- provide efficiency gains for Immigration New Zealand and the international education sector
- offer education providers an additional advantage for promoting New Zealand as a study destination
- increase the retention of high-quality international students.

Because of the timeframe for the pilot and the lack of a clear comparison group, the evaluation is limited in its ability to provide evidence on how well the visa is achieving its objectives of efficiency gains and retention of high-quality students. However, the online survey of students gathered information on students' choice to come to New Zealand and how influential the Pathway visa was in this decision.

### **Pathway visa is a potentially important marketing tool for education providers**

One advantage of the Pathway visa reported by participants in the interim evaluation was the marketing opportunities the visa provides for education providers. Participants in the final evaluation interviews also reported that the Pathway visa has marketing potential and provides a competitive advantage. A couple of participants said they could now offer courses to markets they had not been able to in the past.

Most education providers were marketing the Pathway visa to some extent but in several cases this was simply mentioning it in newsletters. One education provider was concerned about the reputational risk to their organisation if the Pathway visa was not extended beyond the end of the pilot.

Other providers were marketing the Pathway visa through their offshore agents. This included providing information to agents as well as ensuring the Pathway visa was included in any education or training sessions for immigration agents.

The Pathway visa was seen as a useful marketing tool among providers, particularly for certain markets and pathways of study, and as an added advantage when promoting their educational institution:

People are using it as a promotional tool ... their agencies are looking at it giving them a little bit more security ... so while it's still a limited uptake ... it is a positive promotional tool.

One education provider said it is important for Immigration New Zealand to promote the Pathway visa, particularly offshore, as this gives legitimacy to the visa:

When I had been to China marketing by myself I get a good responses ... but when I have a person from ... [the New Zealand] government it raises the profile of the meeting.

## Some students are choosing to study in New Zealand because of the Pathway visa

Students were asked in the online survey whether they had chosen to study in New Zealand rather than in another country because of their ability to obtain a Pathway visa. Table 5.1 shows that while two-thirds said the Pathway visa had not impacted on their choice to study in New Zealand, one-quarter said they had chosen to study in New Zealand rather than in another country because they were able to get a Pathway visa.

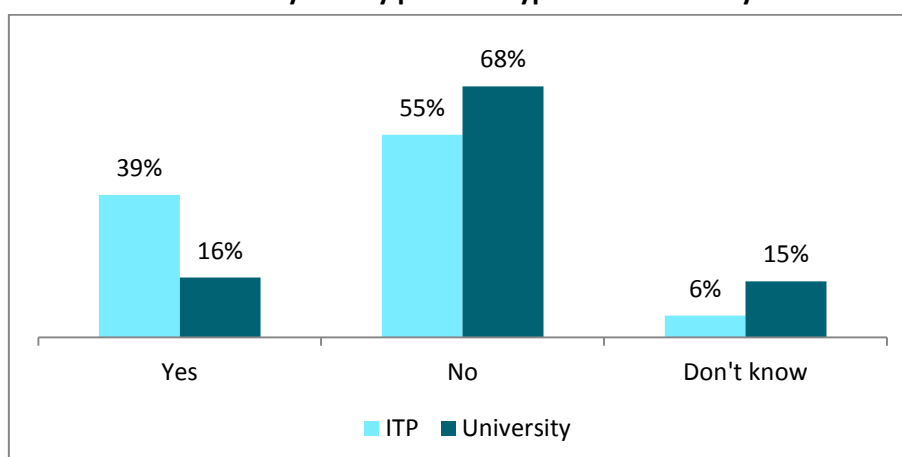
While numbers are small and should be considered only indicative, students from India were more likely than those from China to say they had chosen to study in New Zealand because of the ability to get a Pathway visa.

**Table 5.1: Whether students chose to study in New Zealand rather than another country because of Pathway visa by nationality – online survey**

Whether students chose to study in New Zealand rather than another country	China (%)	India (%)	Other (%)	Total (%)
Yes	14	40	22	23
No	67	54	68	65
Don't know	18	6	10	12
<b>Total No.</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>310</b>

Figure 5.1 also shows that students studying at ITPs were more likely to say they had chosen to study in New Zealand rather than in another country because of the Pathway visa than those who were studying at a university (39 per cent compared with 16 per cent).

**Figure 5.1: Whether students chose to study in New Zealand rather than another country because of the Pathway visa by provider type – online survey**



Note: ITP = institute of technology and polytechnic. School and private training establishment students are not included in the graph due to low numbers.

## Reputation of the education provider, cost of studying and living in New Zealand, and lifestyle are the most important reasons for choosing to study in New Zealand

Table 5.2 shows that over 80 per cent of students said that the reputation of the education provider and cost of studying and living in New Zealand were ‘important’ or ‘very important’ reasons in their decision to study in New Zealand. The lifestyle in New Zealand was also very important to students in choosing to study in New Zealand.

Seventy-one per cent of students with a Pathway visa also said that being able to get a Pathway visa was also important in their decision making. However, they were more likely to rate this factor as ‘important’ rather than ‘very important’ (see Appendix 2, Table A2.4). Less than half the non-Pathway visa students said the ease of studying more than one qualification was a ‘very important’ or ‘important’ reason in their choice to study in New Zealand.

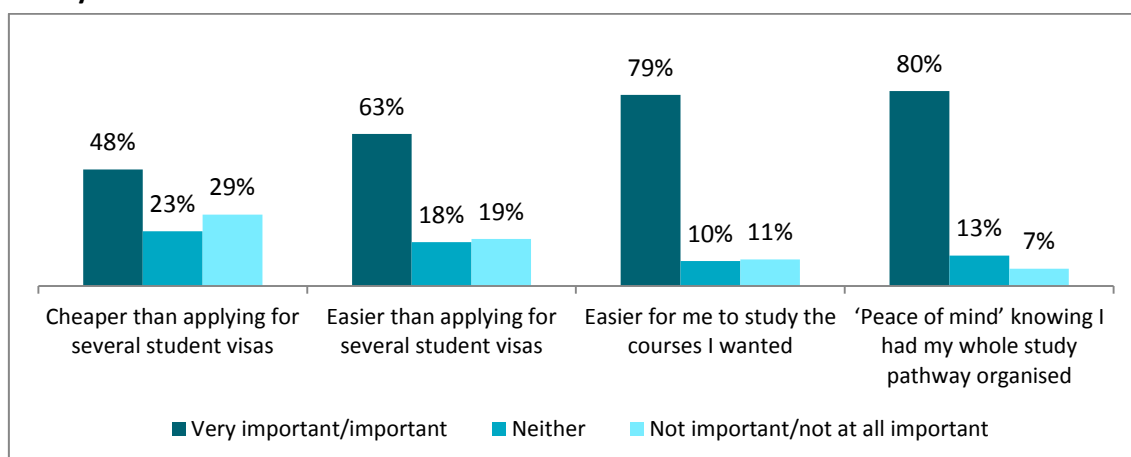
**Table 5.2: Proportion of students saying that reasons for choosing to study in New Zealand were ‘very important’ and ‘important’ – online surveys**

Reason for choosing to study in New Zealand	Pathway visa (%)	Non-Pathway visa (%)
The reputation of the education provider	84	83
Cost of study and living	83	86
Lifestyle in New Zealand	82	78
Being able to get a post-study work visa	75	71
Being able to get a Pathway visa	71	n/a
Recommendation from friend, family or agent	63	66
Ability to work 20 hours a week	64	52
It was easy to study for more than one qualification	n/a	45
<b>Total No.</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>380</b>

## Peace of mind and ease of study were the most important reasons for choosing a Pathway visa

Students who were on a Pathway visa or had been on one were asked how important various aspects were in choosing to apply for that visa. Figure 5.2 shows that four out of five students rated as ‘important’ or ‘very important’ peace of mind knowing they had their whole study pathway organised and that it was easier for them to study the courses they wanted. Only half said that cost (cheaper than applying for several student visas) was ‘very important’ or ‘important’ in their decision to apply for a Pathway visa, with 29 per cent saying it was either ‘not important’ or ‘not at all important’.

**Figure 5.2: Importance of various factors in choosing to apply for a Pathway visa – online survey**



## The majority of students are being funded by their parents and the majority plan to stay on in New Zealand after completing their studies

Both Pathway and non-Pathway visa students were asked in the online survey how they were funding their studies and what their plans were.

Table 5.3 shows that most non-Pathway visa students were being funded by their parents (92 per cent). While this was also the case with Pathway visa students, a considerably lower proportion (69 per cent) said their parents were funding their studies. Pathway students were more likely to say they had used their own money (25 per cent) or had 'other' funding (10 per cent). In most cases 'other' funding was a government-funded scholarship (for instance, all students from Papua New Guinea were on a scholarship).

**Table 5.3: How students are funding their studies – online survey**

Funding source	Pathway visa (%)	Non-Pathway visa (%)
Parents	69	92
I used my own money	25	18
Other family	5	5
Loan	8	1
Friends	0	1
Other	10	1
<b>Total No.</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>380</b>

Note: Percentages add up to more than 100 as students could indicate more than one funding source.

Three-quarters of non-Pathway visa students said they planned to stay on in New Zealand for work or study when their current visa expired (see Table 5.4). Nearly half (46 per cent) had plans for further study compared with about one-quarter of Pathway visa students (28 per cent). This is perhaps not surprising as the Pathway visa allows students to study multiple courses on the same visa.

A third of Pathway visa students said they planned to stay on in New Zealand to continue or find a job. Seventeen per cent planned to return to their home country or another country for a job.

**Table 5.4: Students' plans – online survey of students**

<b>Plan</b>	<b>Pathway visa (%)</b>	<b>Non-Pathway visa (%)</b>
Find or continue a job in New Zealand	32	29
Further studies in New Zealand	28	46
Further studies in home or other country	7	7
Find or continue job in home or other country	17	8
Apply for New Zealand residence	2	2
No plans for the future yet	12	7
Other	2	2
<b>Total No.</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>380</b>

## **6. The Pathway visa should be retained but it can be improved**

The Pathway visa became available from 7 December 2015 and will be available until 30 November 2018, by which time decisions will have been made on whether it should be made permanent, and, if so, what operational or policy changes should be made to the visa.

Participants in interviews were asked for their opinion on what changes should be made if the visa was extended beyond the end of the pilot and to the eligibility criteria for education providers. Participants also commented generally on ways the visa could be improved.

### **Most interview participants thought it would be a setback if the visa was not retained**

Only a couple of interview participants, both in the ITP sector, indicated that the impact of cancelling the Pathway visa would result in a fall-off in enrolments. However, most felt it would be a shame not to retain the Pathway visa even if the numbers at this stage are not large. Some felt it would create uncertainty in the international education sector, and others said it would be a setback. It would also put at risk the education sector's support of future Immigration New Zealand initiatives:

Well I think it would be a very sad day if [the Pathway visa] was not retained. I actually think everything takes longer to get going than people thought it would.

If it's not retained? Think it's just going to be a setback; we need every tool we can at the moment.

The Pathway visa was also seen as providing New Zealand with a competitive edge in attracting international students:

There's a real risk there because other countries do have it as an option and I think if we were to knock it on its head, what signal does that send out?

A few said the pilot should not be judged on the numbers who had used the Pathway visa to date. They suggested new initiatives always take a significant amount of time to 'bed in' and that improving the experience of students who come to New Zealand is of value in itself:

Irrespective of this adding hundreds of students who wouldn't have otherwise come, I think it's important to acknowledge that if this improves the experience of those students who would have come anyway then that, in itself, is a valuable outcome.

### **Views were mixed about the eligibility criteria should the visa be retained**

To qualify for entry to the pilot, education providers had to be a school, be a university or hold a category 1 or 2 rating under the New Zealand Qualifications Authority's external evaluation and review framework and have a minimum 90 per cent global student visa approval rate over a 12-month period.

A couple of peak bodies and an education provider that was not eligible for the pilot (all of which were interviewed for the interim evaluation) commented on what they perceived as the unfairness of the criteria (namely, the requirement to have a minimum of 90 per cent global student visa approval rate over a 12-month period). These interviewees felt the category 1 or 2 rating under New Zealand Qualifications Authority's External Evaluation and Review framework should be sufficient guarantee of quality.

This issue was raised again by a couple of providers in the 2018 round of interviews and the requirement was seen to particularly disadvantage education providers whose markets include significant numbers of international students from the Indian subcontinent:

So I think that 90 is ... it's not prohibitive but it's certainly an impediment to some providers – good providers – being on the pathway.

A few interview participants felt the current settings for eligibility were about right, and others felt it was important to ensure systems were in place to monitor whether education providers were meeting their obligations. One participant said a university or an ITP should be the end point of the pathway as a way to ensure quality.

## **Participants appreciated the support from Immigration New Zealand but suggested further support**

A couple of education providers said it would be really helpful to have feedback from Immigration New Zealand on how the Pathway visa was working for their institution. These providers mentioned that it would be really useful to get a list of students who had been issued a Pathway visa so they could check this against their records. It would also be helpful for education providers to have information about why students who received a letter of offer from the education provider were declined a Pathway visa.

Immigration officers mentioned that clearer guidelines on the Pathway visa would be helpful for all parties, including having a definition of a Pathway visa and what process to follow when a breach of the visa has occurred. They suggested a Pathway visa application template would be useful for students and for immigration officers so it is 100 per cent clear that someone is applying for a Pathway visa.

A couple of interviewees said the main support they need from Immigration New Zealand is consistency of advice about the Pathway visa. One education provider mentioned a situation where students needing to vary their conditions to their Pathway visa all received different advice from Immigration New Zealand.

A couple of education providers also mentioned that it would be useful for Immigration New Zealand to understand the different needs of different education providers in the different sectors – there should not be a 'one-size fits all' approach – and to understand the particular markets and pathways that certain providers are working with. One provider made this comment specifically with reference to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade scholarship students.

[O]nce you start talking about the Pathway visa and how it works, sometimes the complexity around how you apply for a Pathway visa or what needs to be shown can put people off applying.

## Operational and data issues continue

As mentioned in chapter 2, all consecutive programmes of study that demonstrate progression are eligible to be included in the pilot with the exception of the following pathways:

- Any English language programme of study to any tertiary sector Level 1–4 Certificate on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF); and
- All pathways within and between tertiary sector NZQF Levels 1–4 Certificates; and
- Secondary school to any tertiary sector NZQF Levels 1–4 Certificates.

The interim evaluation found some students were issued a Pathway visa to study a course that was not eligible for the Pathway visa or to study at a provider that was not an approved Pathway visa provider. Data analysis for the final evaluation showed that these errors had decreased but were still occurring and, in particular, errors where students were issued a Pathway visa to study two level 3 or 4 qualifications. Table 3.5 shows that 6 per cent of Pathway visa students issued a visa since December 2015 were issued a visa for this pathway. In most cases it was an English language course through to a foundation studies course. However, in some cases it was a pathway between two English language courses or a pathway from an English language course to a level 4 tertiary programme of study. In addition, 3 per cent of Pathway visa students were issued a visa for study with an education provider that was not part of the pilot.

A couple of interviewees said it would be helpful to have all courses and study conditions noted on the visa label, although this was becoming less of an issue with the move to e-visas instead of hard-copy visas.

## Other suggestions for improving the Pathway visa if it is retained

While most participants in interviews were comfortable with the Pathway visa being retained beyond the end of the pilot most had suggestions about how the visa could be improved.

A couple of education providers suggested it would be useful to have template agreements between providers as well as guidelines to help all parties with the application process. One education provider said it would be helpful to know what Immigration New Zealand requires in terms of financial evidence so they can advise and help students applying for a Pathway visa.

A few participants said that any way to simplify the Pathway visa and application process would make the visa a more attractive proposition. One education provider said the visa could be simplified by ‘sanctioning’ certain programmes or levels. Another commented that there is quite a lot of compliance and verification work for education providers with students on Pathway visas so anything that lessened the compliance load would be helpful.

A couple of participants working in the university sector suggested the eligible pathways should not be course specific but should simply mention a degree or level 7 qualification. This would then remove the need for Variation of Conditions when a person wanted to change aspects of their pathway:



As a group we have long said that to make this ... not just easier to administer but a lot more attractive internationally, if [the visa] just referred to a bachelor level programme as the end point.

A couple of participants raised concerns about students “waka jumping” (that is, changing education providers) and suggested that this needed to be tightened up if the Pathway visa was to be retained. Education providers spend a lot of effort attracting students; if students want to change education providers on their pathway, they should be required to apply for another visa.

Other suggestions for changes to the Pathway visa included:

- allowing English language courses to be longer than 20 weeks<sup>22</sup>
- ensuring students on a Pathway visa are monitored effectively and that information flows smoothly between education providers and Immigration New Zealand.

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22 Where a first-time student from a country with a decline rate of more than 20 per cent has submitted an English language test result and been granted a Pathway student visa to undertake an English language programme of study culminating in a qualification at levels 5–8 on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework, the English language programme of study must be completed within a 20-week period.

# Appendix 1: Method used for this evaluation

## Mixed-methods approach

This evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, including analysis of administrative data, online surveys, and interviews with immigration officers, education providers and peak bodies (representing providers in different education sectors). Where possible, the methods were chosen to allow triangulation of data to meet evaluation objectives.

## Evaluation objectives

The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the level of interest in the new visa, how well it is working and the extent to which the objectives have been met. The key evaluation questions for the interim report and final report were:

1. What has been the student, and eligible provider, uptake of the visa and what are the barriers to uptake?
2. What are the characteristics and pathways of students using the visa and those not using the visa but eligible to do so?
3. How well is the policy working from a process perspective, including the establishment of pastoral care arrangements, and what could be improved?
4. To what extent are the objectives of the policy being met?
5. What are the immediate/intermediate outcomes of the visa, including any unintended consequences?

## Analysis of immigration administrative data

Data on students issued a Pathway visa was extracted from the immigration data warehouse of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. This data included demographics, institutions of study, courses and level of study. Data for this section of the evaluation was generated using SAS (statistical software) to query the variables of interest and analysed using MS Excel.

In addition, analysis was undertaken of international students who had undertaken an eligible pathway of study at an eligible education provider but who had not used the Pathway visa.

## Surveys

### International students

Two online surveys were conducted. The first of these was a survey of students who had been issued a Pathway visa since December 2015, including those who were no longer on the Pathway visa. Only students aged 16 or over were included in the survey. The survey was sent to 1,392 students. Only those students who had a personal email address (rather than an agent email address) were included in the group sent the survey.

The aim of this survey was to understand the importance of the Pathway visa in students' decisions to study in New Zealand and the difficulties they might have experienced with the visa.

A sample of 430 was achieved with a response rate of 31 per cent. However, 21 students did not complete the survey, and 70 students (16 per cent) said they had never been on the Pathway visa or did not know if they were on it.

The second survey was sent to 1,464 students who would have been eligible for the Pathway visa but instead were on a standard student visa. These students had been issued more than one student visa and were studying courses eligible for a Pathway visa at approved Pathway visa providers. Only those students currently on a student visa were selected in the sample.

The aim of this survey was to understand awareness of the Pathway visa and reasons for not using it. A sample of 398 was achieved with a response rate of 27 per cent.

Two pilot surveys were conducted of 50 students each to test the questions and method. The surveys did not change as a result of the pilot and responses have been included in the analysis for this report. The surveys were analysed using MS Excel.

### **Immigration advisers**

Questions were added to an existing online survey of immigration advisers, including lawyers, offshore student advisers and licensed advisers. All had clients who had received a visa decision in the three months before the survey. A sample of 454 was achieved with a response rate of 31 per cent.

The aim of the questions in this survey was to understand what proportion of immigration advisers had used the Pathway visa and agent awareness of the visa.

### **Interviews**

Interviews were undertaken with two immigration officers, seven education providers and five peak bodies.

The aim of these interviews was to understand how well the Pathway visa was working, barriers to uptake of the visa, and how the visa could be improved.

Two researchers undertook the interviews, with one taking extensive notes during the interview. Audio-recordings were transcribed by an external agency. A software package for the analysis of qualitative data (NVIVO) was used to analyse interview data.

### **Ethics**

This evaluation was conducted in accordance with the Code of Ethics of the Association of Social Science Research.

The evaluation was designed, conducted and reported in a manner that respects the rights, privacy and dignity of those affected by and contributing to the evaluation. Researchers ensured participants were fully informed about the research and attempted to anticipate and avoid all possible harm to participants.

### **Informed consent**

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participants were made aware of what information would be sought and the purpose of the research. It was made clear that all participation was voluntary and that participants had the right to withdraw their involvement at any time. The informed consent process was conducted in an appropriate style and language.

### **Confidentiality**

The physical data for this evaluation is in a secure (locked) cabinet and electronic data is in restricted folders in the electronic document and records management system of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. All data is accessible only by the immediate project team and will be destroyed after five years.

Participants were told that no identifying information would be presented in the report. However, education providers were informed that in some cases, their roles are so singular it could make anonymity difficult. We advised participants that if this were the case, we would let them know that they could be identified and give them the opportunity to review their contributions before inclusion in the report.

## Appendix 2: Additional information about the participants in the online surveys

**Table A2.1: Country of origin of Pathway students – online survey (sample and respondents)**

Country of origin	Sample		Respondents	
	N	%	N	%
China	548	39	103	30
India	280	20	78	23
Other	564	41	157	46
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,392</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>338*</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: \* This number includes respondents who indicated that they were currently on a Pathway Visa or had previously been on one and who completed the survey.

**Table A2.2: Country of origin of non-Pathway students – online survey (sample and respondents)**

Country of origin	Sample		Respondents	
	N	%	N	%
China	1,049	72	288	72
India	7	1	3	1
Other	408	28	107	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,464</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>398</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table A2.3: Types of education providers Pathway and non-Pathway students had attended – online survey**

Provider	Pathway visa (%)	Non-Pathway visa (%)
School	14	23
Institute of technology and polytechnic	30	16
Private training establishment	5	6
University	56	69
<b>Total No.</b>	<b>338</b>	<b>398</b>

**Table A2.4: Importance of various factors in choosing to study in New Zealand – online survey of Pathway visa students**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Very important (%)</b>	<b>Important (%)</b>	<b>Neither (%)</b>	<b>Not very important (%)</b>	<b>Not at all important (%)</b>
Recommendation from friend, family or agent	16	47	24	9	4
Reputation of the education provider	38	46	12	3	1
Ability to work 20 hours a week	28	36	22	10	4
Lifestyle in New Zealand	38	44	12	4	2
Cost of study and living	37	46	14	2	1
Being able to get a Pathway visa	26	45	19	6	3
Being able to get a post-study work visa	40	35	17	5	3

**Table A2.5: Importance of various factors in choosing to study in New Zealand – online survey non-Pathway visa students**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Very important (%)</b>	<b>Important (%)</b>	<b>Neither (%)</b>	<b>Not very important (%)</b>	<b>Not at all important (%)</b>
Recommendation from friend, family or agent	19	47	19	12	2
The reputation of the education provider	38	46	12	3	2
Ability to work 20 hours a week	19	33	23	17	8
Lifestyle in New Zealand	36	42	18	2	1
Cost of study and living	48	38	10	2	2
It was easy to study for more than one qualification	14	31	39	12	5
Being able to get a post-study work visa	33	37	18	7	4

**Table A2.6: Importance of various factors in choosing to apply for a pathway visa – online survey of Pathway visa students**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Very important (%)</b>	<b>Important (%)</b>	<b>Neither (%)</b>	<b>Not very important (%)</b>	<b>Not at all important (%)</b>
Cheaper than applying for several student visas	18	30	23	19	10
Easier than applying for several student visas	24	38	18	13	6
Easier for me to study the courses I wanted	36	43	10	7	4
'Peace of mind' knowing I had my whole study pathway organised	41	39	13	5	2

