

8 May 2020

To: Honourable Chris Hipkins (Minister of Education)
From: Daryl Streat (President, [TESOLANZ](https://www.tesolanz.org.nz))
Regarding: Impact of COVID-19 on the English Language Sector

Dear Minister Hipkins,

I am writing to express TESOLANZ's deep concern for the risk to the English Language sector in Aotearoa due to COVID-19. TESOLANZ is the New Zealand Association of English Language Teachers. We directly represent over 600 trained teachers, tutors, support staff, academics, and assessment specialists. Our members work in ECE, primary, secondary, tertiary education, and refugee/migrant education. The purpose of this letter is to explain the scope of our sector, as well as clarify how it is currently being impacted.

As stated, our members work across a variety of roles across all sectors of education. The wide range of roles and sectors is a strength of our members as we educate and support students throughout their education. However, this diversity can lead to the valuable work of our members being unrecognised. While our teachers and tutors do educate international students, they also work to support the language development and literacy of domestic students who have a home language other than English. Also, at many institutions (such as secondary schools, ITPs, and universities), our members play a crucial role in supporting broader pathways of education. For example, an ESOL teacher in a secondary school may support an ESOL-funded student who then goes on to complete NCEA. Similarly, an English for Academic Purposes tutor in a university may teach an MBIE-funded student as part of an English language programme, leading to a PhD. In other words, ESOL professionals play a crucial role in all parts of our education sector (public and private). Private English language schools, and the education of international students, are also an essential part of our sector.

Export education in New Zealand is a sizeable part of the national economy, and English language programmes form a crucial part of it. For example, universities and ITPs operate language centres to provide English language training to international students. However, these centres are also involved in postgraduate skills programmes, learning support, pastoral care and other education activities that benefit universities and ITPs. Not to mention that many of these centres play a role in supporting refugees, migrants, and providing programmes for various types of funded students. If international students are not present, then these other vital activities will no longer be supported at the same level. In other words, international education and the provision to domestic learners are mutually essential. Similarly, ESOL teachers in secondary schools who teach international students are critical in meeting the needs of domestic learners.

TESOLANZ fears that the COVID-19 epidemic and associated (but necessary) border restrictions will impact the English language sector first and hardest. This impact will lead to cutbacks and restructuring of English language centres and programmes, leaving many practitioners with no option but to look elsewhere for work opportunities. COVID-19 will cause significant disruption to the international student market, and this, in turn, will result in job losses for our sector. However, the loss of revenue and expertise will also lead to decreased provision for domestic learners who most need it. In terms of equitable access to education, proficiency in the language of instruction is critical. Without strong, robust, English language provision across all sectors of education, many learners (international and domestic) will suffer.

International education adds real value to Aotearoa, and not just in the commercial sense. The presence of international students in our schools and campuses provides opportunities for Kiwis to make new friends and encounter diverse cultures. Also, the act of studying in New Zealand leads many International students to form a lifelong connection with New Zealand. When they return home, they become some of the strongest advocates for New Zealand Inc. Not to mention, many of them go on to become highly-skilled, motivated New Zealanders in their own right. International students genuinely appreciate the manaakitanga they experience, and many have stated that, right now, there is no other place in the world they would rather be.

To conclude, the provision of quality English language education is crucial to a vibrant, quality education sector that equitably meets the needs of diverse learners across all sectors of education. However, there is a history (both in New Zealand and internationally) of our sector being unrecognised and marginalised. This often leads to precarious situations when crises arise. We experienced this during previous financial crises, the Canterbury earthquakes, and fear we will see the same again because of COVID-19.

To mitigate considerable job losses for the sector, we seek consideration of the following:

- Reopening of borders for international students (as soon as is safely practicable) with appropriate quarantine measures in place and, if needed, assistance with the management of this for smaller PTEs and institutes
- Extension of the wage subsidy scheme for businesses (such as English language PTEs) and schools that have been significantly impacted by COVID-19
- Establishment of a working group to comprehensively scope the position of English language instruction across all sectors and strategically determine how best to support teaching and learning of English language in Aotearoa, New Zealand

Many other stakeholders have proposed similar solutions. While these measures will be crucial to the viability of our profession, TESOLANZ seeks a commitment to dialogue with the Ministry of Education. This will help us ensure a fair and equitable system for our learners which takes a holistic view of English language instruction and its importance for learners in ECE, primary, secondary, tertiary and refugee/migrant education.

Sincerely,



Daryl Streat

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