

Research + Real Life

Lessons from connecting students
with local economic issues



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- > By many measures Queenstown Lakes has a healthy economy – low unemployment and strong growth
- > Instead it faces other economic challenges including:
 - How to respond to the pressures population and tourism growth bring
 - How to help more locals earn enough to build a future in the district
 - How to create career and business opportunities beyond tourism and construction
- > Coping with these issues day to day, and the scale of these challenges means those coping can feel swamped, with little time to reflect

> Steps

1. Recommendation sought from Business School departments
2. Interest gauged from Post- Grad Student/s
3. Brief, timeline, support and cost agreed
4. Results presented to key people (lecturer invited)

> Advantages

- Brief creates clear focus and expectations
- Customer-supplier relationship without intermediaries
- Ability to refine results
- Student and audience interaction

> Challenges

- Timelines can be challenging (travel, academic deadlines)
- Getting research translated into practical recommendations
- Review and endorsement required to build credibility for the results

> Measuring the Ripples – how to measure the impact of Startup Support Organisations (2024)

- Commissioned by Economic Futures and Startup Queenstown Lakes
- Researcher - Kate Ellmers, Masters in Sustainable Business student

> Tourism Productivity in New Zealand (2025)

- Commissioned by Economic Futures
- Researcher – Syed Zulqernain Hussain, PhD Economics student

“The sense of real-world impact was the attractive aspect for me. Knowing that the analysis could potentially influence local policy and planning decisions made the work particularly meaningful and motivating... I would recommend this kind of assignment to other postgraduate students, as it helps develop practical research and communication skills while showing how academic tools can be applied to real policy problems”

Syed Zulqernain Hussain

> Steps

1. Research topics proposed and discussed w/ Business School staff
2. Brief, timeframe, data access and level of engagement agreed w/ course coordinator
3. Student(s) undertake research as part of coursework
4. Findings and final report/recommendations shared

> Advantages

- Access to multiple teams exploring a common problem from different angles
- Builds relationships with students and teaching staff
- Structured within existing academic timelines and assessment frameworks

> Challenges

- Project scope constrained by course requirements and semester timelines
- Variable depth and practical applicability across outputs
- Limited ability to iterate or refine beyond assessment deadlines
- No formal peer review or endorsement unless separately arranged

- > Understanding the value of environmental shocks in the Queenstown Lakes visitor economy
- > How can high-churn tourism sectors justify and structure workforce training to lift skills, retention, and productivity?
- > What shapes community attitudes toward tourism, and how can destinations rebuild and maintain social licence?
- > What early warning signs lead to anti-tourism sentiment, and how can destinations prevent escalation?
- > How can visitor-facing technology influence behaviour and support regenerative tourism outcomes?
- > How can destinations reduce seasonality to improve productivity and maximise return on investment?
- > How can mature destinations shift visitor behaviour, such as increasing length of stay?

- > Don't assume all students are young and inexperienced
- > Pay fairly and encourage them to present in person
- > Invite lecturers to be part of the process (without them being in control)
- > Pick topics that aren't time critical – and be prepared to be patient
- > Students are students for a reason – be realistic about your expectations (but be open to be delighted too)
- > Guiding, connecting and reviewing is part of the process
- > Challenge them to go beyond academic sources and make recommendations
- > Be prepared to change your mind



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