

Perspective

Quality the key for future

The export education industry is not putting enough effort into assuring the quality of its institutions or teaching staff, writes IAN BRUCE.

The annual conference of Education New Zealand takes place in Christchurch this week. This conference is largely concerned with the promotion of international education in New Zealand — international education referring to the activity of fee-paying students from other countries attending New Zealand educational institutions, such as schools, polytechnics, universities or English language schools.

International education brings about \$2 billion a year into the New Zealand economy, making it about seven times the size of the wine industry as an export activity.

New Zealand is not alone among the English-speaking countries in exploiting education as an export earner. In fact, we are a relative latecomer to the activity. However, international education in New Zealand has tended to suffer from issues of quality relating mainly to the unregulated environment in which it takes place.

Education New Zealand, which is organising this week's conference, is a Government-appointed trust that administers the export education levy, a sum of money collected from the fees paid by every international student who studies privately in New Zealand at any educational level. In the year 2004-2005, the sum collected from the levy was approximately \$3.8 million. The Education Act 1989 states that the Export Education Levy (EEL) is collected with the aim of providing "support (financial or otherwise) of other bodies engaged in the development, promotion, or quality assurance of the export education sector".

Much of the conference this week is concerned with the promotion of international education and thereby, some would argue, its development. In relation to quality assurance, the main focus of Education New Zealand has been its development of a code of practice for the pastoral care of international students. This has involved establishing standards of good practice in terms of homestay, welfare and fee administration, which, of itself, is a necessary and worthwhile activity.

However, Education New

Zealand has so far not addressed the issue of educational quality, an issue that would appear to be central to the industry. This lack was also identified in the 2006 review of the levy spending by its auditors, Deloitte, who stated, "the majority of levy spent on quality assurance goes to the code (of practice for pastoral care) (\$716,000 in 2004-05) . . . Given this emphasis on quality assurance in respect of the code, we query whether there should be more initiatives which focus on the quality of education".

The report by Deloitte makes a very salient point. As I see them, the key issues in international education are the need for improved systems of institutional accreditation, implementation of teacher accreditation (especially for English language teachers), and more effective quality assurance evaluation. These issues can be summarised around three questions.

First, who may manage a language school or a language programme within a larger educational institution in New Zealand?

There are effectively no qualifications requirements for such a role. Even in quite large tertiary institutions, language divisions catering for international students are often run by former school principals or managers with commercial experience in other sectors who often have limited knowledge of this specialist area of education. In relation to the management quality issue, a possible solution would be to develop tougher accreditation procedures for institutions wanting to offer international education, including requirements that senior managers must be qualified and experienced in this specialised field.

The second question is, who may teach English as a second language in New Zealand educational institutions?

Again, there are no official requirements in New Zealand. The English language teachers' own association, TESOLANZ, has a set of teacher competencies on its website, but as an association it resists qualification requirements. This situation has come about because there is no form of teacher registration or accreditation of English



language teachers in the private or tertiary sectors. On the other hand, primary and secondary schools accept generic teacher training (and registration) — although this type of training is usually not specific to the needs of international students. The solution is to require minimum teacher qualifications for English language teachers working in New Zealand educational institutions and equally importantly accreditation of the teacher-training providers.

The third question is, how is the quality of institutions offering education to international students monitored?

The short answer is that international education isn't really monitored as a specialised educational activity. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (for the private sector and polytechnics), the NZ Vice-Chancellors Academic Audit Committee (for universities) and the Education Review Office (for schools) are all supposed to perform this function. However, to a large extent these agencies are not staffed to provide specialised, expert evaluation of this sector of education. A possible solution would be to establish an effective specialist international-education monitoring agency that can be used to audit and rate institutions.

The levy collected from the fees of international students

and administered by Education New Zealand (ENZ) is supposed to support international education — including in the area of quality assurance (which one would assume would include educational quality).

While Education New Zealand itself is not a monitoring organisation, its legal remit is to provide support for the bodies that do monitor quality — a remit that it does not appear to be fulfilling at least with respect to educational quality.

In an ideal situation, international students contemplating study in this country should be able to make their choice of education provider from transparent and reliable information about the quality ratings and accreditation of educational institutions.

The Government could then effectively support the quality process by permitting the issue of student visas only to students who have secured a place in a properly-accredited institution.

There is a lot of work to be done before we can achieve this idea situation. But, in the highly competitive world export education where New Zealand is a small player, can we afford not to?

■ Ian Bruce is a lecturer in applied linguistics at the University of Waikato, Hamilton.

Breaking the cycle

Labelling the intervention in Australia's Aboriginal communities as racist is to ignore the deep complexities and problems faced, writes KIRSTEN STORRY.

Are Australians racist? This is the question that New Zealanders were asking last month after the Australian Government sent the army in to Aboriginal communities to help combat shocking rates of child abuse. The Northern Territory intervention had strong critics on both sides of the Tasman, with Maori Party MP Hone Harawira calling Prime Minister John Howard "a racist bastard".

Now the fatal abuse of Nia Glassie, on top of the deaths of the Kahui twins last year, has Harawira and others calling for strong and immediate action. He wants Maori MPs to work out how to "break this spiralling cycle of violence and mindless destruction that is killing our kids and brutalising our society".

The reality is that the need for action in failing communities — at least in Australia — is now so urgent that radical action is required.

Since 1999, some 40 reports have detailed high levels of sexual abuse and neglect in Australia's indigenous communities. For too long, the accusation of racism and the fear of promoting negative stereotypes have kept indigenous and non-indigenous alike from speaking up about child abuse and domestic violence.

Warren Mundine, a former Australian Labor Party president and himself indigenous, rejected this sort of kneejerk response earlier this year. "A lot of people use the word racist too easily," he told a public forum. "I don't think that calling someone a racist will wash away the issues. Anyone who thinks that Aboriginal

communities don't have domestic violence or child abuse problems is kidding themselves."

Indigenous leader Noel Pearson, too, expressed horror that people should be so quick to dismiss the intervention out of hand, "particularly when those children are subject to imminent abuse, abuse that takes place on a regular basis".

The issues facing the Northern Territory's remote indigenous communities are complex. The vast majority have fewer than 100 inhabitants, are situated hours by road from major towns, are often cut off for around five months in the wet season and have scant access to education, policing and health services.

Communities often have high rates of chronic disease, diabetes, foetal alcohol syndrome and low birth weights. Average indigenous life expectancy is some 17 years below the Australian average, often more than a dozen people cram into overcrowded publicly supplied houses, and few earn a living despite 14 years of Australia's uninterrupted economic boom.

Currently in Northern Territory communities, many children attend school irregularly — in the second largest community of Maningrida, average attendance is a staggeringly low 32 per cent — and most drop out of the school system entirely by their early teenage years.

In the name of self-determination and the indigenous rights agenda over the last three decades, Australia has tolerated Third World conditions in remote communities. Land rights were

hailed as the panacea for indigenous community issues after the Australian High Court recognised "native title" in 1992. They weren't. Some 44% of the Northern Territory is already Aboriginal land and a further 10% is under claim, yet the disadvantage on the range of social and economic indicators persists.

Of course, the Northern Territory intervention is not without its flaws. The Government had to pull back from its heavy-handed compulsory health checks on children, and it continues to be too guarded with the details of its plan.

It is time to open up debate, not close it down. We need to put our minds together on how to achieve systemic change in the Northern Territory's remote indigenous communities and to break the cycle of disadvantage and dysfunction.

Fixing school education in remote communities will be critical. Without the skills and discipline of a robust school education, indigenous children in remote communities will not have choices and opportunities inside or outside their communities.

We stand to lose another generation of indigenous children, some to abuse and others to simple neglect. The intervention is drastic, but so is the situation.

■ Kirsten Story is a policy analyst at the Sydney-based Centre for Independent Studies. Press reporter Martin van Beynen will be reporting from Australia's Aboriginal communities over the next fortnight.

There's no place for Nimbys

PHILLIP REX ROBINSON rises to the battle-cry of the Nimby — "not in my backyard".

Living in all our backyards is a new subspecies of humanity which has evolved in, and recently emerged from, a modern political swamp.

Look closely and you will see green stuff clinging to them, green attitudes, green propaganda and green smugness. This is an evolutionary disguise called mimicry.

This subspecies is positively geotaxic, that is, it instinctively heads uphill against gravity until it finds some high moral ground to cling to. Any issue will do. Once there, it spins a cocoon of self righteousness and looks down on everyone else. It then taxes everybody by raising prices. Homo sapiens nimbyensis has arrived.

Evolutionary anthropologists have a unique opportunity to study a rare transitional species. Nimbyosis, the mutational process which produces Nimbys, is commonly understood to be caused by planet warming greenhouse gases. Nimbys encourage this belief, and claim Nimbyism is the only adaptive niche open to humanity.

Luckily, molecular research has revealed a basic flaw in the Nimby genome. Nimbys also keenly reject projects which promise to do good in the world, even those which are carbon neutral, renewable, and environmentally safe.

Meridian Energy's Project Aqua was cancelled because of dense Nimby infestation. The Wairau project discovered several new Nimby species hiding under rocks. The Central Plains Water scheme is turning from a picturesque beneficial lake into a brackish Nimby breeding ground.

All these schemes use renewable resources and can be environmentally monitored for ecological problems, but that is not good enough for Nimbys. If supposedly threatened fish show they can survive in hydro canals or irrigation channels before being recreationally caught and eaten, then Nimbys will substitute kayakers or birds as justification for destroying the project, and denying poverty-stricken families cheaper electricity.

Propose harmless windmills in the badlands of Otago's Lammermoor and Nimbys say it will spoil the view of the six people who subsist there. Anytime soon expect Nimbys to claim rabbits are an endangered species, thus enforcing a stoppage in some vital infrastructure project.

Nimbys live on a different planet than the rest of us, or should do. Where is their social co-operation for the sake of the nation? The very name "Nimby" says it all, and betrays their real reason for putting spanners in the works. The project is in a Nimby backyard.

Nothing more is needed, proximity is the only problem. Nimbys simply disguise their selfishness with green stuff.

Twenty years of hothouse privatisation evolved today's Nimby from an ancestral green slug. Under social ownership we all happily sacrificed to help others. No Nimbys then. This harked from the story of the Good Samaritan — it is noble to help neighbours in need, even when you don't like them.

Privatisation changed that. Money became the focus, and the electricity produced became secondary. In their own primitive way Nimbys are asking "why should we freely donate our resources to make clean electricity when big business sells the electricity back to us at whacking great profits, with no social responsibility to our poor?"

Until big business understands this genuine resentment, and becomes more socially responsible, privatisation will remain the spawning ground of nimbyism. Nimbys have this tiny gene of justification at the invertebrate level.

Nimbys are a parasitic species because they, too, deny social responsibility. They say to their grandchildren "I'm all right Jack, blow you" by hindering developing windfarms. If we all became Nimbys overnight, improvements in technology

would stop. We would be denied our cottages by the sea because no-one would want environmentally-friendly timber mills, paint factories, cement works, aluminium smelters, etc, in our back yards. We would be carless, bikeless and have no road to reach our cottages, anyway.

Nimbyism is ultimately sterile, even for Nimbys. Ironically, Nimbys increase profits for electricity producers. Money earmarked for cleaner projects is instead distributed as fat dividends and lawyers' fees.

Nimbyfication strangles new supply, putting prices up further. I'm toying with a conspiracy theory that Nimbys are secretly working for big business by creating scarcity.

Nimbys need their own inviolate back yard. A Nimby's natural habitat is a mud and grass hut, where he eats roots, shoots, and leaves, dares not light a fire, then finally freezes to death in the dark, extinct at last.

If a new planet cannot be found for Nimbys because they nimbyfied space exploration, the sub-Antarctic Auckland islands would be perfect for a temporary Nimby sanctuary. I sure don't want any Nimbys in my back yard.

■ Phillip Rex Robinson is a Christchurch entertainer and writer. Regular Friday columnist Simon Cunliffe is away.

MORE PEANUT BUTTER CHOICE

Dear Peanut Butter Lovers,

At Sanitarium we have a proud history of providing the best peanut butter for New Zealanders. It's what we've done for over 100 years.

We're passionate about our customers and always appreciate feedback. Many of you have recently been in touch and expressed a preference for a more locally produced peanut butter made to our original recipe. Others have indicated they prefer our existing peanut butter.

As a result, we are pleased to announce that we will be offering you more choice by re-introducing our Australian made Sanitarium Peanut Butter. This will be in a new distinctive pack and additional to our existing peanut butter.

We look forward to your support for our more local product. It will be available in Smooth, Crunchy and low salt varieties in about eight weeks' time.

Just as New Zealand is a major global producer of dairy products, China is a major grower and producer of peanuts and peanut butter. You would have noticed that most peanut butter brands available in New Zealand are made in China. Their larger scale enables them to produce at a more cost effective price for many countries.

Kiwis have come to expect low prices for their peanut butter. Our existing peanut butter, produced to high standards in a fully audited and accredited factory in China, meets this need at a great value price and will still be available.

At Sanitarium we are proud of our rigorous food quality standards and nutritional credentials. These standards apply to our own factories and also to anyone who produces for us. Both our current value offer and soon to be re-introduced local range come with the trusted Sanitarium stamp of excellence.

We value your feedback and look forward to your continued support.

Kind regards,

Pierre van Heerden
GENERAL MANAGER
SANITARIUM HEALTH FOOD COMPANY



THE HEALTH FOOD COMPANY
Sanitarium