

International Students in New Zealand: Needs and Responses

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This paper considers the pastoral care needs of international students in New Zealand. Using the relatively new Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students as its departure point, this paper critically evaluates the assertion that there is a crisis in New Zealand's export education industry. It does this through considering international students' expectations and experiences in New Zealand and their delineation and evaluation, and criticisms of pastoral care provisions through research and policy documents. Drawing on recent empirical research, the academic, social (including health and safety), and financial needs of international students in New Zealand are identified. The paper concludes by suggesting proactive responses to these needs and asserting that proper pastoral care of international students is essential and necessary for the sustainability of New Zealand's export education industry.

Asian students, pastoral care, New Zealand

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we seek to unravel the public discourse on Asian students in New Zealand and highlight some of their critical needs. Recognising the needs of international students is more relevant now than it ever has been. The phenomenal increase in international students in New Zealand during the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, as demonstrated in Figure 1, has simultaneously anecdotally saved institutions from bankruptcy while putting increasing strain on student support services; it has diversified and injected significant revenue into communities and cities, while also provoking increasing resentment in these communities against the sheer numbers of students; it has buoyed the property markets in many major cities, especially Auckland, while other potential tenants say they do not want to share a property with English language schools; it has opened up trade and educational opportunities with China as never seen before, while also creating controversy in the way Chinese students are treated and the criminal behaviour they are engaging in; and it has diversified New Zealand's culture, while also seeing international students as a threatening sub-culture.

There is a perception that all international students are wealthy (or at least their parents, as fee-payers, are wealthy) and cannot but help themselves to flaunt this wealth to all and sundry. However, international students in New Zealand come from a variety of countries with a variety of fee-payers. Some are government-sponsored, while others are the beneficiaries of aid-grants; some are on university scholarships, while others are paid for by companies; some are paid for by siblings, while others are paid for by parents; some are wealthy, but many are not.

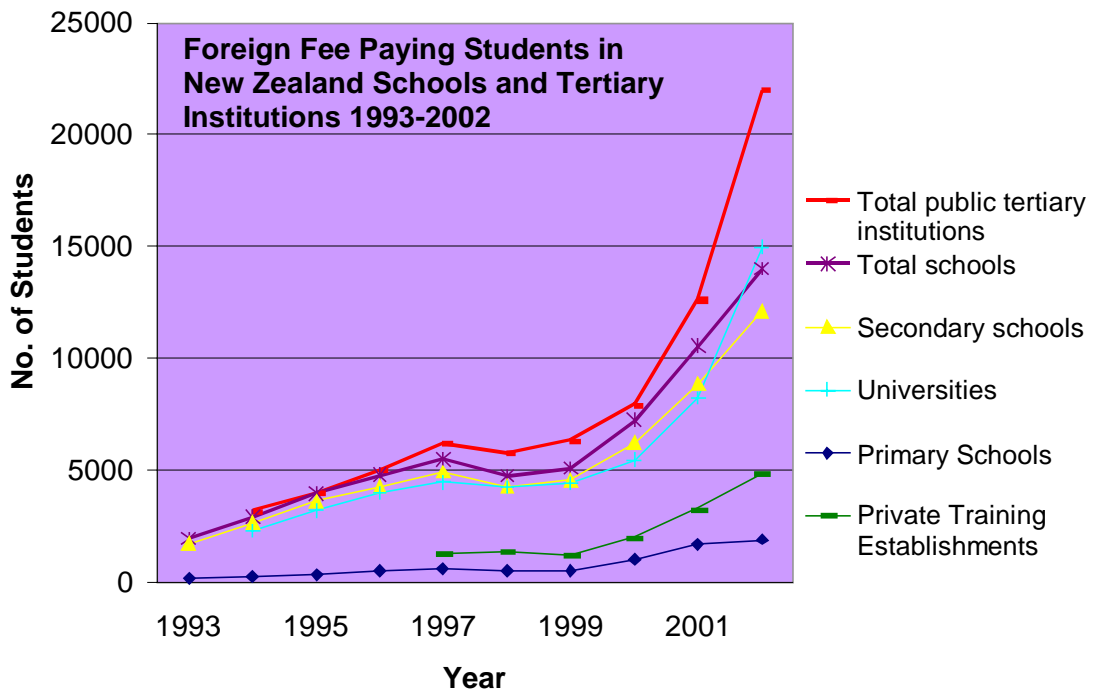


Figure 1. Growth of full-fee paying students in New Zealand (Lewis and Butcher (2003) derived from data provided by the New Zealand Ministry of Education)

Some choose to come to New Zealand because it is cheap and easy, but most come for more complex reasons. Some choose to come to New Zealand to study because they will attain a Western degree and the ability to speak English, but most come to New Zealand with more varied expectations. Some students come to New Zealand and walk around with wads of cash, buy European cars, and flaunt their wealth; while others struggle to pay for their daily meal, cause their parents great financial sacrifice, and cannot afford to return home in the holidays. Some students come to New Zealand and commit crime, do drugs, gamble their money away, and never turn up to class; most, however, study late into the night, wish they had more New Zealand friends, say little because they don't think their English is good enough, and wonder how much colder it can get. Some students are Asian, speak Chinese and like rice, but other students are from South America or the Pacific Islands or Europe or America or Africa and speak many different languages and like all sorts of different foods.

In addition, there has been an increasing role played by central government in the marketing and regulation of New Zealand's export education industry. The reasons for this are complex and are discussed in more detail elsewhere (Lewis, 2003). However, the ongoing changes in the regulation of the industry recognise, at least at face value, that looking after the needs of international students through our pastoral care of them is strategically important to the export education sector in particular and New Zealand in general. The mandatory *Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students*, enacted in 2001 and revised in 2003, effectively highlights three aspects of information, safety and care (Ministry of Education, 2003)..

We have discussed elsewhere some of the shortcomings of the Code (McGrath and Butcher, 2003), but here we wish to discuss the international students' needs alongside these various discourses, interactions and regulations.

International students have a variety of dreams, expectations, fears, concerns, frustrations, disappointments, and successes. Their lives are complex, sometimes difficult, and combine a range of educational, psychological and social experiences. International students in New Zealand are on sojourn and in transit. They arrive with a variety of expectations from a variety of sources.

Their initial period of contact will significantly affect their perceptions of New Zealand and New Zealanders thereafter: friendship and hospitality offered to them will engender positive experiences, perceptions and memories; discrimination, isolation, and dislike will create long-term negative perceptions.

FACING A CRISIS?

Some may argue there is a crisis in New Zealand's export education industry. A recent significant downturn from certain markets (discussed below in this paper), negative media attention, and even negative comment from within the industry would tend to support this assertion. Research would also suggest this. Li et al. (2002) note two studies where Chinese students expressed dissatisfaction with New Zealand's current education practice (Tang, 2002; Mao, 2002). According to Mao (cited in Li et al., 2002, p.2), New Zealand is facing a crisis because of:

- the shortage of qualified ESOL teachers;
- teachers' poor knowledge of the learning needs of international students;
- unsatisfactory learning situations in schools;
- lack of learning support;
- poor quality of money-oriented commission-earning agents; and
- social problems faced by international students.

If this is a crisis, then we need to respond with effective and responsible crisis management; if this is not a crisis, and merely a moral panic, we need to consider closely what has provoked this moral panic and whether responsibility rests with some of the practices and philosophies of the export education industry and its providers and agents.

Are the experiences of contemporary students bearing out this notion of a crisis? Regrettably, we cannot equivocally say either way, since there is no substantial research looking at international students' experiences in New Zealand, nor has there been a significant longitudinal study undertaken. However, Table 1 shows findings of research by Berno and Ward (2002; tabulated by Lewis and Butcher, 2003) of student experiences and expectations in New Zealand.

Table 1. Expectations and experiences of Asian students in New Zealand

Expectation	% Expected	% Experienced
Understand New Zealand English	80	57
Express myself effectively in English	77	40
Get good grades	87	28
Form friendships with New Zealanders	91	41
Enjoy socialising with New Zealanders	82	52
Understand NZ social customs	82	34
Be accepted by New Zealanders	72	37
Maintain a positive outlook	88	69
Feel stressed	31	49
Have enough money	62	51
Have no problems with my living arrangements	59	70

Students' Experiences: Delineation and Evaluation

In considering these experiences of contemporary students, however, we should be cautious against reading these experiences solely within the framework of the Code. For largely pragmatic (although also philosophical) reasons, the Code delineates students' experiences into definable categories such as accommodation and marketing (even if its underlying notion of 'quality' is vague and indefinable). This creates a false distinction between the experiences of international students and does not recognise that the experiences in a home-stay may affect the students educational performance or *vice versa*. It is significant that students' educational experiences are absent from the Code.

Concern and Criticism

Concerns and criticisms about the experiences of international students have been voiced from a variety of quarters. Here, we wish to note some of those concerns.

The International Education Advisory Authority

In their 2002 report, the International Education Advisory Authority (IEAA), noted five major concerns:

- Pastoral care;
- Appropriate orientation programs;
- Responsibility for agents and integrity in marketing;
- Appropriate class-level placement of students; and
- Interpretation of contract documentation.

Their concerns with pastoral care centred on the specific roles and responsibilities of the staff allocated to international students. We believe that this is an area of some concern, as it may suggest:

- there are not adequately trained support staff for international students;
- that support staff are not adequately resourced;
- that support staff are spending a disproportionate amount of time on administrative tasks; or,
- that support staff are seen in the institutions as the one-stop shop for all issues to do with international students, even if these issues are best dealt within academic departments, or through other avenues.

The IEAA Report (2002) also expresses concern about contact with other stakeholders, such as the articulation of expectations to home-stay parents, and overall communication to all its stakeholders. The revised Code of Practice may address some of these issues; but, nevertheless, if there is poor communication between stakeholders, or even within an institution, then the needs of international students may be too easily overlooked. The IEAA Report (2002) also expressed concern that management meetings should take place with a specific agenda directed toward the needs of international students. This would serve, we believe, not only to articulate the students' needs in an open forum, but also to communicate to the managers and decision-makers in an institution what processes and policies need to be in place to best meet these needs.

Auckland City Council

The IEAA Report's (2002) concerns, as noted above, are echoed in part by concerns expressed by the Auckland City Council in a briefing paper written in 2003. The paper bemoans the lack of comprehensive information, particularly about private training establishments (Butcher, 2002a), as well as issues particular to Auckland surrounding accommodation, transport, market risk, sustainability, and the diversity of students in the CBD (Auckland City Council, 2003). There are also issues surrounding promoting Auckland as a study destination (Lewis and Butcher, 2003) and the significant numbers of migrant and permanent resident students in Auckland's institutions (Butcher, 2004).

Research

Some institutions, such as the University of Auckland, have undertaken in-house research on the needs and experiences of international students within their institutions. This research, however, is usually confidential to that institution and therefore is not in the public domain. Published

research on the needs of international students in New Zealand, however, includes research on the adjustment facing Asian and Polynesian tertiary students (Beaver and Tuck, 1998); the interaction of Indonesian, Thai, Malaysian and Singaporean students in tertiary classrooms (Mills, 1997); a survey of homestay experiences of Non-English Speaking Background students (Welsh, 2001); the cross-cultural needs of international students (Bennett, 1998; Holmes, 2000); and the re-entry of international students into their countries of origin (McGrath, 1998; Butcher, 2002b). The Asia2000 Foundation facilitates a research database of New Zealand research, which is on their website at <http://www.asia2000.org.nz>, and there is an Australian-based database with an extensive collection of references at <http://aei.dest.gov.au/general/research.htm>.

While the documents and research noted above address a variety of needs, we wish to comment specifically on academic, social and financial needs of international students.

ACADEMIC NEEDS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The academic needs of international students, while being the focus of Wellington-based research (for example, Li et al., 2002), are largely poorly understood within institutions. As the Asia2000 Foundation (2003) noted in their presentation to the Education New Zealand Conference 2003:

International students and in particular students from the Asian region, are now a significant part of New Zealand's education system and society and New Zealand is firmly linked and increasingly integrating with the region in many other respects too. The fact that the word Asia hardly appears in the draft charters of New Zealand's universities stands in contrast to other models.

This absence of Asia within charters may reflect both a particular parochialism and a lack of interest in the substantial issues surrounding international students *vis-à-vis* curriculum, funding, resource allocation, future direction, and the particular needs of international students.

There are several academic needs of international students, which include:

- their proficiency in English and ability to understand textbooks and their lecturers;
- their lack of understanding of non-verbal communication, references to New Zealand historical events, use of humour, and so on;
- their difficulty in responding to the Socratic mode of teaching, particularly if they have been educated in rote-learning and taught not to question authority (such as the lecturer or author);
- their difficulty in comprehending questions, assignments, and research skills;
- their ability to communicate effectively in English in order to attain good marks and attendant difficulties surrounding plagiarism and cheating;
- their lack of cultural connectedness with the material being presented to them;
- the possible lack of international applicability of their degrees (for example, will a New Zealand business degree equip them to work in Hong Kong?); and
- their cultural reluctance to participate in class discussions and tutorials.

Research by Li et al. (2002), of 23 Asian students at the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand and the Wellington Institute of Technology, found that language difficulties constituted a significant barrier in the learning and cultural adaptation of these students; this impacted upon interaction in the classroom as well as coping with unfamiliar learning situations, and differing concepts of learning and role expectations. Many students are not used to the participative approach used in business courses (Li et al., 2002). A similar Socratic method of teaching is used in the Social Sciences. In these teaching models, and in contradiction to Asian students' expectations, neither the teacher nor the textbook is the final authority on information. As Li et al. (2002) noted of one student:

Her learning experiences in her own country had led her to believe that there must be a **right** answer to every problem and it could be found in the textbook. She did not realise that for assignments and most examination items in Business Communication, very often there were no “answers” to “questions” or “problems” but **responses to tasks**, and that the responses could vary from one task to another.

The response to this need can work both ways: students can be better equipped and prepared for particular forms of teaching while lecturers can more clearly express their expectations of international students, while also broadening their curriculum and teaching methods to encompass a multicultural classroom (Lim, 2002).

This speaks to the broader philosophies of an institution surrounding internationalisation. It is not enough to claim that international students on a campus equals internationalisation. It does not. Internationalisation requires significant and fundamental policy initiatives, such as those adopted by the University of Melbourne (cited in Asia2000 Foundation, 2003):

While it is true that international fee-based enrolments have generated urgently-needed revenue growth, the primary strategy behind international student recruitment has been the internationalisation of Melbourne as a learning community, particularly through engagement with Asia. That is why international student enrolments have been paralleled by an ambitious Melbourne Abroad program providing hundreds of Australian students each year with an international education experience.

This demonstrates a further connection with academic internationalisation: supporting exchange programs for domestic students. While we proclaim the cross-cultural benefits of recruiting and enrolling international students, we should recognise that cross-cultural experiences necessarily involves at least two parties and an increase in exchange programs would allow domestic students to understand better the transition experiences of international students.

SOCIAL NEEDS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The academic needs of international students are as important as their social needs. International students are firstly in New Zealand to study and there are often great expectations placed upon them by the fee-payer for them to return to their countries of origin with a qualification. Yet their social interactions will affect their academic performance.

Research has suggested that a significant proportion of overseas students feel ambivalent about their relations with host nationals and that many perceive discrimination (Ward et al., 2001, p.188; Berno and Ward, 2002). Butcher (2002b) identified two groups of international students: those who remain among themselves and do not interact with the host culture and those who interact readily and easily with the host culture. Although research shows that international students prefer close friendship with co-nationals (Ward, 2001; Ward et al., 2001), it also shows that international students who befriend members of the host culture ultimately have a more fulfilling and enriching study abroad experience (Butcher, 2002b; McGrath, 1998). Many students who fell into the first category, in Butcher's (2002b) research, expressed regret that they had not interacted more with domestic students. Returnees who fell into the second categorisation bemoaned their peers for not mixing more, as this returnee noted (cited in Butcher, 2002b, p.117):

Well those who want to join their own group; I think they...took education as secondary. I think they...more like...having fun.... I don't quite like international studies having formed their own group. I mean they are going to other countries they should learn you know the culture; there are more opportunities to learn the cultures.... I don't quite agree with them you know forming their own group [pause] well I don't know what they usually talk about, ah I don't think I want to join their group.

Students also perceived a lack of institutional student support structures (Butcher, 2002b). This may, in part, be a reflection of inadequate resourcing and cumbersome workloads on support staff, yet it also encompasses issues surrounding students' awareness and use of these services. Extensive research has demonstrated that social networks are important in migration (Massey et al., 1998; Tilly, 1990; Vertovec, 2002) and many students found their social support to be within the host communities, such as through churches, civic groups, Rotary, and student clubs (Butcher et al., 2002).

While the orientation of students to New Zealand culture is important in establishing positive perceptions and experiences, similarly orienting students to their re-entry into their countries of origin is also important. In their re-entry, students face many significant transitions, including to work, lifestyle and an altered worldview (Butcher, 2002b, 2002c; McGrath, 1998).

Students' social needs can also be ascertained through their negative experiences, such as discrimination. Australian research by Mullins et al. (1995) showed that ten per cent of international students saw off-campus discrimination as a serious problem, while 54 per cent saw it as a minor problem. For on-campus discrimination, seven per cent saw it as a serious problem while 52 per cent saw it as a minor problem. Discrimination is based on prejudice and stereotyping. As one student expressed it in Butcher's (2002b, p.114) research:

I would say that...there are still a lot of presumptions or stereotypes... such as... international students go over to New Zealand...from a very much a society that is less developed or something like that. To a certain extent its quite true, but then for us who come from the city like K[uala] L[umpur] or [Kota] Kinabalu like this, we're not that far behind in that sense; its just that we need a place to study.... In terms of expectation...they expect us to be courteous and conservative and to a certain extent I would say that some of these presumptions are true in a sense. But then some of these presumptions or stereotypes that is no longer valid and like most of the things what ever that they know about Malaysia or other countries they are mainly from the media which can be quite misleading at times and it doesn't give the whole truth, the [whole] picture.

Other researchers (Ward et al., 2001, p.166); our emphasis) confirm the same problem:

There are a number of factors that affect the structural components and functional outcomes of intercultural contact, and stereotypes, in particular, are known to exert a strong influence on the interactions between local and overseas students. In some situations, such as equal status contact under conditions of low threat, stereotypes may foster positive intergroup relations. However, this is not uniformly the case for interactions between domestic and international students. **Research has suggested that a significant proportion of overseas students feel ambivalent about their relations with host nationals and that many perceive discrimination.**

Positive experiences can counter discriminatory experiences and these experiences can lose some of their negative significance when issues surrounding international students' social and academic needs are addressed.

Health and Safety of International Students

Anecdotally, there is an apparent increase in the number of international students with mental health difficulties; or, to put it another way, there is a perceived increase in mental health difficulties faced by international students. However, there is no conclusive research in New Zealand in this area at this time (Ho et al., 2003). We know that international students face many stresses, including language barriers, acculturative stress, and lack of social support networks.

Overseas research has shown that international students are more likely to suffer psychological and social distress than domestic students, including facing depression, anxiety and psychosomatic disorders (Canadian research by Sam and Eide, 1991) and social, psychological and health problems (Scandinavian research by Chataway and Berry, 1989). However, research is ambivalent as to whether there is an increased usage of support and counselling services by international students, although, among other things, it highlights issues surrounding the cultural appropriateness of some of these services.

Although students' mental health difficulties may go largely unnoticed outside the industry itself, the apparent deviant behaviour of many international students provides bold headlines for newspapers and material for negative media publicity, while also feeding a particular discourse about the types of Asian students in New Zealand (and the discourse is almost exclusively about **Asian** students). Anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been an increase in crime among Asian students, particularly kidnapping. While there is no conclusive evidence to support this, what we do know is that:

- proportionately, crime committed by Asians in New Zealand is quite small;
- the crime that is committed is intra-ethnicity (that is, by Asians, against Asians);
- many of the perpetrators are migrants or permanent residents (not students); and
- many students are vulnerable victims.

There is no adequate police data in this area and there is only one dedicated four-person police unit in New Zealand, based in Auckland, which deals with Asian crime. It is worth noting that many students arrive in New Zealand with the expectation that it is crime-free (Butcher, 2002b) and therefore in our response to that we need to equip students to look after their personal safety, in a similar manner that we do for primary school children. There are also issues surrounding the authenticity and acquisition of driving licenses and attendant issues surrounding the purchasing, use and selling of cars. There is no general regulatory policy regarding these issues; however, individual institutions often have their own regulatory procedures, and organisations such as the Land Transport Safety Authority and the Automobile Association of New Zealand are considering responses. There are similar *in situ* responses for issues surrounding fraudulent ESOL certificates: many institutions have rigorous checking procedures along international guidelines.

FINANCIAL NEEDS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

There is also anecdotal evidence that there is an increase in gambling problems among Asian students. Again, there is no research to bear this out. However, we can speculate that if this were so, it might highlight financial difficulties as well as perhaps cultural practices of these students. Financial difficulties are a further area that has generally received very little coverage, publicly at least. Research by Ward (2001), found that while 62 per cent of the students surveyed expected to have enough money, only 51 per cent felt they did so. Recent changes to immigration policy (such as an increase in required funds from \$7,000 to \$10,000 per year) may only accentuate financial difficulties. Students who are financially at risk include:

- poor budgeters,
- gamblers and affected associates,
- immigration requirement circumventors,
- family dependents and those affected by altered family circumstances, and
- those facing unexpected needs, such as theft, accidents, fines, or tenancy requirements.

It is worth noting, as we did at the outset, that many students' parents, if they are the fee-payer, have made significant sacrifices in sending their children abroad. With that sacrifice, there is a significant obligation to obtain a qualification. There is no New Zealand research that supports the

contention that all international students are wealthy; indeed, some research implies that they are not (Ward, 2001). Furthermore, it is necessary to consider remittances to their countries of origin (that is, monies earned through part-time employment sent back to the payee or family in their country of origin), as well as financial obligations placed upon the student at the end of their studies, such as financing siblings or others for their study abroad.

It is worth considering the fees international students are expected to pay. The perception that higher fees equals higher quality is dubious as it overly simplifies quality and implies that it is measured only by the expenditure costs to the student or the revenue costs to the institution. However, issues surrounding resource allocation, the demography of students, and the interaction with the host cultures also play a significant role.

RESPONDING TO THESE NEEDS: PROACTIVE PASTORAL CARE

Having identified the needs, we wish to use the final part of this paper to look at various responses to those needs. Here, we draw on some of our previous research (McGrath and Butcher, 2003; Butcher et al., 2002).

We believe that pastoral care should involve caring for the whole person – that is, the student's integrated experiences, educative, social, spiritual and psychological. As part of that pastoral care, we see two forms of care, reactive and proactive. Reactive care, as its name suggests, is intervention care in a crisis, such as at times of accidents, bereavement, illness or acute culture shock.

Proactive care, by contrast, anticipates students' needs and potential problems and therefore enhances the quality of students' sojourn. It articulates and addresses expectations; it provides education and information; and it enhances well-being. It should include academic orientation (alongside social orientation), which would cover living skills, health, legal, and safety issues, and identify community friendship programs. Proactive pastoral care can provide learning support in academic assistance, anticipate accommodation needs, respond to culture shock issues such as homesickness and making friends, and have procedures in place for crises. It can offer life-skills training in cooking, shopping and budgeting and warn students of potential dangers in car purchasing, gambling and tenancy. Proactive pastoral care can offer friendship programs, social events, recreational activities, assist teachers in adopting a multicultural pedagogy, and implement and facilitate early intervention programs for at risk students. Given the significant contribution offered by the informal sector, they should also be involved in proactive pastoral care.

Proactive pastoral care programs can be used to address the gap between expectations and experiences and therefore lead to a more fulfilling overall experience for international students in New Zealand. Proactive pastoral care should also affect funding provisions. Rather than considering what residual funding may be available, proactive mechanisms should be budgeted for so that policies and provisions cover international students' needs. Proactive pastoral care should also affect marketing, it should determine policies, and it should drive practice. As Bennett (1998, pp.87-88) argues:

It is not enough to send a trawling mission to Asia to back up a slick advertising campaign, and then allow recruits to sink or swim. Recruitment must have a clear conception of student expectations, and the authorities should meet those needs with impeccable service if customer satisfaction and loyalty are to be achieved.

CONCLUSION

Among New Zealand's alumni are Royal Advisers, Cabinet Ministers, world economists and others, including, the Director for the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs, a

distinguished political scientist at Jakarta's Research Institute for Democracy and Peace, and a Recipient of the World Food Prize (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2001). As students in New Zealand under the Colombo Plan, they had positive experiences; they befriended New Zealanders then and are friends with them still. Their distinguished influence has not gone unnoticed. However, while we may bathe in their reflected glory, it is not enough to rest there. We must celebrate the past, but we should also make memories for the future.

Currently, New Zealand's export education industry is suffering a downturn, which has caused no shortage of hand wringing. Much of the cause of this downturn is seen to be external. However, it may suggest issues that need to be addressed closer to home. As we have argued elsewhere (Lewis and Butcher, 2003; McGrath and Butcher, 2003), it may reflect that: the characteristics of New Zealand are no longer dependable; a loss of competitive edge; a saturation of particular markets; and the end of the golden weather, as well as more fundamental problems with the philosophy and practice of recruiting, teaching and offering pastoral care to international students.

International students have significant needs; but programs and procedures cannot just meet these needs, although they have their place. Fundamental changes are required in some institutions; others require funding reallocation; while many more need to shift from reactive responses, to proactive pastoral care. Furthermore, while responding to international students' needs is in large part the responsibility and role of the institutions that recruit and enrol them, it is also the responsibility of the communities and cities in which they are a part, and the nation to which they offer significant contributions. We conclude with this astute comment by Hughes (1993, p.100) that:

The future...in a globalised economy...will lie with people who can think and act with informed grace across ethnic, cultural linguistic lines. And the first step in becoming such a person lies in acknowledging that we are not one big world family, or ever likely to be: that the differences between races, nations, cultures and their various histories are at least as profound and durable as their similarities; that these differences are not divagations from a European norm, but structures eminently worth knowing about for their own sake. In the world that is coming, if you can't navigate difference, you've had it.

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