



VC-NET

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Staff and student mobility in the UK

Two reports just published in the UK examine two aspects of the way campuses are being internationalised. The first, *Global Horizons for UK Students*, looks at the reasons why UK students do not want to study overseas. The second, *Talent Wars: the Market for International Staff*, looks at the changing composition of academic staff and explores the steady increase in the proportion of international staff on UK campuses.

The reluctance of UK students to travel is shown by the fall in the numbers joining Erasmus schemes for study within Europe. Ten years ago 9,500 English students went; now the figure is 5,500. The report examines the reasons for this fall and then illustrates some of the practical solutions that individual institutions are adopting to encourage students to travel. It is not all bad news and some universities are managing to increase their numbers significantly. One or two have even set a target that 10 per cent of all students will study overseas at some time in their university career. It is clear that, where Vice Chancellors see study abroad as a key part of their university's internationalisation strategy, academic staff and students will get the message and numbers will increase.

The UK is not alone in having this problem and the report describes how other English speaking countries also want to encourage mobility among their students. The Australian government is responding with federal Endeavour Scholarships to remove financial barriers to travel. Similar grants are mooted in the USA, where a recent commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship program has suggested a target of 50 per cent of undergraduates studying abroad in the next decade. What all the countries have in common is that they regard as essential the need for students to understand other cultures in order to become better global citizens and potentially more valuable to employers. This latter point has been confirmed by the UK study. It surveyed over 200 employers, 65% of whom would favour an applicant that had studied abroad compared with one who had not, all other things being equal.

The report on international staff illustrates how the composition of academic staff is changing. Last year 27 per cent of all UK academic appointments were to staff born outside the UK and over 35 per cent of full time researchers are from other countries. The UK is a net beneficiary from the brain drain and there are significant annual inflows of young researchers at the more junior levels. The search for quality staff by developed countries is becoming an international issue, as shown by recent ACU research. This raises the ethical issue of employing skilled academic staff from developing countries that can ill afford to lose them in crucial disciplines such as health and education.

Sources: Council for Industry and Higher Education and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills. July 2007. *Global Horizons for UK students: a guide for universities*. Available at www.cihe-uk.com Universities UK July 2007. *Policy Briefing. Talent Wars: the international market for academic staff*. Available at: <http://bookshop.universitiesuk.ac.uk/downloads/Policy%20Brief%20Talent%20Wars.pdf>. ACU (2006). Trends in academic recruitment and retention: a Commonwealth perspective. Available at: http://www.acu.ac.uk/policyandresearch/publications/ACU_wholereport_na.pdf

New Zealand freedoms under threat.

The New Zealand Vice Chancellors' Committee is increasingly worried about some of the wording in the Education (Tertiary Reforms) Amendment Bill which is currently going through Parliament. Part of their concern is that their buffer body, the Tertiary Education Council (TEC), has drafted clauses that give the Minister of Education much wider powers than he had before. The reason for this may be due, they surmise, to recent "expenditure blow-outs" in the polytechnic sector, which also fall under the remit of the TEC. 'Sledgehammer clauses' in the Bill aimed at polytechnics could be used to control universities. The Minister would gain powers of "direction" and "control" that are incompatible with earlier exemptions that universities gained from intervention. In addition, the Vice Chancellors fear that suggested changes would be monitored in such a way as to favour short-termism at the expense of their long term strategies. Until now they have each been able to set out their long term vision in "Charters"; now they are being asked to produce shorter plans which the Minister can instruct the TEC to approve or not.

The universities draw comfort from an earlier Education Act which enshrined their freedoms in the following words: "The object of the provisions of this Act relating to institutions is to give them as much independence and freedom to make academic, operational and management decisions as is consistent with the nature of the services they provide, the efficient use of national resources, the national interest and the demands of accountability".

One question arising from the concerns is whether funding further and higher education institutions from the same buffer body will give rise to further cases of similar policies being applied to differing sectors. Two other countries with funding bodies that cover both further and higher education are Botswana and Scotland; so far neither have triggered the same worries. Indeed, many are now suggesting that some governments' concerns over the "skills agenda" will inevitably lead to policies for the further and higher education sectors converging.

Source: New Zealand Vice Chancellors' Committee. Newsletters, 26th June, 10th July and Special Edition 17th July 2007 at www.nzvcc.ac.nz

AUQA audits the government's checks on doubtful providers

One of the more idiosyncratic audits undertaken by the Australian Universities Quality Agency is the audit of the federal Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). The AUQA, an agency owned by the federal and state government, is responsible for checking all those bodies with powers to approve the establishment and accredit the continuation of higher education institutions. Under this brief the AUQA investigates how well State and federal governments are carrying out these powers. This covers the authority of the federal government to approve universities in exotic locations such as Norfolk Island and Christmas Island. The main reason for the audit coming to attention was the cause celebre of Greenwich University (a private institution not linked to the University of Greenwich in the UK) which had gained approval from Norfolk Island's authorities some years ago and was then barred after several years of federal investigation.

The audit examined the control that DEST exercises over unauthorised use of the title "university". This is done by regular scans of the internet in order to catch any new virtual providers, liaison with domain administrators to stop the title being used and the development of rigorous procedures for those organisations that apply formally to DEST to use the word "university" in a company name. In addition the department hosts websites giving information about unaccredited or doubtful providers throughout Australia, and a full list of those providers accredited by each State. The role of AUQA in auditing state agencies that accredit private HE institutions was outlined at the recent conference of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) in Canada in April.

Elsewhere, the University Grants Commission in India provides a list of 'fake' universities on its site and the Department for Education in South Africa produces a list of registered private higher education institutions. The most recent was released last week and listed details for 76 registered institutions.

Sources: AUQA web site. For report see http://www.auqa.edu.au/qualityaudit/aa_reports/index.shtml

The DEST List of Authorised providers is found under

www.goingtouni.gov.au/Main/CoursesandProviders/

Further details of the INQAAHE conference and full list of presentations can be found at:

<http://192.139.188.172/inqaahe/index.asp?d1=61>

The Indian list of 'fake' universities can be found at: <http://www.ugc.ac.in/inside/fakealerts.html>. The *South African Register of Private Higher Education Institutions* (July 11 2007) can be downloaded from. <http://www.education.gov.za/dynamic/dynamic.aspx?pageid=326&dirid=47>

The editor, Jay Kubler, and author, John Fielden, are always pleased to receive comments on the usefulness and content of this briefing service. News from other Commonwealth countries, which might be of wider interest, is also most welcome. They can be contacted by e-mail on vcnet@acu.ac.uk or by fax on +44 (0)20 7387 2655.
