

Preparing for the Twenty-First Century

To conclude this study, it is appropriate to make a number of recommendations concerning the future development of post-secondary education in the Pacific. We have framed these recommendations under 11 headings.

1 Extending choice

Educational planning needs to facilitate open access to a wider range of learning sources. None of us knows how far world trends will impact on the Pacific. However, the views of seventeen of the world's most prominent thinkers on the future are worth considering (as summarised by Coates and Jarratt, 1990). Many feel that formal systems of education face long-term decline. Roy Amara, past president of the Institute for the Future, considers that 'educational institutions will not be major players in the future'. Alexander King, President of the Club of Rome, says 'universities have poor potential for change', and Richard Lamm that 'as the education system declines, computers and related technologies will replace teachers'. Dennis Meadows notes that 'already, more education is being done by businesses than by colleges', and Robert Theobald, that 'community colleges are more useful models than four-year universities'.

As has been seen, these trends are already apparent in the Pacific. Ensuring that students have access to an ever widening range of

sources of learning will necessitate allocating some government and aid resources to stimulating the provision and marketing of educational materials and programmes, by the private sector, by church systems and by government.

Tremendous progress has been made in post-secondary education in the Pacific region since World War II. But the pace of change is accelerating, and even greater challenges lie ahead. Expansion and reorientation of efforts is needed to make education more cost-effective, more extensive, and better adapted to the needs of the new century.

The current somewhat monopolistic approach to education needs to evolve into a more open one in which the public has a wider range of choice, and in which those who want to provide innovative forms of education may do so. Ministries of education can play a vital role in facilitating and stimulating educational development, including encouraging government departments, private businesses, churches and voluntary organisations to expand the educational component of their activities, both for their own employees and for the community they work in.

2 Increasing levels of self-financing

A major error of past thinking was to assume that if money were put into teaching information and skills and acquiring qualifications, the nations of the South Pacific would 'develop'. A lot of teaching was done and qualifications issued, but the economic stagnation of the 1980s shows that this was too simple an assumption. Moreover, governments do not have enough money to supply nearly as much education as their people want.

The evidence seems clear to us that integrated work/study programmes, whether organised by firms, churches, self-funded by students in private universities, or involving part-time, mainly distance, education, are more cost-effective than the regular government funded programmes. Also, the total experience in these work/study schemes appears to engender more maturity, responsibility and self-reliance. Thus, taxpayers' funds (whether from the nation or metropolitan country) would seem to be better spent on

encouraging the further development of these programmes than on expanding the free government-sponsored sector.

It should also be possible, within the government sector, to shift towards a higher proportion of students being involved in work/study schemes, probably through more part-time distance programmes and summer schools.

The assumption that large systems are more cost-effective has been shown to be fallacious as some of the best education is coming from some small, low-cost systems.

3 Coming to terms with new international context

The major political pressures in the structuring of post-secondary education in the region still come from donor nations. In the past these were mainly former colonial powers and international agencies, but in the future these are likely to be the rising powers of East Asia, particularly Japan and its neighbours. This shift has major consequences for higher education.

The changing power balance necessitates teaching the history, polity, culture, economies and main languages of East Asia. The facts can be learned anywhere, but it is increasingly important that a proportion of students study in those countries. Over the past two generations total immersion in the cultures of USA, Britain, Australia or New Zealand, gave leaders an unparalleled experience which was of immense value when they had to deal with those countries later in their lives. Now that the countries that matter are changing, the broadening range of countries in which Pacific people study is encouraging, but the numbers who study in Japan, China and their neighbours merit urgent expansion.

4 Strengthening national institutions; widening the spread of regional facilities

National institutions and education systems should be strengthened and regional facilities more equitably spread. Regional co-operation has an important role in higher education, but it is overconcentrated and thus disproportionately benefits the countries which host the institutions concerned, and those beyond the region who

provide resources for higher education, to the detriment of most Pacific island countries. (The same problem was apparent in USSR and Eastern Europe when it was overcentralised.) The ideology of centralist regionalism, in a region where mobility is limited by legal, administrative and financial constraints (none of which has relaxed significantly in the past 25 years while some have been tightened), leads to the massive relative deprivation of the people of those countries which are locked into the region but have no significant alternative sources of higher education.

To the extent that regional solutions are found, and there is an important role for them, it is important that physical facilities, as well as economic, employment and other benefits be more equitably spread. Regional facilities need to be distributed rather than centralised, to avoid the main beneficiary of regional educational services always being the host country; a spread of physical facilities distributes leverage as well as educational opportunities and reduces the capacity of a single institution to serve any one nation disproportionately. Nevertheless, there is much scope for regional interaction and sharing between national institutions. The developing Caribbean notion of regional centres of excellence, to overcome the problems of excessive centralisation, merits further consideration here.

It is important that each nation be able to choose the best mix of options for its students, whether these are national, regional or international.

5 Internationalising education

While there is a case for strengthening national education, there is also a case for international experience – including that in other Pacific countries as well as further afield. If possible, students should avoid doing more than one post-secondary qualification in any one country. There are better prospects for achieving this in the Pacific than anywhere else in the world. Donor nations should therefore not continue to act on the assumption that it is in their interest to focus higher education on just one country, rather than on the nations equitably – this can only lead to the benefits being

further skewed, and the majority of countries further marginalised.

6 Benefiting from science and technology

While great strides have been made in recent decades, radical expansion is needed in the teaching of science and technology if Pacific people are to benefit from the potential of the new century. This is particularly important now that the Pacific is moving away from dependence on unprocessed primary products to dependence on knowledge and skills. The post-secondary institutions alone will not be able to change far or fast enough, and much will need to be done by the media, the voluntary and commercial sectors, and educational institutions from kindergarten onwards. They should be given every encouragement, for whatever they achieve will have a positive impact on formal education.

7 Working towards life-long learning

Every Pacific nation has made tremendous strides towards making learning a life-long process. The new technology greatly facilitates the process. Regular consultations (perhaps an annual one-day consultation on progress towards life-long education) between governments and representatives of other sections of the community could enhance the process.

‘The divorce of learning from action, which still pervades formal higher education, is being made redundant by the integration of information, theory and action in the work setting....(this) requires that thought be developed in an action context’ (Morrison, 1989 p.7). Morrison also notes (1989 p.5) that higher education is changing from a full-time commitment for four years to a part-time commitment for forty years.

Achieving the aim of life-long education requires flexibility. Mike Moore, a former Prime Minister and now Leader of the Opposition in New Zealand, spoke to us enthusiastically of a high school in his electorate which is pioneering an ‘all-day’ concept, with the regular classes from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. as usual, followed by optional courses in technology, science, languages, arts and computing. He says pupils, parents, teachers and the community are all supportive. The

Honiara Municipal Authority's planned experiment with voluntary afternoon schools for unemployed young Solomon Islanders is another welcome initiative. Innovative approaches of this kind, with appropriate incentives, should be encouraged throughout the region, at all levels of education.

If trends elsewhere are any indication, the percentage of mature age students will increase, as will the need to facilitate their being able to receive more of their education where they live. We need also to explore the possibility of encouraging the media to undertake more public education – some of which they already do very well.

8 Strengthening the curriculum

A cultural component is an important part of any curriculum but this has to be seen in the context of providing education of the highest possible quality. We consider the quality of education to be more important than content. It is too easy to equate qualifications, rather than evaluate the quality of the total educational experience.

While there is a strong case for special curricula in all subjects for individual nations, or for Polynesia or Melanesia or Micronesia, or for the Pacific Islands as a whole, this need not be overdone.

New approaches to the teaching of sciences, mathematics, technology and management are being evolved. We need programmes to ensure that the evolving techniques are known and implemented.

We see a strong case for greater emphasis in the whole learning process on health, creativity, ethics and responsibility.

9 Acknowledging mobility

Education systems need to take more account of the increasingly mobile nature of Pacific society. The heightened mobility of Pacific people, particularly in Micronesia and Polynesia, has been remarkable in the past generation. Indications are that it will expand, both within the nation and internationally. The Micronesian countries north of the equator now have free access to USA, the outflow from Polynesia continues, and the Greenhouse Effect and population pressure could lead to some resettlement within or beyond the

region. Education needs to help people to be able to function abroad as well as at home. Where some of the smaller Pacific countries are concerned, more young people are likely to live outside their countries of origin than within them. The rest are likely to spend periods away from home – this is already common for senior civil servants assigned to international agencies and for management staff of international firms – or working at home with people from abroad.

The current attention being given to the development of national culture and identity is consistent with high mobility. To a large extent it is a protective reaction to it. People will be better equipped to handle themselves in the wider world if they are confident in themselves and their own identity. It is a matter of balance. A well devised system of education can encompass both.

10 Ensuring personal development

Beyond education for employment, there is always a need for personal enrichment programmes in local and international culture, art and creativity.

The UNESCO report on education, culture and identity in the Pacific is a useful reference here (Teasdale and Teasdale, eds, 1992). Philosophy and the humanities, science for interested lay persons, communications skills, lectures and discussions on current world affairs; all can widen horizons and develop a community. They need not cost much money. Much is available in books, audio-cassettes, disks, videos, television programmes and so on. But places for meeting for discussion and teaching are also valuable. Some churches, some voluntary organisations, and most educational institutions do some work in this field. It merits further promotion.

11 Developing personal and social values

We have come through a period in which the emphasis in education and qualifications has been too heavily on the transmission of skill and information, and not enough on the development of responsibility, integrity and higher values.

A recent UNESCO survey of what we can learn from the

experience of various approaches to education shows the importance of values in education (Futuresco, vol 2, 1992). While the authors are not associated with any religious organisations, we believe the evidence indicates that the quality of graduates of church-related institutions is often higher than those of government institutions or of purely commercial sources of education. This is less so with business in-house systems, though there the values are sometimes narrow. It is time we sought to evolve ethical and value systems better designed for the circumstances of the new generation.