



7th ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC7)
 Students' Forum: 11–14 May 2019 | Rectors' Conference: 12–14 May 2019
 Bucharest, Romania

Higher Education Taking Action Towards the Sustainable Development Goals:
 Perspectives from Asia and Europe



Opinion | James Ranstead

The plight of international students in the New Zealand Higher Education system

International Students in New Zealand are being treated unfairly through huge fees, and discriminatory policies that come at the expense of student welfare. This is not sustainable.

“As an international student, I am treated like a cash-cow. I enrolled in a Private Training Establishment in New Zealand, and pay 3x the price that my domestic counterparts do. Thankfully my course is only two years long – my friend studying a 5 year long veterinary qualification is going to be charged hundreds of thousands of dollars over the course of their studies.”

“When I enrolled in my course, I was hit with unexpected costs. The New Zealand Government called it an Export Education Levy. The Export Education Levy is mostly in place to cover the promotion and marketing of institutes which I thought was odd, however I paid it anyway as it is mandatory.”

“Whilst studying in New Zealand, my Private Training Establishment couldn't continue financially. I was reimbursed for some of what I paid for my studies, however I could not complete my qualification, and I felt that a large amount of time was wasted in New Zealand. What's more, I have since found out that the Export Education Levy has been raised to cover the expenses incurred by the PTE failures.”

This is the story of many international students that have travelled to New Zealand to further their education in recent years, as according to the New Zealand International Students Association President Lukas Kristen.

The story is correct – international students pay three times the amount that domestic students do (The University of Auckland, n.d.). The price that they pay is deemed acceptable as it is said to cover the full cost of the education (i.e. New Zealanders have their fees subsidised by two thirds), as they are foreigners and often leave soon after graduating (Butcher & McGrath, 2004). There are flaws in this argument, however. First, many international students do work in New

Zealand, either during their studies or after (often visa restriction dependent). This work often fills a critical skill shortage, as the New Zealand population trends older and older on average. Second, many of these students end up staying in New Zealand upon graduation, often working in highly sought after fields, and contributing significant amounts of tax money to the Government. Finally, even if these graduates do go overseas/head home, they are contributing to the global economy and worldwide knowledge economy. The graduate may be working on green technology, they could be teachers, or they could be doctors. The career limits are endless, and in many respects, as are the secondary benefits to the global society.

While international students cover the full cost of their education, they also pay an additional fee – the export education levy (EEL) (The University of Auckland, n.d.). This is currently 0.5% of university, Institute of Technology and Polytechnics, and private schools (Ministry of Education, n.d.). The rate is 0.89% for Private Training Establishments (Ministry of Education, n.d.). The key function of this fee is so institutes can continue to market themselves internationally (Ministry of Education, n.d.). As was said in the story above, this rate has increased recently to cover the cost PTE's failing financially and not being able to reimburse students that have been ripped off.

New Zealand is an incredibly fortunate country. We have one of the best tertiary sectors in the world, supporting 8 universities, 16 polytechnics and over 100 Private Training Establishments, however unfortunately over the past few decades we have manipulated the international student market and started treating them as 'cash cows' (Butcher & McGrath, 2004).

It is our responsibility as a wealthy country in the Pacific to educate our Pacific neighbours, many of which come from island nations that do not have the resourcing and infrastructure to support an education system as good as ours. Here in New Zealand we talk a lot about inequality within our own country, however the educational inequality between other nations is much larger. We need to be reducing barriers to education, and upskilling those that want to experience upwards mobilisation and assist their own communities in their home countries.

We are at an incredibly interesting time in the history of the planet. Issues are increasingly become borderless, and require an international approach. Climate change, for example, requires an educated society for a solution to be found. It is estimated that within ten years we will be within a water crisis, and soon after, a food crisis.

By starting with educational equity across nations and reducing barriers, we will be one step towards not only enhancing the education related Sustainable Development Goals, but also many other as well. The old adage of 'education as the great leveller' definitely rings true in this instance, as it is most definitely a

key opportunity provider.

So, how can we change the story that was posed at the beginning of this Op-Ed?

First and foremost, I am not going to the extreme of suggesting that international students should pay the same as New Zealanders. The New Zealand Government is currently shifting towards a 'free tertiary education' policy model, which probably wouldn't work for international students. Domestic students contribute to New Zealand, as do international students. A lower fee for international students should apply.

Second, New Zealand offers what they call 'NZ Aid' scholarships to international students who come from developing countries (New Zealand Foreign Affairs & Trade, n.d.). These scholarships are door openers for students from a variety of backgrounds. It presents them with opportunities that many didn't know existed. The 'NZ Aid' Scholarships should be expanded, as many of the students go on to make significant gains in their home communities that relate to the Sustainable Development Goals. Freshwater management within the Pacific, for example. The criteria should also be edited to remove the expectation that New Zealand also benefits from the scholarships - they should be provided on more of an altruistic basis (New Zealand Foreign Affairs & Trade, n.d.).

Finally, the EEL should either be removed, or its use changed to go towards a service that international students actually benefit from. Institutes that want to advertise to international students should not charge them directly for this, nor should international students pay more as a result of poor governance and academic qualifications management.

Much of this Op-Ed was not referenced with formal referees, as much of the content was picked up during Task 1 – My interview with the President of the New Zealand International Students' Associations (NZISA)

References:

Butcher, A. & McGrath, T. (2004). International Students in New Zealand: Needs and Responses. *International Education Journal*, 5(4). 540 – 551.

The University of Auckland. (n.d.). Postgraduate fees for international students. Retrieved from: <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/study/fees-and-money-matters/tuition-fees/postgraduate-international-fees.html>

Ministry of Education. (n.d.). *New Export Education Levy rates from 2019*. Retrieved from: <https://libguides.library.usyd.edu.au/c.php?g=508212&p=3476096>

New Zealand Foreign Affairs & Trade. (n.d.). New Zealand Scholarships.
Retrieved from: <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/aid-and-development/new-zealand-government-scholarships/>