

sector is very much a desired factor. When the Government does not recognise the qualification, many naive citizens tend to conclude (mistakenly) that a shoddy or worthless commodity is being dumped by the providers onto their laps. This kind of belief gets reinforced further when the quality of instruction or material is poor.

“Certain sectors of the government would like to see higher education privatised — others see this as contrary to the nation’s social engineering policies.”

4. Government

Education is a major political issue in Malaysia. The law in terms of the establishment of universities locally is very clear (University & University College Act, 1972). There has to be a Royal Charter. However, in recent years, the philosophy of privatisation has been expounded very hard as a national ideology. Certain sectors of the government would like to see higher education privatised —

others see this as contrary to the nation’s social engineering policies. In this climate of confusion, the vaguely framed Education Act of 1961 is not much help for higher education because it is silent on the matter. It does not cover tertiary education either on or off-campus. However, an emergency regulation promulgated in 1969 specifically states that all those providing any form of higher education can only do so with the express permission of the Minister for Education. This Act covers the delivery of external courses as well. While the nation is no longer under any security threat, the 1969 emergency is still in force and, therefore, the Act exists. Many new and old providers of external studies operate in this grey area. Civil servants responsible for enforcing the educational act think that such operations are illegal, and such external providers are liable for prosecution. However, they (the civil servants) have a natural hesitancy in enforcing an Emergency Act eighteen years after its promulgation. This dilemma/difficulty is not expected to exist for long. The Educational Act of 1961 is being amended and measures will be introduced to regulate private higher education whether it is delivered locally in classrooms or from abroad.

Table 5: Population size and age structure 1980-1990 in Malaysia

Age group	1980		1985		1990		Average annual growth rate (%)	
	'000	%	'000	%	'000	%	1981-1985	1986-1990
Peninsular Malaysia	11,473.0	100.0	12,968.8	100.0	14,605.2	100.0	2.5	2.4
0-14	4,484.0	39.1	4,835.1	37.3	5,263.2	36.0	1.5	1.7
15-24	2,436.9	21.1	2,726.3	21.0	2,891.0	19.8	2.2	1.2
25-39	2,301.2	20.1	2,789.2	21.5	3,333.7	22.8	3.8	3.6
40-54	1,310.0	11.4	1,535.3	11.8	1,833.3	12.6	3.2	3.5
55-64	515.7	4.5	605.6	4.7	721.3	4.9	3.2	3.5
65+	425.2	3.7	477.3	3.7	562.7	3.9	2.3	3.5
Sabah	1,055.1	100.0	1,279.5	100.0	1,517.4	100.0	3.9	3.4
0-14	471.0	44.6	575.1	44.9	667.2	44.0	4.0	3.0
15-24	228.5	21.7	244.8	19.1	287.6	19.0	1.4	3.2
25-39	201.0	19.1	268.5	21.0	324.0	21.4	5.8	3.8
40-54	101.7	9.6	123.5	9.7	152.0	10.0	3.9	4.2
55-64	34.1	3.2	41.9	3.3	52.7	3.5	4.1	4.6
65+	18.8	1.8	25.7	2.0	33.7	2.1	6.3	5.4
Sarawak	1,351.1	100.0	1,542.8	100.0	1,754.6	100.0	2.7	2.6
0-14	587.5	43.5	636.3	41.2	683.5	39.0	1.6	1.4
15-24	266.2	19.7	319.5	20.7	372.5	21.0	3.7	3.1
25-39	246.9	18.3	299.2	19.4	360.8	20.6	3.8	3.7
40-54	142.2	10.5	164.0	10.6	195.1	11.1	2.9	3.5
55-64	61.2	4.5	69.0	4.5	77.6	4.4	2.4	2.3
65+	47.1	3.5	54.8	3.6	65.1	3.7	3.0	3.4
Malaysia	13,879.2	100.0	15,791.1	100.0	17,877.2	100.0	2.6	2.5
0-14	5,542.5	43.5	6,046.5	38.3	6,613.9	37.0	1.7	1.8
15-24	2,931.6	19.7	3,290.6	20.9	3,551.2	19.8	2.3	1.5
25-39	2,749.1	18.3	3,356.9	21.3	4,018.6	22.5	4.0	3.6
40-54	1,553.9	10.5	1,822.8	11.5	2,180.4	12.5	3.2	3.6
55-64	611.0	4.5	716.5	4.5	851.6	4.8	3.2	3.5
65+	491.1	3.5	557.8	3.5	661.5	3.7	2.5	3.4

5. Predictions

A number of predictions can be made as to the direction in which higher educational trade activities may move over the next ten years. However, given the dynamic nature of the Malaysian nation, what probabilities one can give to these predictions will very much depend on which rumour one subscribes to.

- It is likely that the Government will encourage the establishment of private colleges. However, these will be stringently regulated so as to make them conform to national ideologies (both political and social).
- It is unlikely that the Government will attempt to establish its own new universities. However, the capacities of the present seven may be expected to increase from the present ceiling of 10,000 each. Given the fact that the country’s population is young and productive, one can assume an increase in demand rather than a decrease (Table 5). Seventy-eight per cent of the population is under 39 and roughly three-quarters of them are in the fertile age group.
- Need for external and part-time studies can be expected to increase as the backlog of those who ‘missed out’ in the first instance keeps building up and as individuals move to jobs straight out of school and then pick up further education. Opportunities will be there for providers of locally relevant programmes.
- Language of instruction is going to be a major problem to contend with as the use of Bahasa Malaysia increases and that of English decreases.
- The attractiveness of external studies can only be taken advantage of if pricing levels are appropriate. If prices remain high as they are today — then it is very likely to be unpopular.
- External studies will become even more unattractive if its status as a recognised form of education is not firmly established in the Malaysian mind or government.

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Offshore education: a Hong Kong perspective

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Introduction

Australian educational institutions are increasingly offering their external courses overseas. Some are already represented in Hong Kong, and it seems that others plan to join in. This article provides some background information about Hong Kong students and gives advice on how Australian institutions can best meet their needs.

Hong Kong

Hong Kong is a small territory of some 1000 square kilometres, which is due to be handed over, just a little nervously, to the People’s Republic of China by the British Government in 1997. Nearly all of its population of over five and a half million people is Chinese, with the remaining 2% comprising an international community. The two official languages are English and Chinese. Most Chinese in Hong Kong speak Cantonese, while Chinese texts are written in Putonghua (Mandarin) style.

The natural resources of Hong Kong are very limited. Its prosperity is very much dependent on its position as a financial and tourist centre, and as an exporter of manufactured goods. The people of Hong Kong have been particularly successful in constantly adapting to change — this ability has led to Hong Kong having a high standard of living, perhaps second only to Japan in the Asian region.

Chinese families are traditionally both extended and close. Respect is due to all family members, especially elders, with filial piety being the great virtue. The ‘face’ concept still prevails; this expresses the great value the Chinese place on allowing others to escape the humiliation implicit in not knowing, failing to understand, having been mistaken, or being inferior to others. The traditional family has an emphasis on a literary and moralistic education, stressing the spiritual needs of man and the cultivation of certain character traits. Contact with Western materialism has, however, modified such strict discipline, so that economic success and achievement is now the dominant motivating force for the people of Hong Kong.

The urge to acquire wealth that permeates Hong Kong would probably be regarded as extreme elsewhere. In Hong Kong, your worth is largely measured by your material success, and so hard work is

a great virtue. People work long hours, often with two or more jobs, and there is little time or room for pursuits or activities of an unprofitable nature.

Hong Kong students

1. Circumstances

Most people in Hong Kong live in high-rise flats. Accommodation is expensive, and available living space is severely restricted. It is not unusual to have a family of eight persons, representing three generations, living in a flat with a floor area of 400 square feet. The implications of this overcrowding on people’s ability to study at home are obvious. Nevertheless, great emphasis is placed on education.

The obsession of Japanese parents with the education of their children is legendary. The situation in Hong Kong is little different. Parents use what might be considered extreme measures to ensure their offspring’s academic success.

Success in examinations is foremost. As well as parental pressure on students, teachers are judged professionally in terms of their students’ results. Parents of young children tutor them while they are not at school, and those with means hire tutors to ensure high marks. Doing well in examinations is seen as a way for children to lead a better life than their parents. The result of this philosophy and practice is an inflexible education system that is exam-oriented to a high degree and which succeeds only in relation to fairly crude criteria. All of this is understandable in Hong Kong’s competitive environment and in an education system where the ratio of suitably qualified applicants to available places in post-secondary education is greater than ten to one.

2. Attitudes

Hong Kong students display almost unquestioning acceptance of the knowledge of the teacher or lecturer. This may be explained in terms of an extension or transfer of the Confucian ethic of filial piety. Coupled with this is an emphasis on strictness of discipline and proper behaviour, rather than on the expression of opinion, independence, self-mastery, creativity and all-round personal development. Further, there is a seeming lack of investigatory zeal, in that what the lecturer says must be true, so that there is no need to find anything further that might contradict what has been taught. Indeed,

if a contradiction can be found, this could be construed to lead to a ‘loss of face’ on the lecturer’s part.

One of the few times that a lecturer’s judgement may be called into question is over marks or grades awarded. Western students are likely to accept grades virtually unequivocally, whereas Hong Kong students tend to want to check their answers with the model, and will sometimes argue over the lecturer’s interpretation of an answer.

The firm base of familism and filial piety leads groups of Hong Kong students to react differently from their Western counterparts. There is also emphasis on group identity, as in general Chinese achievement motivation is rooted more firmly in the collectivist than the individualistic orientation. The result of this is that some well-tried educational practices used elsewhere (seminars based on confrontation, debate and other argumentative techniques) are not likely to work, because group pressure is on unity rather than division. Added to this is the ‘loss of face’ or embarrassment implicit in losing an argument. Also, the aggression required for certain techniques, notably some forms of role play, is notoriously absent from the Chinese makeup.

Implications

The above information has implications for Australian institutions wishing to offer their courses in Hong Kong. The information is, naturally, incomplete. A further consideration, not discussed here, is the problem of Hong Kong students studying in a second language.

There are also other factors which influence whether and how courses can be offered:

- the nature and needs of Hong Kong students,
- the ‘educational marketplace’ of Hong Kong, and
- the attitude and policies of the Hong Kong Government.

The first issue has been partly addressed already in this article. The other two also need closer examination.

1. The Hong Kong Educational Marketplace

The educational marketplace in Hong Kong is thriving and robust. Those with

the heart to venture therein must first realise that Hong Kong is not a third world country. In fact, it can hardly be described as a developing country — it is developed. To illustrate this contention, it was recently revealed that Hong Kong textile manufacturers were setting up factory operations in northern England, partly because of the low wage rates there.

As already mentioned, there is a large unmet demand for higher education in Hong Kong. The five tertiary institutions (this will soon grow to six with the start of the third university) and the technical institutes have no trouble filling their quotas, and each year turn away hundreds of thousands of suitably qualified applicants.

The result of this situation is that educational institutions from around the world vie for the attention of the huge pool of people looking for qualifications. Represented among the institutions are the good, the bad, the indifferent and the fraudulent. Educational brokers abound, so that competition is fierce in the struggle for the elusive student dollar. Costs of advertising one's educational wares can be very expensive, as any institution that has been able to afford a cubicle at one of the educational fairs will testify.

“... Hong Kong students are becoming street-wise in their search for a good qualification at a nice price.”

This market atmosphere has existed for some years, with the consequence that Hong Kong students are becoming street-wise in their search for a good qualification at a nice price. They know what they want, and will look very carefully at what's on offer before making a decision. An established reputation counts for a lot more than flashy advertising. Once their decision is made, students are willing to make considerable sacrifices in both personal and monetary terms to achieve their aims.

2. The Hong Kong Government

The Hong Kong Government will not welcome foreign institutions with open arms. Unless working in partnership with a local institution, institutions will not, for instance, be allowed to run tutorials in Hong Kong. This policy has made it difficult for overseas institutions to run the types of courses they would like, and to offer their students the full services they need. Thus, for the past few years, the Open College of the University of East Asia has been unable to run study sessions in Hong Kong. Instead, the hydrofoil and

jetfoil services have benefited by transporting large numbers of students and tutors to and from Macau for their tutorials.

Another problem is that foreign courses will not be recognised for entry into Government service, which can reduce potential clientele. However, many students are not concerned with this restriction, and recognition can take other forms. For example, courses may qualify persons for admission to a professional organisation, a vital concern for some enrollees.

So, all is not lost. Further, new opportunities are arising with the release of the Government's Education Report Number 2, which has a chapter devoted to the future of open learning in Hong Kong. The major recommendation of the chapter was that the tertiary institutions should establish an open learning consortium, something in the style of that set up in British Columbia, but of course tailored to local needs. Particular attention was given to the role of overseas institutions, with the need for public safeguards being stressed.

Options

Faced with the above issues, Australian institutions have a choice as to how they offer courses to Hong Kong students. The available options are summarised below, along with recommendations as to which of the options are the most feasible and desirable.

Go it alone

This method is to simply offer a distance education course in Hong Kong, and administer it totally from the home institution. It is the easy way out, and avoids complications. However, it is not particularly recommended, as it displays a lack of commitment, and will probably have a high level of attrition.

Get local help

It is possible to have a commercial organisation in Hong Kong to provide administrative help. This assistance can be given in a number of ways, including distribution and collection of materials, the monitoring of student progress and advertising. It is quite a good solution, but care must be taken in choosing a representative. Obviously, their track record needs to be checked, and knowledge of who else they are currently representing is an indicator of their worth and expertise. The manner in which they charge the host institution also requires close attention — a percentage charge per student is better than a lump sum, especially early on when student numbers are uncertain. Also, one that makes additional charges to students should be avoided.

Set up in Hong Kong

An institution may choose to set up its own office in Hong Kong to administer

the course and provide support to local students. This option is not particularly recommended. Office accommodation is extremely expensive, and an overseas institution operating in this way will be closely watched by the Government.

Partnership

The five tertiary institutions in Hong Kong are able to offer courses in collaboration with overseas institutions and professional bodies. This is a good solution, but is only possible if the overseas institution has something to offer that will complement existing offerings. Partnerships already in operation include links between Ohio University and the Hong Kong Baptist College, and the Henley/Brunel MBA being offered through the City Polytechnic of Hong Kong.

Sell

It will be possible to sell overseas courses to the Open Learning Institute, presently being established in Hong Kong. This future possibility provides quite a challenge to overseas institutions. To succeed with this option, an institution will need to have a course which is of high quality and is portable (that is, can be usefully applied in places other than the host country). Naturally, it would be of considerable advantage if the course is already translated into Chinese!

A few parting words

Australian institutions wishing to offer courses in Hong Kong should not assume that they are entering a naive and unsophisticated educational scene. Further, although Hong Kong students are fairly quiet and passive, they are highly ambitious and know what they want. They study for qualifications, not for general interest or self-fulfilment.

As a suggestion, institutions interested in offering courses in Hong Kong can:

- read the Hong Kong Government's Education Report Number 2,
- talk to the educational representatives in the Australian High Commission in Hong Kong,
- contact the existing tertiary institutions to ascertain the possibility of cooperative ventures, and
- talk to the Hong Kong Government.

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Offshore education marketing: professional and industrial issues

The Hawke Government's announcement in 1985 that higher education institutions would be allowed to market their services overseas was met with an in-principle response from many quarters. Education, it was said, is not a commodity and therefore cannot properly be bought or sold, either to Australians or to overseas students. The academic unions were among those who adopted this stance. This accorded with their policy positions opposing tuition fees for higher education and against the establishment of private higher education institutions. Both unions, however, have consistently maintained a double-pronged approach to the issue, with strongly pragmatic elements counterbalancing their principled position.

The practical side to the unions' policies encompasses an acceptance that, whatever people may feel about principles, institutions are already selling their courses and services. The need for Australia to expand its export base is also recognized. Nevertheless, leaving aside issues of principle, academic staff have clear and legitimate industrial and professional concerns about the nature and extent of institutions' commercial activities. It is principally because of these concerns that unions have been deeply involved in the issue of education export for well over two years.

“The shift in Australian overseas higher education policy towards trade, and away from aid, is central to the crisis currently facing our higher education system.”

While they may essentially be pragmatic, the unions' concerns are broader than an interest solely in the export of education services. The shift in Australian overseas higher education policy towards trade, and away from aid, is central to the crisis currently facing our higher education system. Its relationship to the crisis is both causal and one of effect; the consequences of the Govern-

ment's education export policies are potentially serious unless both the Government and its agencies, and the higher education institutions themselves, are prepared to exercise caution, restraint and sensitivity in the implementation of marketing initiatives.

Two major political pressures contributed to the Federal Government's decision to allow institutions to market their services overseas. These were, first, **ideological pressures** from the free-market monetarist ascendancy in and around Federal Cabinet and, second, **financial pressures** which included:

- unprecedented unmet demand for higher education, already serious in 1985 but which rose to 20,000 qualified school-leavers who, in 1987, were unable to find a place¹;
- policies entailing the reduction of public expenditure in most budgetary areas and strong resistance to growth in the public sector, including higher education, despite conflict with traditional Labor Party priorities and policies and despite the commitments of the Prices and Incomes Accord of 1983;
- a need to improve Australia's balance of trade;
- within higher education, stagnation in both salaries and employment opportunities for academic staff, caused by real funding cutbacks in the decade 1975-1985².

From the institutions' perspective, therefore, as well as that of the Government, any extra source of income was to be welcomed. Many have accordingly become involved in education export, and no one can blame them from entering the field with all despatch and enthusiasm. Some are already making a profit from the exercise, though to what extent permanent reliance on this source of income is a viable proposition remains to be seen.

But, as well as providing at best temporary and modest respite from the funding crisis, the commercialisation of Australian higher education in the overseas market has also contributed to that crisis and has the potential to become a significant factor in the deepening of the problems facing the system as a whole. Before I turn to examine specifically the professional and industrial issues con-

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nected with offshore and distance education marketing, the more general potentially destabilising effects of the commercialisation of higher education services should be briefly mentioned.

In general terms, overseas marketing poses threats to the reputation, effective co-ordination and regulation of the system.

The Federal Government has allowed developments in overseas education marketing to proceed in an uncoordinated and unregulated manner, subject only to a very weak and general set of guidelines overseen by the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission. This is a short-sighted approach. First, it encourages institutions to compete against each other rather than to cooperate and has already resulted in a number of somewhat hasty and ill-conceived schemes which have finally been rejected by overseas clients. It has led also to a loss of credibility for Australian higher education as a whole.

Senator Susan Ryan, former Minister for Education, referred to this general problem in a speech delivered in Hobart on 24 March this year:

“It is important also to the successful marketing of education services that the advertising and promotion by institutions reflect the highest standards of integrity and probity. The experience of both the United States and the United Kingdom is that some institutions may not be entirely scrupulous in this regard. Failure on this point could jeopardise the whole marketing effort.”

Malaysia's major English language newspaper, the *New Straits Times*, has also editorialised on this problem. In a series of articles in 1986, Education Editor John Pillai raised questions about the academic standards of courses marketed to Malaysian students by overseas institutions, including Australian universities and colleges. He also referred to community concern about the welfare of the Malaysian student clientele of marketing institutions and accused some of them of being ignorant of Malaysia's cultural, social and economic needs. They were, he alleged, content to treat Malaysian students as “guinea pigs” in their commercial operations³. It must not be