

New Zealand reformers propose radical overhaul of British education

A British think tank's commission on public service reform says real choice for parents and removal of central control are the only ways to improve education. We look at the arguments put forward by the three-member commission.



The report, from UK think-tank Reform's Commission on the Reform of Public Services (New Zealand's Sir Roger Douglas and Ruth Richardson with former UK

Treasury senior executive Sir Steve Robson), proposes a radical new agenda for education, as well as health and crime.

Ruth Richardson (pictured), speaking at the report's launch on 7 April, said, "When the consumer of health or education services has choice and the provider is incentivised to be efficient, it costs less and the consumer gets more".

The commission has said that centralised management and funding of schools has put the British Government in a wholly conflicting position as provider, purchaser and regulator. It has resulted in schools with poor teacher motivation, bored children and falling standards, whilst education

spending increased by £33 billion in nine years – a 55% increase after inflation.

The commission's reform proposals call for:

- all parents having the purchasing power to educate their children whether through a voucher or tax credit;
- heads and teachers having the right to buy their schools; and
- minimum levels of regulation consistent with all schools meeting school-registration requirements and accurately publishing information to support parental choice.

"The goal of reform is changing what

government does, not the government trying to change what schools do," the commission's report stated.

The objectives of a reformed system would be to:

- depoliticise education provision;
- transfer purchasing power from government providers to individual parents; and
- liberate the supply side, so good schools can expand and new providers come into the sector.

Government would retain its role as funder, but transfer purchasing power to

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parents. This would require a genuine capitation system, similar to that in Sweden, where schools received resources according to the decisions of parents.

The capitation value would vary by pupil age and other factors reflecting higher costs, such as inner city schools and those with special needs. This would ensure that children often seen as unwanted problems in the current system would be accorded extra value by education providers.

At present, funds under the direct control of head teachers amount to £2900 per pupil on average. Switching public spending on schools would mean an average capitation value of around £5000. Compared to the current system, an additional £2000 per pupil would therefore

be under the direct control of head teachers, according to the report.

The capitation system should also include a capital element. By so doing, it would break the lock on the expansion of good schools and the creation of new schools.

Since teaching was so central to the business of education, and was by far the largest element of a school's budget, head teachers should be responsible for the employment of teachers and should be free to appoint anyone they want to any post.

They should also be responsible for the training of their staff. Pay and conditions bargaining should be carried out on a school-by-school basis.

Government's key role as regulator

should be to ensure that, in order to exercise choice, parents should receive accurate information on the performance of schools. Its role should also be to ensure that schools publish annual educational and financial results.

Government must also maintain the financial integrity of the system. As well as distributing financial support to parents, it should register all organisations asking for taxpayer support for education. But this role should not be allowed to become a means for government to take back control over curriculum and teaching methods.

More information on the commission's report is at <http://www.reformbritain.com/module.asp?module=3&page=home>

Competition in education the way to go, national hui told

A three-day hui in Taupo last month addressed the Government's education strategy for Maori and focused in particular on the issues of Maori academic achievement. One presentation urged more competition in education as the way forward.

A more competitive education system would give diversity and choice, according to a presentation from Adrian Orr, in his role as director of investment company Lake Taupo Funds Ltd.

Mr Orr, who is also assistant governor at the Reserve Bank of New Zealand, said in his presentation that competition in the tertiary sector:

- improved strategies;
- altered the nature and quality of the product being offered; and
- raised the need for boards to address strategies.

He said the future role of the private sector in education could include public/private partnerships in all areas of education (including the construction of schools and

financing); private, targeted, untagged research; and tertiary centres of excellence.

Simply improving access to education for Maori would not boost results; curriculum design and teacher performance should also be looked at, and "one size does not fit all".

Government-iwi partnerships and a Maori Education Authority were among other topics discussed at the hui.

A Ngai Tahu presentation said the iwi did not support a national education body because "we do not believe it can better represent our specific treaty interests.

"Instead we call for government resourcing of regional Taumata [or councils] that are facilitated and managed by mana whenua [or local people].

"We believe that [this] would allow each iwi to focus on what needs to be done at the ground level to address their unique educational needs."

Held at Taupo from 7-9 March, the hui, Hui Taumata Matauranga, was opened by Prime Minister Helen Clark. Minister of Education Trevor Mallard, Minister of Maori Affairs Parekura Horomia and Associate Minister of Education Marion Hobbs also attended, along with iwi representatives, Maori education providers and Te Taihū o nga Wananga, the association of Maori tertiary institutions.

A Ministry of Education web page about the annual hui is at <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/index.cfm?layout=index&indexid=6506&indexparentid=1063>

Teacher training quality a concern but wider reforms needed, MPs told

A select committee inquiring into teacher training has heard concerns, from across the political spectrum, about training quality. We look at what the Education Forum says should be fixed and also how teachers view the situation.



Reforms far wider than just improving teacher training are needed to improve teacher quality, the Education Forum has told the Education and Science Committee inquiry into teacher education.

Education Forum chairman, and headmaster of Auckland Grammar School, John Morris (pictured) told the inquiry earlier this month that while it was important to look at teacher training, it was also important to recognise that "difficulties in attracting and retaining enough high-quality teachers" reflected a cluster of factors that together made teaching an increasingly unattractive career.

"If our teachers' colleges cannot attract sufficient numbers of able men and women who are themselves well educated, or if considerable numbers of well-trained, able teachers are resigning, then clearly the

problems facing schools lie elsewhere."

While teacher-training reform was important, much more was required to get able people into the profession.

This included:

- raising salaries significantly;
- new roles for teachers and new ways to reward them;
- more mentoring;
- better support for new teachers; and
- better training.

"We have little chance of catching the knowledge wave and reaching first-class standards without first-class teachers. We need to do much more than just improve teacher education to get and retain the best people," Mr Morris said.

More flexible paths into teaching were also required, he said. One such programme, successful in the United Kingdom, the United States and parts of Europe was 'school-centred initial teacher training' where teacher trainees gained qualifications while working at schools.

"From every point of view there is weight of evidence that such programmes have many advantages over traditional programmes."

Lengthier internships would also help.

"Student teachers in New Zealand will get at most 15 weeks in schools. Teacher trainees in countries such as Germany, France and Chinese Taipei have full-year

internships. Without a doubt there is growing importance attached to clinical practice through lengthy student-teaching experiences," Mr Morris said.

The Post-Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) submission to the inquiry expressed concern with trainee teacher quality.

It said there was a widespread belief among teachers that the quality of applicants accepted for teacher education courses had declined.

This was due to factors including: absence of a reasonably-sized pool of suitable recruits; the competition between providers; and under-funding, meaning that providers were pressured to accept "sub-optimal" applicants to keep programmes running.

The fundamental problem at the heart of the failures in teacher education was that of student loans, the PPTA said.

"Tertiary education has become so expensive in New Zealand that institutions are obliged to provide the cheapest possible programmes in order to attract and retain students.

The Education Forum's Notes to accompany its appearance before the Education and Science committee inquiry into teacher education *can be downloaded from* http://www.educationforum.org.nz/documents/submissions/teacher_training.htm

Challenges ahead to boost Maori representation in tertiary study

Despite big increases in tertiary education participation since the mid-1980s, significant disparities exist for ethnic groups and students from low-decile schools, and a shift in government policy is needed to solve the problem, a Fulbright scholar studying New Zealand argues.



Maori and Pacific students are under-represented in tertiary education, as are students from low- and middle-decile schools, especially at the higher levels of tertiary

education. Most Maori and Pacific students attend low- or middle-income schools. These opportunity gaps meant the goal of broadening access had not been solved, Fulbright scholar Maureen McLaughlin said.

Recent policy decisions, such as eliminating the accumulation of interest while studying, had spread government assistance to all participants rather than focusing on where it would make the most difference – on those most in need or most at risk.

"Current tertiary policy discussions also tend to focus on costs and debt for all students, and on system direction and processes to change the system steering, but not enough on issues of opportunity," Ms McLaughlin said.

To address tertiary access and opportunity issues, New Zealand faced three main challenges:

- developing better acceptance of public/private cost sharing in tertiary education;
- closing the opportunity gap in tertiary participation for at-risk groups; and
- using data and research to inform decisions to make and deliver good policy.

"Many New Zealanders still feel that free tertiary education would provide the most access. However, evidence in New Zealand and in other countries runs counter to this, as tertiary participation has increased in New Zealand and many other countries at the same time that costs increased for students and families."

Maintaining the policy of student fees and public/private sharing of costs should be continued to ensure adequate resources, Ms McLaughlin said. The policy should be coupled with targeted early intervention and financial assistance for students most at risk.

A strategy to help students and families "think tertiary early" would also help students and families to plan earlier so that tertiary education was a "real option academically and financially".

Ms McLaughlin's report, Tertiary Education Policy in New Zealand, was released in March. It can be downloaded from <http://www.fulbright.org.nz/voices/axford/docs/mcLaughlin.pdf>

Government releases GATS papers

On 1 April, the government made public its offer on the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).

GATS is the first set of multilateral rules covering international trade in services. Its purpose is to establish a multilateral framework of principles and rules to help open up trade in services to competition from foreign suppliers.

Concern has been expressed over its impact on education in New Zealand. The government has said public education would not be on offer to foreign suppliers.

The Minister's statement on New Zealand's offer is at <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/ViewDocument.cfm?DocumentID=16388>

A summary of the offer is at <http://www.mfat.govt.nz/foreign/tnd/wtonegotiations/stagetwo/services/GATS%20initial%20offer%20summary1.pdf>

An Education Forum speech on GATS is at <http://www.educationforum.org.nz/upload/pdf/pirates.pdf>

An Education Forum hot topic on GATS is at: http://www.educationforum.org.nz/text-hot_topic_5-65

Choice, not student debt, leading to fewer children, says Australian report

There is no evidence to suggest that student loan repayments in Australia are affecting people's decisions to have children, according to a report released by The Centre for Independent Studies this month.



Opponents of university fees have recently linked declining fertility to student debt, in an attempt to justify lower charges under the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS).

The infertility claim can't be proved, report author Andrew Norton (pictured) said.

Evidence suggested that university-educated people had fewer children whether they were paying HECS or not.

"Education itself, rather than debt, is the force driving fertility down," Mr Norton said.

Even with HECS repayments, young graduates had the financial capacity to raise a family. The average person aged 25-34 with a bachelor degree or above and still repaying HECS earned about AU\$8000 a year more than a person with Year 12 education.

Evidence suggested that, on average, young university graduates could afford children, but chose not to because of lifestyle reasons, Mr Norton said.

The report is at <http://www.cis.org.au>

You know the rules!

Courtesy of the Pioneer Village in Stratford, Taranaki, we have a list of rules for teachers from 1872.

The teacher each day will fill lamps and clean windows.

Each teacher will bring a bucket of water and a scuttle of coal for the day's session.

Make your pens carefully. You may whittle them to the individual taste of the pupils.

Men teachers may take one evening each week for courting purposes or two evenings a week if they go to church regularly.

After 10 hours in school the teachers may spend the remaining time reading the Bible or other good books.

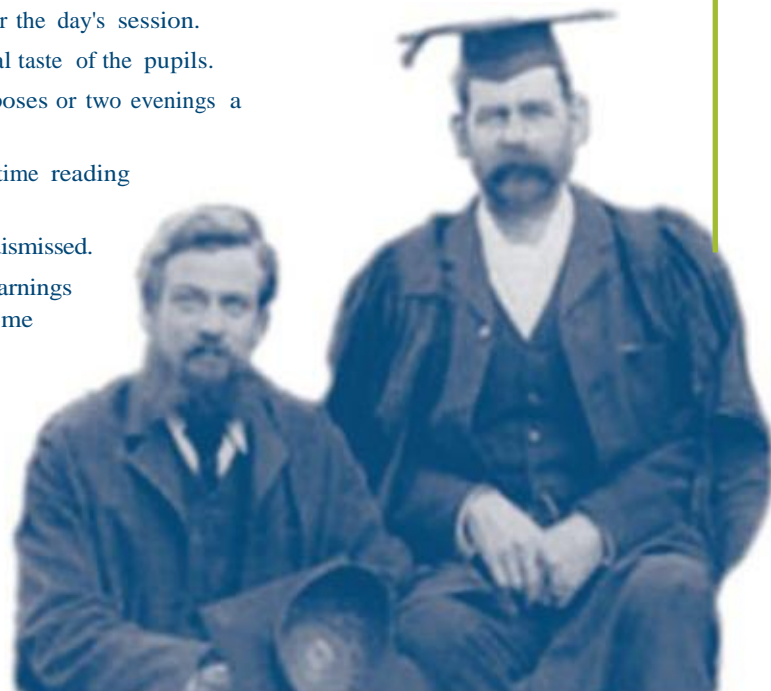
Women teachers who marry or engage in unseemly conduct will be dismissed.

Every teacher should lay aside from each pay a goodly sum of his earnings for his benefit during his declining years so that he will not become a burden on society.

Any teacher who smokes, uses liquor in any form, frequents public halls or gets shaved in a barber's shop will give good reason to suspect his worth, intention, integrity and honesty.

The teacher who performs his labour faithfully and without fault for five years will be given an increase of 25 cents per week in his pay, providing the Board of Education approves.

The image used in this story comes from the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, (ref: PAColl-2232-01).



Education sector fills office space in Auckland, makes inroads in Wellington

The growing importance of the education industry in New Zealand can be seen in the increasing amounts of central city office space being converted for educational use, and two surveys indicate the trend is on the up.

The education business dominates Auckland's central business district (CBD) and is making inroads in Wellington, two real estate reports indicate.

A Bayleys Research and Telfer Young report for Auckland said the education sector had the largest net CBD occupation and had increased it from 140,000 square metres to 160,000 square metres between July and January.

Lawyers occupied the second-most amount of space, followed by technology and banking, then property, insurance, communications, finance and travel.

Banking businesses were the CBD's largest individual tenants, on average occupying between 1600 m² to 1700 m² of net lettable office area per individual tenancy. Education was in third place, occupying between 1270 m² and 1300 m² on average, the report said.

Much education business was in Queen St and the Anzac Ave area. It was also in outlying inner-city areas such as Parnell, Grafton, Newmarket, College Hill and Newton.

In Wellington, education businesses made up 4.4% of the CBD office space as at December 2002, according to Telfer Young research manager Phil Tomlinson.

This was made up of 45,145 m² for teaching and 18,805 m² for teaching

administration. The figures took in Thorndon, downtown Wellington (from the railway station to Boulcott St) and Te Aro, an innercity suburb on the southern fringe of the central city. It included Victoria University and the Ministry of Education buildings.

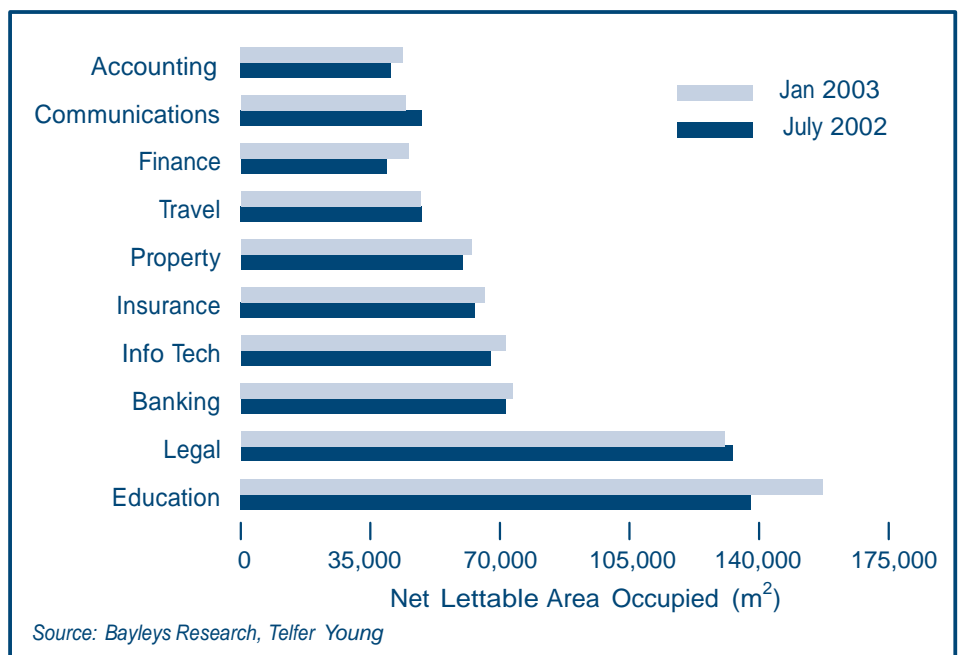
The Te Aro figures did not include accommodation such as hostels and backpackers' accommodation, but their presence was significant, Mr Tomlinson said.

It was the first time education had been included in the six-monthly Wellington

office market survey. Mr Tomlinson expected it to become a regular part of future surveys.

He said student numbers had increased about 20% in the past five years, and if that growth continued it would have significant implications for central city office space.

In recent months, Stafford House on The Terrace and Education House on Willis St had been converted into residential and student accommodation, with new backpackers' accommodation planned for a couple of sites in the Te Aro area.



Registered early childhood teachers may 'not be the answer' to quality concerns

The government has plans for the registration of all early childhood teachers by 2012, but research shows the move will not necessarily lead to better childcare or education outcomes, a conference has heard.

Raising registration requirements would raise costs, could give unintended consequences and the benefits were not likely to outweigh the costs, John Pierre de Raad, from the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research, told the Early Childhood Council's annual conference in Christchurch this month.

He said qualifications were only one area affecting quality. Other factors such as innate skills, family background, teacher ratios and external influences were also important.

Education Forum policy advisor Norman LaRocque told the conference it was not clear that more qualified teachers would lead to better results; and even if there were some education improvements, it might come at a higher cost than could be achieved using other interventions.

"Studies have shown that, although less true for at-risk families, family characteristics can have a greater impact on child outcomes than the quality of childcare. The potential importance of non-childcare factors in determining child outcomes suggests that the road to better outcomes may not necessarily be paved with more spending on childcare."

Mr LaRocque said increasing staff-education requirements could have the

unintended consequence of driving up costs and so forcing some providers out of business or putting regulated childcare centres out of the financial reach of many families.

This was most likely to happen to the most vulnerable families, forcing them into the unregulated part of the sector with potentially lower quality and less safe forms of care.

Meanwhile, a new working paper from the United States National Bureau of Economic Research has found that efforts to raise teacher quality through stricter certification and licensing provisions were likely to raise wages in the affected occupation, and the theoretical effects of such requirements on teacher quality were ambiguous.

The researchers used the US Schools and Staffing Survey to estimate the effect of state teacher-testing requirements on teacher wages and teacher quality, as measured by educational background. The results suggested that state-mandated teacher testing increased teacher wages with no corresponding increase in quality.

Norman LaRocque's speech can be downloaded from
<http://www.educationforum.org.nz/documents/speeches/eccspeech.pdf>

The NBER working paper, Does teacher testing raise teacher quality? Evidence from state certification requirements, by Joshua Angrist and Jonathan Guryan is at
<http://www.nber.org/papers/w9545>

A Subtext story on the Early Childhood Council's reaction to the legislative changes proposed last year is at
http://www.educationforum.org.nz/upload/subtext/subtext_Oct02.pdf

In education, business is booming

In the United States, education is big business. We take a look at some recent moves in the ever-growing private education market.

Education company moves into teacher training

New York-based Kaplan Inc., the operator of a law school and 46 undergraduate colleges, has announced plans to open an online school of education next year.

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* has reported that Kaplan officials hoped the new school's students would be made up largely of working adults and midcareer professionals, who would take most of their classes via distance education.

"The goal here is to attract a higher-calibre person into teaching," the school's announced head Harold Levy said in a *Chronicle* interview. "There is a crying social need for more teachers and for better-qualified teachers."

Kaplan is part of the Washington Post Company, and in 2002 it became that company's biggest division, with revenues of US\$621 million. Higher education is Kaplan's biggest revenue earner. Its campus-based and online divisions generated just under US\$250 million for the company in 2002, an increase of nearly 51% over revenues in 2001, the *Chronicle* reported.

DeVry buys Caribbean university

DeVry Inc. has announced that it will buy Ross University, which operates a medical school and a veterinary school in the Caribbean, for US\$310 million in cash, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported in March.

DeVry officials say the purchase will strengthen and diversify the company, known for its business and information technology programmes, according to the *Chronicle*.

DeVry is one of the largest publicly-held, international, higher education companies in the US, according to its website. It currently provides undergraduate and graduate degrees through 26 undergraduate campuses and 37 adult learning centres, including DeVry University Online.

Sylvan opens 74 new learning centres

Sylvan Education Solutions has partnered with 12 school districts to provide supplemental reading and maths programmes to more than 2300 students, according to a report on Educationnews.org.

The 74 new school- and community-based centres are in California, Colorado, Kentucky, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York and Tennessee.

To date, Sylvan has been approved as a 'No Child Left Behind' supplemental educational services provider in 24 states, more than any other provider, according to the Education Quality Institute.

The Sylvan article is at <http://www.educationnews.org/sylvan-education-solutions-begin.htm>

United Kingdom white paper gets thumbs up from top researcher

The British government's controversial white paper on tertiary education, which among other things has allowed universities to set top-up fees, has the support of an eminent education researcher.



In a paper released last month, Nicholas Barr of the London School of Economics offered a "strongly supportive" assessment of the white paper.

Professor Barr said three lessons from economic theory were that: the days of central planning were gone, students should contribute to the costs of their degrees and student loans had essential core features.

"The strategy that ... I have long advocated has three elements: deferred variable fees; loans that are large enough to cover all fees and realistic living costs; and active measures to promote access – measures

that address both financial poverty and information poverty."

The white paper shifted the balance of power from the central planner and producers to the consumers – the students and employers. The resulting competition would benefit students, the economy and the university system, Professor Barr said in his paper.

He said a major effort was needed to publicise what income-contingent loans were. Key messages included: it was a payroll deduction, not debt; and students would get higher education free – it was graduates who made repayments.

If there was political leadership, the beneficial outcomes would be self-reinforcing: publicity and education would get student debt from the "overdraft bit of people's brain to the payroll-deduction bit"; in a calmer political environment, the interest subsidy could be reduced, freeing a large volume of resources for pro-access policies; and the fees cap could be raised in stages, bringing in the benefits of competition and increasing resources.

"The result is a vibrant, diverse and responsive system, at its best world class, with strongly progressive funding."

Professor Barr's paper is at http://econ.lse.ac.uk/staff/nb/Barr_Selcom030311.pdf

Performance assessment works, study suggests

A recent study shows that young, low-income, urban students enrolled in classrooms with a curriculum-embedded performance assessment displayed growth in reading far above other students.

The study, carried out with third and fourth graders in Iowa, looked at the change in scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills [JH1] of students who had been enrolled in classrooms where the Work Sampling System (WSS) was used for at least three years.

Results indicated that students who were in WSS classrooms displayed growth in reading from one year to the next that far exceeded both the demographically matched contrast group and the average change shown by all other students in the district.

Children in WSS classrooms made greater gains in maths than children in the other two groups, although the results were only marginally significant when compared with gains by the matched contrast group.

According to the report's authors, "Perhaps the most important lesson that can be garnered from this study is that accountability should not be viewed as a test, but as a system".

The study, *Creating a system of accountability: the impact of instructional assessment on elementary children's achievement test scores*, was written by Samuel J. Meisels, Erikson Institute; Sally Atkins-Burnett, University of Michigan; Yange Xue and Julie Nicholson, Palo Alto, CA; Donna DiPrima Bickel, University of Pittsburgh; and Seung-Hee Son, University of Michigan.

The report is at <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v11n9/>

Quote of the month:

"How is it ... that a substantial period of apprenticeship is required for those who trim our nails, our curls, or even the limbs of our trees; but is not required for those who are to help shape the minds of the next generation?"

Arthur E. Wise, president of the Washington-based National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, in *Education Week*, April 2003.

Our story *Teacher training quality a concern but wider reforms needed, MPs told*, on page 3, looks at teacher-training issues in New Zealand.

Overseas student boom expected to continue

The huge growth in overseas students seeking education in New Zealand is expected to more than double in the next 10 years and become the country's fourth largest foreign-exchange earner.

A discussion paper by the Asia 2000 Foundation says the economic impact of international students on New Zealand could rise to between \$4 and 5 billion within the next 10 years (from an estimated \$1.7 billion last year).

The report is at http://www.asia2000.org.nz/about/research/international_education_apr03.shtml

Another Asia 2000 Foundation paper detailing New Zealand research and researchers on export education is at http://www.asia2000.org.nz/about/research/international_education_expertise.pdf

Moratorium on universities' consideration of private provider foundation courses

A one-year moratorium has been placed on considering private education provider applications for recognition of their foundation studies programmes as qualifications for entry to New Zealand universities.

The New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee said a number of private providers had approached the universities to have their foundation studies programmes recognised for entrance purposes. Providers hoped to provide entrance using a route similar to that used by students who applied for entrance with overseas secondary qualifications.

Course helps Auckland business students gain entrepreneurial skills

Entrepreneurial students from The University of Auckland Business School are being given a helping hand to develop innovative products by a leading American academic and businessman.

Visiting Yale Adjunct Professor Henry Bolanos is teaching a semester-long course, Innovation and New Product Development. He is confident some students will produce marketable products.

Professor Bolanos, who holds over 100 patents and was research and development vice president at the US Surgical Corporation, teaches a similar course at Yale University.

"This is my third visit to New Zealand to teach the course, and in the past it's been very successful," Professor Bolanos said.

Reports look at Australian universities' success with commercialisation

Two new reports show universities' commercialisation processes and intellectual property management are improving, though some universities perform much better than others.

Australian universities currently obtain only 0.2% of their revenues from royalties, trademarks and licences.

One of the intentions of Australia's recent year-long review of higher education was to examine ways to make it easier for universities to commercialise research.

More information on the Department of Education, Science and Training-funded reports is at http://www.dest.gov.au/ministers/nelson/mar_03/n313_250303.htm

Australian fellowships for researchers to move between universities and industry announced

Funding of up to AU\$100,000 will be given to individual researchers to move between universities and industry, the Australian government announced in March.

The Minister for Education, Science and Training, Brendan Nelson, said the initiative would promote research mobility as a pivotal factor in transferring information, ideas and expertise between the academic and industry sectors.

The Australian Research Council will provide up to \$100,000 support for researchers to base themselves in industry or public sector research organisations for 3-12 months, as part of the \$90 million *Linkage Industry Fellowships* programme.

Two million Australians use student loans

Almost two million students in Australia have been assisted to access university study through the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS).

According to Brendan Nelson, Minister for Education, Science and Training, new data from The Australian Taxation Office showed [JH1] that more than 1.7 million people had taken advantage of the interest-free loan scheme since it was introduced in 1989.

More than 600,000 people had repaid their loan and 1,077,675 people currently had a loan. Australian taxpayers are carrying the cost, which is around \$9 billion but forecast to rise to \$11.5 billion by 2006 as more people take up loans.

HECS data is at http://www.dest.gov.au/ministers/nelson/mar_03/n296b_050303.htm

Australian teacher shortage could mean part-time schools

Up to a third of Australian schools will be forced to cut back to a four-day week by 2007 because of a looming teacher shortage, according to Australian principals, *The Age* reported in March.

Secondary Principals Association president Ted Brierley said that within four years only 60% of teaching course vacancies would be filled because universities were ignoring their responsibility to create extra education places.

Literacy and numeracy in the 'middle years' vitally important, says report

A new Australian report says that middle-year students have distinct needs in literacy and numeracy, and a range of strategies is needed to help them.

The report completes the first stage of an Australian government project to better understand the needs of students in Years 5 to 10 who are not meeting national literacy and numeracy benchmark standards.

As part of its ongoing commitment to improving the literacy and numeracy skills of all students, the Australian government has provided \$5 million for initiatives targeting middle-year students.

The report is available from

<http://www.dest.gov.au/schools/publications/2003/index.htm>

Schools with no pupils by 2030, scenario suggests

A future where schools have no pupils, lessons or classrooms is one of a range of possible scenarios put forward in a provocative new report.

Possible Futures: four scenarios for schooling in 2030 suggests that within 30 years publicly managed schools could shed most of their traditional functions to become 'learning brokers'.

In this 'schooling without schools' scenario, schools were no longer responsible for educating children but instead oversaw the assessment of learning by other education providers based in companies or community organisations.

The scenario was one of a range of possible futures outlined in the National College for School Leadership-commissioned paper, which argues that schools have a role not only in responding to the forces of change in society but also potentially in shaping them.

More information is at <http://www.ncsl.org.uk/index.cfm?pageid=college-pr-26032003-a>

Gates opens doors for education

As part of a broader push to create hundreds of small, personalised high schools across the country, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation announced the launch in early March of a five-year, US\$31 million initiative to start 168 alternative schools geared to young people who were falling through the cracks in traditional high schools, *Education Week* has reported.

The cost of spelling mistakes

Simple spelling and grammar errors, and mistakes such as addressing people by the wrong sex, cost UK firms more than NZ\$11.66 billion a year in lost business, the *Sunday Star Times* reported in March.

The paper reported that a survey found that 31% of consumers had ended a business relationship due to poor communication.

Private university in Nigeria opens doors

The private Covenant University opened its doors to its first 1400 students in February, the *Daily Trust* has reported.

The university, based in Ota, Ogun state with a satellite campus in Lagos, was issued an operating license from the Nigerian Universities Commission in February 2002.

The three colleges that make up the university – the College of Business and Social Sciences, College of Human Development and College of Science and Technology – offer 20 programmes in six departments.

Little return from programmes to turn around failing schools

A report looking at programmes aimed at turning around failing schools in the US has found little improvement in student achievement.

The Fordham Foundation report describes 20 different kinds of interventions into failing schools and provides examples of where they have been attempted. These range from simple identification of failing schools, to technical assistance for school staff, to longer school days or years, to replacement of the principal, to closing down the school or having the state take over the entire district.

While the milder interventions had often been tried, examples of the more intrusive reforms were rare.

The report examines three interventions in detail: the Schools Under Registration Review process in New York; comprehensive school reform in Memphis, Tennessee; and school reconstitution

in Prince George's County, Maryland.

In each of those cases, roughly half or fewer of the schools that were subject to the intervention showed real improvement when gauged in terms of pupil achievement.

The report can be found at http://www.edexcellence.net/library/failing_schools/failingschools.html

China opens door for foreign universities

A new regulation recently adopted in China gives foreign universities guidelines for establishing joint-degree programmes with Chinese universities, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* has reported.

China's Education Ministry hopes that it will encourage foreign universities to expand there.

Under the new regulation, effective from 1 September, foreign universities will be permitted to grant diplomas and certificates bearing their names alone. In the past, diplomas and certificates offered in joint-degree programmes had to include the names of the sponsoring Chinese universities.

Report cards proposed for US universities

In the US, the Career College Association, a lobby group representing for-profit colleges, wants Congress to require colleges to publish annual "institutional report cards" measuring their success in retaining and graduating students and in preparing students for life beyond university, *The Chronicle for Higher Education* has reported.

Members of the association say this would help prospective students and their parents decide whether a particular college was right for them. And, officials of for-profit colleges say, the report cards would give policy makers valuable information about an institution's goals, including how well it was meeting them.

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