

**Maximising your marketing to senior secondary school students: analysing student decision making and the implications for marketing strategies: paper for IIR conference on Marketing Education, 27 June 2001, Centra Hotel Auckland.**

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### **The responsibility of tertiary institutions to students**

It is appreciated that those involved in strategies to attract students to their particular institution for tertiary study face the dual responsibility of filling study places in their institution while at the same time assisting potential students to make informed decisions that are in the student's best interests and contribute to the well-being of the student (and society) over time. Where there is a conflict of interest between these responsibilities, it is assumed that those employed by tertiary institutions are professionals who act in the best interests of students at all times even if this means, for instance, reduced student numbers for a particular course. It is especially important that this ethos is upheld because adults, with their greater resources and experience than young people, have a collective ethical responsibility to assist young people in the many aspects of their lives especially decisions involving life changes, even if this means reduced opportunities for adults themselves.

With this in mind, there is much that tertiary institutions can usefully do to assist student awareness and understanding of current options and possibilities for study and careers. Such an approach can lead to filling more places in tertiary institutions and produce a win-win outcome for all.

### **What do tertiary institutions need to know about their potential students?**

#### *Tertiary students socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds*

The focus here is on students coming to tertiary study straight from school. Students from higher socio-economic groups have always been over-represented in tertiary study, especially university study. This is true for New Zealand and other countries and is a very strong pattern. Family socio-economic status is the strongest predictor of tertiary study up-take. (Haverman & Wolfe, 1995; Lauder & Hughes, 1990; Nash, 1993; Fergusson & Woodward, 2000; Parr & Parr, 1995; Long, Carpenter & Hayden, 1999; Lam & Ball, 1999).

New Zealand has various policy initiatives in place to improve the representation of students from lower socio-economic groups, and from Maori and Pacific ethnic groups, in tertiary study. Generally such initiatives are experiencing some success and increased proportions of students from these groups are undertaking tertiary study, in particular courses offered by polytechnics and private providers. The proportion of students entering the seventh form has greatly increased with, for instance, a doubling

between 1982 and 1993 (Nash, 1993). Boyd, Chalmers and Kumekawa (2001, forthcoming) surveyed some 321 final year students in five schools in 1999 about their intentions on leaving school, and in 2000 followed up on their actual destinations. The students came from lower, medium and higher socio-economic backgrounds as indicated by the range of school deciles<sup>1</sup> for the schools they were attending.

In 1999 a little over 80 per cent of the students surveyed intended going on to tertiary study. In 2000 a little over three-quarters were undertaking tertiary study. This difference is accounted for by small numbers of Maori and Pacific students who were less likely than the Asian and European students to follow their 1999 intentions and go on to tertiary study in 2000. The other Maori and Pacific students surveyed did continue on to tertiary study. Chapple (2000) reports that data from the Household Labour Force Survey shows there has been a slow progressive decline in the differences between the population shares of Maori and non-Maori without qualifications between 1985 and 1998, and also that more sophisticated measures of the education gap patterns between the populations show a very similar pattern of slow convergence (Chapple, 1999).

Currently the national secondary school roll stands at about 240,000. A roll bulge is beginning and the national roll is expected to rise to more than 290,000. (Middlebrook, 2001). This roll growth is taking place at a time when there is already increased demand from lower socio-economic groups for tertiary education and when the demand from higher socio-economic groups for tertiary education is continuing. Such a situation presents opportunities for tertiary institutions to increase their student numbers or market share.

If not undertaken already, it may be timely for tertiary institutions to adopt market segmentation whereby potential students are categorised according to particular characteristics which place them as part of traditional markets or emerging markets. This could involve making specific provision for the emerging markets by, for instance, researching their needs and, as a result, providing useful, high-quality information and guidance both written and in-person, as appropriate. This information could be specifically targeted to the identified needs of new, first-generation “would-be” tertiary students and their families and made available through the teachers and schools these students attend, as well as other avenues which market research would identify. The traditional markets of higher socio-economic students would continue to be targeted as well but probably using different approaches. Again there might need to be market research to more fully understand their needs in the worlds of today and tomorrow.

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<sup>1</sup> A socio-economic indicator by which a calculated decile rating is assigned to all New Zealand schools. Deciles 1-3 represent low decile schools (the most disadvantage); deciles 4-7 represent medium decile schools; and deciles 8-10 represent high decile schools (the least disadvantage). The indicator is developed from six dimensions pertaining to students, namely equivalent household income, parents' occupation, household crowding, parents' educational qualifications, income support payments received by parents, and Maori and Pacific Islands ethnicity of students. (Ministry of Education, 1997a).

### *The timing of student decision-making*

In her research on tertiary participation, Maani (2000) used 1977-1995 data from the Christchurch Health and Development Longitudinal Study to examine the determinants of school leaving and labour supply of young adults at ages 16 and 18. She found that intentions at age 16 to attend university or polytechnic were closely associated with later attendance at the respective institution at age 18. Maani suggested that schooling decisions at ages 16 and 18 were based on personal choice but were also significantly influenced by factors that are at work for a long period of time. Students base their decisions on whether to leave or stay at school at age 16 on taste and information available to them through their family, school, and peer networks. If students attend a school in a community where education was not highly valued or achievement levels were low, then there was an increased likelihood that a student would leave school early and with no or low school qualifications. The process of improving educational opportunities is therefore multi-faceted. For example, it is important for students to know early on of the link between doing well at school and future career opportunities (Rivers, 2000).

Boyd, Chalmers and Kumekawa (2001, forthcoming) found that only a little over half (55%) of the final year students surveyed in 1999 had been influenced in their choice of school subjects that year by their ideas on what they might do when they left school.

In a survey of 157 undergraduate students attending Massey University in Palmerston North, Bloor and Brook (1993) found less than half the students were able to specify an occupational goal. Participants who had a commitment to an occupational goal possessed a higher level of career development, reported greater satisfaction with life, and exhibited higher self-esteem than participants with no such clarity of direction. The authors suggest that many young people in New Zealand do not possess the coping repertoire for making career decisions.

Boyd, Chalmers and Kumekawa (2000, forthcoming) found that in 1999 just under half (48%) of the students surveyed did not know their intended career or job title. By the time of the follow-up survey in 2000 this percentage had reduced to a little under a third (29%) and “personal interest” was the main reason given by nearly three-quarters (70%) of those who know their intended career or job title.

### *Combining work and study*

A 1998 survey on student employment conducted by the New Zealand Vice Chancellor's committee found nearly two-thirds of students were in paid employment in term-time, and around 40 percent said they were unsuccessful in getting enough work during term-time. Yet a little over half agreed with statement “I would be more successful in my studies if I did not spend as much time employed during term-time as I do”. Raewyn Dalziel, pro vice-chancellor (academic) at the University of Auckland said that the impact of part-time work on student performance was an area crying out for research. She said time at work was obviously time taken away from

study, but it was too difficult to know what the effects were without current research findings (McCarthy, 2001).

Boyd, Chalmers and Kumekawa (2001, forthcoming) found that 85 percent of those who intended in 1999 to study the following year intended to combine work and study. Most of these intended full-time study and part-time work (71%). In 2000 seventy-five percent of those studying also worked. The majority of these (89%) combined full-time study with part-time work.

### *The role of families in student decision-making*

Several New Zealand studies have found that students' families play a significant part in students tertiary education decisions ( Rivers, Lynch & Irving, 1989; Parr & Parr, 1995; Wilson & Young, 1998; Boyd, Chalmers & Kumekawa (2001, forthcoming).

Rivers, Lynch, and Irving (1989) asked final year students to list with whom they had discussed their futures. Mothers, friends, fathers, school careers advisers, teachers and other relatives were the most common responses. The authors report that a greater proportion of females than males discussed their futures with their mothers, but mothers were still the most used source of discussion for both females and males. For males, after mothers, fathers were the second most used source, followed by friends and school careers advisers. For females, fathers were the fourth most used source, coming after mothers, friends and school careers advisers.

Parr and Parr (1995) asked students in their sample to indicate the usefulness of sources of information for their plans for the following year, using a list provided. They report that 70 per cent of the students (more females than males) found family and friends to be useful. Similarly, Wilson and Young (1998) found that when students were asked about influences on their career and transition decisions, the students were most likely to mention family members. Boyd, Chalmers and Kumekawa (2000, forthcoming) found family members and relatives to be the information source most students overall reported using, with just under 70 percent of students reporting some use.

Families may have varying assumptions about tertiary study and work. For instance, Lauder, Hughes, Dupuis, and McGlenn (1992) examined the educational decisions made by similar ability students from a range of social backgrounds for a subsample of 129 young people from the 1982 Christchurch School Leavers Study. This analysis suggested that for children from professional or managerial backgrounds, university entry was typically seen as the expected part of their life course. This group tended to automatically assume that going to university was both a natural and beneficial move with this view constituting the fundamental wisdom of this group. In contrast, lower socio-economic families tended to take an instrumental approach to schooling, placing a greater emphasis on the role of education as providing entry into a good job or specific vocational course, while viewing a university education as a more risky career path than entering the workforce or vocational training following school leaving.

In England, the influence of families on students' tertiary education decisions has been the subject of several recent articles in the Times Higher Educational Supplement, McCord (2000); Furedi (2001); and Apter (2001). McCord (2000) states recent research shows parental influence on prospective undergraduates is greater than any other influence including school principals. She refers to market research by the University of Manchester into the role of parents, which shows how their importance has increased dramatically in recent years. They are now more influential than teachers when it comes to a sixth-former's choice of institution and course. Parental open days are held weekly during term time and parents are given the opportunity to discuss issues that concern them as well as being given a guided tour. The introduction of tuition fees is thought to be a main reason for parents' vested interest. There is, however, a concern that many parents have misconceptions and often base their decisions concerning their children's higher education on out-of-date information. Furedi (2001) wrote of the infantilisation of campus life, with over-involvement by parents, while Apter (2001) described the young adults as "thresholders" who benefit from parents' practical help with the proliferation of choices in education and careers.

Wilson and Young (1998) suggest that although New Zealand parents seem to have a substantial input into their children's career decisions, only a small number of schools directly involve parents as one of the main career resources through option evenings, work experience placements, or the Parents as Career Educators (PACE) programmes run by Career Services Rapuara.

*The role of school careers advisers, school careers information services and tertiary institution personnel*

In New Zealand studies school careers advisers and tertiary institution personnel have been found to be important sources of information for students. Parr and Parr (1995) report that just under 80 per cent of students in their study (slightly more females than males) found the school careers adviser to be a useful source of information, and around two-thirds of students in this study found visits by tertiary institution personnel to be useful. Just under half the students gave this rating to the Careers Expo. Wilson and Young (1998) found Career Expos, open days, and tertiary liaison officers were the most important sources after families. Boyd, Chalmers and Kumekawa (2001, forthcoming) found that after family members the most popular information sources in descending order were brochures, pamphlets or handbooks put out by universities or polytechnics (used by 58 percent of respondents); careers information service at school (used by 57 percent) ; peers/own age group friends (used by 41 per cent) and university/polytechnic liaison officers (used by 37 percent).

It seems that, for the most part, young people prefer personal sources of information, that is people, supplemented by written sources of information.

### *Careers Information Service in schools*

Schools have a responsibility to provide career education in the form of information and guidance for their students, particularly students at risk of becoming unemployed. Career education is concerned with developing (through planned programmes of learning and experiences) skills, attitudes, and understanding that help students make informed decisions about school and post-school options and directions and enable them to participate effectively in working life (Ministry of Education, 1997b).

In 1998 the Education Review Office (ERO) produced a report entitled *The Senior Secondary Student*. This report drew on information regarding career information programmes included in ERO institutional reports on 135 schools with senior secondary school students. It found that half the schools provided a good quality career information programme for their senior students. In 1999 ERO analysed a further 100 ERO reports on schools with secondary students to assess whether there had been changes since 1998 in the quality of schools' provision or in the ways in which they helped students plan and prepare for future careers. The later report found the quality of provision of career information and guidance in the 100 schools studied to be good in over half the schools, and satisfactory in a further quarter. The report concluded that approximately four out of five schools were providing acceptable to good career information and support.

Boyd, Chalmers and Kumekawa (2001, forthcoming) found that the most frequently used information source by students for the decile 2, 3 and 4 schools studied was the "Careers Information Service" at school, while "family members and relatives" was the most frequently used source for decile 9 school respondents. Although the Boyd, Chalmers and Kumekawa study findings relate to only five schools and 321 students, these differences by school decile suggest that the school careers service may be particularly important for students whose parents are less likely to have undertaken tertiary education. However, most students in the Boyd, Chalmers and Kumekawa study used more than one information source. The average number of sources used was six.

### *Students satisfaction with information and preparation for life beyond school*

Boyd, Chalmers and Kumekawa (2001, forthcoming) asked students in 1999 and again in 2000 if they felt they had had enough information, advice and preparation to help them decide what they wanted to do in 2000. At both points in time similar proportions – around two-thirds – felt they had had enough information. However, approximately one third did not think this was the case. Respondents whose final year of schooling was year 11, 12 or 14 were less likely to say they had sufficient information than students whose final year was year 13. This suggests that students whose final year is year 13 feel better provided for. Perhaps the careers information service at school is directed more towards them than towards other groups. Another reason could be that students who stay until year 13 come from higher socio-economic groups with more family resources available to assist them.

About forty of the students who felt they did not have enough information made suggestions on the types of information or preparation they would like to have received. Most frequently mentioned was more career planning. This included starting

career planning at school at an earlier age; providing information about what subjects to take to lead to their desired career, the jobs that different courses led to, the range of courses and locations available, the content of individual courses, university life and requirements, where to access further information; work experiences organised by the school; talks from visitors about decisions they made or courses they did; and preparation on how to get jobs.

In 2000, participants were asked “Would you make the same decision now that you made in 1999 about your life after school?” Two-thirds thought they would make the same decisions again, with the remainder saying, amongst other things, that they would take different subjects or courses.

Some 27 students in the study by Boyd, Chalmers and Kumekawa (2001, forthcoming) made comments about the helpfulness of the careers service and teachers at their school. Comments about one particular teacher stood out. This careers adviser held individual career interviews with students. During a dialogue in which the student and the careers adviser had a realistic discussion about the student’s abilities and skills, the adviser looked at the subjects the student was studying, and encouraged the student to continue with these subjects if the student enjoyed them. He then matched the student’s skills to jobs using a computer program. From this matching, he presented the student with a range of information on tertiary courses that would lead to later employment related to their skills and interests. He also assisted students with enrolment forms. These young people commented that the counsellor was “more like a friend than a teacher”, he “always had his door open”, and he “discussed what you wanted to do”. One respondent reported that she had first visited this counsellor in Form 3, and he had helped her select her school subjects all the way through secondary school.

This type of assistance could be particularly beneficial for students from lower decile schools, whose families are less likely to be familiar with processes for selecting and enrolling in courses of study, including understanding about subject pre-requisites.

### **Looking ahead**

In 2000, Boyd, Chalmers and Kumekawa (2001, forthcoming) asked respondents who had left school in 1999 about their plans for the next few years. Over 80 percent planned to study. This included ‘study and work’ for a little over half, and ‘study only’ for a little over a quarter. This research involved only five schools but information from other sources referred to in this paper suggests a similar scenario.

Overall, the outlook looks bright for both tertiary students and providers.

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