

Eurotck

A reminder to everyone concerned for the education and welfare of TCKs. Eurotck 2010 will take place in the historic town of Peñíscola on the Spanish coast between Barcelona and Valencia. This is a major event where we would like to welcome as many people as possible. Most of our presenters will be from Europe, BUT the themes we will consider are much more widely relevant.

Dates 28th March – 1st April

Themes – These include plenary sessions on child protection, TCKs in crisis and reports from across Europe and beyond from a wide range of TCK support ministries. There will also be a choice of workshops each day on education and welfare issues including multilingualism, English language learning, supporting TCKs from first application to adulthood, re-entry support, stress in the mission family and how to overcome it, and much more.

For further details, check out the website at www.eurotck.net where you can find prices and a booking form. Contact Steve Bryant at SteveGill@mkea.freeserve.co.uk for any other information.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING MANY OF YOU THERE!

Issues for families from Australia and New Zealand when faced with educational transition

What has prompted us to write about this?

Our recent visit to Sydney (May-June 2009) has raised our awareness of the educational issues faced by Australian families. During our time at BCS in Senegal, we worked closely with families from New Zealand, and knew about the complications arising from the fact that the academic years were incompatible. At different times we also had two students enrolled on correspondence courses from New Zealand. In previous editions of Educare we have looked at the needs of families from newer sending countries such as Brazil and Korea, but we have never specifically focused on Australia and New Zealand before.

What is the purpose and scope of this article?

- To highlight the issues faced by families from Australia and New Zealand, particularly for educators, school principals and teachers in international schools and MK schools around the world.
- To elicit helpful dialogue amongst interested parties, and encourage the development of support networks among educators and parents.
- To encourage serious consideration by parents of the state-provided distance education systems as opposed to commercial home schooling packages from other countries.
- It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss other countries from the southern hemisphere, or others using the calendar-based academic year.

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An overview of education in New Zealand

(Information taken from <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/>)

Schooling is compulsory between the ages of six and sixteen, although it is common for children to begin on their fifth birthday and join the new entrants' class. Primary education takes place between year 1 and year 8, but years 7 and 8 may be taught either by the primary school or by an intermediate school. Secondary education comprises years 9 to 13, during which period the timetable is based around distinct subject areas. Some students begin vocational training while still at secondary school, but programmes are not separated into academic and vocational streams. The New Zealand curriculum was revised in 2007 and will become mandatory in all schools by February 2010.

The national qualifications system begins in year 11, when the students work towards the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). Level 1 is taken in year 11, Level 2 in year 12 and Level 3 in year 13. NCEA Level 3 is required for university entrance, and very able students may also take the Scholarship Award. Detailed information about all NZ qualifications, including the subject specifications for the Scholarship Award, are available at the government website. <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/scholarship/subjects/resources.html>

Generally, for university entrance, the NCEA Level 3 is officially recognised in Australia and the UK, and although there is no official recognition agreement with the USA, the qualifications are seen as broadly compatible.

An overview of education in Australia

Education in Australia is not run as a national system, but is the responsibility of each of the eight individual states. This means that there are variations between the systems. Generally, education is compulsory between the ages of six and seventeen (the school leaving age has been raised this year in most states). There is some pre-school education, but this is unregulated and the uptake is variable. Schools are required to adhere to the same curriculum frameworks, whether they are state-run or private.

To give an example of state-by-state variations, primary school consists of years 1 to 6 (ages 6 to 12) in ACT (Australian Capital Territory), New South Wales, Tasmania and Victoria, and years 1 to 7 in Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland. In Northern Territory (NT), years 7 to 9 are known as 'middle school'. Years 8 to 12, ages 13 to 18, (10 to 12 in NT) are the high school years.

The New South Wales system is considered by many to be the most rigorous in Australia. Students taking the School Certificate at the end of year 10 do external tests in English and literacy, maths, science, Australian history, geography, civics and citizenship. Students are graded on a scale of 1 to 6, where 6 is the highest mark. The Higher School Certificate (HSC) is taken at the end of year 13. (See the HSC website, <http://www.hsc.csu.edu.au/> for subject specific information, including detailed syllabi, for the HSC.)

Students may enter employment, university or vocational training, known as TAFE (Technical and Vocational Education). The HSC is essential for university, and in addition students are given a score ranking them against their peers according to the Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank, ATAR, formerly called UAI (University Admissions Index).

Queensland has a very different school leaving certificate, and is described by the government website <http://education.qld.gov.au/etr/senior-options.html> as 'a broad-based senior schooling qualification that recognises senior school subjects and nationally recognised vocational training, as well as some workplace, university and community learning'. Students who wish to enter tertiary education must take approved subjects, from which their 'overall position' in relation to their peers (OP) is calculated. Further information on the school leaving qualifications is available from the Queensland Studies Authority, online at <http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/certificates/589.html> and specifically on the OP at <http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/tertiaryentrance/630.html>.

It is beyond the scope of this article to look at each state in detail, but the above comparison is intended as an illustration of the variation between states. Feedback from Australians familiar with the systems of other states would be welcome.

Areas which may be missed by those being educated on the field

Students from Australia and New Zealand who are in MK or international schools overseas are likely to miss out on studying the history, geography and culture of their passport countries. For example, the New South Wales curriculum requires students to cover Australian history in depth in years 9 and 10. Geography is also taught with much reference to Australia. A parent from New Zealand wrote that when her daughter joined the class in the home country, 'she didn't know basic NZ geography, like knowing that Nelson is a major port'. Another parent commented 'the one area that [the children] were starting from scratch is Maori language and culture, which is part of the primary curriculum now'.

It is widely understood among international educators that Americans regard a detailed study of their history as so crucial that it must be imported into the international setting. However, the importance of this area for students from Australia and New Zealand (among others!) has not been recognised. I suggest that there are ways to address this discrepancy. For example, where students from Australia and New Zealand are present, time should be made available for them to study their own history and geography. This could be done in various ways, such as creating a short module for the whole class, or using 'project time', where all students research the history and geography of their passport countries. Homework assignments could also be designed with this in mind. The availability of the Internet now makes it much more possible for an imaginative teacher to include the history, geography and culture of diverse nations in the curriculum. It may be too ambitious to attempt to teach the Maori language, but the students could at least research into Maori history and culture.

It is also important for parents to take the initiative in familiarising their children with the passport culture. For example, they could buy age –appropriate books or DVDs to take with them to the field. It is important to start this process while the children are still fairly young, so that they grow up with some knowledge which they can build on later. It may be difficult for families just setting out overseas with young children to see the importance of this at the time. However, it is necessary to take the 'long view' even at this stage, as it will make re-entry a little easier later on.

Incompatible academic years

All students coming from a calendar-based academic year will face a transition every time they move. For students leaving Australia at the end of the calendar year, they will have completed an academic year as well. They will then be required to join the new school part way through an academic year, and will face the choice of either repeating several months, or jumping ahead and missing several months. In addition, the material that is missed or repeated may not be wholly compatible with the curriculum that they have come from. For students on the field completing an academic year in May/June/July, they will face the same issue in reverse on their return to the passport country. The decision as to whether to move students forwards or backwards needs to be made on an individual basis and in consultation with the teachers in both schools. It may depend

both on academic ability and on other factors such as the child's confidence. For some children, transferring part way into an academic year may be more difficult socially as the others may have already formed their friendship groups.

One parent commented that 'the transition going back to [the field] was way easier than to New Zealand; because they felt they were going 'home'.

See below an example of southern hemisphere term dates. (NSW).

2010

Term 1 Wednesday 27th January 2010 to Thursday 1st April 2010

Term 2 Monday 19th April to Friday 2nd July

Term 3 Monday 19th July to Friday 24th September

Term 4 Monday 11th October to Friday 17th December

Reading and writing in the early years

Children from Australia and New Zealand may face extra challenges when transferring to and from the field during the early primary years, if they are moved while still learning to read and write. Not only do they need to get used to a new teacher, a different reading scheme and perhaps a different method of learning, but they are also faced with a degree of phonetic confusion. One NZ parent commented as follows: 'We had a terrible time during our furlough, as X was 6 and just starting to get the hang of reading. He had been taught the British way of course, with sounding out the letters rather than learning to read by learning the whole word. Also if he tried to spell a word, he used the sound of the letter rather than the name of the letter, so it caused a lot of confusion'.

Having said this, another New Zealand parent, with younger children, said 'I don't remember any vowel issues during reading/spelling at school'. Feedback from New Zealand parents on this issue would be welcome.

While in Australia, we met two adults who had moved there from the UK at a young age. One commented that school in Australia had been very difficult for her, due to the difference in accents and in particular vowel sounds when she was learning to read. She also said that she felt stupid, even though the problems were not related to her academic ability. The other person we met had trained as a teacher in Australia and had been corrected by the college lecturer while teaching vowel sounds to primary children.

The phenomenon of Christian schools (Australia)

Compared with the UK and a number of other Commonwealth countries, Australia has a large sector of private Christian education. This came as a surprise to us. We were able to visit two Christian education organisations while we were in New South Wales, namely Christian Schools Australia (www.csa.edu.au/) and Christian Education National (<http://www.cen.edu.au/>). The website for Christian Schools Australia (CSA) states that the organisation 'has 150 schools, with more than 60,000 students and 3,000 teaching staff.' Its purpose is 'to see Christian beliefs and values impact on all aspects of practice and community life'. Christian Education National (CEN) 'is an Australia-wide group of 53 member associations that together govern over 80 schools of approximately 23,000 students and 2,000 teaching staff. The website describes the roles of the organisation as, among others, 'facilitating school and curriculum development' and 'articulating and nurturing a Biblical worldview'.

At present the government offers help with school fees under a system called the Education Tax Refund. Some schools also offer scholarships and bursaries.

Distance education or home schooling package?

Both Australia and New Zealand have well-established distance learning or correspondence schools. The policies of the schools vary as to whether families living overseas are eligible for enrolment. For example, when we visited two distance learning centres in the Sydney area, we found one that was willing to work with families living overseas and another that was not.

The Sydney Distance Education Primary School website (<http://www.sdeps.nsw.edu.au/>) states that 'enrolment is available to students who are temporarily living overseas in areas where there are no suitable English-speaking schools. The enrolment will generally be for a minimum of three months (1 term) and a maximum of twelve months (4 terms). An extension may be granted in exceptional circumstances and on application to the School Education Director.' In practice this school is willing to enrol missionary families and to operate flexibly in order to accommodate their needs.

It is important to consider the difference between a home education package and a distant learning programme such as that provided by the Sydney Distance Education Primary School (SDEPS). The website states that 'distance education is a unique form of teaching. Lessons are provided weekly or fortnightly through specially designed materials. They are delivered primarily by mail or via the internet. Opportunities exist for personal contact using phone, facsimile, email or our web page facility. The learning program is designed by the teacher to suit the specific needs and circumstances of your child. The parent or an appropriate supervisor is responsible for supervising the child's learning and ensuring regular contact between the teacher and the child.'

The main difference between this programme and a home school package is that each student has an individual teacher working with him or her on a regular basis. The website emphasises that 'distance education works best when there is a strong, co-operative relationship between the teacher and the supervisor.' Also, 'the one-to-one relationship between student and supervisor, and between student and teacher, is highly conducive to quality learning, self-confidence and the development of new skills.'

What would be the disadvantages of using such a system? Some Australian missionaries have pointed out that the term dates do not fit with life in the northern hemisphere. However it may be possible for the family to adapt in order to accommodate the system. To some extent, missionary families' lives are inevitably regulated by one school system or another.

Others have commented that they prefer to use an American home school package. This may be because their colleagues on the field are using it, and it is seen as easier and more fun for the children to be following the same programme. However, each family needs to make its own decision based on the individual needs of the children, and bearing in mind the eventual re-entry to Australia. We suggest that an Australian curriculum may be more culturally suitable.

Another comment made is that a government distance learning package is too secular. We contend that a good secular system can be better than a 'christianised' home school system, provided that the parents engage with the curriculum and are prepared to discuss the issues of the day with their children. In a Christian home schooling package, it is possible to use religious language in the course materials without really instilling Christian values, whereas, with the distance learning programme, families can take the opportunity to engage with secular topics by discussing them from a Christian worldview. The teachings of Jesus as presented in the Gospels include many examples from everyday life, such as farming, fishing, animal husbandry and building. He drew spiritual lessons from everything and did not confine his messages to religious topics.

We welcome comments from Australian families on the issues of distance learning and home education.

University entrance (Australia and New Zealand)

University entrance in **Australia** is based on the Higher School Certificate and the Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) which has recently replaced the University Admissions Index (UAI). The ATAR score is based on each student's performance relative to his/her peer group in a range of subject areas, and is expressed as a number between 0 and 99.95. The Universities Admissions Centre (UAC) states that 'the ATAR is a number (not a mark) that indicates a student's position in relation to their Year 7 cohort, including students who did not complete Year 12. An ATAR of 80.00, for example, indicates that students with that ATAR have performed in the HSC better than 80 per cent of their Year 7 cohort, had all these Year 7 students completed Year 12 and been eligible for an ATAR. (www.uac.edu.au/)

Individual course requirements state the minimum ATAR score in addition to prior knowledge in appropriate subject areas. As an example, currently at Macquarie University a score of 77.10 is required to study for an undergraduate degree in arts subjects such as English or modern history. At the University of New South Wales a score of 83.47 is needed to study for a Bachelor of Science (Honours) in biotechnology.

Students who have graduated from an American system and are returning to Australia to study need to be aware of the following information, taken from the website:

<http://www.studyinaustralia.gov.au/Sia/en/Help/NorthAmerica/home.htm>

Entry Requirements for US Applicants

Entry requirements vary between universities and even between programs at the same university. Before applying, you will need to contact the university's international office about specific entry requirements for your course of study.

Generally speaking, the minimum qualifications US students will need are:

- High school diploma WITH
- GPA equivalent to a "B" or higher AND
- SAT Reasoning Test scores of 1500 or higher OR
- ACT scores of 22 or higher

In some cases:

- 1-2 APs with a score of 3 or higher
- 1-2 SAT subject tests with a score of 500 or higher

In addition, the website states that 'the Australian bachelor's degree is three years and tends to be less directed at general education studies [than US degree programs] because Australian students have completed these in high school. Instead, students focus on their major from their first year. After successful completion of a bachelor's degree, students can progress to graduate study or enter the workforce.'

In **New Zealand**, the standard university entrance requirement is NCEA Level 3. As an example, to study for a Bachelor of Engineering with honours, a student needs one of the following:

- a. 16 credits or more at NCEA Level 3 in each of Physics and Mathematics with Calculus
- b. A mark of 50% or more in each of Physics and Mathematics with Calculus in the NZUEBS qualification

c. A minimum of a D grade at AS level in Cambridge International Examinations in Physics, Maths (Calculus) and Chemistry (where appropriate). International Baccalaureate students must have completed the full diploma and have gained at least 24 points including the Theory of Knowledge and the Extended Essay.

(Taken from <http://www.massey.ac.nz/>) Further information regarding entry requirements for specific course and their international equivalents may be found by contacting individual universities.

Feedback and discussion

Please write to us with your feedback or comments about this article. We are looking to maximise the usefulness of the material and expand our own knowledge at the same time.

Gill Bryant October 2009