

Kia orana MFEM

On behalf of USP Cook Islands I would like to submit two documents for consideration within the consultation on the draft Cook Islands Economic Development Strategy. I believe both align well with the intentions of the strategy for economic transformation and growth. On reviewing the draft Cook Islands Economic Development Strategy I note that tertiary education is not mentioned, and yet at the Economic Summit 2019 there was regular discussion over the day about the lack of higher skilled Cook Islanders to fill key positions across all Ministries and the Private Sector. Proposal 1 and 2 attached relate directly to tertiary education. They are, of course, documents for discussion and stimulation of thought. I would be happy to discuss and expand further if you thought useful.

Proposal 1: Export of Education for Economic Transformation. Export education is a major income earner for other countries. Export education relates directly to the 'Colombo Plan' and the focus of developing human resources across the Asia Pacific region. The potential for international student income has seen phenomenal growth in New Zealand and Australia. NZ revenue from the export of education to international students was NZ\$5 billion in 2018, and the fourth largest export for the country. Even with COVID19 in an online webinar I attended just last week, the study abroad programmes are looking at reopening albeit in differing ways. Both NZ and Australia have National Strategies for International Students due to the level of income derived from this industry.

Proposal 2: Investing in the future - Cook Islands Tertiary Student Loans scheme. Currently *there is no strategic plan* for the upskilling of future leaders of the Cook Islands and for the country to consider what tertiary qualifications may be needed in industries across the nation. While Government currently provides repayment for NZ student loans when students return to the Cook Islands there is no equivalent loan scheme available for students who do not want (or have) to leave the country to get their higher degrees. Data from USP research has shown that having to pay for courses upfront is *the key barrier* to them enrolling in higher qualifications. Other countries, in the name of equity, provide student loan facilities for their citizens and then reap the benefits of highly qualified staff and skills in the local workforce.

As 'we work together to build quality growth' for the Cook Islands I present you with the attached proposals.

Meitaki maata e kia manuia,

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