

Welcome remarks for the New Zealand Mobility Forum, 18 November 2020

Mōrena. It's an honour to welcome you to the University of Auckland for a day focused on education abroad. Lydie reminded me that I last met with this group when we hosted in 2017 and that my speech was on our website. It was a bit of a throwback to read that and realise how much our field has changed since then, even before the pandemic.

Three years ago, I talked to you about the changing landscape of IE, the importance of employability, lateral credit mobility vs vertical program mobility, changing student demand and offers, the importance of benchmarking. "It's not your dad's study abroad." How education abroad helps the recruitment agenda.

What progress we have made since then.

In 2018, I published a book on international internships. This was distributed at the 2019 Global Internship Conference where we also hosted a panel of NZ employers to talk about where internships and education abroad fit in their talent acquisition needs.

Ainslie and I published a chapter on NZ talent mobility patterns connecting post-study work for international students to the big OE tradition for domestic students.

We set a goal to address under-representation in learning abroad for our Māori students. Lydie and her team won the Diversity and Inclusion award for outreach from Diversity Abroad, the Universitas 21 award this year. And the inbound team won 2nd place for bilateral relations for our Generation Study Abroad Campaign, from the NZ AmCham awards.

The University had set a goal of 25% participation in education abroad by 2020. We met that goal 2 years early. 1 in 4 graduating bachelors in the class of 2018 had had a learning abroad experience during uni.

This year, I finally finished a book I had been working on for 5 years with models and case studies for education abroad focused on community engagement. My last overseas stop of 2020 was for a launch seminar at Michigan State. Little did I realise then that I was launching the book into the black hole of Covid that was about to overtake all of our lives.

So where are we now? Well, you obviously still care about this work very much because you're here. Some of you even travelled on your own dime to join this group. Well done.

At the University of Auckland, like you, we initially focused on supporting our students. Helping them return home, complete their semester, get to safety. We moved classes online quickly, like everyone else. And it took us a minute to realise that students still wanted to keep going towards their goals. We've had far more students continuing or initiating their studies online than we would have predicted initially. And we have seen the demand for virtual experiences exceeding our thinking as well. Lydie is going to talk about this in more detail and Keri Ramirez will share the results of a survey of NZ students. No, virtual learning is not their preferred mode, particularly for education abroad, but shorter, well designed experiences, particularly those that aim for an employability skill learning outcome, are finding significant interest.

For the University of Auckland, we are planning for a future state that will include this kind of work, even after life has returned to whatever the new normal is going to be. For full degree recruitment, that means more TNE, more off-shore starts, more blended delivery, joint programmes, etc. For education abroad, it means connecting with a longstanding body of work that takes the position to increase access through virtual collaboration. In Europe, this is called Internationalisation at Home (IaH). In the US, it's COIL collaborative online international learning. At the Global Internship Conference, where I chaired the content for several years, we were seeing more and more virtual programming even before the pandemic. U21 projects, virtual internships, etc.

There is a lot we can learn from this body of work. And things we can incorporate into our programme design. Education abroad is not about travel for travel's sake. We're not travel agencies promoting cool destinations. Kiwis do that in record numbers on their own. We have one of the most mobile populations in the world. What today's student wants is to start their OE during uni when it can enrich their learning experience. That's not going away.

We are all dealing with the challenges of the crisis. Last year we had 119,000 international students in NZ. You could think of that as our 6th largest city, just after Tauranga. Today, there are 43,000 international students here. Is the sector in crisis? Of course. I've been doing this for a very long time and have lived through some big ones. Learning aspirations remain. The budget situation is not easy but universities should keep their learning abroad efforts engaged, seeking new and sustainable ways to work towards the desired learning outcomes. I can't tell you exactly what that should look like at your university. We're still figuring it out here. But we're not stopping. Next year, we've increased our outbound scholarships to \$.5m and using it on virtual experiences.

Learning abroad is not an 'extra', a 'nice to have', it's a required component of the modern university. Students want this, their parents want it for them, government wants it. Last December we hosted a celebration event with ENZ noting that over 500 University of Auckland students had received over \$4m in scholarships through the prime minister's scholarship. Learning abroad is central to the government's international education strategy and I'm thrilled that colleagues from the Ministry of Education and from Education New Zealand are joining you today.

Looking at the proverbial silver lining in every crisis, let's work towards the ways we can accelerate change and come out of this with a sustainable learning abroad agenda that will allow us to increase access through more virtual collaboration. Yes, we will eventually return to international travel. But when we do, we won't be standing down the virtual collaborations we will have built. They are here to stay, part of our new normal and I encourage all of you to share your ideas and what's happening at your universities. The size of our sector and our collaboration gives us a unique opportunity to build something unique and sustainable. I encourage you to think beyond the current difficulties to identify common ground with your peers at other institutions to build a sustainable learning abroad agenda for New Zealand.