



## Feliz Navitas, but can we return this gift?

**A**ustralia and New Zealand share many things. You give us your banks, your mineral deposits, and access to your biggest sporting tournaments - and we give you half the population of the Gold Coast. It is not quite symbiotic, but it works as a typical sibling relationship. However, we really would like to have had an exchange card with one of you recent 'gifts'.

Recently our University of Canterbury agreed to import Australian-based private education provider Navitas Limited to establish an affiliated college on campus that will recruit and prepare international students for degree study.

University of Canterbury Vice-Chancellor Dr Rod Carr says the university hopes international undergraduate students will account for approximately 15 per cent of funded enrolment within ten years. Currently 8 per cent of undergraduates Canterbury are international students.

When this was announced, all we knew about Navitas was what we could find on Google - it is an Australian stock exchange listed company whose first responsibility is to return a profit to those shareholders, not to improve the education opportunities for people in Canterbury.

So we asked around our sister unions, including NTEU. Education International consultant David Robinson told us all these Navitas deals are pretty much the same around the world. 'They involve the outsourcing of international student recruitment and some academic work (i.e. language training). All the deals also 'guarantee' students who pay extraordinarily high fees access to the regular academic stream upon completion of the Navitas 'foundation' program.'

In the United Kingdom, where Navitas has operated for several years, the local tertiary education union UCU noted that Navitas' corporate strategy identifies the major conditions for its success as being the 'lack of tertiary infrastructure in source countries', where students are recruited from, and the 'real reduction of government funding (increasing reliance of universities on full-fee paying international students)'.  
 Staff working in private pathways colleges in the UK have reported being pressured to ensure that students pass their programs even if they have not achieved the program requirements.

In both the United Kingdom and Canada, Navitas has a reputation for outsourcing the work of academics and employing staff outside of the relevant collective agreement, with lower rates of pay, little or no benefits, more contact hours and heavier workloads.

In Britain, the UCU reports that ventures such as Navitas maintain their profits by recruiting more students. That means students arrive with a lower than usual level of ability.

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'If staff want to maintain standards and ensure that students are not fed into the university at lower levels of ability they have to work harder than before. Worse than this, they have to do so with stand-

ardised off-the-shelf materials that, it is reported, are not produced by specialists in English for Academic Purposes.'

NTEU told us, as you may know, Navitas has introduced a culture of casualisation and lower superannuation for staff. Roughly 90 per cent of Navitas' Australian teaching staff are in casual employment, and the majority of administrative staff it employs are also casual.

We asked Navitas whether its University of Canterbury staff would have permanent jobs. Navitas told us, evasively, 'typically our colleges employ a number of permanent employees and casual positions.'

Its Canterbury staff will not be on the University of Canterbury collective employment agreement negotiated by TEU but that pay rates and conditions would be 'comparable' and 'competitive'.

'In fact,' said Navitas Group Manager Public Relations, James Fuller, 'at many of our colleges our teachers already work at the University and they use the extra Navitas work to supplement their incomes.'

All New Zealand universities are under pressure from the government to increase international student numbers, but Canterbury is already a very experienced recruiter of international students. In choosing to sign a contract with Navitas it is implicitly conceding that Navitas can either do the job cheaper than it can, or will import students that the University could not take itself. A college set-up by Navitas will be under pressure to make profits and satisfy stock-market expectations.

We believe that the University of Canterbury can provide a better education to international students by employing its own people and keeping the provision in-house. As a public institution it also has a responsibility not to turn good jobs into casual precarious employment, via contracting out. There is no reason the University cannot continue to be the employer and provide these courses as it does now.

Two weeks after Canterbury announced its Navitas plan it also announced plans to shut down its English language programme for international students and make all seven staff redundant. The University and Navitas both assure us the two announcements are unrelated.

We believe, even if this deal goes ahead, the University of Canterbury should require Navitas to employ staff in permanent positions on the same terms and conditions as its own staff - otherwise it is obvious that Navitas' business plan to make a profit off education is simply to cut pay and working conditions for staff.

We would rather the things we share with Australia are cooperation and public education, not casualised work, student fees and loss of working conditions. **A**

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