Are the needs of Maori being met by current industry training programmes?

Tina Cummins

Abstract

Forestry education in New Zealand has traditionally been taught at three levels: practitioner, technical, and tertiary. While past research has shown that Maori make up a significant proportion of the New Zealand forestry logging and silviculture workforce (Byers, 1995), current research has shown that the number of Maori enrolled in forestry training at a tertiary level is considerably lower than the number of European. Maori appear more likely to fill practical roles in forestry rather than roles of forest management, which is of concern given the size of the New Zealand land resource owned by Maori, and the increasing association of Maori with forestry under commercial ventures.

Introduction

In 1996, Maori accounted for approximately 15% of the New Zealand population and collectively owned approximately 1.3 million hectares of land under the control of the Maori Land Court (Schaffler, 1996). In 1993, 20% of this land had already been afforested under commercial forestry ventures, a figure which continues to increase annually as both foreign and domestic interests seek land for afforestation. This increasing exposure of Maori to afforestation should be seen as an opportunity for Maori to play a greater role in the management of their resource.

However, Maori have traditionally been under-represented in managerial positions and over-represented in elementary positions such as labouring and cleaners (Andrews and Rose, 1994). The occupational situation is reinforced by educational statistics. NZ educational statistics for 1990 show that Maori accounted for five percent of all internal university students (Ministry of Education, 1990). In 1996, Maori comprised 11% of the total NZ student population, which included universities, polytechnics, Colleges of Education and Wananga (Maori tertiary institutions). This represented an increase of 4.6% on the 1995 statistics (Ministry of Education, 1995). National graduation figures from 1996 show that over half (56%) of Maori students completing a qualification did so at a certificate level. In comparison, six percent of both Maori and Pacific Islands graduates completed programmes of study at a post-graduate level (New Zealand Education Department, 1997). During 1995, statistics showed Maori were more likely to be enrolled in polytechnics, while non-Maori were more likely to be enrolled at university.

Previous forest industry research

Past demographic workforce surveys show Maori comprise a significant portion of both the harvesting and silviculture workforces (Gibson, 1994; Byers, 1995; Cummins and Byers, 1997). A study of the management staff of smaller New Zealand forestry companies (Byers, 1996) found that Maori accounted for only seven percent of the total forest management workforce. Only one of this group held a tertiary forestry qualification. All other Maori represented, held a middle-management forestry qualification such as the New Zealand Certificate in Forestry (NZCF) or Ranger/Woodsman Certificates, all of which had been gained through the New Zealand Forest Service (NZFS) training system (Byers, 1996). Many Maori Forest Service "graduates" are now working to develop forestry opportunities for their people (McLean, 1997). Byers (1996) concluded that with the demise of the NZFS training system, a university qualification was likely to become the dominant qualification in the forest management sector. A study of students enrolled in practical forestry courses taught at seven regional New Zealand polytechnics, revealed that Maori comprised nine percent of course enrolments (Byers, 1994). A later study of polytechnic-trained forest workers found that 11% of those who had been trained at polytechnic were Maori (Cummins, 1998). Statistics from the Forest Industry Training and Educational Council (FITEC), the forest industry training body, revealed 38%
of 1998 trainees were Maori, while European accounted for 58%. Therefore, it appears more Maori are seeking training at a practical rather than managerial level. In a study of university forestry graduates, Maori comprised only one percent of students enrolled in forestry-sector degrees, being recruited for a longitudinal study to track graduate workforce movements (Cummins, 1998). Because none of this group were able to be recontacted for the main study, the career movements of Maori who had graduated from tertiary-level forestry courses were unable to be identified. Considering the increasing trend for Maori self-management of forest resources, it is of concern that the number of Maori enrolled in the three main New Zealand forestry degree programmes was so low. The question arises: is the current forestry education system more suited to European than Maori, and if so, what changes to the current system need to be made to ensure Maori are provided with the opportunity to learn to manage their resources. University students enrolled in a forestry option, who were being recruited into a 1998 study, were asked who had funded their training (Cummins, 1998). It was surprising to find that none of the one percent who identified as Maori, had received any form of mihi assistance for their tertiary education.

A Solution?

The New Zealand Ministry of Education has previously addressed the issue of Maori education, recognising that the achievement rates of Maori students were low in comparison with other groups (Ministry of Education, 1993; Statistics New Zealand, 1997). A majority of Maori believed the 1989 institutional structure to be so European-oriented as to be incapable of making the transformation necessary to accommodate Maori values. Later the observation was made that “the education and skills training systems have not prepared Maori for ownership or for management of resources” (Henare, 1994). A changed qualifications framework has led to the development of Wananga, providing an educational environment which allows the interests of Maori to be represented (Ministry of Education, 1993; Anon., 1995) and a number of Wananga (Maori tertiary institutions) now include practical forestry units as part of their curriculum (New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 1997). In 1998, a Maori Education Strategy was developed, starting with a series of regional hu to discuss issues of Maori education (Brell, 1998). At the same time, the Forest Industry Training and Educational Council (FITEC) sought to assess the responsiveness of the forest industry skill training system to Maori needs, by holding a series of regional hu (meetings) with local Maori. The concerns of this group were reflected in comments that training was seen to be limited to the highly skilled, with language used by trainers often seen as inexpressible and difficult for trainees to comprehend, potentially creating difficulties for Maori (McLean, 1997). Concerns about the suitability of training for Maori should not be limited to practitioner-level. Enrolment figures from the University of Waikato indicate increasing numbers of Maori enrolling in the BScTech (Forestry) option, but numbers are still low in comparison to European. Parallels can be drawn between forestry and other fields of work where similar problems exist in assisting Maori to attain leadership roles. Solutions may include quota systems to ensure that a certain proportion of Maori are enrolled in the training programme; scholarships for Maori; creating a working party of key Maori who are employed in a variety of roles within forestry; and further research into the issue (e.g. focus groups with key Maori to gather qualitative data about barriers). The forest industry has already implemented some of these solutions, however work needs to continue in developing a suitable learning environment for Maori to develop managerial capacity for their own resource.

References

Anonymous (1995). What are we doing right? A special feature highlighting how Maori providers are helping their learners to shine under the framework. In Learn, number 4, April.