



If Japan can do it, so can we

They're a shining example of a knowledge-based society



COMMENT
Steve Maharey

Once the building stops shaking, what do you do? Tom Music's response was to scramble for his cellphone and keys in the shambles that had been his office. Outside, on Christchurch's Victoria St, a few blocks away from Cathedral Square, the air was thick with dust. As he stepped out across the broken glass, he could see people fleeing the city centre, some at a sprint. In Cranmer Square, which served as a gathering space, Tom did a count to make sure the occupants of his building were OK, then set out along roads made treacherous by water, sewage and liquefaction to look for his daughter. Her school had been destroyed in the September 2010 earthquake; he was deeply worried.

Tom, Massey's Christchurch-based student liaison adviser, was not alone in his experiences. His story, or some variation of it, belongs to thousands of other Canterbury residents. Indeed, because New Zealand is such a small, tight-knit nation, these stories in some sense belong to all of us, for we are all affected. Although Massey does not have a physical campus in Christchurch, it has strong ties to the city: more than 900 extramural students call Christchurch home, as do tens of thousands of our alumni; hundreds of Cantabrians study on

Massey's physical campuses in Albany, Manawatu and Wellington; and the university and its staff maintain close links with Canterbury and Lincoln universities.

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, Massey dispatched emergency management specialists and a veterinary search and rescue team to Christchurch.

We began working closely with New Zealand's other universities to help Lincoln and Canterbury to return to full function and to ensure as little possible disadvantage to their students.

It will take years for Christchurch to recover properly.

A myriad of problems lie ahead, and in addressing these, the expertise held by New Zealand's universities will be key.

But for New Zealand, simply aspiring to return Christchurch to some comfortable, earthquake-proofed, low-rise version of what it was is not enough.

The combined cost to New Zealand of the September and February earthquakes has been estimated at \$15 billion, and GDP growth in 2011 has been forecast to fall back 1.5 percentage points. Yet, even before the quakes, New Zealand's growth rate was modest: over a period of decades New Zealand has been steadily slipping down the OECD rankings. When in opposition, Prime Minister John Key described New Zealand as being among the foothill nations at the base of the OECD wealth mountain.

As New Zealander of the Year – and former Massey staff member – Sir Paul Callaghan recently wrote, the best way to ensure New Zealand's future prosperity is to invest in high-wage activities.

"Our top 100 technology companies export \$4 billion a year. We need 10 times that, a goal we are capable of achieving. And to ensure

all New Zealanders share in the benefits, every child must have a chance at taking part in this future."

In Christchurch, the power that tertiary-level education and research can exert in the economy can be seen in the international success of hi-tech enterprises like Tait Electronics.

Since the Christchurch earthquake another calamity has struck the world: the earthquake and tsunami of March 11. Our hearts go out to the people of that other small island nation, Japan.

But I also look to Japan, as a knowledge-based society, to provide an example of what might be.

Sixteen years ago, on January 17, 1995, a massive quake hit the Japanese city of Kobe, causing US\$102.5b in damage and a massive loss of life. Today Kobe is one of the major centres of Japan's booming biotech industry, and at the centre of that industry is Kobe University.

I think New Zealand and Japan can look to Kobe's example with a sense of hope. They will come through these trials. Given time, they may emerge better.

And what of Tom?

Like many Cantabrians, he is fiercely loyal to Christchurch and has no wish to leave. Best of all, his daughter is fine. The people of Manawatu wish her well.

Working with Sir Paul's vision, let us all make her a city and a future she will want to be part of.

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