

Adventure Calling

For how much longer will we have the profession of surveying, while all over the world universities are complaining about declining numbers of incoming students? In this issue of GIM International John Trinder, professor at the School of Surveying and Spatial Information Systems, University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia again rings the alarm bell in his article 'Geomatics Education in Australia'. Down under, it seems, the yearly influx of new students for the eight geomatics programmes in the country lies at around 250 to three hundred students. Along the way about fifty to a hundred will leave university, so the output is around two hundred new geomatics professionals entering the Australian market every year. John Trinder estimates that this should be at least doubled to meet demand.

Already in the April issue of GIM International John Hanna of the School of Surveying at the University of Otago, New Zealand told us in his article 'A Skills Crisis Unfolds' that demand for surveyors in Australasia was higher than at any time in living memory. The series 'Developments in Geomatics Education', initiated by our editor-in-chief and carrying articles by teachers, professors and deacons from universities all over the world, shows the alarming development once again illustrated by Trinder in his discussion of the Australian situation in the issue you're about to read.

Every profession suffers now and then from shortage of new blood. But these shortages are by definition followed by years of abundance; this goes for teachers, doctors and nurses. Up until now, the recognised economic principle of the 'pig cycle', where years of high profitability lead to higher productivity only for this to fall again in response to overproduction, could readily be applied to labour-market studies. The chance of profitable jobs produced high influxes of students, leading to saturation of the job market with new graduates and a commensurate fall in job availability. But this seems not at all to apply in the field of geomatics education. How come? I think that's the main question that needs to be addressed. If the field can answer this general economic principles should once more become applicable.

One factor that plays a role, in my view, might be the vague idea given candidate students about the profession they will be joining after graduating. It might be good to have just one title that suits all the different types of jobs. I would suggest a return to the old-fashioned but still highly recognisable title of 'surveyor'. That a graduate, after specialising, will be able to work as a 'GIS-professional', 'photogrammetrist', 'engineer', 'policy-worker' or 'planner with public services', is just the icing on the cake. But calling them 'surveyor' might actually open up the minds of prospective students to the vista of working close to nature, of unknown lands, creating new things, exciting frontier-pushing projects using state-of-the-art techniques. Adventure calling! That will definitely attract more people to the profession.

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