IBT leads field in education export

Emily Plesse

IBT Education Ltd is Western Australia’s largest education exporter, based on revenue from international students.

In the 2007 financial year, the company’s export revenue was up 16 per cent, from $195 million to $227 million.

This represents about 80 per cent of the group’s total $282.7 million turnover.

IBT’s core business is pre-university and entry level university education, in high-volume courses such as business, IT and engineering.

Its English language arm, worth $90 million, caters for overseas students and recently migrant arrivals.

The company also has a workforce and training business, and performs some student recruitment.

According to IBT chief financial officer Bryce Houghton, the past few years have been a period of growth for the business.

“We’ve had a bit of a flatter patch over the last few years. Now we’re getting growth across the board of around 20 per cent,” he said.

IBT’s largest market is China, which grew 113 per cent last year, followed by Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and South Korea.

A number of these key markets experienced strong growth last year, including India (149 per cent), Vietnam (89 per cent) and South Korea (71 per cent), as well as Pakistan (57 per cent) and Nigeria (62 per cent).

“China and India are really the powerhouses now, both in size and growth rates,” Mr Houghton said.

Part of IBT’s growth strategy is to establish offices on existing university campuses in what it calls public-private partnerships.

The company has one college in Sydney, branded as Curtin University, and recently opened another under the Macquarie University brand.

It has also opened a college in Vancouver, Canada.

IBT was established in 1994 and was the first education service provider to list on the ASX 10 years later.

Curtin University of Technology is WA’s second largest exporter in the education industry, ranked 24th in the WA Business News Book of Lists.

Of its total $370.5 million revenue last financial year, $134.8 million (36 per cent) was generated by international student fees. About 38 per cent of its total student pool is made up of offshore students.

Latin America and South Asia are the university’s fastest-growing markets, increasing by 34 per cent and 31 per cent, respectively, in 2004-07, albeit from a low base.

Like IBT, China is Curtin’s biggest market for overseas students, with 1,482 Chinese students studying onshore at the university in 2007.

Malaysia is the next biggest market (1,312), followed by Indonesia (661), Hong Kong (504) and Singapore (429).

Edith Cowan University has the state’s third largest share of international students, which make up 10 per cent of its total student pool.

These students contribute $34 million to the university’s total revenue of $254.2 million.

Private education providers also rank as some of WA’s largest exporters.

West Perth-based English language school, Phoenix Academy, generated $7.4 million in revenue from international students last year.