



Glad to be here: Mr Earl at the University of Queensland

Picture: Brian Condron

# Relieved to be across the pond

**Christopher Niesche**

□ New Zealand correspondent

AN academic has quit his economics chair at New Zealand's Lincoln University and moved to the University of Queensland partly because he felt pressure to pass under-performing students.

Peter Earl says he will get the same pay and better support in a senior lecturer position at UQ.

His move has sparked controversy in New Zealand over whether grade inflation is a problem in the country's universities.

Some academics claim funding dependent on student numbers has led to an easing of pass rates; others say there is no evidence of this.

British-born Mr Earl said the environment at UQ was "far better resourced. I can work with tutors who are well trained, who have a masters degree or PhD."

He said at the Christchurch university where he worked for 10 years, he had to give up small-group tutorials and hold whole-class tutorials for 140 students at a time with the help of some honours students.

Funding problems were endemic, he said.

"You just have this doom and gloom that we can't do anything because we haven't got the resources," he said. "It's a very depressing environment in which to work."

also lifestyle-related. Without the bureaucratic and administrative chores of a professorship, he was free to do more research and enjoy life, he said.

"To me it came down to very high stress levels trying to do a very good job without many resources around me to do it — being paid well without enough time to enjoy it," he said.

"It makes a lot of sense, if you want to cut the stress levels, to do what I have done. In a more junior job I can still get the same income."

Mr Earl said the lack of resources also caused the university to view students as fee-paying clients and he felt pressure not to fail them — although the pressure was perceived more than overt.

"If a student is admitted into university and taking on a major financial obligation, then there are problems if you start failing these students or making it very difficult for them to complete if they're not up to scratch," he said.

"If you had a marks average that did not fit with the norm, but that you believed in, you would then have this letter come back from the academic registrar saying: 'We would like a justification of how the results have come out that way,'" he said.

A Lincoln University spokesman said the university would not be drawn into public debate over the views of one departing staff member.

Mr Earl's decision to move was