



MBAs lack in sustainability

Bernard Lane

NOT one Australian business school qualified as “leading edge” in an international survey of education about sustainable development.

“It’s a long way from best international practice,” said Bruce Boyes of the Australian Research Institute in Education for Sustainability. “The fact that no leading-edge programs were identified in Australia is quite a concern.”

As a result of the pioneering survey, five top business schools — including the Sydney-based Australian Graduate School of Management — are working out how they can build the concept of sustainability into MBA courses.

The federal Government helped bankroll ARIES at Macquarie University as part of a new campaign to encourage practical environmental education that changes the behaviour of individuals and companies.

Although the concept of sustainable development had gained currency here, it seemed to be entering the corporate mainstream more rapidly overseas, ac-

cording to Mr Boyes, who coordinates the MBA project.

“If we’re going to achieve change in business and industry, the first step is to educate the people who are going to be running business and industry,” he said.

Drawing on the example of specialised sustainability programs in the US, Canada and Finland, ARIES surveyed and rated 37 Australian business schools. None of them specialised enough in sustainability to qualify as “leading edge” although at the time of the survey the Graduate School of Business at the University of Technology, Sydney, was working up a sub-major in sustainability for 2005.

Three MBA programs featured core and elective subjects on sustainability, so they fell into the second-highest category of “good practice”. These were the Australian Maritime College Graduate School of Marine Resource Management in Tasmania, the University of South Australia International Graduate School of Management and the RMIT School of Management.

In the “acceptable standard”

category, 13 MBAs had elective sustainability courses. More than half the schools (19) did not include sustainability in elective or core subjects.

Sustainability has been defined as a new economic model in which resources are harvested without damaging the environment or society. Five business schools — the AGSM, Melbourne Business School, Macquarie Graduate School of Management, The University of Queensland Business School and the UTS business school — have been given \$35,000 in commonwealth grants to improve the sustainability content of their courses.

Asked whether students looked on sustainability as “a soft option”, Mr Boyes said this did seem to be “a reasonably widespread view”.

“A lot of students don’t see that it is an issue for business,” he said.

But he said the sustainability push was growing and gave the example of the Bainbridge Graduate Institute in the US, which had devised a new sustainability for business MBA and tripled applications against a nationwide trend of declining enrolments in MBAs.