

# \$74m school for Wakatipu

## Otago Daily Times

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John Hilhorst

After two years of discussion and speculation, the Wakatipu will be the location for a \$74 million international school, attracting top students from around the world.

New Zealand United World College project director John Hilhorst told the Otago Daily Times yesterday an undisclosed site in the Wakatipu basin had been selected out of nearly 70 considered nationally for the school.

The college would be one of 13 worldwide.

The United World College trust board had previously been pursuing a site at Glenorchy, which had proved too difficult, and after short-listing three other sites, one near Nelson's Abel Tasman National Park and another in the Bay of Islands, they had settled on the third site, in the Wakatipu basin, pending negotiations with the owners, Mr Hilhorst said.

While the board did not have an agreement in writing and was "still in discussion" with the owners, whom he declined to name, Mr Hilhorst was sure the school would go ahead on the site.

"It's a process that needs to be worked through," he said.

"At this stage, the board is confident that it will be able to work with its preferred site in the Wakatipu."

The location would be announced once the negotiations were complete and the landowners' wishes met, he said.

The "beautiful, iconic" site had been selected because of its accessibility to areas for the school's outdoor recreation programme, its ability to be granted resource consent, its proximity to a supportive community and the "connectivity" to international speakers via the airport, he said.

The college would be part of a global network of 13 United World Colleges.

It would house and educate up to 250 scholarship students from around the world, employ 85 staff and have annual running costs of about \$7 million, Mr Hilhorst said.

The colleges ran a demanding two-year academic programme where students were selected on personal merit.

The college would pitch itself as the Rhodes Scholarship college equivalent, Mr Hilhorst said.

While the original commencement date of 2012 was being reviewed - because it had proved overly ambitious in the current global economic climate - Mr Hilhorst said, "If we had all the money in the bank it would be done by then."

The proposed college location was quite small, with access to the surrounding property, Mr Hilhorst said.

"We plan a programme that has a lot of interaction between the school and the local and regional community."

Funding would be sought from philanthropic sources, with an anticipated 20% from New Zealand, he said. "It's a major development and, we think, a major project for New Zealand."

Major sponsors backing the project included New Zealand Post, Contact Energy, Air New Zealand and ASB.

Each had contributed \$100,000 for a feasibility study.

They regarded their contributions as an investment in developing future worldwide links with New Zealand, he said.

The college would not be seeking funds from Queenstown Lakes District Council, Mr Hilhorst said.

Mayor Clive Geddes welcomed the news as a significant "diversification for Queenstown and very compatible with the tourism economy".

"I think it's very good news and well done to the promoters."

The council had provided a significant amount of support from its staff when the trust board was first investigating the earlier Glenorchy site.

It would continue to provide support through advocacy, Mr Geddes said.