

Uses of Higher Education Policy Research

V. Lynn Meek
Centre for Higher Education Management and Policy
University of New England

Introduction

One of the University of New England's most distinguished scholars, Professor Russel Ward, entitled his 1968 inaugural lecture the *Uses of History*. He commenced by stating that 'an inaugural lecture is traditionally supposed to justify, or seek to justify, the teaching of the subject one studies'. Professor Ward said that 'my theme may be stated in three words, "History is useful"'. Though it takes twice as many words, I can state my theme similarly, 'higher education policy research is useful'. But, one may well ask, useful for what? And, more to the point, what is higher education policy research?

It is my intention to take this opportunity to explain aspects of higher education policy research and to explore, if not defend, its usefulness. More specifically, I will address the following broad questions:

- What is higher education policy research?
- How can higher education policy research contribute to a better understanding of Australian higher education?
- What is the future of higher education policy research in Australia?

In addressing these three questions I will attempt to highlight a few specific policy themes and processes and in so doing analyse aspects of the history and development of Australian higher education. The specific themes and processes I will touch upon are:

- Amalgamation
- Participation and equity
- User pays
- Funding mechanisms and market competition
- Corporate models of management
- Institutional diversity
- Higher education in post-industrial global society.

What is higher education policy research?

Another purpose of an inaugural lecture is for the professor to review his or her work and explain it clearly for the lay outsider.¹ This is no easy task for any disciplinary area, but is made even more arduous in this field due to the complexity and variety of

higher education studies. Higher education policy research is divided and subdivided into a nearly limitless number of themes and disciplinary perspectives. It is a moot point whether higher education policy research has acquired the characteristics of a unified professional field of study.

In universities around the world there are named chairs of higher education, degrees with higher education in the title, and departments/centres of higher education and higher education policy studies. In my opinion, however, the study of higher education does not constitute an academic discipline, having its own specific and unique body of knowledge, theories and methodologies. The possible exception to this assertion is the study of teaching and learning of university and college students which does have a strong grounding in educational and psychological theories of learning.

But, generally, higher education policy research is best understood in terms of themes to which the knowledge base, methodologies and expertise of a variety of different disciplines are brought to bear: history, sociology, economics, philosophy, psychology, political science. A number of distinguished social scientists have from time to time chosen higher education as their object of study; social scientists such as Max Weber (one of the first sociologists to write on higher education), Talcott Parsons, Robert Merton, David Riesman, Edward Shils, Howard Becker, Seymour Martin Lipset, Ralf Dahrendorf, Anthony Giddens, to mention but a few.

On the other hand, though not a discipline, higher education policy research is more than disparate and unconnected social scientists who individually from time to time choose a topic of interest in the realm of higher education. There is a world-wide network of higher education policy researchers, formalised in such organisations as the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers (CHER). There are other professional organisations that draw membership from both researchers and practitioners, such as the European Association for Institutional Research (EAIR), the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) and the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE). Nationally, we have the Australian Network for Higher Education Policy Research (ANHEPR), located in the Centre for Higher Education Management and Policy (of which I am Director).

There are a number of journals devoted to higher education themes, such as *Higher Education Policy*; *Higher Education Management*; *Tertiary Education and Management*. The main international research journal is entitled *Higher Education*, with the coordinating editor, by the way, being Professor Grant Harman from my Centre. There are research centres devoted to the study of higher education around the world, the largest and best known being the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) at the University of Twente in the Netherlands. I mention CHEPS not merely because of its size, but because of the close relationships and numerous collaborative projects I and colleagues at UNE have had with CHEPS for now well over a decade.

A well known British sociologist of higher education, Professor Oliver Fulton, goes so far as to state that:

... higher education is not just one among many focuses of study within the core disciplines: organizationally it has, at least in embryo, some features of a disciplinary area in its own right. These include not only the existence of an “invisible college” ... —, but also visible manifestations of the college in the form of learned societies and specialist journals, as well as the specialist teaching departments or organized research units ...²

In my opinion, however, higher education policy research is not a disciplinary area of study in the classical sense. Rather, it is a truly multi-disciplinary endeavour, held together by scholars from numerous disciplinary backgrounds with a common interest in the history, development and future of higher education. Professor Tony Becher, another British sociologist of higher education and well known for his book entitled *Academic Tribes and Territories*, likened higher education policy studies to a mule. It is a creature whose parents have long and respected lineages, but cannot from itself be reproduced.³

Moreover, I believe the field of higher education policy research gains much from its multi-disciplinary character. It is being recognised in a number of scientific fields that the most complicated problems can only be solved through the synergy provided by multi-disciplinary teams of researchers.

Higher education policy researchers come in many hues, with the academic, disciplinary-based researcher at one end of the spectrum and the reflective practitioner (the university president, rector or vice-chancellor; the head of a government department; institutional administrator, etc.) at the other. Somewhere in between are the policy analysts based in government departments, or those who conduct ‘institutional research’ for university management, followed by private consultants. Though the categories are not mutually exclusive, the non-academic policy researcher is usually focused on relatively narrow issues, often involving quantitative analysis of empirical data, that require more or less immediate advice to a superior as to their resolution.⁴

The type of higher education policy research I am mainly concerned with in this lecture is the disciplinary-based variety, as pursued continuously by interested academics. But I also recognise that in practice we cannot be so ‘pure’ in our classifications, for the same scholar may be placed in several of the different categories outlined above during his/her career.

Having defined higher education policy research as a multi-disciplinary endeavour, I should declare my own disciplinary allegiances.

I attempt to bring a sociological perspective to higher education policy research, though I would not wish to draw any clear distinction between sociology and closely related disciplines, such as social history and political science. My earlier works based on in-depth case studies of the University of Papua New Guinea and the then Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education involved extensive fieldwork and were very much in the realm of social anthropology. Not only is the field of higher education policy research eclectic, but a number of its practitioners are as well. Or maybe it is just that higher education policy researchers are rather promiscuous when it comes to commitment to a particular paradigm.

But, in general, particular characteristics of the sociological perspective can be identified. It treats higher education not as an isolated phenomenon but as part and parcel of the historical transformation of society. The sociological approach stresses the dialectical relationship between higher education and society: higher education is shaped by society, and in turn shapes society through knowledge production and the socialisation of the next generation of scientific, economic, political and social leaders. It consumes resources and in turn contributes to the economic well being of the nation through producing useful knowledge and supplying highly skilled manpower.

A sociological approach to higher education not only looks at internal divisions of labour and knowledge within universities and colleges, but also examines how these divisions reflect basic ideologies and structures in the society as a whole. The sociological approach is concerned with participation in higher education, in how higher educational institutions serve societal needs through producing scientific knowledge and technological expertise, and in how such institutions may serve as mechanisms of social cohesion within society.

In order to more fully appreciate and understand the nature and extent of change in higher education, the sociological approach closely examines the overall ideological and political context in which change takes place; contradictions within the higher education system itself; and the values, attitudes and interests of those who constitute the system.

Thus, higher education policy research is not so much about particular policies per se, but focuses on the outcome of the interactions of the major policy actors: government, government bureaucrats, university managers, academics, professions, learned associations, students, community lobby groups, etc. Even here, the concern is not so much with government and other policy actors, as with the higher education institutions themselves. Burton R. Clark, distinguished sociologist of higher education puts the argument similarly:

National and state legislatures, executive departments, commissions, and councils can announce broad policies, but implementation lies squarely in the hands of the constituent universities and colleges ... The institutions have trajectories of their own; they have policies of their own, of which governmental dictates are only a part. *It is important analytically to pursue the ways that higher education operates as a 'self-guiding society' as well as to see it as composed of institutions dependent on certain main patrons.*⁵ (emphasis provided)

The research orientation suggested here is somewhat different from the classical position adopted by policy analysis in general. Premfors, a distinguished Swedish policy analyst, maintains that 'the *object* of policy analysis is public policies, that is, series of government actions and their effects in view of some goal or set of goals'.⁶ My argument is that while recognising the importance of public policy, the *object* of study is actually the higher education institutions and their *response* to public policy/government actions. I think this distinction is particularly important in an

increasingly deregulated and complex world where institutions have mounting discretion as to their response to government policy initiatives.

Before proceeding to a discussion of Australian higher education and its relationship with society, it is worthwhile to first mention factors that make the Australian relationship unique in some respects in comparison to the way in which higher education is organised in most OECD nations.

Firstly, a striking feature of Australian higher education is that the States have the legislative responsibility for higher education, while financial responsibility rests mainly with the Commonwealth government.

Secondly, though the federal government has no legislative control over higher education, the 'power of the purse' has been more than sufficient to bring about sweeping and far reaching change to the sector. The federal government over the last couple of decades has used financial incentive and quasi-market relationships to steer the sector. Financial incentive is the main policy instrument, and most of the change to Australian higher education in recent years must be understood in this context.

Finally, a word about definitions. While in most OECD countries the term 'higher education' usually refers to all forms of post-secondary education, in Australia 'higher education' is taken to mean university education, while the term 'tertiary education' refers to both TAFE (Technical and Further Education) and university level education.

The object of study of higher education policy research

One reason why higher education policy research is useful is because the primary object of study, the western university, is such an enduring and interesting social institution. The western university is a remarkable institution if for no other reason than its durability and its 'transportability'. Throughout history, civilisations have developed various forms of advanced training for their ruling, priestly, military and bureaucratic elites, 'but only in medieval Europe did an institution recognisable as a university arise: a school of higher learning combining teaching and scholarship and characterised by its corporate autonomy and academic freedom'.⁷ The former president of the University of California and Head of the Carnegie Corporation, Clark Kerr, in his book entitled *The Uses of the University* observes that:

About eighty-five institutions in the western world established by 1520 still exist in recognisable forms, with similar functions and unbroken histories, including the Catholic church, the parliaments of the Isle of Man, of Iceland and of Great Britain, several Swiss cantons, and seventy universities. Kings that rule, feudal lords with vassals, guilds with monopolies are gone. These seventy universities, however, are still in the same locations with some of the same buildings, with professors and students doing much the same things, and with governance carried on in much the same ways.⁸

The western university not only inherited what appears to be a remarkably stable organisational form, but also a propensity to traverse national and cultural boundaries. In the 13th century, scholars from the most distant parts of Europe migrated to the

main centres of higher learning at Paris, Bologna and Salerno. Later, universities themselves migrated to every corner of the globe, including Australia.

Due to their historical durability, it is often asserted that higher education institutions are resilient to societal pressures for change and are becoming increasingly irrelevant. Some have gone as far as to equate the fate of the university with that of the dinosaur. But the evidence does not support such pessimism. In fact, the challenges currently faced by the modern university are not a result of increasing lack of relevance to society but are due to its very success.

In a sense, the university is a 'schizophrenic' organisation. While it has preserved many of its basic characteristics, the university has also proved to be tremendously flexible and adaptable, incorporating entirely new bodies of knowledge as well as flourishing in cultural milieux quite different from that of its medieval European home. In fact, it is the tension between the preservation of traditional forms of governance and academic autonomy and pressures for change that makes the university a dynamic organisation. Moreover, the resolution of tensions and conflicts between orthodox patterns of university organisation and demands for innovation impinges directly on questions of the future structure and character of the modern university.

About 60 per cent of the world's universities founded since the twelfth century have been established since the Second World War.⁹ It is during this period that higher education has achieved most of its growth and transformed itself from a small collection of relatively mono-purpose elite institutions into very large mass systems of higher education. Clark Kerr in his above mentioned book coined the term 'multiversity' to characterise these new institutions, which he conceptualised as a 'series of individual faculty entrepreneurs held together by a common grievance over parking'.¹⁰ (It is interesting to note that the term 'faculty entrepreneur' appeared at least as long ago as the early 1960s.)

Elite to mass

The transition from 'elite' to mass systems of higher education is an international phenomenon which occurred in most if not all industrialised countries in the post World War II period. The transition was brought about by a combination of demographic, social and economic pressures and the phenomenon was originally conceptualised in terms of the proportion of the relevant age cohort in higher education institutions. Below 15 per cent is considered to typify 'elite' higher education, between 15 and 35 per cent 'mass' systems and over 35 per cent 'universal' access.¹¹

The massification of higher education was not a one off event, but a phenomenon that continues today. Not only are many OECD nations approaching if not exceeding universal access, they are also experiencing the phenomenon of lifelong learning where nearly all of the population, at sometime or multiple times during their lifetime, experiences some form of formal post-secondary education. The lifetime probability of entering higher education in Australia appears to be 45 to 50 per cent, which places the nation among the top ranking OECD countries in terms of access to higher

education. In terms of tertiary education, almost 90 per cent of persons can expect to enter higher education or TAFE over their lifetime.¹²

In contrast to the small number of elite, largely autonomous institutions which were essentially peripheral to national concerns and existed up until the mid-1940s, the mass systems that developed in the post War period were characterised by:

- expanded goals for higher education (in addition to those of production and dissemination of knowledge);
- the diversification of organisational, administrative and governance structures;
- the explicit linkage of higher education with other educational sectors and with national socio-economic objectives;
- a more heterogeneous clientele; and
- greater funding, planning and coordination by government.

In addition to the expanded goal structure of higher education, mass systems are expected:

- to play an important role in the general social objective of achieving greater equality of opportunity;
- to provide education adapted to a greater diversity of individual qualifications, motivations, expectations and career aspirations;
- to facilitate the process of lifelong learning; and
- to assume a 'public service function', that is, to make a contribution to the solution of major problems faced by the community surrounding the higher education institution and by society at large, and to participate directly in the process of social change.¹³

Thus, today's student of higher education must understand higher education systems that are exceedingly complex, multi-faceted and constantly changing. The complexity of higher education systems also presents major challenges for policy makers everywhere. Indeed, the substantially increased set of goals and related responsibilities have, not surprisingly, given rise to a number of critical areas of tension. Tensions have developed:

- between the requirements of excellence and of egalitarianism;
- between the structure and size of individual demand for higher education and of labour market requirements;
- between the aspirations and interests of the different groups involved in higher education; and
- between the aspirations and expectations of individuals and the prevailing socio-economic constraints in terms of availability of resources, academic attitudes, institutional hierarchies, and established cultural and social value structures striving for self-perpetuation.¹⁴

Attempts at understanding how best to reconcile such conflicts have been challenging higher education policy researchers for at least the last three decades. Of course, policy researchers cannot suggest any definitive resolution to the dilemmas faced by either higher education systems or institutions, for no single model of how best to

organise higher education exists. But, through research, we can better inform the ongoing debate regarding the most appropriate forms of management, planning and coordination at both the system and the individual institution level.

In contributing to this debate, it is also important to keep in mind that in the transition from elite to mass higher education, rapid growth in student participation is but one of the issues, and for some not the most important. Burton Clark argues that ‘knowledge growth is a more important determinant of the difficulties of university problems than is student growth’.¹⁵ I will discuss higher education in relation to the ‘knowledge society’ shortly.

Though the university is an ancient institution, most of the issues confronting both higher education researchers and policy makers are contemporary. That said, the importance of history needs to be emphasised as well. Few if any present day policy issues can be thoroughly understood without reference to the historical context. ‘To ignore history is to repeat it’ is a truism particularly apt for government and institutional policy makers alike. In order to understand where Australian higher education may be going, we need to first understand where it has come from.

Understanding Australian higher education

Beginnings of the Australian higher education system

We need to appreciate that, for most of its history, higher education has been peripheral to Australian society. Unlike the United States, Australian higher education did not develop as a result of mass public demand, nor was it recognised as an integral feature of economic development, as were the American land grant colleges. As is demonstrated by the difficulty of placing higher education issues, such as funding, on the political agenda and capturing the interest of the electorate, the remoteness of higher education from the everyday concerns of most Australians continues to some extent today. Even as late as the mid-1980s, Professor McKinnon, a well known Australian educator and former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wollongong, was prepared to state that:

The Australian public has been conditioned to the view that tertiary education is for a small privileged elite. It has not taken the view that tertiary education is a national necessity for a substantial proportion of the population.¹⁶

Australia’s oldest university, the University of Sydney, began teaching in 1850 with 24 students, and the University of Melbourne commenced its programs with 16 students three years later. Just prior to the foundation of the University of Adelaide in 1874, the University of Sydney had only 74 students, while Melbourne was doing somewhat better with 250 students. The University of Tasmania was added to the list in the late nineteenth century, followed by Queensland and Western Australia in the early part of the twentieth century.

The founding fathers of Australian higher education represented what there was of an Australian wealthy elite. They were Australian by physical location and British by social predilection. The new institutions of higher learning were also mainly British in

character, precisely so when it came to standards and curriculum. The institutions were staffed by British scholars and served a small privileged minority that looked more to Britain than to Australia for what was culturally, socially and scientifically of value. Students were taught British history, they studied British literature and learned British politics. It was not until the 1940s that the first full course in Australian history was introduced by an Australian university and a full course in Australian literature was not taught until the 1950s.¹⁷

Several factors maintained the social isolation of Australian universities, two of the most important being geographical location and the fact that until 1901 Australia was a collection of separate colonies rather than a nation. Up to the Second World War, Australia had established universities in the capitals of the six States. These six universities largely developed in isolation from one another. There was virtually no movement of students between the capital cities, and the academic staff continued to be recruited from Britain, or from Australians who had gained their qualifications in Britain. Partridge notes that 'one reason why there was comparatively little intercourse between ... [universities] in all the years before the Second World War was that the instinct of each of them to look always towards the British source was so strong'.¹⁸ Yet this tendency to look continually towards Britain helped to create remarkable similarities among Australian universities, despite their geographical isolation.

Even by the early 1940s, higher education remained a privilege for an elite few. Writing at the time while resident in Australia, the distinguished British botanist and theoretician of higher education, Sir Eric (later Lord) Ashby observed that this elitism contributed to the marginality of the universities. He noted that Australia spent more money on its mental hospitals than on its universities, and that 1.7 persons per thousand were in universities and 3.8 persons per thousand were in hospitals for the insane. He told his audience that 'it is about twice as likely that you will go to a hospital for the insane as to a university'.¹⁹ At that time, of every 100 children who entered primary school, 40 left at the age of 14 years, and of the 60 who remained, 50 left at the intermediate standard. Of the ten who remained until the Leaving Certificate standard, less than 0.7 per cent would enter a university.

In 1939, there were about 14,000 students enrolled in Australian universities out of a population of seven million and, up to immediately after World War II, Australian higher education was homogeneous in the extreme. During the Second World War there was an unprecedented injection of federal funds into the universities for manpower training and other purposes geared to the war effort. Even more importantly, there was a heightened awareness amongst politicians and the community of the social value of science and technology. In 1946, there were 25,500 students enrolled at Australian universities. Shortly after the War, the Commonwealth government created the Australian National University to further research and postgraduate study, and in 1949 the New South Wales government established Sydney's second university: the University of New South Wales (initially called the NSW University of Technology). In 1954, the New England University College received its independence from the University of Sydney and, in 1958, Monash became Melbourne's second university. Thus, by 1960, Australia had ten universities with a student population of about 53,000.

In the mid-1950s, a committee of inquiry into the future of Australian universities, chaired by Sir Keith Murray, the then Chairman of the University Grants Committee in Great Britain, recommended that the Commonwealth become more involved in the affairs of the universities — particularly with regard to finance and development — and that an Australian Universities Grants Committee be established to advise the government on university matters, including funding.²⁰

By the early 1960s, the political and social pressures to further expand higher education intensified, and in 1961 the Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia (the Martin Committee) was appointed to charter the course of development of Australian higher education. The 1964–65 report of the Martin Committee recommended the creation of colleges of advanced education (CAEs) as an alternative to the expansion of the universities.²¹ Martin and his committee's report differentiated colleges from universities by their function: vocational and teaching-oriented colleges on the one hand, and academic and research-oriented universities on the other. The substance of what later came to be called the binary system, following an English precedent, lay in this doctrine. The binary experiment was to last until 1988.

Although Martin envisaged that the expansion of higher education would take place mainly within the advanced education sector, by the mid-1970s nine additional universities had been added to the system. In 1974, the Whitlam Labor government assumed responsibility for providing all regular recurrent and capital funds for universities and CAEs. State education department controlled teachers' colleges were recognised as CAEs for funding purposes (to qualify for federal funding, the teachers' colleges had to become independent of State departments of education) and tuition fees in universities and colleges were abolished. These decisions significantly changed the Australian higher education landscape and ensured that the federal government would dominate planning and funding of this sector.

Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, policy makers and institutional leaders alike became increasingly concerned about the future of Australian higher education. This culminated in a push at the end of the 1980s to make higher education more relevant to national economic needs and priorities. The 1988 federal government White Paper initiated a dramatic transformation of Australian higher education which, amongst other things, led to the abolition of the binary distinction between universities and CAEs and the creation of the Unified National System (UNS) in which there is now a much smaller number of significantly larger institutions, all called universities.²² These events are often referred to as the Dawkins' reforms, in recognition of one of their primary architects, the then federal Minister of Employment, Education and Training, the Hon. John Dawkins.

Transformation of Australian higher education

The Dawkins' reforms had several immediate effects, such as extensive consolidation of institutions through amalgamation. But, more importantly, the Labor government set in train a number of long-term trends, such as the following, that are still helping to shape the system today:

- a shift in some of the cost of higher education from the State to the individual; the government has curtailed its financial commitment through the introduction of such mechanisms as the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS — partial tuition payment through the tax system);
- enhanced national and international competition for students and research income;
- greater emphasis on accountability for the government dollar and some movement towards performance based funding;
- greater deregulation within the higher education sector through, for example, collection and retention of student fees, and the right to borrow money for capital works;
- an increased reliance on income gained from sources other than the Commonwealth.

The announcement of the impending death of the binary system in mid-1987 came as little surprise to the Australian academic community. Based on how it had evolved since its establishment in the mid-1960s, the binary arrangement of higher education had probably reached its limits, both in terms of its capacity to absorb further expansion and in terms of the structural and philosophical contradictions it expressed.

The ‘equal but different’ philosophy (the assumption that CAEs were equal to the universities in status but different in terms of educational function) on which the binary system rested had the opposite effect then that intended. Institutions on both sides of the binary divide came to equal one another in terms of educational function, but remained different in terms of status. Also, the binary system denied the reality of an institutional hierarchy in which the universities were placed at the top and enjoyed the lion’s share of status, prestige and wealth.

We conducted a survey in 1989 that included all college directors and university vice-chancellors, the results of which clearly indicated that the CAEs, particularly the large institutes of technology, resented the fact that their location in the advanced education sector gave them less resources and much less opportunity to engage in research and postgraduate programs relative to the universities.²³ The results also indicated that the college directors were significantly more optimistic about the Dawkins’ reforms than university vice-chancellors. Resources for research were to be made available on a competitive basis throughout the higher education system according to institutional performance rather than sector location.

With the change of federal government in March 1996, it became clear that the size of the task to which higher education must adapt had in fact substantially increased. The 1996 budget statement from the newly elected Liberal coalition government regarding higher education placed additional pressures and challenges on this sector. Key changes announced in the 1996 budget statement included:

- a reduction of operating grants by 5 per cent over three years;
- a lowering of the HECS repayment threshold; an increase in level of HECS payments; and the introduction of differential HECS according to course of study;
- no Commonwealth supplementation of academic salary increases;
- an insistence upon return of funds if enrolment targets are not met;

- a phasing out of postgraduate coursework enrolments from Commonwealth funded load.

The privatisation of public higher education and the introduction of market like relationships to achieve both greater institutional efficiency and adaptability have been national policy goals for more than a decade, regardless of the political orientation of the government of the day. A number of factors have influenced government policy and expectations of the higher education sector and include:

- the substantial costs associated with mass higher education which have led to a concern by government to realise more value per dollar committed in this sector;
- a clear expectation by government that the higher education sector is more closely tied to the national economy both in terms of meeting national labour market needs and also through the commercialisation of its research and teaching activities;
- as a larger proportion of the population expresses an interest in participating in higher education, inevitably, higher education also becomes more of a political issue;
- due to an ageing population, the social service burden on the national treasury is rising dramatically, which is coupled with pressures to cut government expenditure and to demand greater efficiencies from public sector institutions;
- as with other industrialised countries, traditional manufacturing industries are being replaced by the so-called 'knowledge processing sector', of which higher education is an integral component.

The rapid expansion of the higher education system was clearly a primary motivating factor behind the Australian government's 1988 reform agenda. In fact, enrolments increased at a pace that far exceeded government expectations. But the then Labor government was not prepared to fund growth entirely from the public purse and the current Liberal government has gone even further in demanding that an increasing proportion of the financing of higher education comes from sources other than the public weal. In Australia, as elsewhere, the last decade has ushered in a new phase in higher education planning and policy development, one characterised by:

- reductions in public expenditure;
- increased emphasis on efficiency of resource utilisation;
- increased emphasis on performance measurement, particularly in terms of outcomes;
- increased emphasis on demonstrable contribution to the economy of the nation; and
- the strengthening of institutional management and of the policy and planning role of individual institutions.

Quite understandably, higher education policy research in Australia over the last few years has been preoccupied with the processes and outcomes of the Dawkins' reforms. I will now turn to a brief discussion of what have been the most important processes shaping Australian higher education over the previous decade.

Policy processes and outcomes

Amalgamation

One of the most immediate consequences of the 1988 reforms was the reduction in the number of higher education institutions as the binary and former university sectors dissolved. Government policy statements clearly indicated that many of the reforms could be accomplished only within larger institutional units and set a size criterion for joining the UNS. The considerable reduction in number of institutions was achieved mainly through amalgamation, itself both a process and outcome of enhanced competition.

The 19 'older' universities and some 44 CAEs were reduced to 36 institutions (1994 figures), mostly through merger. The size criterion was not the only factor that drove the amalgamation process: institutional ambition and a perceived need to grow as large as possible also contributed. Moreover, part of the rationale behind the amalgamations was improvement of management efficiency and the lowering of unit costs. In this respect, the use of institutional amalgamations as a policy tool conforms to several international trends: consolidation and often the creation of multi-campus institutions; the move from smaller towards larger higher education institutions; and the move from mono-purpose institutions towards comprehensive multi-school institutions. These trends are, in part, a result of the transformation of small elite systems of higher education into mass systems of higher education. The sheer cost of mass higher education creates pressures for efficiency, elimination of apparent duplication, and consolidation into more economic units.

Participation and equity

The former Labor government recognised in the mid-1980s that increasing retention rates at Year 12 would dramatically increase demand for higher education and committed itself to growth in the sector. The 1987 Green Paper, precursor to the White Paper, had as its targets 'growth in total enrolments, including higher degrees, from 475,000–495,000 in 1987 to 530,000–550,000 by 2001; and growth in all graduate numbers from about 88,000 in 1986 to just over 100,000 by 2001'.²⁴ Both targets were achieved by 1991, ten years ahead of schedule. In 2000 there were about 700,000 students in Australian universities.

All Australian studies, and there have been a number of them in recent years, conclude that the participation rate of a number of equity groups has improved substantially in recent years. For example, women made up 57 per cent of all 1999 non-overseas commencing students, a considerable improvement on their participation a decade ago. Indigenous Australians and persons from non-English speaking backgrounds with respect to overall participation have become over represented. However, these studies also indicate that little or no progress has been made on the relative access by rural and isolated students, or by persons of low socio-economic status. Despite a dramatic increase in student numbers since the mid-1980s, participation in higher education by persons of low socio-economic status has not improved, in fact, evidence suggests that it has gotten worse.

User pays

Towards the end of the 1980s, though participation in higher education was increasing, the student population continued to be drawn largely from the middle and professional classes. Arguing the benefits of participation in higher education for the individual, it was not difficult for the government to reintroduce student fees in the form of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme.

HECS was a very clever political device for reintroducing student fees. Though since the 1970s the level of income of graduates relative to non-graduates had fallen, these incomes have still been substantially more than those earned by the rest of the workforce. But, for reasons of equity and access, the then Labor government was not prepared to charge up front fees. Rather, HECS students were to contribute to the cost of their course through a tax levy that would come into effect only when their income reached the average national income.

The public/private good debate with respect to higher education intensified with the election of the Liberal coalition government in March 1996. The new government has substantially increased the HECS charge for all students and lowered the income threshold for commencement of repayment. Based on both the cost of the course and the earning power of graduates, the government has introduced a differential HECS scheme which, for example, resulted in a 92 per cent fee rise for engineering and business students and a 125 per cent rise for law and medicine students. This has made tuition fees for Australian university students on the average amongst some of the highest in OECD countries.

It is worthwhile to again stress that the current government has not substantially changed policy direction, but only intensified the emphasis on competition, market relationships and privatisation embodied in the policies of the previous government. Nor has the ideology underpinning policy changed much. A good example is the deregulation of fees for overseas students brought about by the former Labor government.

Full-fee paying overseas students. Up to the mid-1980s, the education of overseas students was seen mainly as a form of foreign aid. Students were subsidised by government aid programs and fees were not paid directly to institutions. But, in the late 1980s, government foreshadowed a more market oriented approach to foreign students — from ‘aid’ to ‘trade’ — by indicating that full-fee paying overseas students provided another important source of potential revenue growth.

The deregulation of the foreign student market created an environment of fierce competition amongst institutions for the overseas student dollar. Nearly all institutions regularly send representatives on student recruitment drives throughout South East Asia, and some institutions have established overseas campuses. By 1999, over 157,000 foreign students (about 84,000 enrolled in higher education institutions) were studying in Australia and contributing about \$3 billion in that calendar year to the national economy, making the education of overseas students one of the country’s largest export earners. Here is an example of how enhanced competition in a deregulated higher education environment appears to produce the desired outcome. A relatively new phenomenon in this area is for Australian universities to enrol overseas

students through distance education or at an offshore campus established by a university in collaboration with a foreign partner.

Funding mechanisms and market competition

The history of Australian higher education can be told, in part, by the way in which it has been funded. Figure 1 displays the proportion of university income by major funding source for the period 1939 to 1998. As can be seen, before World War II, the

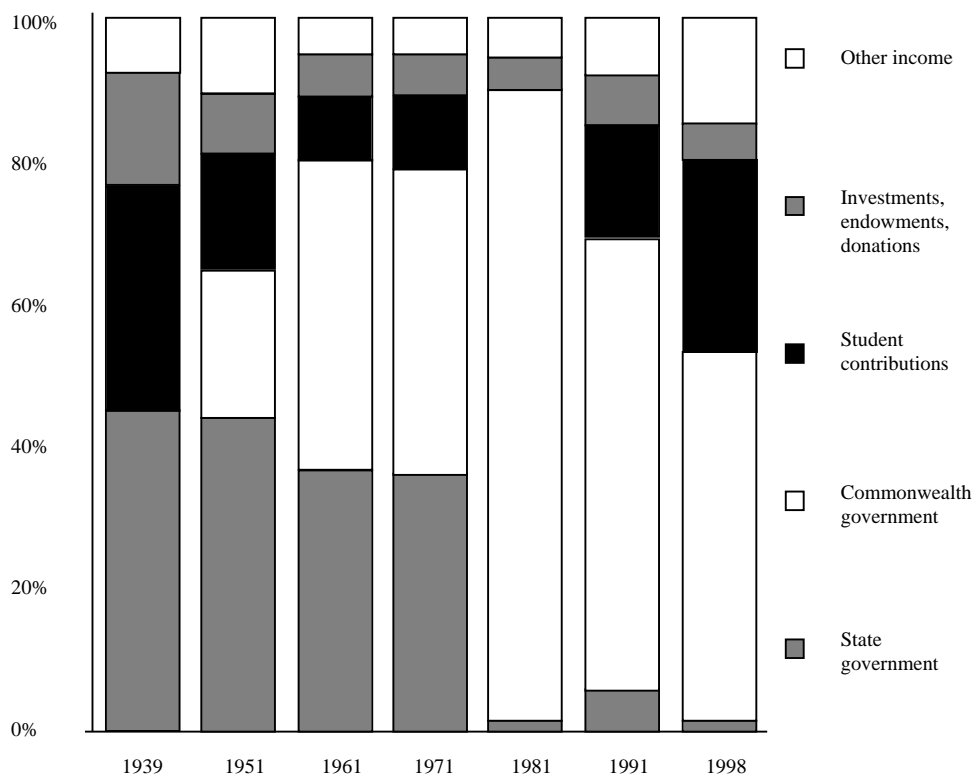


Figure 1: University Income by Source²⁵

Commonwealth government did not contribute to the running of the universities, while nearly 80 per cent of the income came from State governments and student tuition. In 1981, nearly 90 per cent of the income came from the Commonwealth, and student contributions had effectively disappeared as a source of income, as had money from State governments.

Currently, it is clear that at least some Australian higher education institutions are successfully meeting the challenge to diversify their funding base. In 1999, total annual operating revenue for the higher education sector was \$8.5 billion, of which just over 50% was from Commonwealth government grants and 17% from HECS. In the early 1980s, non-government sources of funding for higher education were negligible across the sector. Presently, a number of institutions (mostly the older, well established ones) receive over half of their operating revenue from non-government sources. On average, about a third of university revenue is from earned income.

While Figure 1 clearly illustrates the dramatic decline of the State governments as a higher education funding source, it is worthwhile to note that in the last couple of years the Queensland, Victorian and ACT governments have been investing in specific science research projects, and there is in some quarters a renewed interest for increased State involvement in higher education. In 2001 we will be undertaking an ARC funded project that reassesses the States' relationships with higher education.

Another interesting feature of Figure 1 is the variable and rather insignificant contribution to university income that comes from investments, endowments and donations. In a proportional sense, Australia did better in this regard in 1939 than in 1998. But, compared to other nations, Australia has a long way to go in terms of income from investments, endowments and donations. In the United States, for example, Harvard University alone earns around \$9 billion annually from endowments.

Historically, and in contrast to the situation in a number of other OECD countries, the Australian private sector has invested little in public higher education. This is due, in part, to the fact that many Australian companies are multinational corporations which prefer to invest in R&D in the country of their home office, such as the USA or Japan. In the early part of the 1990s, there was some increase in private funding of Australian R&D, but those gains have largely disappeared in more recent years.

The way in which Australian higher education may be funded in the future is presently subject to considerable speculation. There is pressure on government from the scientific community to substantially increase funding for research. Clearly, since the mid-1990s, there has been a substantial reduction in investment in research and an alarming deterioration of infrastructure. While over the last few years a number of comparable countries, such as Canada and Ireland, have witnessed renewed and substantial investment in research infrastructure, the Australian response so far has been the issuing of a White Paper on research that provides a blueprint for the restructuring of the Australian Research Council and a concentration of research effort within universities all within the current revenue base. Disappointingly, the White Paper makes little reference to the substantial international literature evaluating different research funding models and questioning the degree to which the concentration of research funding should be a goal in itself.

More generally, student centred funding based on a voucher system was the main recommendation of the *Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy* (known as the West Committee after its Chairman, Mr Roderick West) which reported in April 1998.²⁶ A Cabinet document, prepared by the Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs and leaked to the opposition and the press in October 1999, proposed a student demand-driven model for funding higher education where institutions would be allowed to set their own tuition fees and students would be encouraged to obtain loans (replacing HECS) at commercial interest rates. The government and the Minister were embarrassed by the premature publication of the document and quickly denied its intention to implement the new financial arrangements recommended. But the Cabinet submission itself admitted that the funding of Australian higher education had reached crisis point, and this is generally agreed upon by all concerned with the sector.

How the present government will handle this crisis is not yet known, but it is clear that the government prefers a further deregulated consumer-driven system, funded largely through student fees. The opinion in many other OECD countries, however, seems to be that on average the proportion of the costs of higher education that can be borne by students through fees has reached saturation point.

A recent OECD publication entitled *Redefining Tertiary Education* argues that nearly everywhere, 'tertiary education is replacing secondary education as the focal point of access, selection and entry to rewarding careers for the majority of young people'.²⁷ Moreover, there is a compelling argument for continued expansion based on three key political factors:

- individuals are increasingly seeing the value of continued education and training of a high standard;
- the advanced, industrialised democracies for both economic and social reasons require highly competent, responsible citizens;
- there is an increased risk to social structure and cohesion and a threat to equity and social justice if a significant proportion of the population is excluded or discouraged from participation in a stage of education which clearly confers benefits.²⁸

The OECD report presents a public good argument for increased investment in higher education based upon overall economic returns to society of a skilled workforce. This kind of argument has not been heard at this political level for sometime.

Over the last decade, Australian universities have mainly been able to offset the decline in Commonwealth funding through substantial increases in student fee income of various types. In this respect, it is interesting to note the following from the OECD report:

The option of increasing or imposing direct charges for students (fees) is supported by many arguments, but our conclusion is that this is not a sound basis on which to further extend opportunity. Instead, governments need to be more active in mobilising a wide range of financial sources, both public and private ... Our fear is that undue preoccupation with student charges deflects attention from the wide range of options to mobilise the needed resources and to use them more efficiently.²⁹

Redefining Tertiary Education perceives a major financial role for government and argues that 'as participation levels increase, the case for a strong contribution from the public budget is reinforced'.³⁰

It is extremely unlikely that Australia will ever return to the days when government provided nearly all of the funds for higher education. Moreover, there are a number of reasons why the sector desires a diversified funding base, institutional autonomy being one of them. On the other hand, viewed comparatively, Australia is probably approaching the limit to which government can abrogate its responsibility for funding public higher education.

Much of the funding policy in Australia, as elsewhere, has been directed at making higher education more relevant to industry and ensuring a direct contribution to the nation's economic well being. But we are hearing internationally an argument that higher education's contribution to the knowledge economy must extend well beyond the parameters of economic growth. The new Vice-Chancellor of RMIT, Ruth Dunkin, recently said in her inaugural address that in Australian higher education:

there has been little to support social policy objectives; community service objectives have generally been poorly funded and little measured as part of overall performance and much of the policy debate has been dominated by industry's demand for more flexible and relevant education and training.³¹

Social policy objectives for higher education require more attention if for no other reason than to maintain social cohesion.

Corporate models of management

Market steering of higher education supposedly requires strong corporate style management at the institutional level. And in Australia, as elsewhere, in recent years there has been a substantial shift towards a more managerial approach to running universities, deliberately encouraged by government policy. The push to diversify the funding base has been one of the primary factors making university management so difficult and complex, as Michael Gallagher, Head of DETYA's Higher Education Division recognises:

With currently a third of university revenue on average dependent on 'earned income' that is hard to win, that can be volatile and uncertain, that costs funds to earn and when earned may be available for use only in designated activities, with little discretion for the university at large, the tasks of university management become more complex and require new skill, systems and cultures.³²

Within the changed policy context, many responsibilities have been devolved to individual universities. But, at the same time, institutions are held more directly accountable for the effective and efficient use of the funding and other freedoms they enjoy. Moreover, institutions are now placed in a much more highly competitive environment, and considerable pressure has been placed on universities to strengthen management, to become more entrepreneurial and corporate like. The large universities with more than 30,000 students and annual budgets that run to hundreds of millions of dollars, rival in size and complexity many private corporations. Institutions must respond quickly and decisively in order to take advantage of market opportunities.

There can be little doubt that the sheer size and complexity of Australian higher education demands strong and expert administration at the institutional level. But the current emphasis on what some have termed 'hard managerialism' is creating significant tension between rank and file academic staff and the executive. This tension between the managerial and collegial approaches to running the university is widespread and contributes significantly to staff alienation which, in turn, may

undermine commitment to the very corporate planning processes that the managerial approach is intended to accomplish.

In 1995, we surveyed Executive Officers (Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Pro Vice-Chancellors), Deans of Faculty, and Heads of Departments/Schools in all Australian universities.³³ The questionnaire canvassed the appropriateness and effectiveness of management and governance structures and procedures.

The results confirmed that in Australia as elsewhere the perception is that corporate style management practices are replacing more traditional methods of collegial decision making. There was a clear indication that executive management priorities and practices take precedent over collegial decision making. A significant majority of respondents agreed that the trend toward central management is at the expense of collegial processes; that the values of staff and management goals are in conflict; and that executive management takes precedence over collegial decision making in their institutions. A substantial majority of Heads also indicated that this should not be the case, while the majority of Executive Officers seemed more supportive of these shifts in management style.

Although many of the survey items indicated tension over the way in which the institutions were being governed and managed, a great majority of respondents agreed that it is academic staff who determine teaching and research directions. These results support those on research of higher education management in other countries — despite the introduction of stronger corporate styles of management practices into higher education institutions, it appears that it is the scholars who still determine the direction of the primary higher education processes of teaching and research.³⁴ The evidence does not suggest that strong institutional management threatens academic control of teaching and research, and, in fact, strong management may be the only thing that protects these core activities. The challenge for both management and academic staff is to maintain communication and a healthy awareness of their relative strengths and weaknesses.

Institutional diversity

The creation of the UNS was to bring about a more diversified higher education system. The 1988 White Paper stated that:

The new arrangements will promote greater diversity in higher education rather than any artificial equalisation of institutional roles. Institutions that attempt to cover all areas of teaching and research compromise their ability to identify, and build on, areas of particular strength and the achievement of areas of genuine excellence. The ultimate goal is a balanced system of high quality institutions, each with its particular areas of strength and specialisation ...³⁵

The research we have conducted on this topic indicates that, to a large extent, institutions have done just that: attempted to cover all areas of teaching and research.

In terms of the usefulness of higher education policy research, one of the areas of study I have found most valuable is that of diversity. With colleagues from a number

of overseas countries, and through CHEPS in the Netherlands, I have been involved with large scale comparative research on diversity for well over a decade.³⁶ This research has been of great interest both from a practical policy perspective and a more basic scientific one.

With the emergence of mass higher education, many national governments have identified a diverse higher education system as a policy imperative. It can be argued that mass higher education must have diversity, as it is through diversity that both the range of choices for students and the accessibility to higher education for many different clientele groups are increased. Diversity is also perceived to ensure that higher education is not only more responsive to the varying needs and abilities of students but also allows for specialisation within the system. Diversity is seen as good because it supposedly:

- increases the range of choices for students;
- opens higher education up to all of society;
- matches education to the needs and abilities of individual students;
- enables and protects specialisation within the system; and
- meets the demands of an increasingly complex social order.

While the value of diversity goes largely unquestioned, there is a good deal of argument over what policies best achieve this goal. Basically, the arguments fall into two opposing camps. First, there are those who maintain that a functionally differentiated higher education system can only be maintained through strong State intervention. The maintenance of functionally divergent higher education sectors, such as the community colleges, State University and University of California system in the United States, or the polytechnic/university system that used to prevail in Australia and Great Britain, requires legislative intervention.

The second and opposing policy paradigm is based on the assumption that market like discipline rather than State regulation best produces a diverse, innovative and adaptive set of higher education institutions. Competition in a deregulated higher education environment is seen as the key factor in creating diversity.

Higher education researchers are no more in agreement on what best creates diversity than the policy makers. The scholarly literature very broadly falls into two camps: those who view higher education in terms of an inevitable trend towards ever-increasing differentiation and those who see the opposite brought about by a natural tendency for institutions to converge in terms of structure, activities, status and prestige.

The importance of diversity as an object of study is also a fundamental topic for research in much of the more general organisational sociology literature. But, here too, considerable confusion surrounds both the use of the term 'diversity' and the application of various theories to explain its occurrence.

If looked at internationally, there is obvious variety in the way in which different national systems have formally organised and/or reorganised themselves. There are formally unified systems in Australia and the United Kingdom, formal binary/trinary divisions between university and non-university institutions in California, Norway,

the Netherlands and Finland, and the systems in Hungary, Portugal and Sweden appear to be in a state of transition. However, what is of concern to higher education policy is not diversity per se as some absolute state of affairs, but desirable degrees of difference and similarity coupled with an understanding of the forces which push higher education institutions and systems in one direction or another.

With respect to diversity, there are two possible institutional responses to increased market competition: institutions can diversify in an attempt to capture a specific 'market niche', or they can imitate the activities of their successful competitors. The direction in which institutions respond depends on a number of factors, not the least of which are the history and traditions of particular national systems and the reward structure put in place by policy. It appears that the competitive environment in which the Australian higher education system operates has enforced a degree of uniformity on the sector.

The policy intention was that competition would encourage institutions to find their own particular market niche. However, it seems that institutions have been more prone to copy each others' teaching and research profiles than to self-consciously diversify.

In attempting to diversify their funding base, for example, the overseas student market has proved a lucrative avenue for many institutions. Full-fee paying overseas students are big business for Australian higher education. But the majority of these students are only interested in a fairly narrow range of courses centred around economics and business studies. In attempting to cater for the preferences of the overseas student market, many institutions have engaged in course duplication.

With the abolition of the binary divide, subjects once relegated to the non-university sector (nursing, tourism, lower levels of teacher training, etc.) were suddenly exalted to the level of university degrees. Combined with a process of extensive institutional amalgamation between 'older' universities and former CAEs which occurred immediately after the collapse of the binary system, these subjects were automatically dispersed throughout the system. Looked at from this perspective, programmatic convergence rather than diversification has been the result.

Research policy and the reward structure that it set in place stimulated institutions to imitate, at least to a degree, one another's research profiles. The competitive nature of the research quantum allocations also encourages institutions to engage in research of a particular type. The newer universities have not done as well in the competition for research dollars as the older universities. But what gains they have made are seen as significant in bringing other rewards in their train. On the other hand, the older and more prestigious universities appear to resent sharing any of the research spoils.

The issue of diversity is probably one of the most important ones to face Australian higher education over the next couple of decades. At stake is whether weaker institutions will merely become pale imitations of their more powerful and prestigious brethren, or create their own excellence in different and varied ways. Uniform policy probably stimulates a degree of uniformity in institutional response, as does market competition where institutions are competing for the same clientele, such as full-fee paying overseas students. There is a growing body of evidence in Australia and

elsewhere to suggest that formally regulated and separate policy environments better serve the principles of diversity than market competition. Compared to legislative control, market discipline can be far more ubiquitous and unvarying. In the end, it must be recognised that policy decisions about diversity are political ones, not something that can be left to the vagaries of the market.

Higher education in post-industrial global society

The massive and unprecedented expansion of higher education during the second half of the 20th century is being fuelled by global economic restructuring and the advent of post-industrial or 'knowledge' society. In post-industrial society, knowledge supersedes agriculture and manufacturing as the main means for wealth production, and becomes the primary resource of society. It is not that agriculture and manufacturing disappear, but rather that technology has made both agriculture and manufacturing so efficient that they demand the attention of only a minority of the workforce.³⁷

The American sociologist Daniel Bell coined the term post-industrial society in 1962, and predicted the replacement of factory workers by 'knowledge workers' as the primary producers of wealth.³⁸ About the same time, Clark Kerr in outlining *The Uses of the University* argued powerfully that the exponential expansion of knowledge was opening the academy to the broader interest of society in an unprecedented fashion that would transform the university forever. Since these early speculations the knowledge economy has indeed become a global reality. And, on a global scale, wealth and prosperity have become more dependent on access to knowledge than access to natural resources.

As the knowledge society continues to develop, market relations based on knowledge production increasingly permeate all aspects and institutions of society, and the university is faced with a growing number of competitors in both research and training. What is at question is the continuing importance and centrality of the university as knowledge is increasingly brought within market and political exchanges.

According to Scott, former editor of the *Times Higher Education Supplement* and current Vice-Chancellor of Kingston University, universities 'have been absorbed into, been taken over by, market relations'.³⁹ Or put another way: 'higher education systems are no longer simply "knowledge" institutions, reproducing the intellectual and human capital required by industrial society; they are becoming key instruments of the reflexivity which defines the post-industrial (and post-modern) condition'.⁴⁰

Scott indicates that the interesting sociological question is whether higher education institutions, universities in particular, will continue to be recognised as such as post-industrial society moves into the 21st century. Commentators such as Scott and Gibbons⁴¹ see the university losing its monopoly over knowledge production to the extent that the institution may eventually disappear as an identifiable form. Scott, for example, provocatively entitles a 1998 journal article 'The end of the European University'.⁴²

There is a lot of hype about the future of the university in post-industrial/post-modern society, ranging from the replacement of the traditional campus by the ‘virtual university’, to the disappearance of the academy altogether as knowledge production becomes increasingly dispersed throughout society. It is one of the tasks of higher education policy research to inject a healthy scepticism, based on analysis of hard data, into some of the more extreme arguments about the future of higher education.

Certainly, the different roles and functions ascribed to the university are becoming highly complex, and it will need to more effectively share some of its key functions with other institutions in society. Partners and competitors will be found amongst private sector R&D companies, corporate training departments, for-profit private education providers, etc. But there is nothing new about this. In a 1967 publication prophetically entitled *Toward the Year 2000*, Daniel Bell, in arguing that the ‘major new institutions of the society will be primarily intellectual institutions’, listed the research university as only one example of research and intellectual entities of various kinds. However, he did go on to state that ‘no single kind may dominate, though perhaps the universities may be the strongest because so many problems get thrown at them, and they are immediately available for the kinds of tasks that were not there before’.⁴³ In another publication, Bell is more unequivocal: ‘the university increasingly becomes the primary institution of the post-industrial society’.⁴⁴

The academy has never had a complete monopoly over the production or dissemination of knowledge. For example, historically in many countries some professions, like medicine in the United Kingdom and engineering in Portugal, had to fight protracted battles before being let into the universities. Moreover, at least in terms of the funding of basic research (particularly outside bioscience), there is evidence to suggest that in the United States the research universities have actually increased their dominance over the last couple of decades.⁴⁵ And while new technology is influencing the way we teach within universities, there is no evidence that the emerging ‘virtual university’ will replace the physical campus and its traditional function of socialisation of the next generation of social, political and scientific leaders.

I am confident that higher education policy research will continue to have its uses, for I am also confident that its primary object of study, the western university, in all its forms and guises, will become even more important. Post-industrial society will demand even greater diversity from higher education institutions and systems, which will in turn broaden further the higher education policy research agenda.

Society will impose new roles, pressures and demands on higher education while simultaneously expecting the preservation of key traditional functions. Higher education institutions in turn will help shape the very society that generates these new and traditional expectations. Higher education policy researchers will not be put out of a job, though their task of understanding the relationship between higher education and society will become exceedingly complex and difficult. As I mentioned earlier, it is a very good thing that higher education policy research is a multi-disciplinary affair, for the intellectual resources of no one discipline are sufficient to grapple with a full understanding of higher education in the 21st century.

But, as I also indicated above, there is a difference between the isolated social scientist making the odd contribution to a problem associated with higher education, and systematic and sustained exploration and analysis of higher education policy by a multi-disciplinary research team. We find these teams in other countries, well supported by governments and foundations. One such example is the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies in the Netherlands, with more than 30 research staff, well supported by the Dutch government, the EU, and its own university, and having a research brief that includes projects in most of Europe, Russia, parts of Africa, and North America. Such units in Australia are conspicuous by their absence.

Australia has a few renown scholars interested in aspects of higher education policy, and a couple of centres for the study of higher education, such as my own — the Centre for Higher Education Management and Policy. But these centres have only two or three permanent academic staff who must perform teaching as well as research duties and have no or very limited budgets for research outside the project grants won by individuals.

I see Australia's lack of explicit commitment to independent and sustained higher education policy research as an important problem and would like to conclude my lecture with a few more words on this topic.

The future of higher education policy research in Australia

Despite the many reviews of the sector, Australia has been quite poor in subjecting its higher education policies to rigorous analysis and informed comment. This is lamentable considering the billions of tax payers' dollars spent on higher education and the importance of the sector to the future of the nation.

Over the years, expert committees of enquiry have helped shape Australian higher education, such as the Murray Committee in the 1950s and the Martin Committee in the 1960s. But the impact of such committees has waned in recent years, with recommendations of the most current effort — the West Committee which reported in 1998 — being shelved. The Higher Education Council within the former NBEET (National Board of Employment, Education and Training) structure commissioned specific reports on issues of immediate concern to government, as DETYA to some extent continues to do under its Evaluations and Investigations Program.

A new phenomenon emerging over the last decade has been for government to turn to private consultants for advice on particular issues. Consultants have been international companies, such as KPMG, or private individuals, often ex-government bureaucrats. A danger with consultancies is that government is under no obligation to make the findings public. But the main point I want to make here is that none of government's past or present involvement in policy evaluation is a substitute for sustained, ongoing, long-term, public and independent higher education policy research.

This situation is somewhat surprising in that the need for independent objective study of higher education policy has been recognised in a number of government reports for well over two decades, with many commentators and government officials noting

with regret the lack of a special centre or of work of a similar kind to that found in many other OECD countries. For example, the Williams Committee concluded its 1979 report to the Prime Minister on education, training and employment with a proposal for:

... a University Centre or Research Centre to provide a focus for the work of individuals and groups in several universities and colleges of advanced education, and to extend research into universities, colleges of advanced education and TAFE institutions in the context of the whole system.⁴⁶

The 1986 *Review of Efficiency and Effectiveness in Higher Education* (the Hudson Committee) also made positive noises about the establishment of a national higher education research centre, to no avail.⁴⁷

In fact it can be argued that the situation with respect to government commitment to independent higher education policy research has deteriorated rather than improved over the past two decades or so, with the closure of the Education Research Unit in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University, and the demise of the federal government's Education Research and Development Committee (an educational research funding body) in the early 1980s.

In 1970, an article in *Vestis* emphasised 'how essential it is that national educational planning bodies have the support of research units ...'.⁴⁸ The article also noted that 'at the present time educational planning is stamped with the hallmark of rank amateurism. It is largely a process of conciliation and compromise among conflicting demands, almost invariably subjectively determined and usually inflated in their estimates'.⁴⁹ About twenty years later (1991), the then Minister for Higher Education, the Hon. Peter Baldwin indicated that:

The Government is ... interested in encouraging a deepening of the process for development of and debate over education policy generally. The importance of this is highlighted by the increasing interaction of the schools, TAFE and higher education sectors, the complexity of the issues and the need to ensure that all interested parties have a genuine opportunity to bring their perspectives to policy formulation. The Government will be initiating discussions with a view to identifying interest in a broadly supported foundation or some other form of Australian education policy Centre.⁵⁰

Government's interest was not translated into action.

Research cannot identify any one best way to coordinate, fund, govern or manage either higher education systems or institutions. The dynamics of higher education are contingent on too many historical, social, cultural and economic factors to even suggest that there is an 'ideal type' that can be imposed in every circumstance. But research can identify policy weaknesses and the unintended consequences of policy implementation, helping to better inform the planning processes at both the system and institutional levels through the rigorous collection of data and their analysis. There are a number of research questions requiring urgent attention. These include the following.

With respect to market like regulatory frameworks:

- *What are the unintended policy consequences of enhanced market competition in higher education?*
- *What are the effects of market competition on the academic profession?*

With respect to governance and management at the institutional level:

- *What innovative mechanisms and initiatives have higher education institutions developed in response to recent policy changes on institutional governance and management?*
- *To what extent have institutions capitalised on new opportunities arising from these changes in policy?*
- *What new management structures have emerged and how well are these working?*
- *How best can these new structures inform the policy process at the system level?*
- *To what extent has the changed governmental perspective on the steering of the system resulted in changes of governance structure at the institutional level?*
- *To what extent have these changes brought about a different role of the central institutional administration in relation to the other institutional constituencies?*
- *To what extent have new models of institutional governance affected the innovative and adaptive capacities of the institution?*
- *What are the effects of possible changes in the patterns of institutional governance on the adaptive and innovative characteristics of higher education?*

With respect to diversity and differentiation:

- *How do national higher education policies promote either diversity or convergence of institutional teaching and research activities?*
- *How do institutional management policies promote either diversity or convergence of institutional teaching and research activities?*
- *What higher education policies appear to best serve the principles of diversity?*
- *To what extent do higher education institutions achieve diversity in a climate of deregulation?*
- *What effect, if any, does the lack of explicit sectors of higher education have on institutional diversity?*

Or as Professor Burton Clark puts it:

- *How do sets of institutions called universities now legitimate a plurality of meanings whereby we accept that a growing number of different types do different combinations of useful things?⁵¹*

These are but a few useful questions to which higher education policy research can suggest useful answers.

Conclusion

Above, I urged caution in uncritically accepting the post-modernist argument concerning the death of the university. The ‘facts’ to my way of thinking clearly indicate the vitality of the university in what Barnett refers to as a world of

supercomplexity — a situation where ‘our very frameworks for making the world intelligible are in dispute’.⁵² The university simultaneously helps generate supercomplexity and is asked to assist in resolving the uncertainties it creates.

I clearly accept that the forces for change in an increasingly turbulent and complex world do not neglect the university. Nearly everywhere, the university is required to find a new legitimacy while retaining essential traditions. Higher education policy research has much to contribute to this task. In Australia, one hopes for a heightened awareness of both the importance of understanding the changing role of higher education in society and of the critical contribution higher education makes to Australia’s economic and social welfare and the nation’s future.

¹ Richard A. Burrige, ‘The King’s Values? Consumer Culture and Higher Education’, The Dean’s Inaugural Lecture, King’s College, London, 9 October 1995.

² O. Fulton, ‘Higher Education Studies’, in Burton R. Clark and Guy Neave, eds, *The Encyclopedia of Higher Education*, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1992, p. 907.

³ Comment made along these lines at the Conference on Future Directions for Higher Education Policy Research: Priorities, Capacity and Developing Effective Links with Policymakers, Canberra, 7–8 December 1998.

⁴ Ulrich Teichler, ‘Current Agendas and Priorities in Higher Education Policy Research: An International View’, paper presented at the Conference on Future Directions for Higher Education Policy Research: Priorities, Capacity and Developing Effective Links with Policymakers, Canberra, 7–8 December, 1998. See also, Ulrich Teichler and Jan Sadlak, eds, *Higher Education Research: Its Relationship to Policy and Practice*, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 2000.

⁵ Burton R. Clark, ‘Developing a Career in the Study of Higher Education’, in John Smart, ed., *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, vol. XV, Agathon Press, New York, 2000, p. 36.

⁶ R. Premfors, ‘Policy Analysis in Higher Education’, in Burton R. Clark and Guy Neave, eds, *The Encyclopedia of Higher Education*, Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1992, p. 1907.

⁷ Harrold Perkin, ‘History of Universities’, in *International Higher Education, an Encyclopedia*, Garland, New York, 1991, p. 169.

⁸ Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, 3rd edn, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1982, p. 152.

⁹ Francisco O. Ramirez and Phyllis Riddle, ‘The Expansion of Higher Education’, in *International Higher Education, an Encyclopedia*, Garland, New York, 1991, p. 91.

¹⁰ Kerr, op. cit., p. 20.

¹¹ Martin Trow, ‘Problems in the Transition from Elite to Mass Higher Education’, in *Policies for Higher Education*, OECD, Paris, 1974, pp. 51–101.

¹² Phil Aungles, Tom Karmel and Tim Wu, *Demographic and Social Change: Implications for Education Funding*, DETYA, Canberra, 2000 (www.detya.gov.au/highered/occpaper).

¹³ L. Cerych, D. Furth and G. Papadopoulos, ‘Overall Issues in the Development of Future Structures of Post-secondary Education’, in *Policies for Higher Education*, OECD, Paris, 1974, p. 23.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.

¹⁵ Clark, op. cit.

¹⁶ K. R. McKinnon, ‘Re-shaping Higher Education’, *Vestes: The Australian Universities Review*, 28(1), 1985, p. 15.

¹⁷ W. J. Gardner, *Colonial Cap and Gown*, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, 1979; D. Grant, ‘To Know Ourselves: Canada and Australia’, *Overland*, no. 93 (December), 1983, pp. 39–42.

¹⁸ P. H. Partridge, *Society, Schools and Progress in Australia*, Pergamon Press, London, 1968, p. 120.

¹⁹ E. Ashby, *Challenge to Education*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1946, p. 67.

²⁰ Committee on Australian Universities, *Report of the Committee on Australian Universities* (Chairman: K. A. H. Murray), Government Printer, Canberra, 1957.

²¹ Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia, *Tertiary Education in Australia: Report to the Australian Universities Commission* (Chairman: L. H. Martin), 3 vols., Government Printer, Melbourne, 1964–65.

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- ²² *Higher Education: A Policy Statement*, AGPS, Canberra, 1998.
- ²³ V. Lynn Meek and Leo Goedegebuure, *Higher Education: A Report*, University of New England, Armidale, 1989.
- ²⁴ *Higher Education: A Policy Discussion Paper*, AGPS, Canberra, 1987.
- ²⁵ Michael Gallagher, 'The Emergence of Entrepreneurial Public Universities in Australia', paper presented at IMHE/OECD General Conference 2000, Paris, 13–15 September 2000, p. 5.
- ²⁶ Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy, *Learning For Life Final Report* (Chairman: Roderick West), AGPS, Canberra, 1998.
- ²⁷ OECD, *Redefining Tertiary Education*, OECD Publications, Paris, 1998, p. 20.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
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- ³² Gallagher, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
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