

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY AND RESEARCH

Canberra, December 7-8, 1998

Outcomes of Group Discussions

Future Priorities for Higher Education Policy Research: Topics and Directions That Could be Pursued

Green group

- There is a need for intersectoral collaboration between professional practice, academic work and disciplinary groups. There has been a gradual loss of collaboration at the interface. One reason may be the competition between professions and universities for access to continuing professional education.
- Collaboration between various disciplines can be constructive and provide additional resources. (Monash/ACER/Melbourne group has a mix of skills for conducting research projects in economics of education.)
- Interpretation of "intersectoral" may be influenced by background and assumptions of audience & endash; ie, professions and universities; or schools/VET/universities.
- Movement of graduates and need for generic skills may provide a conflict for types of provision made by universities.
- Do professional associations have too much influence on curriculum?
- Tensions for academics to play a dual role as teacher and practitioner.
- Has the focus on vocation and meeting of professional associations' agendas had the result of narrowing the research focus?
- Value of longitudinal studies is accepted but cost often prevents the execution. Can DETYA support this type of research?
- Need to repeat such studies since policy and questions relevant will also change over a period of many years.
- Issue of equity & endash; there is a need to explore more dimensions other than SES and rural, eg, unemployment, DECs, women in PhD programs?
- Research needed for deciding on effectiveness of IT/flexible learning in improving learning outcomes (or not) & endash; a cost/benefit analysis.
- Need for understanding of university market concept and for alternative approaches & endash; what is the evidence for choice of approach?
- Ideology and influence on HE policy from various sites within government especially PMC. Should research be targeted to influence these? Should their assumptions be questioned/challenged? Where does integrity fit?

Gold group

- Relations between post-compulsory sectors.
- Demographics of post-compulsory education.
- Impact of technology on teaching and learning and on access.
- Public and private dichotomy & endash; meaning and significance.
- Market forces, deregulation and the limits of the "free market" in HE.
- Universities' role in social and community as well as economic development.
- Rhetoric vs reality re the achievement of university missions.
- Access and equity issues & endash; important and highly political.
- A comprehensive review of the impact of the Dawkins' reforms.
- A suggested framework for policy research
- Organisational Levels: Past, Present & Future
- System: Institutional, Sub-institutional

Red Group

- Organisation of higher education policy research community.
- Need to be proactive in the areas of:
 - seeking funding
 - formulating new ideas and setting trends.
 - Most higher education policy research is commissioned, so researchers are reactive.
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- We need to seek other sources of funding (c/f CHER, the Consortium of Higher Education Researchers based in Europe)
- As the research base is too small in Australia, there is a need to encourage postgraduate students in the policy area.
- Too much policy research is currently quantitative. As well as measuring it, we need to understand more the experience of higher education.
- There is a need to think of higher education policy research
 - nationally
 - internationally, and at a
 - systemic/institutional level
- The possibility of a virtual centre?

Blue Group

- Need for long-term, collaborative, 'good-for-the-system' research.
- There is current fragmentation. More emphasis needs to be placed on:
 - higher education policy research
 - research funding
 - systematic data collection and analysis
 - training of future policy analysts
- How do we keep 'the cauldron boiling'? Possibilities are:
 - development of a national centredevelopment of a virtual centre
 - find seed funding
 - seek out more funding sources – federal, state and private.

Mechanisms for the Way Forward

- Communicate research findings to policy makers/policy communities. This could be done by:
 - databases of research, meta-searches
 - links to existing databases
 - face-to-face dialogue (this is critical) through regular forums, say every 4 – 6 months and paper/poster sessions
 - seeking sponsorship
- Make links with other associations via:
 - electronic means, eg AAIR, IPAA (advent calendar – the virtual workshop)
 - piggybacking on conferences
 - joint for a with other professional groups
- AVCC links for purposes of professional development (through their Education Committee)
- Scoping project for best practice in electronic communications and student projects
- Workshops for peer review and validation of research findings/policy claims
- Communication and dissemination is critical via such things as:
 - 1 page policy summaries
 - proactivity in sending out ideas and material
 - establishing a higher education databank (this would involve set-up cost and some maintenance – a bit costly but could be self funded?)
 - central database of 1 page summaries on web page
 - link to DETYA home page
 - links with a range of other groups, eg. Society of Engineers
- All of these are conditional on the existence of some quality assured output.
- DETYA funding will be need to set up the above, thereafter it should be self funding. Access to the

fruits of research to be paid by the consumer via a subscription approach.

- Recognise health and other areas which we have recognised as receivers of research.
- Develop better links with the press and media who could be users of a newly developed database.
- Consider a name change for the Network ‐ such as Australian Network For Higher Education Policy Research ‐ which would allow a wider range of participants to be admitted), ie. researchers, producers and users.
- In 5‐10 years time consider a broader nomenclature re postsecondary/tertiary and the like.
- Consider at the next Network meeting a formal constitution.