

From: Ditta Bartels[SMTP:d.bartels@unsw.edu.au]
Sent: Thursday, 13 November 1997 12:04
To: ARNOLD,Satis
Subject: Postgraduate Vouchers

Dear Satis,

Further to our conversation yesterday I will put down some points to note.

1. Postgraduate research training

Postgraduate research supervision is a function that a university might pursue but it does not automatically flow from the teaching functions of a university in regard to undergraduates and postgraduate coursework candidates. Rather, supervision of PhD candidates is most closely related to the research potential and achievements of a university. Indeed, in many overseas countries, PhD supervision is often more a function of research organisations than of universities.

It follows from this that the funds provided by the government to universities for supervision of research should be separated out from the operating grants. I understand that these funds are of the order of \$ 500 Million p.a. Furthermore, not all universities should have an automatic call on these funds, but only those universities that have shown themselves to be expert at research. There is no doubt that research cannot be supervised by academics other than those who are themselves expert researchers.

By now there are very good performance measures for research, with a good mix of input and output measures. It stands to reason that in the allocation of funds for research supervision these measures should be followed closely.

There appear to be two mechanisms for bringing this about: (1) allocating funds for research supervision to those universities who rate high on research performance measures; (2) allocating funds for research supervision directly to highly qualified PhD candidates. They will then themselves choose the universities where they wish to obtain their supervision. In essence this would be a scheme of vouchers for research postgraduates.

There will be next to no opposition to the introduction of such vouchers on grounds of equity, etc.

2. Selected vouchers for undergraduates

Once the above scheme has been made to work, a parallel system could be introduced in the case of Medicine. There are only limited numbers of medical schools in Australia and they take a small, defined group of commencing students every year. There would be next to no political fall-out if vouchers were introduced for this group of students, provided that the total expenditure on these vouchers equals the current contribution via the operating grants.

2.1 Next round of undergraduate vouchers

Once Medicine vouchers have been made to work the system could be extended to dentistry, veterinary science and perhaps law. Again the political fall-out could be counted on to be manageable.

2.2 Commerce, Arts, Science and Engineering

These undergraduate courses could remain paid for by way of the current system of operating grants. There would really be no advantage to the government in pushing for vouchers in these traditional and popular study areas.

I hope these comments will be helpful to you,

Kind regards,

Ditta

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