

The Review of Higher Education
Financing and Policy,
Location Code 728,

CANBERRA, ACT 2601.

1st December 1997.

The West Review reflects trends in industry, business and, more widely, in services towards:

global competition
greater efficiency

*

Such trends have been evident for some time in industry, and are intimately tied up with the Information Revolution and the concomitant improvements in information and as they result in significantly more efficient use of available community resources.

The West Review seems concerned to establish a developments can occur also in a key service industry - education. By "student-centred" funding and portability of funding vouchers, the education sector in Australia would be from the following observations:

*

factor of 4-10 fold (more likely the latter) if everyone on this planet is to enjoy a "western" materialist lifestyle and yet achieve ecological conservative - some suggest a 20-fold efficiency increase - and must be accomplished in the next 2-3 decades if widespread ecological collapse is to be avoided

organizations that consume energy/materials in quantity, similar to greater efficiency improvements may be

* although the time frames for these changes seem feasible in the case of much shorter. West cites 'evidence indicating that the on-line industry is gathering momentum in the USA' and one must ask how long it will be before global educational envisages for Australia. The answer may be of the order of 4-5 years, 7 years at the outset. In other words, Australian universities are already in a reactive mode to educational education industry to overseas penetration.

This assessment, then, proposes a ten-fold, or so, improvement in efficiency over the next refined by more careful analysis but their underlying message is clear and urgent.

While the West Review concentrates on microeconomic reform that it should next focus. For it is here that change will be dramatic and rapid if community needs urgent guidelines, 'benchmarks', against which to measure its performance in the next few years.

funding purposes. Similarly, my own faculty takes another 30% for its central funding purposes. In other words, programs receive scarcely 50% of the income they generate.

What, we might ask, is an appropriate figure for central funding if our educational programs are to become competitive and sustainable in a global rather than regional than 50%! gues is its likely to be nearer 5-10%

Again, West is silent on this critical advice. What are progressive institutions doing to reduce their overheads, to become 'mean and lean' in readiness for the global

The functional duplication between most faculty structures and the wider university administration seems extensive and much of it could be removed with little loss other non-monetary costs and benefits? West could usefully illuminate us.

A second initiative might be to send academics back to the classroom! There has been a 'personned' by academics in recent years and, again, we should question their effectiveness. Removal of faculty structures, development managerial effectiveness, economics, and re-focus academics on their proper community role. This, of course, is speculative, but do we have evidence one way or the other for the

Not even central administrations of the universities seem likely to be immune from the changes ahead. Arguably, initially in regions where several universities exist (Sydney), economies of scale could be achieved by greater inter-institutional collaboration in, say, information services, learning and teaching support, research support and so on.

To conclude, let me briefly summarise the above. Evolutionary pressures must catapult the still significantly craft-based universities into the information age. This will be traumatic, but delay will only worsen its eventual impact. Much better that universities approach this change proactively than reactively. Microeconomic efficiency will become of paramount concern in an increasingly global educational market. The West Review should rehearse the nature of the needed changes and provide the universities with advice on best practice from the information available. It should also advise governments on the broader frameworks within which large-scale change should take place so as to minimise the traumatic consequences, provide a broader social framework for the likely changes, and leave Australia a higher education sector which can compete effectively on the developing global stage. I am confident that the West Committee will not resile from such critical tasks.

Yours sincerely,

(Dr) John A. Broadbent,
Senior Lecturer,
Faculty of Design, Architecture & Building,
University of Technology, Sydney,
Broadway NSW 2007.

[\[Return to Top\]](#) [\[Return to Index\]](#)