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**The University of  
NEW ENGLAND**

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18 December 1997

Clare White  
Secretary  
Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy Committee  
Higher Education Research Branch  
DEETYA  
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**PAGES: 13 in all**

Dear Clare,

**Submission in response to the discussion paper of the West Committee:**  
*Learning for Life - Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy -  
A Policy Discussion Paper*

Attached is a submission to the West Review Committee which arose from the outcomes of a recent symposium sponsored by the Australian Network of Higher Education Management and Policy Researchers. The symposium, *Higher education for the new millennium: the West Committee's options*, was held at the University Centre, Sydney on Friday 5 December 1997. The submission consists of points that were deemed to need further consideration by the West Committee.

The Network is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the West discussion paper and looks forward to the outcomes of the Review Committee.

The original copy is being despatched to your office today.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Kay M. Harman  
*On behalf of the Network*

# The Australian Network of Higher Education Management and Policy Researchers

**Submission in response to the discussion paper of the West Committee:**  
*Learning for Life - Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy -  
A Policy Discussion Paper*

## INTRODUCTION

This submission summarises responses to *Learning for Life - Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy - A Policy Discussion Paper* and highlights areas raised in it in need of further attention. These arose from the symposium, *Higher education for the new millennium: the West Committee's options*, which was sponsored by the Australian Network of Higher Education Management and Policy Researchers. The symposium was held at the University Centre, Sydney on Friday 5 December 1997.

The symposium drew together Network members and other key stakeholders in post secondary education in Australia, including members of the West Review Committee, and provided them with the opportunity to assess reactions expressed by Australian higher education specialists to the Committee's discussion paper.

The main focus of the symposium was on policy options for the future of Australian higher education. Professor Gordon Stanley, Chair of the Higher Education Council, addressed the opening session. Keynote panel members provided commentary on three key aspects of the West Discussion Paper: higher education's future operating environment; funding options; and research funding. Panel members comprised:

- Professor Di Yerbury, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University
- Professor Don Anderson, Visiting Fellow, Australian National University
- Professor Tony Blake, Vice-Chancellor, University of Technology Sydney
- Emeritus Professor Robert Smith, former Vice-Chancellor and Chair of the AVCC; and ex-Executive Director, Australian Education Office, Washington, DC
- Professor Chris Fell, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & International), University of New South Wales
- Professor Grant Harman, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research), University of New England

A list of the symposium participants and program, and an outline of the Network's aims and functions are appended.

## FEEDBACK FOR THE FINAL REPORT

### 1. *Value of the final policy document*

1.1 The final report of the West Committee presents an opportunity to define the major issues facing Australian higher education over the next two decades and to provide challenging policy guidelines. It is a mistake to believe, as some commentators suggest, that the final paper will be of little consequence given the changing political context. The final document should provide leadership in what some see as a policy vacuum at the national and institutional levels.

### 2. *The idea of a university in the 21st century*

2.1 There have been some major gaps in Australian universities of discussions about what universities ought to be and do that the final report could address more strongly. Discussion at the system and institutional levels in Australia is preoccupied with pragmatic questions of *how*, rather than *what*. Instead of discussing *what* universities are for, *what* ought to be taught, (and when), Australian higher education policy focuses heavily on resources, delivery of knowledge, and efficiency (often at the expense of effectiveness). Specifically, there has been very little discussion of curriculum matters (other than in occasional disciplinary reviews), and especially what the relationship between general or liberal education and vocational specialist education ought to be.

2.2 In the final report, the Committee has an opportunity, and obligation, to initiate such a discussion. It should define the university and its recommendations and suggestions should be clearly derived from, and guided by, the Committee's vision of what a university ought to be. It ought to press hard the need for ongoing debate about the funding of universities.

2.3 While not overlooking the urgencies of technological change and globalisation, a reflective approach is needed in the final report to sustain a focus on both the interests of the universities and the relationship those interests have with the national agenda.

2.4 Consideration needs to be given to the role of universities in developing critical intelligence. While developing civic and technical intelligence is an important role of universities, so too is development of critical intelligence. While technical intelligence allows us to find out the most efficient way to get from A to B. the critical skills of assessing whether B is worth getting to are just as important

2.5 The focus of the discussion paper is appropriately fixed on the importance of lifelong learning. However, a weakness of the debate about the future of universities, and the analysis of the current level of performance, is the tendency to work from a default model of the typical student as one who has gone directly from school to university and is enrolled full-time on a course in preparation for a career. This has a narrowing effect on the discussion of options, financial and otherwise. For example, a considerable amount of public discussion centres on the appropriateness of student course choices and the extent to which they overly limit career choices. This debate consistently ignores the large numbers of students not motivated to attend university because of direct vocational relevance. The substantial diversity of student motives and aspirations, for both school leavers and adult learners entering university from the workforce, must be fully recognised in any framework for the future.

### **3**     *Community perceptions of a university*

- 3.1 Community perceptions of the purposes of the university ought to be a key target for all those concerned with the future of higher education in the next 20 years. The final report should contribute to the shaping of those perceptions and should balance concerns about deficiencies and external threats against the achievements and performance of the universities which have been particularly strong in the face of serious financial undernourishment. Australian universities are by world standards quite impressive despite their poor funding base relative to comparable institutions.
- 3.2 In discussions leading to the final report there is a potential risk of misreading and underestimating the current high standing of university education in the eyes of the Australian community. We simply do not know if the community in general shares many of the negative views about universities expressed by those interviewed by the Committee during its program of visits. With the expansion of student participation almost everyone now knows someone who is attending a university, and as a consequence, the level of awareness of the role and significance of higher education in the community is high. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, the final report should assume that the prevailing public perception of universities and their worth is largely positive, and that public commitment to universities of the future can and should be strengthened.
- 3.3 It is important for any of the Committee's policy recommendations to be based on the interpretation that universities are learning institutions, not business institutions.

### **4**     *Evaluation needs*

- 4.1 There is a need for a better evaluation of the progress and performance of the Australian higher education system in the final report. Analysis of university performance has been disappointing in Australia in some respects. Such analysis is overly distracted by the urgencies of institutional comparisons and competition.
- 4.2 In terms of asset management, there is a need for a serious evaluation of how Australian universities use their capital bases before concluding that assets are not managed efficiently and imposing an infrastructure charge.

### **5**     *Deregulation issues*

- 5.1 A comparative analysis of the Australian higher education system with overseas counterparts would be useful to check whether Australian universities are over protected and not subject to sufficient competition as the discussion paper assumes.
- 5.2 The assumption that the equation - student choice + deregulation and competition = greater diversity + maximum flexibility + efficiency - needs to be challenged. An ever present danger is that more competition leads to greater convergence - in this case, towards the dominant model of a research university.
- 5.3 As deregulation of tuition fees often leads to higher fees as institutions engage in a competitive push to remain ahead, more needs to be said about Government and institutional subsidies, scholarships and loans for students who cannot buy their way into a selective entry program.

## **6. *Inter-sectoral links***

- 6.1 Distinctions between VET and universities should be made clearer. The "seamless web" metaphor does not seem as appropriate as "pathways and bridges".
- 6.2 Cooperation between sectors and between institutions needs to be stressed alongside competition.

## **7. *Information technology***

- 7.1 In discussing the possibilities IT and university teaching it would be helpful if the final report distinguished between IT for delivery and IT for teaching in the sense of computer aided learning. Furthermore the enthusiasm of Global Alliance needs to be tempered by available evaluations. A careful evaluation of the evidence suggests that the role for IT in both instances is supplementary to more traditional methods, rather than a replacement for it. Distance learning still relies largely on post, phone and face to face meetings. Computer aided learning (CAL) is proving to be effective as a supplement to lectures and tutorials; and as a replacement for a limited range of laboratory and field exercises. Good quality CAL is very costly and there is no indication whatever from good quality evaluations that IT is a cost effective replacement for traditional methods.
- 7.2 It should not be assumed that new technology will necessarily reduce costs, raise productivity and produce efficiencies. Effectiveness needs to be assessed.
- 7.3 In the final report, higher education should not be reduced to an IT-based production process.

## **8 *Contribution of the Global Alliance paper***

- 8.1 While the discussion paper accurately identifies the forces for change, there is considerable weight given to unsubstantiated opinion and anecdote in some areas. In this respect, the contribution of the Global Alliance (GA) appendix is problematic. The obviously provocative role of the GA paper has been useful in focussing responses from stakeholders on future scenarios for Australian universities. The paper demands a response and leaves little excuse for complacency (or fatalism) on the part of those who wish to define alternative scenarios.
- 8.2 However, the GA paper relies rather heavily on somewhat dated stereotypes of universities, academics and administrators: it draws selectively on submissions made to the Committee which does not necessarily guarantee their worth or credibility. Indeed, submissions that are deficient in their logic and evidence have been given undeserved legitimacy by virtue of their use in support of the GA claims.

## **9 *Research policy and funding***

- 9.1 Mixed feelings were expressed regarding the research policy and funding aspects of the discussion paper. Although there were some good ideas in the discussion paper, it was felt that more thought and elaboration were required, and that the position adopted should be in harmony with national R&D priorities. Furthermore, regardless of whether or not the present government adopted the final report, and regardless of whether an election were held in the new year, the problems and issues surrounding research policy and funding would remain and were of sufficient importance to deserve thorough consideration, and not a residual treatment. Rather than treating research as if it were a villain, the Review should emphasise the need for a good balance between basic and strategic research, and across all disciplines.

- 9.2 It is difficult for the Review Committee to deal adequately with research funding policy as no clear indication had been given as to the level of public funding that could be expected. Nevertheless it would be useful if the Review would comment on the amount of research funding and on the adequacy of infrastructure for research.
- 9.3 The Committee's proposition that there is a need for more competition in research training is questioned. It is felt that there is already sufficient competition, but that there is insufficient mobility amongst graduate students, including mobility for postgraduate study overseas.
- 9.4 It was suggested that the following omissions from the report could be addressed:
- Treatment of part-time postgraduates and postgraduate students who are staff;
  - Indication of the source of the 40 cents in the dollar to be allocated to infrastructure.
- 9.5 In general the topic of research funding needs more detailed treatment.
- 9.6 *Models for research funding.* Australia should draw on successful funding models found in other countries. For example, in the US California has a differentiated funding system, with the University of California funded for both teaching and research, and the California State University for teaching only. The Research Assessment Scheme in the UK which had lifted research performance significantly is another model to take into account.
- 9.7 While the discussion paper's Model 3 for research funding is in the right direction, it does not go far enough. Creation of more incentives for improved performance in both teaching and research are needed. The imbalance of incentives in favour of research needs to be addressed.
- 9.8 A total restructure of funding must take into account important issues in the division of academic labour between research, teaching and administration, and recognise that elements of the present process-oriented model are no longer appropriate, equitable, or conducive to stimulating quality outcomes across the higher education sector.
- 9.9 The importance of rewarding researchers for publications (outputs) in preference to grants won, and the importance to postgraduate students of overseas experience should be emphasised.
- 9.10 *Role of the ARC.* The ARC should be acknowledged as the primary agency for funding basic research and research priority setting, but it needs to get back on track. It should decide on what research should be carried out in the national interest. Priority setting is very difficult to operationalise and it is most appropriate in areas which require expensive infrastructure support.
- 9.11 The appropriateness of ARC having a role in transfer of knowledge and skills is questioned.
- 9.12 With regard to reforming the ARC, consideration needs to be given to redirecting it to its original charter.

## **10. *Teaching-research nexus***

- 10.1 The relationship between teaching and research needs to be revisited. On specialisation in teaching, a key impediment is the limitation this imposes on academic career options. In reality, as ARC Large Grants do not include the stipend for the chief investigator, most academics were reliant on teaching positions to support themselves at the most researchactive phase of their career.
- 10.2 Moreover, in the context of a more competitive global market, the importance of the nexus between teaching and research is being heightened rather than diminished, as teaching needs to be informed by the most recent knowledge.

## **11. *Industry links***

- 11.1 The Review Committee could explore better ways than those currently employed to achieve dialogue between industries and universities.

## **A FINAL WORD**

- In contrast to the discussion paper, the final report should be a relatively slim and accessible volume. It should be sharply focussed and strong on principles and vision.
- The question of what a university should be needs to be resolutely addressed in a way that is international in its considerations if the Australian higher education system is to remain internationally respectable, competitive and responsive to client needs in the 21st century.
- Better distinction needs to be made between public and private institutions, especially in comparison with systems of higher education elsewhere in the world.

# Appendix 1

## Australian Network of Higher Education Management and Policy Researchers

### **Origins of the Network**

The Network was established with funding from the Australian Research Council Special Research Initiatives Program (SRI) in 1997. Across the Australian university system, there is considerable research expertise related to higher education policy and management. This expertise is typically located in education faculties and in departments such as economics, political science, sociology and management. There is also expertise in these fields in various government agencies such as DEETYA and in non-government organisations such as the Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee and the National Tertiary Education Union. Yet the expertise is highly dispersed and most of the networks linking researchers are not well developed. Moreover, within the university sector in Australia, there is no one centre or department which currently has the critical mass to enable a number of large scale team projects to be pursued simultaneously.

This situation in 1996 prompted members of the Research Centre for Higher Education Management and Policy (CHEMP) at the University of New England to apply for funding under the newly announced Australian Research Council SRI Program to establish an Australian network similar to ones already established overseas for higher education policy and management researchers.]

After gaining the strong support of higher education researchers and users, and policy developers in various government and non-government agencies around the country, an application proposing establishment of the Network was forwarded from CHEMP to the ARC in August 1996. The bid met with success and, following an injection of funding from the SRI Program to support the initiative, the Australian Network of Higher Education Policy and Management Researchers came into being in mid-1997.

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1 Inaugurated in 1996, ARC's SRI Program has the express purpose of supporting specific activities which encourage: networking among researchers; workshops and seminars aimed at developing or supporting collaborative research activities (primarily) within the Higher Education Sector; the dissemination to the public of the outcomes of research facilitated under the program; and the cooperative development of a research capacity in fields which are not well represented in the Australian research effort. See *ARC Special Research Initiatives Program, Guidelines for Institutions*, 1996: 1.

### **Rationale and Functions of the Network**

The main purpose of the Network is to provide a focus for the cooperative development of scholarly research capacity among a number of collaborating researchers in the fields of higher education policy and management. Via collaborative scholarly research, the main contribution of the Network will be enhancement of the quality of the national policy information base. Such research ventures should provide policymakers and users of research with a stronger research base that will, in turn, assist them and institutional and system managers alike, with enhanced understandings of:

- selected major policy problems and policy issues;
- details of the operation of particular government programs and initiatives, and the effectiveness of organisational arrangements and management structures;
- alternative policy options and their economic and social costs;
- appropriate management models and processes to support high quality teaching and research activity; and
- comparative international perspectives on policy problems and possible responses.

# **Appendix 2**

**Participants at the Symposium and Program**

**HIGHER EDUCATION FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM:**

**THE WEST COMMITTEE'S OPTIONS**

**5 December 1997**



One day Symposium  
**HIGHER EDUCATION FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM:  
THE WEST COMMITTEE'S OPTIONS**

**Sponsored by the Australian Network of Higher Education Policy and Management Researchers**

**Friday 5 December 1997**

Convention Room, Level 11, University Centre, 210 Clarence Street, Sydney

**PROGRAM**

Friday 5 December

- 8.30 - 9.00 Registration
- 9.00 - 9.15 Introduction and Welcome: Dr Kay Harman, Symposium Coordinator
- 9.15 - 9.45 **Opening Session: The West Review and the Future of Australian Higher Education**  
Professor Gordon Stanley, Chair, Higher Education Council
- 9.45 -11.00 Panel 1: The Future Operating Environment: **Globalisation, New Technologies and Internal Constraints**  
Chair: Associate Professor Lynn Meek, Director, Centre for Higher Education Management and Policy, University of New England  
Panel members:  
Professor Di Yerbury, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University  
Professor Don Anderson, Australian National University
- 11.00 - 11.15 Morning tea
- 11.15 -12.45 Panel 2: Funding Options  
Chair: Professor Martin Hayden, Director, Teaching and Learning Unit, Southern Cross University  
Panel members:  
Professor Tony Blake, Vice-Chancellor, University of Technology Sydney  
Emeritus Professor Robert Smith, former Vice-Chancellor and Executive Director, Australian Education Of lice, Washington, DC
- 12.45-1.30 Lunch
- 1.30 - 3.15 Panel 3: Research Funding  
Chair Dr Ross Harrold, University of New England  
Panel members:  
Professor Chris Fell, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & International), University of New South Wales  
Professor Grant Harman, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research), University of New England
- 3.15 - 3.30 **Final Session: Summary and Perspectives**  
Dr Penelope Murphy, Senior Research Fellow, University of Wollongong  
Associate Professor Craig McInnis, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne
- 3.30 - 4.00 Close of seminar followed by afternoon tea
- 4.00 - 5.00 Inaugural Network meeting