

Learning for Life

Point form comments on the policy discussion paper. (I make these comments as an informed individual rather than a UWS institutional manager.)

1. Your time horizon is twenty years. You should not be thrown off course by immediate Government reactions driven by political contingency.

The Dearing Report in the UK will outlive the Government's immediate response in its utility and will influence developments for some years ahead.

2. You do not carry through convincingly your proposition about lifelong learning. The title of the final report should be *Learning through Life* rather just 'for life', which can equally describe an age 18-22 system. Lifelong learning is the key to our future social health and economic survival but your discussion paper slips into pre-experience and even finishing school assumptions..

Note the adult majority in most if not all modern higher education systems already.

3. You should put aside static and old-fashioned ideas about TAFE and training. The idea of a seamless post-secondary system is central and should be amplified.

Abandon thought of TAFE as non-developmental training and look ahead to its role in making Australia's future. It too must foster 'learning for life: and not ideas of mechanistic training, much less 'servitude'.

4. Develop in a visionary way the idea of student vouchers for lifelong learning without political fear, but ensure that any model proposed is generous, visionary and, so far as intelligence allows, really will enhance access for all classes, ethnicities and ages.

Recognise the growing reality of periodic study throughout life, and that individuals and employers will come to contribute more as lifelong learning and recurrent

education catch on.

5. Recognise the damage that you will do to the whole higher education and university system by pressing for differential fees and the marketisation of undergraduate

education. Strengthen the voucher approach to student empowerment but withdraw the proposition that universities differentiate in fee levels for home undergraduates.

Avoid creating a two class system of higher education which will negate your access aspirations, and indeed foster 'servitude ' with lower class education for lower class people. Abandon the contemporary and undoubtedly short-lived market economics approach and place you work in the longer time horizon you are charged with. Note the intellectual movement beyond these fashions in parts of Europe already.

6. Add as a major recommendation increased public as well as private investment in post secondary and higher education. It is extraordinary that your discussion paper should omit such an essential alternative proposition and operate thus with a closed mind. Even contemporary public opinion of 1997 finds you at fault here!

You are charged with offering vision beyond the immediate present, and with looking at Australia 's competitive interests as well as its civic identity and future.

7. Retain your excellent stress on high quality teaching, as the central task of all of the universities.

8. Do not be seduced into freezing universities in time with the current order of ranking.

Remind yourselves where UNSW was 30 years ago, Wollongong 20 years ago, UTS 10 years ago. Ask what this may suggest for productivity and performance 30, 20 and 10 years hence.

9. In your yet-to-be-developed advice on research (a) recognise the need for more diverse research funding and modes to serve the needs of Australian society (b) be realistic, supportive and specific about new sources of research funding .

10. Be really clever and produce a final report which makes 'system diversity' attractive to regional as well as sandstone universities instead of being heard as code for 'teaching only' and 'second class'.

Remind ourselves of the things which make Australia special, different, potentially great. In turning away from traditions of authoritarian bureaucracy do not rush to dry market economics. Note the behaviour which this has already produced. Ask where that will take our HE system.

Are the behaviours encouraged and displayed by our greatest unive ties those which characterize the world 's greatest universities? Rampant competitiveness at institution level denies the good of the wider Australian community andpolity.

Your final report should frame and contain rather than foster such hehaviour. The important judgement on the West report should not be made less than a decade from now. Your deliberations should be fixed on that more distant reference point and not on Autumn 1998.

Each age is a dream that is dying, or one that is coming to birth.

Comments on your questions

1. (p.29) Universality and equity should be the key principles.. Institutions should exercise control of admissions and take full responsibility for this. There will be still greater diversity over admissions in the future..
2. (p.3 1) Institutions should not be able to purchase teaching inefficiencies by trading on their name and charging private top-up fees, nor others driven to provide inadequate teaching by competitive market forces. There will need to be transitional safety net arrangements as we move towards rather than away from approximately similar per capita teaching costs, weighted by subject area.
3. (p.33) There should be much greater transparency in all aspects of higher education, with public access to information especially in the area of quality assurance. The system (ea. through AVCC or an agency thereof) should assume this responsibility before it is imposed on higher education more externally by Government.
4. (p.34) An infrastructure charge is the necessary companion to additional (top-up) fees. The latter is highly undesirable in which event the infrastructure charge should be unnecessary. We only need one if we get the other. Beware the Australian disease of Government regulation and bureaucracy which in another breath this free market discussion paper rejects.
5. (p.35) The final report should recommend encouraging not just philanthropy but, even more, industry partnerships and research/A&D funding and other modes of partnership with industry in the education and training arena.
6. (p.36) Devices like the UK's TLTP could be considered, which require and reward cooperation between universities in the development of new learning materials and delivery methods using for example new technologies.
7. (p.38) Individual contracts of academic staff should span the full spectrum from 100% teaching to 100% research but the extremes should be exceptional and all universities should attract from Government and allocate an element of research Funding for all academic staff end areas. Universities should reflect their purposes more accurately in their criteria for promotions. The Committee should absolutely avoid including anything in its final report which could be interpreted as favouring 'teaching-only' universities. , ' 40w

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