

## Response from the National Academies Forum

Dear Ms White

As you know, the National Academies Forum convened a public seminar on the discussion paper *Learning for Life*. The seminar, entitled 'Reviewing the Review', was held at University House in the Australian National University on 8 December 1997 and was attended by about 100 people.

Presenters at the Forum were not asked to submit written papers. However, several did submit papers or outlines, in varying levels of detail and formality. Although I understand that you have received most of them, I am sending you now all that I have received to date.

While the National Academies Forum was not seeking an agreed position on the discussion paper, the seminar provided evidence of broad agreement on a number of matters. The following points emerged strongly during discussion:

- The defence of the role of higher education in chapter 1 of the *learning for Life* is very welcome. The Committee is urged to restate the excellence of the higher education system in Australia and its benefits to society and the economy.
- A policy of diversity and differentiation is appropriate for a robust higher education system in Australia.
- The system is being crippled by under funding from the public purse. Australia's capacity to maintain an internationally competitive higher education sector will be impossible to sustain if funding reductions continue. A re-examination of the level of government funding for higher education is warranted. Whether or not a voucher system is put in place, the Committee is urged to recommend to government that more public funds be committed to the sector. These funds are most needed to boost infrastructure. Infrastructure covers both teaching and research (which are often difficult to disentangle) as well as the general administrative functions of universities. It includes people as well as buildings and facilities.
- The model of higher education as an industry is inappropriate in many ways because its outcomes are not measurable in market place terms.
- The market place model does not take account of what makes higher education higher: the public good; the pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself; the education of students to be critical and independent thinkers; the intellectual curiosity that drives basic research.
- There is a fundamental tension between the Committee's vision of a totally deregulated, student-driven higher education system and a dirigiste vision of research prioritisation. The two are incompatible.
- There is also a fundamental tension between allowing market forces to determine the profile of higher education in teaching and research and any desire to maintain

core academic disciplines and the traditional fabric of university education. The Committee must address this tension and suggest workable mechanisms to preserve disciplines that cannot survive in a totally market-driven system.

- The Committee must address the impact of national competition policy and the Trade Practices Act on the higher education sector. Issues related to competitive bidding for research funds, recruitment of fee-paying students, and collaboration are all now subject to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission. These policy developments may constrain growth of the sector.
- *Learning for Life* fails to acknowledge adequately the central importance of research in the higher education sector.
- The Australian Research Council should have a higher level of independence and a stronger role in research policy advice to government. The Committee should endorse the ARC's statement that its primary role is to give broad support to basic research of high quality and, within that context, to identify and support priority areas. The ARC should be encouraged to facilitate linkages between the sector, government and industry.
- Some concentration of research effort in Australian universities may be necessary and appropriate.
- While developments in information technology have the potential to enhance access to and improve the quality of undergraduate education, they are unlikely to lead to significant cost savings and could indeed demand additional expenditure.
- The particular character of Australian universities offers a means of enhancing international competitiveness.

Professor Sir Gustav Nossal's account of the seminar, which is included in the attached papers, adds various points to those listed above, and well conveys the substance and flavour of the day's proceedings.

The National Academies Forum appreciates the opportunity presented by the Committee to take part in the Review process; and we were especially pleased that Mr West, Professor Baume and members of the Secretariat, including yourself, were able to participate in our seminar. I hope the Committee finds value in this summary of key points and in the accompanying papers, and wish it well for the second stage of its deliberations.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Foster  
Executive Director

(For Peter Sheehan's paper see response number 16.)

**Paul Bourke, "Mr West's Big Picture"**  
**National Academies Forum**  
**West Committee Seminar, December 8, 1997**

**Introduction**

There is an important threshold question to raise for this seminar. Given the government's response to one important aspect of West and its unwillingness to take on another area of likely controversy in the upcoming election year, are we wasting our time? I suggest that, even if West is consigned to oblivion by the government, there will be residuals. Parts of other reports that have been sidelined, such as the Industry Commission's study of research and Hoare's study of management in universities, continue to crop up in discussions and it is important to deal with their arguments when they arise.

The big picture of the West Report consists of a projected medium-term future for which the report says we are seriously ill-prepared. That future, to which I shall return, is one in which international competition, especially based on information technology from standard and non-standard providers of higher education services, will increasingly render irrelevant the statutory, funding and institutional basis of our higher education system. In the logic of the report, it is this need to maximise incentives to compete in a global, international market which influences the choices of funding models. Other proponents of schemes for student centred financing of higher education have advanced largely domestic imperatives for these changes, for example, the wish to free up the system from excessive bureaucratic intervention. The West Report is on different ground: it is identifying forces of technological change which it behoves to be inexorable and is using that future as a ground for promoting change.

In this respect, the genre to which the West report belongs is that of the jeremiad, the sermon urging repentance before an imminent judgement day. It is not the first such document we have seen in the field of higher education. Some of you will recall a day similar to this in February 1988, organised by the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia and the Research School of Social Sciences at ANU, to consider the Dawkins Green Paper, the tenth birthday of which is just about upon us.

That document was a good deal more austere than West, not as dramatic and terrifying but it too played at this game. It proposed that Australia was caught up in international economic processes for which our higher education system was ill-suited. Therefore it became necessary to undertake very substantial reform of the whole system. So that we can develop a prudent caution about change predicated on scenario building, it may be useful to pause for a moment to look at what the scorecard for the Dawkins jeremiad has been. My view of this will not be everybody's but here it is. The Dawkins reforms have produced, I would argue (I have ten points):

- the freeing up of expenditure choices within universities and the devising in HECS of a very successful income-contingent scheme of student contribution to funding.
- a reduction in public outlays on higher education and in the real income of universities

- through the abolition of the binary line, a succession of new universities seeking to establish themselves as producers of research and research training, thereby bringing the principal direct grant research scheme, the Australian Research Council(ARC) to its knees. Meanwhile the clumping of research in a small number of institutions has become only too apparent.
- through the abolition of the binary line, an explosion in the range and number of awards, especially at the postgraduate level such that it is now possible to secure a Ph.D. in 37 universities.
- the creation of a system in which the government deals directly with institutions thereby, to a degree, politicising their procedures and their senior managements.
- the use of the industrial relations system to achieve so called reforms in the system leading to the recent bipartisan policy of subjecting universities to the destructive processes of Enterprise Bargaining .
- the elaboration of funding indices of exquisite crudity such as the Research Quantum.
- the marked decline in the availability and attractiveness of research and higher education teaching as careers open to talent.
- finally, *a report ten years later saying that there is an international future for which we are not prepared.*

At the most general level, the net of the Dawkins era has been a very significant reduction in institutional autonomy, thereby rendering universities closer and closer to being arms of the state.

If you take this view of things or some version of it, you will be interested to know how West addresses this state of affairs. The surprising thing is that there is very little in the discussion paper that bears on what I have just outlined. Rather than address these rather immediate issues, which are the product of the last exercise in futurology, West proposes to take us to new ground through a substitution of the market for the state. I shall explore some implications of that in what follows. I will not be considering in any detail funding issues concerning undergraduate education since these are the subject of a detailed discussion later. My talk is confined to the broad analytical framework of the report and to only a handful of the major issues it poses, mainly to do with the communications revolution and with the subject of research policy.

### **The Future**

I have suggested that the West big picture rests on scenario building, much of it derived from the widely read Appendix 11 prepared by Global Alliance Limited which projects us into the future of location-independent, digitally revolutionised, global provision of higher education and which finds our present arrangements (location dependent, undigitised and largely domestic) hopelessly under-prepared for what is certainly to come.

In taking us into this, the document begins by noting widespread feelings (in the present system) of malaise and disquiet about resources, about the preservation of scholarly values and about fragmentation. These sound something like my post-Dawkins list but there is very little in the document which discusses these points. Instead the document is chiefly driven by the next point made in the overview, viz. that "higher education has, in recent years, become an industry in its own right" and, that, although many are troubled by this,

as the industry become more global the traditional institutions will be challenged-and, indeed are now being challenged-by private competitors both here and overseas. This trend should be seen not as a threat but as a remarkable opportunity for the development of an industry that has the capacity to play a central role in driving the growth of our economy.

From that point on, the document is off with the digital the information and communications revolution "which will not only introduce different methods of production and delivery of educational courses and materials but will also call into question existing institutional arrangements." The language of this argument is apocalyptic and quite radical: for example, "The changes wrought by the digital revolution will be so pervasive that universities will be forced to rethink fundamentally every aspect of the way in which they provide their services. "

### ***The Politics of the Digital Revolution***

In considering this, it would be possible to engage in a purely technical discussion asking whether the picture is overdrawn, whether the technology offers us better ways to do what we presently do or whether it is likely to take us into unforeseen alternatives? I am not competent to go far on the technical side. Rather, I want to introduce into Australian discussion a dimension almost entirely missing which I shall call *the politics of the digital revolution*, a subject on which there is not a word in West. In doing this I have been much assisted by the work of the American historian, David Noble, whose forthcoming book called *Digital Diploma Mills* will be very -widely read.

In a recent paper, Noble has drawn attention to developments at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) and, especially, earlier this year at York University in Toronto. At UCLA, the administration has launched an "Instructional Enhancement Initiative" requiring the construction of computer web sites for all of its arts and sciences courses funded by a new compulsory student fee. UCLA may be the first major university to require the use of computer telecommunications technology in the delivery of higher education. That university has established in partnership with several private corporations its own company to sell online education (The Home Education Network.) Significantly, there has been clear evidence of student concern and disquiet at UCLA.

More dramatic were the events at York University in Toronto earlier in the year which experienced the longest academic strike in English Canadian history in response to administrative initiatives in the implementation of instructional technology. As at UCLA, the university had formed its own subsidiary directed by the Vice-President for research and dedicated to the commercial development and exploitation of online education. Students at York supported the strike by academics, launching a study of their own into the commercial, pedagogical and ethical implications of online educational technology and including a warning in their student handbook about online education.

As a result of this disruptive and divisive strike, York faculty won a major victory. Their new contract ensured that all decisions relating to the automation of instruction, the use of technology as a supplement to classroom instruction or as a means of alternative delivery (including the use of video, CD-ROM, internet websites, computer mediated conferencing) "shall be consistent with the pedagogic and academic judgements and principles of faculty member employee as to the

appropriateness of the use of technology in the circumstances. " The contract also guarantees that "a faculty member will not be required to convert a course without his or her agreement."

Why should these apparently benign, progressive and exciting new technological possibilities prompt anxiety and political action in countries further down this track than Australia? It is important that we know about this at the very point where our major national review is greeting such developments with almost breathless excitement. Here are some of the major reasons:

- the principal impulse informing the digital revolution is commercial rather than educational.
- accordingly, the principal players and beneficiaries are the major computer companies and the universities which join with them.
- within universities, decisions about online education are typically being taken by administrations and administrators concerned with the commodification of education rather than involving faculty and students.
- once faculty put their course material online, the knowledge and course design skill embodied in that material is taken out of their possession, transferred to the machinery and placed in the hands of the administration.
- faculty fear that once their course is digitised and packaged, their services can be dispensed with, that low paid and temporary staff can be hired to service the online product, that there is much potential for censorship and control of faculty by administrations and that once the faculty converts its courses to courseware, their services are in the long run no longer required; they literally become redundant.
- very significantly, there is clear evidence that students do not like online education and that they, and their parents who can afford to continue to pay for location dependent education at the major universities, will certainly wish to do so and that the digital revolution principally promises to deliver a second-class product to the less privileged.

Now it has to be possible to raise all this in Australia without sounding like some anti-technology luddite and I do not imply that the West Committee would want to produce these effects. What I am asking is that the West Committee bury the naive celebration of the inevitability of the digital revolution in the terms stated in its Appendix 11, and engage in a critical evaluation of these global processes as political and commercial transactions involving real people, real companies, real choices and real motives, however inexorable it may all seem.

It is especially important that we have this critical enquiry for, in the case of peripheral countries like Australia, there is the added problem of being colonised by international digital revolutionaries purveying junk (a lot of it from US universities where much undergraduate teaching is not in the same league as the work we have traditionally done.). In short, the destructive potential of the digital revolution, and our legal and institutional resources to contain it, demand attention alongside the undoubted possibilities it may contain for a new pedagogy and for improving access.

One final word on the digital revolution, the bearing of which may also be relevant for West. In the 1920s and 1930s, there was a very substantial body of work on the subject of mass culture, much of it prompted by the capacity of new technologies such as radio and the improved telephone, and later television. The idea was that the radio had the potential to disrupt and intervene in the most intimate of associations

and relationships, even within the family itself. This line of thinking was associated with the elaboration of mass society theory, especially by the Frankfurt School.

But in the second wave of this work, much done by the Frankfurt people later in the US like Paul Lazarsfeld, some major discoveries were made: viz. that the new technology neither created nor promoted mass man or woman, that new atomised, deracinated individual hooked into elaborate networks transcending ordinary life. Rather, the messages of the radio were assimilated into existing personal networks and primary groups-the family sat about and talked about the radio serial Amos and Andy which explained its success, a simple point which had enormous potential for advertising. The general finding was that traditional primary ties were not only not threatened or put at risk by technology but that the technology became efficacious only to the extent that it was assimilated into those ties. That I think will be the continuing human dimension to the digital world and we should not tear up all our institutions in advance of finding that out.

### **Research**

I want now to turn more briefly to another aspect of the "big picture," the role of and institutional arrangements for scholarly research.

One of the intriguing features of West is that the totally deregulated industry or capitalist student market which it foresees and would facilitate goes along with a *dirigiste* model of research in which national priorities are set by government, in particular the ARC. There is some indecisive language about unregulated research of which this is an example: "while public support for research undertaken in universities should be directed to curiosity driven and strategic research, there should be a concomitant focus on knowledge, technology and skills transfer to industry and the broader community." What does "concomitant" mean here?

The priority setting question is an old one which the ARC has already tackled in a number of ways, although this is not mentioned in the document. There was the *Strategic Role of Academic Research* venture of 1993-4 in which the ARC expended much energy in trying to align research outlays in Australia with socio-economic objectives derivable from Australian Bureau of Statistics classifications and then to ask whether ARC outlays should be brought into line with these by 2010. This was largely abandoned because the alignment was found to within acceptable bounds already.

What new ground does West propose here? The answer is very little yet. In the priority setting discussion in the document, there is reference to a number of sources of possible instruction in how to do it: CSIRO strategic planning, the UK Foresight program, the US and Japanese ventures in this area as well as the very general ASTEC one for Australia.

With respect, these are yesterday's discussions the lessons of which have already been assimilated and they offer no detailed assistance towards a program of national priority setting in this country. Perhaps I may be forgiven for referring to a monograph which Linda Butler and I wrote for ASTEC in 1995 called *Research Foresight Studies: Implications for Australia* in which we reviewed all these programs at length, measured their generic priorities against actual Australian research strengths and drew some inferences about "niche" foresight for Australia. Our general conclusion, echoed now in the international foresight literature is this:

following recent discussions of the subtle relationships between science and innovation, we have sought to enter a cautionary note about the use of Foresight, in any of its forms, to intervene at too concrete a level in the balance of activities that evolved in this country. Existing studies suggest that interventions premised on "hard" substantive predictions, for example, that by the year 2010 we will need more of X and less of Y are very difficult to justify at a low level of aggregation. What is needed is a continuing dialogue between practitioners and policy makers and a readiness to collaborate in producing a future grounded in sensible consensus.

In the spirit of the last sentence of this passage, however, I should note that one of the nine principles in West which should "anchor" future financing and policy arrangements for research is that "advisory mechanisms and funding processes should involve priority setting at the level of sub-fields of research and technology while maintaining support for all broad fields of research." Despite my general cautions in this area, I think there is value in this approach providing we confront the institutional implications of what is being said. This West has not yet done.

The hard issue, which is certainly noted in passing in West, is this: higher education systems, such as England's and Australia's, where academics are appointed to teach and to conduct research and where research agendas, accordingly, continue to be heavily influenced by the concentrations of student demand, cannot be expected to respond easily to research priority setting. Priority setting in the UK "works" because of a dual support system for university research in which the Research Councils identify priorities within which they will fund future proposals and the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) vests substantial discretionary block funding in university operating grants for past research performance (across a four year cycle), an important part of it in the social sciences for example, not affected by national priorities.

Australia has no equivalent either to the RAE or to the scale of funding which supports the RAE and university research has become increasingly dependent on direct, project-oriented ARC support since the onset of the Unified National System.

I would urge West to think through more clearly its hints at the restoration of a dual support system in this country which would combine a strong element of competitive block funding for discretionary research within the operating grants with the designation of broad priority areas of field and sub-field concentration by the ARC. (An interesting recent example is the ARC's specification of Citizenship as an area of interest which prompted some important cross-university proposals).

This has me voting for some version of their third, "radical" research proposal but it badly needs detailed specification. What is also needed is a recognition that the deregulated, student-centred postgraduate student market as well as the clear evidence of the clumping of university research in about a dozen institutions (with enclave exceptions) requires West to bite the bullet and consider carefully some institutional discriminations in the system.

In sum, while the undergraduate and postgraduate teaching agenda in West points to very substantial deregulation if not de-institutionalisation, the research agenda points to new levels of regulation and intervention by funding bodies. The reconciliation of these two major threads of the document is one of the greatest challenges for the final version.

**NATIONAL ACADEMY FORUM  
CANBERRA, 8 DECEMBER, 1997  
PAPER BY ERIC WAINWRIGHT  
TECHNOLOGY  
MAIN DISCUSSION POINTS**

The only specific reference to technology in the "Scope of the Review" is:

"...the use of advanced communication technologies in teaching, and in libraries and other teaching and research infrastructure."

- \* Very little specifically on technology in the discussion paper - appropriate as technology is only a tool.
- \* Technology in efficient use is what matters - take up depends in practice such as convenience, perceived benefit, ability to integrate into social patterns, etc
- However, communications and information technologies (CIT) are pervasive in determining the position of the discussion paper - obviously it is very heavily influenced by appendix 11 The Global Alliance Ltd Report - Appendix 11 arguments are persuasive, like those in many other reports on the influence of CIT on society -
  - there is the potential for universities to increase reach
  - there is the potential for students to increase access and have greater choice
  - however, the report has a technological push focus - it is weak on time scales and consequences for university action - we need to disaggregate the generalities.
- The final West Committee report aim should be directing policy to achieve outcomes, in particular that of the second "Central Element" of the discussion paper, ie "The Review Committee will develop a comprehensive policy framework that will allow Universities to respond creatively and flexibly to change."
- The major outcome sought is University access for all some time in life. Other less explicit outcomes sought in the discussion paper include:
  - maintenance of a robust HE sector capable of meeting domestic demands in face of competition and of limited resources.
  - maintenance of a thriving export industry

West Committee has two choices on technology involvement - either this is a matter for individual institutions in an increasingly competitive environment, or some systemic - level policies and mechanisms are needed which impact on technology for systemic benefit. -

-Technology take up in Universities is needed for four basic areas:

- administrative efficiency - the Global Alliance paper is correct - re-engineering of "back office" is needed - however, a matter for individual universities.
- Marketing / Quality of student interaction - major re-engineering is required to give a student focus to information systems - enrolments, assignments, timetables, help, etc - this is very important in improving information for student choice in a more competitive system. It is also needed at systemic and individual institution levels, providing competitive advantage in the international environment.
- Research/ Research Training - there is a poor state of research infrastructure, lack of national strategy and priorities., limited incentives for collaboration - the UK model (JISC, etc) is superior. There is no coherent approach to infrastructure for all purposes - no mechanisms outside research orientation and unlikely to be achieved through the ARC. National infrastructure priorities are best set up outside the ARC by a more general body providing defining national priorities, with improved access for collaboration and input from the private sector and other research organisations. Needed to give both postgraduates and undergraduates access to state of art equipment used in leading companies.
- Student learning - to increase the range of student options
- funding will be inadequate for universal access to higher education without technology in teaching;
- access will not be sought by many mature age students except through flexible or delivery methods - they will go to providers who enable them to study within their own time and location constraints - if not Australian then from overseas
- main problem is high up-front costs of course development - problem is achieving economies of scale
- no incentives for collaboration in course work
- is a new organisation needed (such as a National braking service) or can existing universities adapt quickly enough? - to improve teaching
- investments in flexible delivery design tend to improve traditional teaching by forcing an attention to pedagogies and learning outcomes sought
- inadequate incentives at present through the university teaching awards and CUTSD
- new incentives are needed for individual academics to gain skills needed for flexible delivery. Major training schemes are needed and consideration should be given to

the UK Dearing Committee recommendation that all entrant academics should be required to gain formal teaching skills

- significant program needed also to give students skills to study in flexible modes and for them to have access to computers - extension of HECS or loan schemes to cover this?
- major programmes are needed to move from isolated excellent pilots to mainstreaming of technology supported delivery methods- often incentives needed at systemic and institutional levels .

NATIONAL ACADEMIES FORUM

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REVIEWING THE REVIEW  
A forum on the discussion paper  
'Learning for Life'  
{West Review}:  
THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

Australian National University  
University House: Common Room  
CANBERRA

Monday, 8 December 1997  
2.00pm

## ***Opening***

The Prime Minister will today announce a set of Industry Policies which will respond to a number of reviews undertaken by the government:

*Mortimer Report. "Going for Growth " - a review of business programs funded by government;*

*Goldsworthy Review into the Global Information Economy, entitled "The Way Ahead";*

*Stocker Report, "Priority Matters" examining the priorities for research and development.*

All of these advocate that the government take a more pro-active approach to economic development and the challenge of technological change to enable Australia to compete - perhaps a little more equally -on the global level playing field.

The government's belated recognition of the need for a policy to establish the environment in which Australian industry can thrive in the global market place indicates a movement away from the reliance on the market alone. It reflects the impacts of key reports like Goldsworthy's on the IT industry and the Australian Business Foundation's, *The High Road or the Low Road*, which concludes that:

*policies based on economic models which assume perfect competition - at the industry or national level - are inappropriate in contemporary Australia... Australian Business Foundation Limited, *The High Road or the Low Road*, 1997, (prepared by Professor Jane Marceau, Dr Karen Manley, Mr Derek Sicklen).*

The winds of change are blowing through neo-classical economics.

Unfortunately, while the West Discussion Paper places great emphasis on the global context, and the impact of technological change, there is little analysis of the strategies for internationalisation

of Australian higher education - beyond the recognition of the need for a decade of managed reform to prepare Australian institutions to compete.

Equally unfortunate, there is a major disjuncture between the vision of *Learning for Life* and the solutions proposed which are narrowly based on the market. If we are to develop a post-secondary education sector which:

- instils a culture of lifetime learning;
- develops a well informed and socially responsible community;
- inculcates a profound respect for scholarship;
- enable graduates to play a productive, wealth creating role;
- provides industry, governments and the community with access to advanced knowledge and skills;
- develops a wealth generating, world competitive higher education industry;
- and, ensures broad access

we will need a much more sophisticated and complex set of solutions, solutions which recognise the fundamental importance of universities to the economic, social and cultural life of Australia and especially their contribution to defining a distinctive identity for Australia.

Globalisation is the great homogeniser and represents the most significant challenge to the identity of nation states in the foreseeable future.

Regretfully, by focusing only on globalisation and ignoring internationalisation, the Discussion Paper does not even begin to grapple with issues relating to Australia's distinctive place in the world.

### ***Purpose of paper***

The task set for me is to talk about *The Global Context* of the West Discussion Paper.

The Review's terms of reference specified an investigation into *the effectiveness of the sector in meeting Australia's social, economic, scientific and cultural needs*. The review was to consider the implications of, among other things:

*the internationalisation of higher education, and*

*... the increasing importance of international links for research conducted in higher education institutions in Australia.*

As I have indicated in my opening remarks, there is no framework outlined which places internationalisation as a priority and, given the emphasis on global market forces and technological change, this is a serious flaw.

There is some discussion about the recruitment of international students, but nothing about the internationalisation of the curriculum or the importance of strategic alliances in the region.

### ***Definitions***

It is important to distinguish between *globalisation* and *internationalisation*. In a recent international report, (Jane Knight and Hans de Wit (Eds) Internationalisation of higher education in Asia Pacific countries, European Association for International Education (EAIE), The Netherlands, 1997 3 ) *Internationalisation of higher education in Asia Pacific countries* these definitions are used.

***Globalisation*** is the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, ideas ... across borders. Globalisation affects each country in a different way due to a nation's individual history, traditions, culture and priorities.

***Internationalisation*** of higher education is one of the ways a country responds to the impact of globalisation yet, at the same time respects the individuality of the nations.

The concepts are different, "but dynamically linked"

*Globalisation can be thought of as the catalyst while internationalisation is the response, albeit a response in a proactive way.*

In a series of case studies, the authors, Knight and de Wit, stress that in the Asia Pacific region, the *individuality of the nation*, is of paramount importance.

Knight and de Wit further define internationalisation of higher education as

*the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the universities.*

However, for all the debate about internationalisation and globalisation, there is an important sub-text: for Australia, the discussions are particularly concerned to construct ways in which to engage with Asian societies and cultures. Globalisation and Internationalisation are terms which can be (mis-) understood as 'westernisation' or homogenisation. As Stephen FitzGerald has argued:

*The Australian commitment to Asia was not one of the mind, it was not informed by deep knowledge. It was not thought out or conceptualised within an understanding of the elemental forces at work within Asian societies. It was, in this sense, not an intellectual engagement, it was not intellectualised. It was therefore almost incapable of sensitivity to subtlety or sub-text or silence, or even to direct and open alternative Asian views of this region and its futures.* Stephen Fitzgerald, Is Australian an Asian Country? Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1997,

Hence, it is important to understand how internationalisation strategies influence the impact of globalisation. Trading blocs are an obvious example. There is no question that Australia's role in setting up APEC and its membership has enabled engagement with Asia to be a much higher priority for Australian higher education and industry. And, it is likely APEC will eventually become a trading bloc in the same way as the European Union and the North American Free Trade Association.

Membership of trading blocs forms a buttress for nation states to retain some individuality and protection (in the widest meaning of the term) from unfettered globalisation. But it is not the only one -individual nations develop their own strategies.

*Quality and International Outlook* Australia, as a whole, and the Higher Education sector in particular, in the last decade or so has become much more internationally competitive. It is a major service provider and exporter to the world.

I believe the sector is successful because of two central characteristics which the rest of the world values: Quality, and an International outlook.

### *Quality*

Australian universities have long had a reputation for quality, especially in research. The relative speed with which it has entered the international marketing of Fee Paying Students is an example of this - more than 143,000 international students (53,000 in higher education) choose Australia as a place to study because of the effectiveness of the institutions, the value for money which the quality of teaching and course offerings present, and the reasonable cost of living. People choose Australia because the higher education system here is respected, not the least because of the outstanding research performance of Australian universities in a global context.

### *International in Outlook*

Universities are by their very nature, international in outlook. This is reflected in the content and curriculum methodologies in Australia. As well, scholarship - that important connector between teaching and learning and research - has always been 'international' in Australian universities - albeit, until recently European and American in its orientations. In the last decade, there has been increasing involvement of Universities and other education providers in the Asian region. The expansion of offshore delivery of programs, strategic alliances with offshore partners, strategies to increase the number of Australian students studying offshore and concerted attempts to internationalise the curriculum, all point to a greater engagement with the Asia Pacific region.

As the Discussion Paper acknowledges - Australian institutions are internationally competitive.

(One has only to think of the international free trade in ideas to recognise this - the importance of Marx, Weber and Durkheim in Sociology; the rise of post-modernist analyses with the increasing

translation of French theorists into English; the influence of Dewey, Bruner, etc. on progressive education and problem-centred approaches.)

*Choices for Australia* The West Discussion Paper presents a range of options for Australia to confront in the way it values and finances higher education in the future.

In the global context, I will restrict my discussion to two key questions. They are:

- Will unfettered opening up of Australian higher education to global market forces lead to an improvement in its quality and diversity?
- What value do we place on Australia's ability to define its own distinctive national identity?

### ***Globalisation***

The first question relates to the issues in the Global Alliance commissioned paper, the main work relating to internationalisation in the West Discussion Paper. Global Alliance Ltd is a Tokyo based investment bank and their report was completed within four weeks.

While there is no explanation given in the Discussion Paper as to why Global Alliance was chosen, or its expertise in the sector, nevertheless it is an important paper to understand the challenge of globalisation.

GAL predicts that by 2015 there will be no government support of higher education, except to ameliorate the worst effects of the market. There will be mass customisation and most Australian universities, as we know them, will cease to exist. Education will be delivered by global providers through computer technology, most will be purely teaching institutions and, it is assumed, specialise in particular courses.

Basically, GAL argues for a minimalist government role and the essential theme is

*that homogeneity will become the Achilles heel of a system that needs to react to the demands of the era of mass customisation*

-that is

*to allow "the learning offering to be tailored to individual student learning styles, goals, abilities, hopefully (my emphasis) leading to an improved outcome " (Para 1. 3. 1).*

GAL sees the result of the forces for change as

- increased segmentation of markets
- increased specialisation and customisation of supply of courses, and
- increased specialisation of providers.

Given the small size of the Australian market and the impact of technology on the learning environment, GAL predicts that the 36 existing Australian universities will have to choose a particular business model in which to operate, including:

- as a low cost university
- as a Asian Middle Class Web university .
- Harvard in Australia .
- World Specialist School
- and the worst case, a Do Nothing University

GAL gives information on 'mean/lean' logistics machines, currently operating as highly specialised independent deliverers of courses. They cite two examples of United States companies, Strayer Education Corporation and the Apollo Group, which appear to have low production costs and are able to generate substantial operating margins. The focus is on the delivery of undergraduate courses and no credit is given to the importance of linking research and teaching.

GAL's future twenty years out predicts only a few vertically integrated producers left in Australia, those who have managed to join the main world teaching university research and teaching alliances. Most have become low cost producers in niche markets at the local, national or regional level. Some have gone out of business.

GAL does not discuss research issues, nor the role universities play as the main providers of basic research in Australia, nor the implications for Australian society of what it would mean if they ceased to have this role.

However, Professor Ron Johnson has pointed to a number of scenarios for the future of Research in the Global University, which parallel this debate, such as:

- the global research corporation which leaves little room for traditional university research;
- international research consortia which will compete with the global research corporation;
- and the non-research university.

His conclusion, like GAL's, is that it is absolutely necessary for universities to reposition and restructure themselves to become competitive global players in the knowledge industry. We are already seeing the beginnings of this in Universitas 21, and other moves to form international consortia.

### *Internationalisation'*

This brings me to the second question in the choices confronting Australia, namely the importance of a nation state retaining its own distinctive knowledge/education industry. That is, what internationalisation strategies should Australia adopt to mediate the impact of globalisation in the higher education sector?

The obvious starting point is that universities, and the important role which they play in research and education, are critical to the future of the nation.

As we know, Australia is one of the great producers of fundamental and strategic basic knowledge. It produces about two per cent of the world's annual new knowledge, as measured by scientific publications and citations '- although there are some concerns that our performance is slipping. Significantly, the authors of the *High Road and the Low Road*, urge among the pathways to a high technology future, increased investment in higher education research infrastructure and training, *note the word 'investment' not 'subsidy'* commenting that

*once top-level education and training is lost to the nation, it difficult to rebuild the same capability.*

i Quoted in The Australian Financial Review, Higher education: it's a right, but it comes at a price, 15-16 November 1997, page 31: reporter Michelle Grattan. 12 Australian Business Foundation Limited, *The High Road or the Low Road*, 1997, section 11.9 (prepared by Professor Jane Marceau, Dr Karen Manley, Mr Derek Sicklen).

The importance of government funded university research is also acknowledged in the Industry Commission study into Australian Research and Development in 1995 which observed that:

*When individuals create new knowledge, they do more good for the community than they know or can personally benefit from. Governments therefore need to underpin and supplement the processes of knowledge creation if these wider benefits are to be adequately realised.*

A key strategy of internationalisation for Australia must be to retain its capacity for basic and applied research, recognising that the former takes place primarily in universities. This distinctive role in Australia which makes the link between research and teaching is essential to maintain.

*Universities in the modern world undertake research because it is an integral part of their academic mission. Human knowledge steadily advances, and new knowledge must become part of what is taught. Moreover, universities educate and train those who discover, as well as communicate, the new knowledge to students and to the community'.*

This is acknowledged in the Discussion Paper, but not reflected in the GAL scenario.

Now that globalisation and new technologies, owned by large trans-national corporations, make a de-institutionalised private educational market a possibility, it is absolutely imperative for nation states, if they are to survive, to establish national priorities, not only in research, but more broadly for higher education. The reliance on vouchers or learning entitlements to prepare Australian universities for the global market place is unlikely to succeed. It involves an abdication of Government responsibility for developing a coherent national education, research and innovation policy.

Are there key discipline areas in science and technology and the humanities, which are currently unpopular among students but are absolutely vital to the well-being of Australian society and the competitiveness of the Australian economy - if so, how do we ensure that they survive and prosper? Surely we have to do more than what is indicated in the Discussion Paper, which is to suggest and I quote

*universities would need to continue to be mindful of their responsibilities to store and preserve knowledge*

Why would universities in competitive markets continue to teach physics or the classics, or continue to maintain regional campuses?

It is for this reason that new spending on infrastructure, particularly new technology, has to be supported by the government, if the sector itself is to become more competitive and collaborative, and less reliant on government support.

I do not wish to imply that the West Committee sees no role for government, it does, even if it proposes to transfer the bulk of the resources to the individual student. It is the unresolved tension between the reliance on student choice and the stress on national priorities which needs to be radically rethought, if internationalisation is indeed the way a country responds to the impact of globalisation and retains its distinctiveness. The rupture of the research and teaching nexus and the simplistic reliance on student choice will not lead to a higher education system in the best interests of Australia.

Similarly, it is inconceivable that if all Australian Universities proved not to be competitive in a global market, they would be allowed to die and for all higher education to be bought offshore, although this is one of the implications of the GAL paper.

### ***Conclusion***

Universities have long considered that they have a duty to articulate, defend and promote democratic values and social cohesion, and build international understanding, as the forces of globalisation brings the peoples of the world into ever closer contact.

What we do in the last three years of this century will determine Australia's place in the world for much of the next. In the future, Australia's prosperity will depend, as never before, on generating and mastering new ideas, and turning them into national wealth, that is to build a dynamic Research and Innovation system. Hopefully, the policies announced by the Prime Minister today will address this issue and recognise the critical role of the higher education sector in this process.

To do that comprehensively, the higher education sector needs an Action Agenda which outlines strategically how we are going to build on the current characteristics of Quality and Internationalisation to ensure that the Australian Higher Education Sector remains competitive.

I am not advocating the Do Nothing University scenario, rather a partnership between the universities, government and industry to bolster our international strategies and develop our distinctive identity. This must involve enhancing our capacity to innovate and interact with the Asia Pacific region and hence our capacity to generate and transmit the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve this.

it also involves Australia understanding and respecting the national identity and internationalisation strategies of the countries in our region. Up until now, we have been less successful at this.

This is the urgent challenge in the global context and one in which a vibrant university sector is absolutely essential if we are to develop effective internationalisation strategies to secure our future.

Ian Chubb  
SPEECH: NATIONAL ACADEMIES FORUM

I should say at the outset that I was asked specifically to speak about what is missing from this Discussion Paper - not about what, if anything, might be good. But I have a lot to cover in just 20 minutes -and I most certainly do not claim to cover all that I could.

To begin. There is little or no serious analysis or interpretation in the Paper; little or no serious attempt to describe why, on balance, the Committee adopted a particular position; there are few facts to let us judge the validity of some of the assertions and assumptions or, importantly, to compare them with other perspectives; and commissioned papers which hardly expose the options and explore the alternatives so that we know what assisted the Committee to reach its position.

It has been said that this is a Discussion Paper, just raising questions and seeking answers, not the finished product and so it is unnecessary to supply detail. After this long a gestation, and so

near the end, we could have expected more: at least a substantial draft that will bear some resemblance to the final product. One of the obvious things missing, therefore, is an adequate process underpinning this important task. When a review committee adopts a position, we can expect that it will be after a careful, constructive and competent investigation - and that change will be recommended only after careful, constructive and competent analysis of options including an assessment of possible impact. I can't see where this was done here, so I don't know whether it was done.

While my comments may be passed off as simply another vested interest trying to keep what is; one of those reluctant to seize, as the Committee put it, *the opportunities for dynamic leadership*, let me say at the outset that neither I, nor those many of my colleagues who share my general views if not every detail, are afraid of change, or unwilling to change or unwilling to confront contemporary reality. If we were we wouldn't be where we are. But the *directions outlined may well be controversial* (they say)...*and may be contested by many in the current system...but our brief is to take the strategic view....we should not be blinded to different ways of doing things, by the status quo...* So a position that is different from the ones adopted by the Committee will reflect an unstrategic blind adherence to the status quo. The reality is quite different: it is not whether we can cope with *different ways of doing things*, but whether we can be shown that the *different ways* are better ways - and this Paper does not do that.

The shallowness of the approach is revealed right at the start. The Committee detects *a feeling of unease in the universities...with low morale ..higher education has lost its way*. And we are told that there is unease about the *capacity of the universities to meet the needs of business and industry*. Neither is new, both can be explained, but the Committee seizes on them. Page 1 also tells us that competition should be seen as a *remarkable opportunity for the development of an industry that has the capacity to play a central role in driving the growth of our economy* . By page 2 we are told that the current policy framework is not sustainable *because the 21st century will provide an environment very different from that which universities faced in the last two decades of the 20th century*. None of these assertions: the unease, the opportunity afforded by competition, the unsustainability, the development of an industry, driving the growth in the economy, are analysed, reality-tested, compared with alternatives or substantiated in any real way.

So in the apocalyptic view, the 21st century demands *urgent and radical change*, based largely on the unease within and about the system, and on comments from a merchant bank which, after a four week investigation, describes higher education as *pretty much a normal Australian industry* while mocking those who think differently. The radical change is a form of demand driven, fee-charging market with higher personal costs and the adoption of technology to drive the costs down. This is piously passed off as *student centred*. But, having freed it all up, the Committee wants some back: so we will have a quality assurance and provider accreditation

process that is robust, transparent and consistent across sectors - *just like in industry* - plus a *prudential regulator* and centrally determined research priorities with funding allocations linked to them. And this so that our students, that is, those who are not deterred by the debt they will incur, will be well taught, apparently for the first time,.

Amongst the many possibilities to discuss, there are four points that I will take up here. The first is the lack of definition of higher education, or any apparent understanding of what it is that makes it higher and not just the last bit that you do, the bit you do after you have done all the rest. The second issue is accessibility and some of the implications of the proposed model. The third relates to mode of delivery and the fourth the autonomy/diversity/market link. At the end, I will comment briefly on two of the 17 points described in the Paper as weaknesses.

First then, the higher in higher education. If this had been addressed we might have been given a reason or two to explain why we should convert from the type of institutions we are now to predominantly teaching institutions with add-one. Or why we should go back to a version of the binary system we moved away from just a short nine years ago.

The most revealing part of the paper, in this respect, is its treatment of research. And it makes clear the Committee's sense that a university is really a teaching institution where the students should bring a voucher to cover just part of their tuition costs. It does not explore the

distinguishing characteristic of higher education- the characteristic that makes it higher and not just that bit at the end of the chain - it doesn't even explore whether there is such a characteristic.

If it had done so, it would have discovered an essential point. Our educational process, in each discipline, should enable the graduate to function at a 'professional' level in that discipline and, at the same time, equip the graduate with the capacity to do so over a life-time in that or another discipline. We try to prepare people for the uncertainties of the future by developing the capacity, the will and the confidence to adapt to, and embrace, what becomes known when it becomes known; people able to adapt to change. Higher education is more than just the mastery of a specific body of knowledge.

Students in higher education learn to be intellectually curious because it is in universities that they learn from staff who are charged not just with the responsibility of disseminating knowledge but also with the responsibility of discovering new knowledge and re-interpreting current wisdom. And the university educates for the future and its uncertainties in the intellectual climate that is created by these activities, not to the standards and certainties set exclusively by present practice and today's comfortable practitioners.

Apart from the direct connection between teaching and research and the importance of research as both a means and an end, research plays an important part in developing the culture of

curiosity that should pervade universities. The one in which students are taught to seek out facts and interpret them, test them indeed, not just to receive them and repeat them. And this complex of activities: teaching, learning, research and scholarship are the inseparable components that make higher education higher.

But the Paper does not attempt to trigger this sort of debate. And in its absence, it is simple for it to take the line that universities should be places where the students enrol where they want, in what they want (or are financially able to) and hand over a voucher to cover the public commitment to their tuition costs and be charged a fee for the rest. And research can be added on as an optional extra in areas determined elsewhere. I would certainly not argue that research funds should not be managed effectively, nor that priorities are unimportant, but I empathise with the very recent Dearing Committee review in the UK which states that: *there is near universal rejection of the idea that some institutions of higher education should be teaching-only institutions...such an institution would simply not be a university in any legitimate sense of that term.* At least that is an ideal to aim for, and achievable, unless politics, real politics, intrudes.

Research and scholarship are integral functions of universities; things that universities do, not just things that get done in universities, not things you can just add in from time-to-time for the reasons I have outlined. They are not things you try to get done when your staff appointments are linked tightly to student study preferences and the research directions set according to

priorities determined by a central body - two unrelated forces combining to separate research from teaching; and the possible impact is not assessed.

But there is no position on higher education in our Paper, on what it is or what it should be, other than an exhortation to *lift our sights, so that we can recover a sense of purpose for Australian higher education as part of a more seamless postsecondary education environment*. The *sense of purpose* must be buried in the vision for a *post secondary continuum* because it isn't anywhere else. *The postsecondary vision* in its own limited way is not problematic; nor is it new and is not, they say, *denying the distinctive identity and mission of the existing VET and higher education sectors*; although a little later the point is made that *it is nevertheless important for the VET sector to retain its distinctive mission*. So, in a Paper which tells us that it is time to *rediscover a sense of purpose* for higher education and to lift our sights, there is no attempt to describe higher education, or to define it, in distinctive terms - no attempt to explore with us what the Committee thinks it is and what it could or should become.

Now, accessibility.

Our open and accessible system is described in the Paper as a strength. It is. There are now over 2,300,000 people currently participating in post secondary education (Higher education and TAFE + private VET and personal enrichment courses). It is predicted in an Appendix to the

Paper that a person of school leaving age has a 45% probability of commencing higher education at some time in their life and an 80% probability of participating in some form of post secondary education - which happens to be the target assumed by the Committee to illustrate a point. The target for near universal access to postsecondary education (not to be confused with university) is unlikely to be much higher. The arrangements proposed in this Paper would not result in a significant increase in participation in postsecondary education, although the proposed mechanism might well increase participation in higher education but at the expense of VET.

The Paper states that access to a place should not be limited by capacity to pay. While it is argued that individuals should make a contribution to the cost of their study the new vision for postsecondary education proposes that *no Australian with the intellectual ability to succeed in higher education is denied access owing to his or her social economic circumstances.*

Since the Committee believes that we should set fees, its solution to the access issue is to convert HECS into income contingent loans, presumably for both fees and living allowance though the latter is given little space. This will simply mean that those more willing to accept debt or those with the capacity to avoid debt by paying up front will be the ones who enrol in the universities first.

It is quite conceivable that such a fee-paying regime would exclude certain groups from access to certain universities and courses of study; and if there really is a hierarchy of university in terms of perceived quality, then why should we adopt a system in this country that allows those able to avoid debt or those willing to incur large debt get most access to the best? Is that a fair and equitable system? The Paper does not tackle the issue.

The Paper is equivocal about the level of public funding. The government should, it says, *maintain, and perhaps even increase the level of public funding provided at present...*(to what is not clear; the present sum allocated to the whole of postsecondary education; to higher education?). *While in the short run public funding should not be reduced as costs are likely to be steady, in the longer term, factors such as the impact of technology are likely to lead to declining costs.* (Higher) education is thus represented as a cost to government that can be reduced, not as one of the ways that the community, the whole community, invests in its own future. The public view is more in line with the investment notion: a recent poll shows that 91% of the electorate believes that spending on universities should be either increased or not reduced only 4% believe spending should be lower only 13% opted for higher student contributions.

It has been said publicly that the Committee assumes that the government will not commit more funds to higher education. If this independent review was told this before it started its work, then

perhaps we should know so that we can understand their context. If it was not, then we should ask why the Committee has not even bothered to explore the case. The government might not reverse its position, but if we don't argue that they should we let it be too easy for them to evade their responsibility.

Making a case for more public funds did not faze the Dearing Committee in the UK, which recommends that *public spending on higher education should increase in real terms* and that it should increase in line with the growth in GDP. Dearing also recommends that it should be supplemented (not replaced!) by an income contingent flat rate *contribution of 25% of the average cost of higher education tuition* by the student and that it should not be increased above 25 % without independent review and affirmative resolution of both houses of parliament. Politics may well intrude again, of course, but if it does it will have to reject a carefully argued case. West opts for the market, deferred loans and for fees set by institutions as preferred funding sources, with incentives for benefactors; and *does not support the arguments ... that public expenditure on higher education should be pegged at a particular proportion of GDP* because of the complication of demographic shifts. An easy way out for government.

Would freed up fees without a firm commitment to a respectable level of public funding change things? There is indeed evidence that it could result in either or both a decrease in public outlays and steady increases in the cost to the individual. In New Zealand, for example, tuition fees have

increased by around 17% in recent years and government outlays decreased by about 7%; in the US, between 1980-81 and 1993-94, the percentage of total revenue received by US public universities from tuition and related fees increased by 42%, while funding from the state and federal government decreased by 34% - and now there is an enquiry. In Australia, mature-age student applications to Australian universities fell by 10% after the increases to HECS in 1996 . At the postgraduate level in Australia, deregulation has led to people in all equity target groups enrolling more often in HECS-liable postgraduate courses than in the fee-paying ones. Is that a good? The paper does not broach the issue in any meaningful way.

Why, in Australia, should we accept this sort of funding regime with these possible outcomes? The answer, if there is one, is not to be found in this Paper!

The Committee could have produced a Paper that confronted the realities of inequality - between rich and poor individuals, rich and poor institutions, between regions, between the various groups in our community. It could have confronted the government with the costs to the sector of operating grant cuts over a long period. It could have explored what extra commitment should be expected of government, and made a case. But perhaps it did not want to take what it describes as the *easy* path that we in the universities apparently take when we *agitate for more public funds* rather than get on *re-engineering our internal processes*. So it has opted for an

uncritical reliance on market driven solutions to *re-engineer* the sector; and not even put forward an argued case for them against other options.

Accessibility covers more than just funding and financial considerations, of course - there is also the issue of access to what. We have in Australia a system where students can, if they wish, transfer between institutions interstate or intrastate, or seek to enrol in any institution in Australia. Some do. The Committee notes, however, *that the distribution of students among universities would undoubtedly be different if decisions about where to study were left to students and to universities. So give the student a voucher and they will decide. But the Committee seems unsure only about 10 per cent of students in Australia move out of their home State to attend university. Given the costs of travel and relocation, it is unlikely that students' location preferences would change dramatically if they were offered broader options.* The Committee appears to believe in a model that will not increase overall participation by very much (unless some of the courses that are presently followed are dismissed as 'hobby' or the unworthy 'personal interest' courses) and it won't increase mobility either- just the cost to the individual.

One summary of all this is that an allocative and financing mechanism is proposed that could load costs on to the students, increase inequities, quarantine courses and institutions from particular people or groups of people, result in a drop in public investment, result in either whole institutions or parts that would be teaching-only, not increase participation beyond current levels,

obviate academic planning, make strategic planning impossible, and not improve mobility of students beyond that which exists. And that is before I get to poaching and other forms of *dynamic leadership!* The preferred model would allegedly improve *student centredness* - but while I know what that means, the Committee seems less certain: they slide frequently between student-centred meaning concern for the well being and perspectives of students to an emphasis on the student as the consumer and the source of profit.

2. Mode of study. It is acknowledged that Australian universities have pioneered open and distance education. The Committee embraces the new vision of individuals in their own homes taking top quality courses off the Net from wherever it comes whenever they feel like it. Now, there can be little doubt that, over the next twenty years, Australian universities will be affected significantly by the developments in information and communications technologies. Many more people will have access to the means of location-independent communications. But the extent to which it will be used and the rate at which it will be adopted for educational purposes is more difficult to gauge - and an assessment should have been attempted and that assessment evaluated not simply embraced. What we need is a sober analysis of effects and impact and time frames, not hype.

In the apocalyptic vision, *the traditional view that higher education services are best provided on a campus, to a student body resident nearby, via a narrow set of delivery methodologies still*

*holds true for much of the higher education sector. This will come under increasing scrutiny ....*

But how soon - as of last year, 43% of the population of the US had never used a computer and of the Australian population only 7% had access to the Internet; 70 or so per cent of those who do are male, which raises serious equity issues. And will they be used by large numbers of Australians for educational purposes? I don't know - but more significantly, nor does the Committee. In the UK, which faces the same future, there were 741,000 students enrolled in universities in 1979/80 - 63% were full-time, 28% part-time and 9% at the Open University. In 1995/96 there were 1,597,000 students in total - 65% full-time, 28% part-time and 7% at the Open University. I do not know what these figures mean except that a secure, well regarded and well established open learning university is not increasing its share of enrolments at a time when the student numbers have doubled and the profile of the 'average' student has changed dramatically. Campuses have some attractions it appears- face-to-face teaching might just be one of them.

I would not argue that these figures will not change and that IT will play a greater role in the future than it does today. But I think that the view that IT will replace face-to-face teaching altogether is extreme and would not be accepted by most professional educators, while almost all would accept its role, its place and its potential. But then all this is not really about professional educators and values and about educating; it is really all about getting facts into minds in the

fastest and cheapest way, and about cost cutting to prove we can do it. Again, let us have less hype and more thought.

3. Institutional autonomy is another one of the identified strengths -greater it is said than in many other countries. This is quite possibly true. The Committee argues that our autonomy will *stand us in good stead in the more globally competitive environment of the next 20 years*, in part because we are free from direct influence from government; we are free to choose our own students; free to appoint and promote staff and are self-accrediting bodies that have the freedom to determine the curriculum content, the teaching methods and assessment arrangements. It is just possible that by exercising our autonomy we have a system that the Committee describes as one comprising: *comprehensive institutions of higher education... in which...there is considerable diversity of mission, clientele, mode of delivery, educational philosophy and style within the system*. So far so good, put the two together and we have a system with important differences between institutions one would think: what more important differences can there be than mission, selection of students, student profile, recruitment of staff, educational philosophies, style, mode, research profile, course profile, curriculum content and assessment arrangements... but the answer is apparently obvious...*far greater differentiation is possible and desirable. One of the fundamental issues that must be confronted in this context is price differentiation.*

The Paper does not, explore what that means in the Australian context, and what it might mean, let alone whether price differentiation would lead to anything other than different prices and socio-economic segregation! Shrug off the diversity, disregard the strengths, the different approaches already developed and get a pricing mechanism in there - it is, after all, *just like any other Australian industry*.

One of the commissioned papers neatly highlights one possible outcome, probably inadvertently: while arguing that those who supply services at the right quality with least cost will prosper, the author then asserts that the appropriate *mix of subjects and qualities would then be determined by market demands, resulting in a more diverse and responsive system. One advantage of the market is its ability to initiate low cost experiments which are quickly copied if successful*. Am I naive or does that mean convergence not divergence. In case it is unclear, the Committee advises us to adopt a co-operative approach that will cut costs and be better, to eschew the *not invented here* syndrome. I suppose they mean that we must be just like a real industry where the main difference between, say, several makes of car is the badge, not what makes it a car or what makes it move. What price diversity? What value diversity?

There is a lot more that could be said. For example, the assertion that there are greater rewards for chasing research funding than for *teaching students well* and the hint that we now teach badly. It is informative that some members of the Committee began at this very point and, after

all their careful investigation, this and some other views have not changed one whit. The evidence? Just a comment that there are more external dollars for research than there are external dollars for teaching grants. And, the counter-evidence? The Quality Assurance Committee, for example, reported in 1995 that they were impressed by *the extent and variety of teaching and learning activities underway in the university system* and that they found *evidence of a strong emphasis on teaching skills in institutional promotion ....in the training of promotions committees in the interpretation of student data* and that *evidence of teaching performance is mandatory for promotion in all institutions*- promotion is one of our substantial internal reward processes. But that sort of thing ruins a good story.

Each of the other 17 or so identified weaknesses could be debated in a discussion of 'what is missing'. But let me take just two:

- it is said to be a weakness that student demand plays little role in the allocation of public funding. First it is not true in the detail - why do we have the course choice, the subject choice and the enrolment and student profile that we have? But secondly, we should note that student preferences are not always driven just by reality, even when informed. A survey conducted in, I think 1993, revealed that 60% of year 12 students in NSW aspired to occupations that comprised around 15% of the workforce; in Adelaide last year something like 60% of first preference school leavers applied for places in about one quarter of the

available courses. And the workforce opportunities that the year 12 students see are the ones here and now, and not the ones that will be there in 3,4,5 or 6 years time when they finish their course. That uncertainty is one reason why we must educate to open opportunities and minds and not reduce them by introducing a peculiarly utilitarian focus to what we do now.

I suspect that a pricing mechanism will have a much stronger influence on student choice than ability, or peers, or parents or even the despised central profile negotiations. A really big debt to study medicine, a slightly smaller one to study engineering or science will have a big impact on the choice of course and the choice of institution, especially for the able but less well to do. How could we possibly adopt that sort of thing as a policy, and entrench disadvantage and segment our enrolments according to price?

- it is said to be a weakness that there is little incentive to reduce costs in the absence of price competition - even though we have endured substantial cuts to operating grants since 1983 and few of us are bankrupt. We apparently *agitate for more public funds because it is easier than re-engineering our internal processes* . This is quite simply an insult. We can get better; we can do things differently; but to have a group like this come in and say that we bleat rather than re-organise reveals more about their own deficiencies rather than those of a system that has struggled through more than a decade of operating grant cuts and is still turning out excellent graduates and excellent research.

I would have liked to see an analysis of the present state of the universities and how we might get through the first few years of the 20 year span of the Committee. This has not been done. Nor is it clear how the fabric of the university will be maintained let alone improved under their preferred model.

In the end, it all comes down to a simple test.

Will the directions set in this Paper get us anywhere near a system, or even a set of universities, that will help us as a nation make our way in the world by getting us to be good at what we do and by developing the talent and cleverness of our people, from whatever strata they come? Will it encourage the able from all and every background? Will it provide fair and equitable access to any or all universities? Will it ensure a rich profile of courses and disciplines? Will it give us advantage in an environment in which most countries are striving to develop the intellectual potential of their citizens so that they have a highly skilled, talented and educated community and workforce? Will it do so when talent and skills become more obvious commodities and when the role that the universities play in this development is both critical in its importance and broad in its scope?

Will the proposals in the West Discussion Paper get us near anything like that? I think not. And the worry is that they have not even seriously considered any alternatives.

## National Academies Forum - 8th December 1997

### Australian Academy of Science's View and Sir Gustav Nossal's Summary of the Meeting

The Australian Academy of Science found much to like in "Learning for Life". It applauds the strong defence of the role of universities in the first chapter. It finds the concept that every Australian should have access to 5 years of some kind of post-secondary school educational experience at some time of life novel, ambitious and appealing. It strongly supports the courageous statement that the commitment of Government funding to higher education should increase or at least stay the same. This is a useful counterpoint to calls for reduction in Government funding. The Academy has no problem with increased student empowerment, greater autonomy of universities, or the Review's strong support of the HECS scheme. Indeed, the significant degree of differentiation between universities which would arise is absolutely in line with the Academy's various submissions to the Review. The Academy considers that the West Committee has made a substantial and lasting contribution to a vitally important debate.

The Academy would have liked to see more emphasis placed on the "public good" aspect of universities rather than the near exclusive concentration on the "private good" gained by individual students. The scholarly function of universities as living repositories of the storehouse of knowledge and wisdom gained over 6 millennia of civilisation; as critics of and irritants to accepted norms; as places where the human spirit can soar, need greater analysis. Furthermore, most of the fundamental research in universities constitutes additions to knowledge that are not immediately appropriable. I venture to suggest that 40% of university funding should be primarily related to scholarship and research and should be more sharply differentiated from the "cost per student" style arguments.

The Academy has submitted separately to a group headed by Dr Doreen Clark a submission related to what it sees as the deficiencies of the discussion paper in relation to research. We see this area as seriously "under-cooked". In particular, we would urge caution about too much emphasis on strategic planning, foresight exercises and a strong dirigiste element creeping into ARC, which must primarily continue to be concerned with excellence. The Academy believes a greater proportion of the total university "cake" should go to ARC and the Research Quantum, and we would wish the NH&MRC, funded out of a different pot, to keep pace. The Academy has a special concern for younger academics. While cut-off points for ARC large grants remain at 20%, the chances for younger academics competing on an equal footing are slight. The Academy wishes the West Committee to give more attention to the very real morale problems and career worries of younger academics, particularly those aspiring to become the research leaders of tomorrow. Losing too many of these overseas would be a national tragedy.

The Academy understands the huge potential of the Internet, and of information and communications technology generally, for the future of education. Nevertheless, it believes the emphasis which the Committee placed on the electronic revolution as controlling costs is overdone. Moreover, the inspirational value of a good academic interacting with fine young minds

is most important. The point was well made in the Academy's submission to Dr Clark's meeting, by Professor John White. He says: "The costs cannot be escaped by technology. Education is that process of "leading forth", ("educere") a student at leisure, to comprehension and intellectual excitement. It has a collective and social dimension related to students being together and with scholars obtaining an understanding. It is a costly but irreplaceable aspect of the highest quality education".

Professor Margaret Clunies Ross started the meeting by defining the aspirations of the National Academies Forum. This seeks to be the peak body of all of Australian academia, coming together as required to address issues of major national significance. It is also in order to congratulate Professor Paul Bourke for his initial stewardship of NAF over its first two years. The present occasion where the discussion paper "Learning for Life" is being reviewed by all four Academies is perhaps the most important NAF function to date.

Professor Paul Bourke warned about some of the exaggerated hopes for the digitised revolution contained in Appendix 11 of the discussion paper. Indeed, he expressed some scepticism about scenario-building in general and expressed himself in some pithy phrases in this regard:

"Jeremiad green papers"

"Digital diploma mills"

"Commodification of education"

"Colonisation by international junk purveyors"

"Dirigiste managerialism"

Perhaps the most memorable phrase was: "Don't just regurgitate the marketing brochures of the technology companies!".

The message that electronic information would have to be dealt with carefully in the universities of the future was well and truly received!

Professor Bourke also made the point that there may have to be some "clumping" of research endeavour within the 40 Australian universities, as it was inconceivable that every department in every university would be empowered to do significant research right across the board.

Professor Peter Sheehan crafted his paper around an eloquent plea for excellence within the Australian higher education system. He articulately captured the feeling of threat and low morale within the university sector at present. He applauded the discussion paper's advocacy for deregulation of the higher education system and greater autonomy for individual institutions. He was very worried, however, about a possible reduction of funding and quoted certain passages of the paper which suggested that indeed reduction in central Government funding could be a possibility for the more distant future. In discussion of his paper, however, it was pointed out that the West Review consistently pleads for a maintenance of the current level of Government funding or an increase. This aspect deserves to be strengthened considerably in the final version.

Professor Sheehan was convinced that the capacity to maintain any reasonable quality in the higher education system would be difficult if not impossible if Government funding were reduced further. He said that quality was not just about the absence of obvious defects in a system. While technology has its place, it is not sure to improve teaching but he has encountered examples where it can actually produce nightmares. Professor Sheehan does not favour the huge mega-universities that appear to be lauded, at least in part, by Global Alliance in Appendix 11.

Professor Sheehan argued that excellence may have different meanings for different universities. He was worried that excellence in research, valued by and important to some of the universities, would be threatened if peer group review were reduced and the block funding component of research were increased.

Professor Sheehan worries that vouchers could favour "prestige" universities good at promoting their own status. He sees a tension between the various visionary statements of the discussion paper and the consistent note of economic rationalism. It will be difficult to weld these two apparently opposing elements together in the final report. Professor Sheehan believes that looking at education as an industry diminishes the importance of scholarship and learning. Moreover, an industry approach does not favour the development of a sense of citizenship, or the building of trust in society, functions of universities which he considers to be critically important.

Professor Peter Karmel addressed the question of whether an exclusive focus on the 15-20 years, which (because of its Terms of Reference) the Committee appeared to see as its chief task, might not be counterproductive if the next 3 or 4 years were not addressed as well. The next 15 years begin with the next year and in discussion there was a broad general feeling that Professor Karmel has made a very good point.

Professor Bruce Chapman finds aspects of the discussion paper easy to agree with and others which occasion him concern. He agrees with the brave principle of universal access to some form of higher education for almost all Australians. He agrees that the TAFE sector should be brought into the same conceptual umbrella as the university sector, in much the manner that the West Committee has sought to do. He very strongly agrees with the discussion paper's strong endorsement of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) as the method by which students make their contribution to their higher education. There should be no problem about equity and access given that HECS is a payment scheme that does not cut in until a person is earning approximately \$400.00 per week and furthermore that it allows payment over a period at a relatively gentle rate.

Professor Chapman worries that too free a pricing structure within the universities and a total fiscal autonomy within them might carry with it some dangers. He referred to fiscal parsimony - temptations for vice-chancellors to impose salary cuts resulting in able people leaving the system. He also worried about the possibility that universities might set fees so high that some graduates would be incapable of repaying their HECS debt, even over a working lifetime. He believed that such a danger was real at about the level of a HECS debt of \$100,000.00. As a nightmare scenario, there could be so much defaulting under the HECS scheme that Governments would begin to question the whole system, thereby of course endangering a key principle of the West

Committee's thinking. He therefore thought that universities should be enabled only to edge cautiously into fee differentials, with some limit, perhaps 25%, being put into what universities could charge above some standard, agreed norm.

In answer to questions, however, Professor Chapman said that the "whole of life" earnings differential between a university graduate and a non-university graduate was of the order of \$1 million. It was pointed out in discussion that, seen in that light, \$100,000.00 was not such an enormous sum. Furthermore, in the real world, it was believed that no university would set its fees so high as to endanger later Government action to limit or destroy the HECS system. It was argued in discussion that the market itself would look after this and would suitably punish universities who attempted to set their fees too high.

Professor Vicki Sara gave a commendably concise and clear definition of the Australian Research Council's goals. She stated that the core business of ARC was basic research with excellence as the only criterion. This repeats a position that the Australian Academy of Science has frequently urged on Government, and one which must not be undermined but rather strongly supported by the West Committee. A secondary role for ARC would be the support of strategic research but here it is more a question of coordination, catalysis, the identification of emerging areas of research, and the support of multidisciplinary areas. In discussion it emerged that the National Health and Medical Research Council (not sufficiently stressed in the discussion paper) in its support of strategic mission-oriented research also used excellence as the overwhelmingly most important criterion, but also had a strategic role in identifying gaps in areas of national health importance.

The third purpose of ARC which Professor Sara mentioned was the stimulation of flows between key players in research and development, namely the universities, the public research institutes and industry. Flows would be both of information and ideas but also of people. Professor Sara believed there was a delicate balancing trick needing to be performed in order to equilibrate the interacting areas of political decisions, academic excellence and commercial demand. There is a certain creative tension here, and Government could well do with the kind of independent advice that ARC could present.

On the matter of priority setting, Professor Sara believed the ARC should use a light hand. She reiterated the comments of the Stocker Report where structural priorities were seen as most important, with ARC playing a great role; whereas thematic priorities should be addressed only in areas of major need. In discussion, the question was raised as to whether ARC might become too powerful or whether there was a conflict between the ARC's role as a disburser of funds and its role as a policy instrument. In answer to that, it should be recalled that the ARC's budget is relatively small when compared with the total of approximately \$4.4 billion of Government funding of R&D and the nation's overall expenditure of approximately \$8 billion.

Further points that emerged in discussion of Professor Sara's important paper were a very strong support for the plea that ARC should achieve independent status, and a vehement denial of the consultants who complained about the high opportunity costs of the ARC research grant writing and evaluation procedure. It is clear that the strategic thinking which precedes committing a grant request to writing is a most important discipline focusing the mind on where research is heading.

While there is a good deal of grumbling within the academic community about the time taken to write grants and also to review them, academics in more reflective moments clearly recognise the discipline of writing the grant and the great learning experience involved in reviewing a series of grants.

Professor Trevor Cole rightly emphasised the importance of the university-industry interface and praised the emphasis of the report on diversity within the university system. The audience was struck by his metaphor in which he said the universities were to the 21st century what the coal mines were for the Industrial Revolution.

Professor Ian Davey highlighted the differences between globalisation and internationalisation. He saw globalisation as having the capacity to engender homogenisation and perhaps even a westernisation of higher education. While recognising some of the advantages of very high quality electronic teaching materials, given the dominance of the United States, he worried about its increasing and perhaps eventually overarching influence. Internationalisation, on the other hand, retained a capacity to focus on the nation state as a still important object of humanity's interest and concern. He feels that the discussion paper does not sufficiently engage the particular character of Australia. He sees a need to develop a subtext - that of the Australian identity, strategic alliances between Australia and our near neighbours, cooperation in education within our region. He sees a huge importance in retaining uniquely Australian universities (and other institutions) as tools of international competitiveness. He sees the universities as having a critical role in research and education, and he believes the degree to which the universities are integral to the success of this nation has not been sufficiently emphasised in the discussion paper. He questions the value of Appendix 11, and indeed of Tokyo-based input into an Australian problem area. He very much echoes Professor Sheehan's concerns re quality within the higher education system.

Professor Eric Wainwright leapt to a spirited defence of Appendix 11, the only speaker to do so throughout the day. He says Appendix 11 shakes us out of our complacency. He believes electronic technology will have a major impact on the universities. He cites the value of Internet-based learning for rural and isolated students. He believes in a high profile for teaching materials delivered via the World Wide Web as leading to increased access and increased choice.

Professor Wainwright gently castigated the universities for not using advanced techniques to achieve greater collaboration between the universities already. This was particularly in relation to information infrastructure, that is in the general field of libraries.

Professor Wainwright has four key reasons for defending an increased involvement of information technology within the higher education sector:

Marketing - both focused on the student customers of the Australian universities and on the international marketing which universities are increasingly engaged upon.

2. The re-engineering of university administrations, particularly the less glamorous "back office" functions.

3. Research collaboration.

4. Student learning (as is naturally the main focus of the discussion paper and as is extensively canvassed in Appendix 11).

Indeed, Professor Wainwright believes that if we are really to deliver substantial post-secondary education to 80% of Australians, we cannot really avoid a much higher profile for information technology. He recognises that there will be high up-front costs, and wonders whether these have been adequately canvassed in the discussion paper. He believes that both students and academics will need training to benefit from the information revolution, it is not good enough to act on the assumption that students will have gathered the necessary skills in schools, this might be true for a proportion of students but will not be true for many with disadvantaged backgrounds.

He made the final interesting point that if we are prepared to have a high electronic information content within our courses right here in Australia, the extra costs of internationalisation of the teaching endeavour would not be that great, which he cites as a further advantage.

I will not attempt to summarise Professor Ian Chubb's paper. Suffice it to say that it challenged the intellectual underpinnings of the whole exercise to date. His presentation was already a compressed summary of views which he has put to the Committee more extensively elsewhere and I could not do them justice by attempting to compress them still further.

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