

From: Professor Peter Taylor
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I wish to make some comments for consideration by the Inquiry. I agree there appear to be some problems which need to be addressed.

1. A Wider Problem

There is a wider problem, exacerbated by decisions of Universities about 15 or so years ago to direct internal funding on the basis of the number of students on seats. This was of course with good intention, with the aim of marginalizing unviable courses and directing the money where the main need was. Unfortunately it created a side effect in that Faculties have gradually reorganised their courses to ensure that as much of the teaching of their own students is done internally and as little as possible external study or choice is possible.

In the 1970s students in most courses had wide choice of majors around their universities and a considerable amount of servicing by academics who were genuine experts in the area. Whereas this choice still applies in generalist courses such as those traditional ones in the Arts and Sciences the choice has narrowed markedly in the so-called professional degrees, which not only include teaching, but also many others such as accounting.

The changes in internal funding methods have resulted in less servicing of disciplines such as language, mathematics, statistics and computing and in the demise in many Universities of departments with fundamental disciplines in the sciences and arts, which in turn provided community respect for the Universities.

2. Teacher Training

What I have said above certainly applies in Teacher Education. Whereas in the past teachers were able to access the content they were to teach, in the last few years, particularly in the Primary sector where there is not a First Degree/Dip Ed option, students have been less able to study this content, and found instead a greater access on pedagogy, sociology and other issues.

My own son is a case in point. A few years ago he gained a (primary school) teacher qualification which enabled him to study a major outside the Faculty. In his case he chose mathematics, and has since graduated to have highly marketable qualifications. He is very much in demand, but he would no longer be able to do this. In the same course, with 96 credit points, only 11 still involve mathematics, and these are almost all devoted to pedagogy. He would only be able to study a minor, no longer a major, outside the Faculty.

We have reached a point in teacher training in Australia where the pendulum has swung too much from Content to Pedagogy. It is important for teachers to be professionals in the subjects they teach and whereas it will not be easy, it is important to enable teachers to be experts also in their teaching fields.

Yours sincerely

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