

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Inquiry into Human Rights and Good Governance Education in the Asia Pacific Region

A MODEL FOR THE COMMERCIAL, COLLABORATIVE ESTABLISHMENT OF GOVERNANCE RELATED DISTANCE EDUCATION TO PROMOTE HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION THROUGH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

This is a companion to the submission entitled 'Ethics and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC): The Divided Self?' made to the Executive Director of the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC). It commented on the Discussion Paper on the Protection of Human Genetic Information (ALRC/NHMRC, 2002) and related matters. The current submission is based primarily on information contained in the Ministerial Discussion Paper and other Issues Papers prepared for the Government Review Higher Education at the Crossroads.

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Submission No:.....	1
Date Received:.....	31/10/02
Secretary:.....	Janet Holmes

Aim:

To present a model for the commercial, collaborative establishment of governance related distance education to promote health and environment protection through sustainable development.

A model for commercial, collaborative, governance related, distance education:

The proposed model has the following features:

- Education content, assessment and administration should primarily be designed to help Australian universities to expand and diversify their markets through assisting governments, industry and communities to implement relevant regional, national and international agreements, goals and standards.
- Education content, assessment and administrative processes should be designed to assist identification, prioritization and control of health, work, community and environment related problems. In some cases this may also lead to the prioritization and development of related strategic research.
- Unless there appears to be good reason to do otherwise, the distance education development emphasis should be on relevant undergraduate education subjects which are currently taught in face-to-face or distance mode in Australian universities.
- Successful student completion of the relevant education assessments should be recognised towards an appropriate and related qualification at a relevant tertiary institution.
- Unless another model has more benefits, the preferred mode of education delivery would involve fully written lecture material, supported by videocassettes of the lecturer speaking, and approximately 20 Powerpoint overhead slides per lecture. Assessment may include practical governance related exercises in the workplace or community as well as final exams or other assessment.
- Unless another course of action can be shown to be in the public interest, the proposal should be delivered in a manner consistent in every way with the requirements of the National Protocols which contain agreed criteria which an institution must meet for recognition as a University (See appendix 1).
- A distance education project management group should be established under the guidance or leadership of the Commonwealth Minister for Education, Science and Training, in consultation with Vice Chancellors of Universities and other major current or potential stakeholders in the scheme.

- The project management group should seek production of content or the provision of teaching or other services from interested staff in Australian universities. It should prioritise and make decisions about the production and dissemination of the education material on offer in consultation with relevant key stakeholders.
- The above discussion should aim to result in appropriate commercial agreements which also meet requirements such as those outlined in the Sydney University Business Liaison Office (BLO) definition of commercialisation which states that:
 - ‘Commercialisation is the process of transferring research outcomes to the community in a manner that:
 - optimises the chances of their successful implementation
 - encourages their use
 - accelerates their introduction
 - shares the benefits among the contributing parties’
- It should be recognised that this definition has potential for integrating traditional but contradictory market, collegiate and democratic governance objectives in a more healthy, just, and efficient way. These contradictory imperatives are currently also reflected in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states that:
 - Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits
 - Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

Benefits and costs of the proposed model:

Benefits

It is envisaged that this model will:

- 1 Assist governments, industry and communities to implement relevant regional, national and international agreements, goals and standards.
- 2 Provide economic benefits for Australian universities and their partnering organizations and communities through facilitating faster development and broader delivery of transparent and interacting education materials, based largely on current face-to-face education in Australian universities.

- 3 Assist Australian universities to meet the education, community service and research related functions outlined in their State enabling legislation in a more effectively coordinated, transparent and productive manner.
- 4 Provide new opportunities for University teachers from across Australia to get their intellectual property better recognised as a result of its more explicit content and broader dissemination.
- 5 Promote more effective education planning, outcome evaluation and education quality as a result of increased transparency of education content and better institutional cooperation.
- 6 Promote student choice of education delivery method
- 7 Promote student competence in spoken and written English
- 8 Promote student understanding of the subject matter
- 9 Where relevant, promote competence in spoken and written English, and also understanding of the subject matter, by workplace based supervisors, workmates, clients or related communities.
- 10 Promote distance education opportunities for students who do not have access to computers, and reduce the socio-economic inequalities which result from current student requirements for computer ownership and maintenance as well as academic text purchase. (In comparison, televisions and video machines are widespread universally.)
- 11 Where students already have computer access, reduce potential computer based problems through a primary reliance on simple Email and Internet technology functions, where this appears to be a fast and effective form of communication and access to reliable information.
- 12 Promote consistent quality and diversity of teaching content across Australian universities by assisting the clarification of appropriate core and competency based aspects of vocational education. This would provide economies of scale which could also assist the development of a broader range of electives, including specialist programs designed for niche markets.
- 13 Provide a transparent undergraduate platform of education on which self-directed post-graduate projects can be built more effectively.
- 14 Facilitate appropriate post-graduate selection through providing a better understanding of the required undergraduate standard.

- 15 Provide a transparent form of education content which facilitates institutional recognition of prior learning across the board.
- 16 Through this form of education, and where appropriate, promote the importance of related and diverse products to the broadest possible global market.
- 17 Provide an early and simple educational platform on which more sophisticated forms of computer-based education delivery may be developed to meet the markets of the future.

Costs

It is difficult to see how the proposed model would entail costs which do not already exist for Australian universities. In the future, all universities will face increasing competitive pressures to meet the constantly growing global demand for the kind of educational choice and flexibility which information technology provides.

By expanding opportunities for tertiary education, the proposal is highly likely to expand opportunities for university related employment rather than to reduce them. It is also designed to reduce major inefficiencies produced by the traditional collegiate culture of universities, whilst protecting and promoting academic independence and objectivity.

Rationale for the Proposed Model:

Meeting the opportunities and commitments of an international market:

Improved design and dissemination of Australian education content is necessary to assist implementation of the following major global requirements and the quality management of related services.

In 1978, World Health Organisation (WHO) members agreed that health is a fundamental human right and that the highest possible level of health is a most important world wide social goal. The Ottawa Charter for health promotion was signed in 1986 and states that the necessary supports for health include peace, shelter, food, income, a sustainable economic system, sustainable resources, social justice and equity. The Charter called for the development of public policy and the reorientation of health services, as well as community action and education to support health goals.

In 1992 the UN Declaration on Environment and Development was also signed. Its first principle puts human well being at the centre of development. At the 1994 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, leaders of the region agreed to creation of an Asia-Pacific free trade zone by 2020, and also supported the protection of health and the natural environment. APEC members have diverse political regimes including, for example, those of Australia, China, Japan, Indonesia and the United States. The 1997

WHO meeting had as its theme the development of health promotion through cooperation between government and the private sector.

In the New International World Order producers are increasingly expected to compete for broader markets. Governments need to provide effective support for agreements which promote freer trade, and also health and environment protection through sustainable development. Australian governments have a particular interest in pursuing these international agreements effectively. In many areas of production the nation cannot compete with low wage economies. However, it should have a natural trading advantage when competing in high value added areas, because the whole Australian population already enjoys the benefits of comparatively high quality services related to health, education, communication and environment protection. The quality, accessibility, diversity and cost of such services are also measures of the effectiveness of Australian governance in general and in particular.

Education for good governance should broadly promote the duty of care and risk management principles contained, for example, in Australian State Occupational Health and Safety and Workers Compensation Acts and in related International Labour Organisation Conventions. A coordinated, consistent, clear and equitable regulatory approach to risk should be taken across the board, unless another course of action can be shown to be in the public interest. Teaching the principles of risk management outlined in Australian and related international standards could also assist identification and prioritization of research needs which must be fulfilled in order to promote health and environment protection through sustainable development more effectively. This risk management approach can also be used to improve the quality of life of Aboriginal people and other comparatively disadvantaged groups. It may also be useful as a means of promoting a related range of high quality and cost-effective services and products.

Participants at the recent Australian conference of the National Committee on Human Rights Education (21.8.02) stated that universities and other education institutions should assist implementation of relevant international conventions and related national standards through education. The National Committee on Human Rights Education Incorporated is an independent association dedicated to promoting and extending human rights education in all its forms. It was established with the support of government, business and community groups. The National Committee has been designated by the Federal Government as the national focal point for the UN Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004).

Dealing with the opportunities and threats of a publicly funded collegiate culture:

The proposed model for the commercial, collaborative establishment of governance related distance education would maximise opportunities and minimise threats in the national and publicly funded collegiate context outlined below.

According to the recent Ministerial Discussion Paper entitled 'Higher Education at the Crossroads', (Nelson, 02, p. 5) universities in this country are nearly all public. All but

two of Australia's 39 universities are established under State or Territory legislation. Forty-four institutions are eligible for Commonwealth government funds under the Higher Education Funding Act. Only five of these are private, and four of them receive limited government funds. In 1999 there were also 86 registered private higher education institutions which were typically single-purpose organisations such as colleges of theology and business institutes. Together they accounted for approximately 3% of higher education students in Australia.

In 1991 Universities had revenues of \$5.5 billion. However, between 1991 and 2000 non-government sources of income are expected to reach their estimated record level of \$10.4 billion in 2002. (Nelson, 02, p. 5) An average of 45% of university revenue currently comes from the Commonwealth, although the proportion varies by institution. Fees and charges, including student loans, represent 36% of revenue. Although State governments have legislative control over the governance of public universities they contribute a very small proportion of funding. The major source of income for universities is their undergraduate students. The current education proposal for commercial distance education is aimed primarily at expanding revenue from this source.

Australian universities need reform so that their functions are pursued more effectively. For example, although university functions related to education, research, community service and accreditation are established by state law, university management is very different from that found in a state government department, a statutory authority, or a state owned enterprise. University management bodies are most often comprised of voting staff who normally act in pursuit of self and collegiate interest. This does not provide the expert direction and accountability necessary for the high quality and cost-effective development and administration of policies and activities designed to meet the objectives of legislation and the public interest.

The Review of Higher Education Financing and Policy (1998, p.23) noted that universities will need to address the ramifications of a view of the world based on collegial decision making. The Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee (2001) report on higher education discussed universities' contribution to regional development and exports. It addressed the limitations imposed on development by current university governance structures, and the need to identify alternate funding models that would better serve the needs of regional and disadvantaged students. The current proposal attempts to meet that need.

The major problems of obtaining accountability for the deployment of public funds in a collegiate environment now appear clearly evident to many people. For example, the Ministerial Discussion Paper noted the views of Ernst and Young (1998) that:

'The current state of cost management in most universities is not adequate to support the needs of their businesses and the changing landscape. Information has been developed in a vacuum within institutional silos using inconsistent practices and less than credible numbers.' (Nelson, 02, p.26).

It also states that there is a perception in the public arena that academics and faculties design their courses and research activities to meet their own needs and interests rather than meeting the priorities and needs of the students, the institutions or society more generally (p. 29).

The Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) recently wrote that:

Universities are not antagonistic to proper accountability. But we must recognise that too many people in universities already spend too much time responding to changed rules, supplying statistics, adjusting, applying endlessly for the basic funds we need simply to do our jobs, responding to frequent reviews or requests for information...while all the time, more and more funds are tied or project-driven or supplied in packets in the name of accountability. We are slowly being made average (Nelson, 02, p.40).

The Ministerial Discussion Paper notes that the recent Senate Committee Report on Universities in Crisis gave little consideration to some of the perceived inadequacies in the internal operations of universities, and that these include variable teaching loads of staff, non-productive research, inflated course offerings, as well as administrative systems and processing inefficiencies. Twenty percent of units (20681) on offer annually have fewer than five students (Nelson, 02, p. 26).

The Paper also claims that 'only a couple of universities can tell whether their staff members' outputs have earned their salaries' (Nelson, 02, p.27). Judging from the information required by the Sydney University annual performance review this lack of transparency should be an easy matter to fix through the perusal of all individual performance agreements. Sensible judgments about resource allocation cannot be made in the absence of this data, which should be fairly easily obtained for planning purposes.

Meeting the requirements of the global marketplace in the Age of the Internet

The proposed model for the commercial, collaborative establishment of governance related distance education would position universities to meet the growing opportunities and threats increasingly offered by distance education in the age of the Internet.

Student numbers at Australian universities have grown from 534,510 in 1991 to 695,485 in 2000, an increase of around 30%. Some of this change has been due to the increasing tendency for people to undertake distance education. This is more commonly used than in former times, as a result of the generally increasing availability of computer based information and technology.

A recent Dept. of Education, Science and Training survey found that 54% of university units now contain an online component; six universities of those surveyed also have an online component in 100% of their units and 23 Australian universities now offer some courses fully online (Nelson, 02, pp.9-10).

Gallagher identified underutilisation of opportunities for continuing education in a paper entitled 'The emergence of entrepreneurial public universities in Australia' which was presented at the IMHE General Conference of the OECD' (Dept. of Employment, Education and Training, 2000). According to Gallagher, Deakin Australia is currently the largest player in the continuing education field and works with corporate clients to design, develop and deliver customized training, including generic courses and specific programs. The Commonwealth Dept. of Education, Science and Training (02 a, p. 42) also refers to the services of Open Learning Australia (OLA) which is utilised by Northern Territory University and which offers 600 flexibly packaged study units.

The Ministerial Discussion Paper concludes that at this stage the growth in fees from provision of continuing education appears to have been somewhat modest in the context of calls for lifelong learning. According to the Discussion Paper the potential of this revenue source has scarcely been tapped by universities and alternative providers are capturing this market. The Paper notes that:

A rise of \$100 per student on average would generate around an extra \$47 million per annum in sector revenue' (Nelson, 02, p.35)

However, it does not explore the value that might be gained for Australian universities through expansion of the market for distance education to meet the growing international need for education resulting from a range of international agreements, including the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation agreement to promote free trade.

The Ministerial Discussion Paper (02, p. 12) states that campus based learning is likely to remain attractive on social grounds but can also be transformed by e-learning strategies. It claims that students, particularly school-leavers, are still generally demanding face-to-face access to teachers and educational experiences. However, in my experience students may currently have little choice in the matter. For example, whenever I survey on-campus students using the Sydney University Institute of Teaching and Learning Open Ended Questionnaire, over 95% of the returning group say that the best thing about my subjects is that a book of all the lectures is available to students on day one of the course. This is supplemented by Powerpoint lecture overheads and eliminates text-book costs.

Australia is lucky to be a comparatively developed, English speaking country, because English is the major international language, followed by Chinese. In this context it would be surprising if the untapped market for Australian education were not gigantic, as long as the product could be provided in a cheap, practical and user-friendly form, such as that envisaged in the proposal currently being put forward.

The potential for tapping the international market of people who would like to study and also improve their English depends on the potential for achieving high level inter and intra governmental agreements as well as high level inter and intra organisational agreements. Achieving this from within the confines of a collegiate culture is totally impossible. The proposal currently put forward is designed to deal with this threat by maximising the strengths of existing Australian national and State regulatory systems.

Increasing educational quality and diversity through coordinated management

Increased transparency of education content is central to the proposed model for governance education. This would also increase education quality through providing everybody with more effective scrutiny of the education product and outcomes.

Transparency of education content would also facilitate a range of cross-sectoral arrangements which have already been initiated. For example, some universities have arrangements in place with schools that enable students to combine year twelve subjects with university topics. Credit transfer arrangements between technical and further education providers and universities also exist.

Transparency of undergraduate education content would also assist the potential post-graduate student's understanding of the basis on which their own educational experience is expected to be built and tailored to the particular needs of the individual, their employer and the community. In some cases, examination based on such UG curriculum requirements may possibly be a better predictor of graduate potential than the Graduate Skills Assessment (GSA). This aims to evaluate the student's general ability in regard to critical thinking, problem solving, interpersonal understanding and written communication.

The recent Issues Paper on Achieving Equitable and Appropriate Outcomes for Indigenous Australians in Higher Education notes that 'unfortunately the cost of designing special courses or delivering courses by alternative modes can be prohibitive' (Commonwealth Dept. of Education, Science and Training, 02b, p. 27). However, it also notes that in 2001 the national retention rate for indigenous students studying through multi-mode enrolment was 69%. This was higher than the retention rates of indigenous students studying externally (51%) or internally (64%). The current proposal for distance education could also facilitate the development of such multi-mode enrolments by clarifying and differentiating between a wide variety of broad and niche markets for subjects. Seeking economies of scale in subject delivery, particularly for core vocational subjects, could also increase ability to tap niche markets more effectively.

In the Commonwealth Dept. of Education, Science and Training Issues Paper on Varieties of Excellence: Diversity, Specialisation and Regional Engagement, the Group of Eight Deans of Arts have recently argued that collaborative arrangements for small enrolment subjects are costly to manage. They recommended that the Government establish 'a Collaborative Support Funding mechanism for cross-institutional collaborations for small-enrolment subjects to ensure that single teaching centres for such subjects will be part of a system of multi-institution support.' The Deans state:

'We propose a system whereby institutions enter into collaboration arrangements (for example, on small-enrolment languages and other subjects), which are agreed in institutional profiles, and then funded by DEST through the operating grants of each collaborating institution with an incentive premium for the agreed

collaboration student load'. (Commonwealth Dept. of Education, Science and Training, 02a, p. 41).

The current proposal for commercial distance education suggests a better collaborative model for protecting and promoting small enrolment subjects.

Collaborative management arrangements were also suggested to the recent government review Higher Education at the Crossroads by a range of submission makers from scientific fields. For example, a successful model of engagement has apparently been established by member companies of the Minerals Tertiary Education Council (MTEC) and selected universities, to facilitate collaboration in the disciplines of each science, mining engineering and metallurgy. The Royal Australian Chemical Institute suggested the creation of 'Regional Councils' which would promote a higher level of cooperation than is currently possible between institutions. The Managing Director of Advance Metal Products described his firm's relationship with the University of Western Sydney as 'strong and supportive', and referred to participation on a recently established Regional Council. (Commonwealth Dept. of Education, Science and Training, 02a, p. 44, p.63).

Many submissions to the recent government review Higher Education at the Crossroads also made the vital point that 'world class status' in relation to a University may mean many different things. For example, James Cook University stated that:

We believe that many Australian institutions can achieve world class status in specific focused fields of study, in either teaching or research, or both. An institution does not have to be large and comprehensive to be world class. (Commonwealth Dept. of Education, Science and Training, 02a, p. 29).

The Western Australian Department of Education Services also argued that:

There is not a single model of 'regionality' for all Australian universities, though the community service function is a common core for all institutions. Delivery to and engagement with remote and regional WA is very different from other States and this needs to be recognised in national policy and funding (Commonwealth Dept. of Education, Science and Training, 02a, p. 49).

Finally, the Issues Paper on Varieties of Excellence: Diversity, Specialisation and Regional Engagement notes that European countries have established a number of initiatives to foster partnerships between higher education institutions and small to medium enterprises. With the assistance of the European Regional Development Fund, in 1995 the Universities of the North East and the Open University in the U.K. formed a collaborative venture to improve small firm competitiveness called The Knowledge House. The European Union's latest five-year action plan (1998-2002) for research and technological development includes specific measures to encourage small and medium enterprises to participate in community research programs (Commonwealth Dept. of Education, Science and Training, 02a, p. 67).

Conclusion

Unless Australia lifts its game in dealing with the collegiate university culture, it is in danger of becoming a comparative intellectual backwater. The current proposal for the commercial, collaborative establishment of governance related distance education to promote health and environment protection through sustainable development has been developed with this national problem foremost in mind. On the other hand, the Issues Paper entitled *Setting Firm Foundations: Financing Australian Higher Education*, which was prepared for the Government Review Higher Education at the Crossroads proposes a strange array of alternative funding possibilities (Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, 02c). None of these appear to me to be consistent with funding arrangements made as a result of health service provision in Australia. It seems that the obvious question of why health and education provision are funded so differently from each other is rarely addressed. I expect that this is related to the nature and vested interests of the collegiate culture.

References:

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APPENDIX 1

The National Protocols contain agreed criteria which an institution must meet for recognition as a university. They state:

- An Australian university will demonstrate the following features:
- Authorisation by law to award higher education qualifications across a range of fields and to set qualifications which are equivalent to Australian and international standards
- Teaching and learning that engages with advanced knowledge and inquiry
- A culture of sustained scholarship extending from that which informs inquiry and basic teaching and learning, to the creation of new knowledge through research and original creative endeavour
- Commitment of teachers, researchers, course designers and assessors to free inquiry and systematic advancement of knowledge
- Governance, procedural rules, organisation, admission policies, financial arrangements and quality assurance processes, which are underpinned by the values and goals outlined above, and which are sufficient to ensure the integrity of the institution's academic programs; and
- Sufficient financial and other resources to enable the institutions' program to be delivered and sustained in the future.

The National Protocols also contain criteria, which must be met for the accreditation of higher education courses offered by non-self accrediting institutions. These are:

- The course design and content should satisfy the requirements set in the Australian Qualifications framework for the award level
- The outcome should be comparable in requirements and learning outcomes to a course at the same level in a similar field at an Australian university
- The delivery arrangements, including matters of institutional governance, facilities, staffing and student services are appropriate to higher education and enable successful delivery of the course at the level proposed; and
- The provider has appropriate financial and other arrangements to permit the successful delivery of the course, and is a fit and proper person to accept responsibility for the course.