

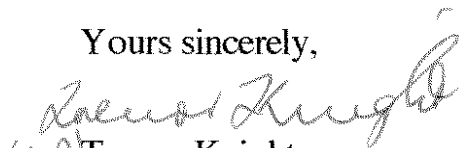
10 Millie Street
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8 August, 2003.

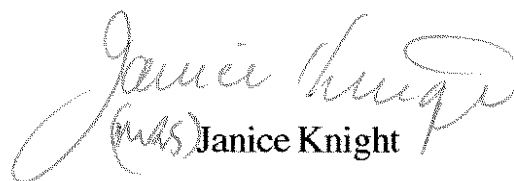
The Secretary,
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee,
Suite SG.52,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA ACT 2600.

Dear Sir/Madam,

Attached is our submission to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee's inquiry into higher education funding and regulatory legislation.

Yours sincerely,


(MR) Trevor Knight.


(MRS) Janice Knight

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References Committee Inquiry into Higher Education Funding and Regulatory Legislation.

Submission

I. Introduction.

Higher education in Australia is in a muddle. For years, it has been changed by cut, patch and stitch methods so that now it is in a mess. Political leaders, vice-chancellors, other university administrators, academics and students are confused about what an Australian university is, what it should be, what their roles in the context of higher education are and what benefits higher education should bestow and on whom. Members of the public are unclear about what they expect of higher education and many either openly denigrate it or at least, are suspicious of it. Parents tend to think of higher education purely in vocational terms for their children. Corporate Australia is rather more clear about what it expects of higher education and is well organised to put its views to government. Governments have, over the years, particularly since the reviews of the 1950s which resulted in a considerable expansion of the Australian university sector, been greatly concerned with the idea that universities must make a substantial contribution to the national well-being, at least commensurate with their cost to the public purse. Recent governments, both in Australia and overseas, have devoted great attention to defining the national well-being and to measuring universities' contributions to it. However, defining the national well-being and measuring the universities' contributions to it, in a meaningful way, have been found to be difficult and may even be impossible. For this reason and because influential corporations, driven by the profit motive, have been able to articulate their views well, successive recent governments have, by default, seized on the easy and easily understood definition/measure and that is to use purely economic terms. In our opinion, this represents a failure of government. Governments, like universities, must both reflect public opinion and lead the community or, in other words, shape public opinion. The skilful thing is to decide wisely which issues require decisions based on current public opinion and which require decisions which will lead the wider community. In the case of higher education policy, the vast majority of members of the public are simply unable to comprehend the complexity of the issue and governmental decisions should be made largely on the basis of an intention to shape public opinion in the interests of the nation.

Under the influence of this most simplistic of attempts to state what a university is or should be and of the pervasive presence of corporate lobbyists, the universities throughout the western world have been encouraged or have even felt compelled to adopt a **corporational managerial** style of administration rather than to persevere with the well-tryed and, within the universities, the highly (if not universally) accepted **collegial** approach to decision making and governance. The detractors of the collegial style of administration have dismissed it as time-wasting, costly and as "democracy gone mad." This has caused even more confusion. Academics appointed to vice-chancellorial positions have tried to adopt a managerial style that is more suited to, for example, a manufacturing firm or mining company than it is to a university.

Some have floundered. At the same time, faced with financial cuts, the leaders of Australia's universities are frequently adversely criticised for their lack of general management and/or financial management experience. "We should have a captain of industry as vice-chancellor" is the theme of those who detract from an *academic* system which appoints *academics* to the most senior managerial post in an *academic*

institution. The confusion is compounded by the view held by some that managers of industrial/commercial enterprises, can succeed in managing universities. No doubt some can but, in our opinion, they are in a tiny minority.

Under great pressure of lack of definition of their roles and with increasingly large financial constraints, some vice-chancellors have adopted an authoritarian administrative style and this has trickled down through deans and heads of schools. We recall an ABC radio broadcast, a copy of which is attached. The summary of that broadcast states:

“What’s wrong with our universities? **Gideon Polya** from La Trobe University in Melbourne talks about new threats to academic freedom from outside university and within.”

“Once publically (sic) funded but highly independent, our universities, he argues, are shifting to being corporate money making organisations driven by a bottom line imperative to sell research and provide education to full fee paying students. Associate Professor Polya says academics are also bullied and victimized for speaking out.”

During the broadcast, Dr Andrew Butfoy of Monash University, is quoted as commenting: “ ‘Further cuts may be inevitable. Much here is in the hands of government and public opinion. But God help us if universities of all places, confuse fund-raising with education, bullying with leadership and propaganda with truth.’ ” It is our contention that, at least in the cases of some universities, the fear that was being expressed by Dr Butfoy two years ago, is at least approaching full realisation.

It is our belief that the Nelson package does little to redress the problems highlighted in this broadcast.

Feeling insecure and even inferior, some modern vice-chancellors have introduced measures aimed at strengthening their defences against criticism, both actual and perceived, from below and from outside. For example, the deans of faculties are now frequently appointed and not elected. This process has been extended so that in many cases, the academic leaders of faculty sub-units such as schools are also appointed and not elected. Information newsletters produced by universities tend to be published infrequently and are sometimes labelled as being for the information of only the staff and students, in an attempt to prevent their contents from being discussed by the wider community. Some such publications will now not accept for publication staff and student letters. Media releases are given a slant which makes them invariably paint a rosy picture.

The point about the *appointment* of deans of faculties and heads of schools is that such appointed officers owe their allegiances upwards and not downwards and most academics in Australian universities where this is the practice, feel disenfranchised, feel that they have lost their communications conduit for suggestions and complaints, feel alienated and at least some, have developed a sense of anomie. Australia’s academic communities, formerly held together to varying degrees by strong and cohesive forces, are in the throes of despair and are showing signs of being on the brink of severe mass demoralisation. This is no exaggeration.

II. Governance and decision making.

So, from procedures seen by some vocal critics to represent "democracy gone mad", at least some Australian universities have adopted practices and procedures which have clearly tended towards the undemocratic.

Some might say that there is no harm in this but we regard this situation with some alarm. If in fact, universities over the years, have provided leadership to society at large and are meant in part to continue to do so, ie., universities are meant to be quasi models for society at large, then our undemocratic institutions of higher education will gradually infuse our society with the collective opinion that the partial removal from our society of democracy is acceptable. It is not a huge step from acceptance of that notion to a willingness to discard democratic processes and procedures largely or entirely.

We also take issue with those who see a collegial form of academic governance as being wasteful of time and of being costly. Sometimes a university's decision making-processes *are* time-consuming as they work their way through say, School to Faculty to Academic Board to a committee of the governing body to governing body. Against this however, must be measured the severe and costly demoralisation of most members of the staff of all Australian universities. The demoralisation arises largely from this new managerial style of administration within which consultation is rare and decisions are handed down from on high without their having been tested by wide debate against opposing opinions. One result of this is that a considerable number of academic decisions is simply wrong. Another is that, without consultation in their making, practically all academic decisions are resented and many are resisted.

We recommend that in the cases of those universities in which academic decision-making is not done within a collegial framework of university committees/faculties and in which a majority of the academic staff wishes to adopt a collegial system of academic decision-making, the universities concerned be encouraged, with a view to having the academic community develop a sense of ownership of institutional academic decisions, to introduce/reintroduce a collegial system of academic decision-making, in consultation with the members of their academic staff.

We also suspect that the governing bodies of our universities, their deliberations, procedures, decisions and reports are inadequately scrutinised by governmental authorities. We believe that the mere appointment of members of parliament, as currently happens (a decision to prohibit MsP from being members of the governing bodies of universities is contained in the Nelson package), to the governing bodies does not guarantee that governments will be kept fully informed. Nor does it guarantee that the governing bodies will act responsibly.

The ultimate responsibility rests with the governing body and we think it incongruous that when academic committees at levels below that of the governing body were being reformed, the governing bodies were, in the main, allowed to continue to proceed in a very formal but muddled manner. Only rarely were steps taken to make the members aware that their roles are akin to those of the members boards of directors of companies.

It seems to us that the governing bodies are the sources of some suspicion among the members of staff of universities.

We hasten to add that our experience is limited to the past and that our very recent information is based on hearsay.

We recommend that an audit of the recent operation of the various governing bodies be undertaken and that, if it is found necessary, mechanisms be established to ensure that members of the governing bodies are kept informed of their responsibilities (akin to those of the members of the board of a commercial corporation) and that governments are kept fully informed of the governing bodies' deliberations, decisions, procedures and reports.

III. The Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS).

In our opinion, the HECS represents a failure of government to recognise that it is false that the major beneficiary of graduate status is the graduate and that instead, it is really society at large which benefits from having within it people who are university qualified. That this is so is exemplified by occasional suggestions to reduce the HECS liabilities of university students in fields of study which provide skills that are in short supply within the wider community.

We see it as illogical that the HECS is applied to university study on the basis that the major beneficiary of that study is the graduate while, at the same time, athletes who are publicly funded to attend the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) are exempt from the HECS. Presumably, this decision is based on a consideration of the athletes' later contribution to society. We fail to see why this should be the case as these athletes will give such ephemeral and comparatively slight benefit to the nation and will, in many cases, reap huge personal financial rewards directly and indirectly from their sporting skills which were developed at the AIS. This is not an argument for applying the HECS to AIS athletes but suggests that the HECS should be abolished because of the contribution to society by graduates in general.

Students who attend the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) are also exempt from the HECS. Their post graduation contribution to the national good seems clear but, we submit, that it is no more than the contribution made by the average university graduate who works for years trying to better Australian society. Again, this is no argument to inflict the HECS on ADFA students but is an argument for the abolition of the HECS.

The HECS also represents a failure of government to recognise the need for a broad and sensible income tax system which would tax high income earners at an adequate rate, whether their income is based on university qualifications or not.

The HECS takes little account of the contribution to society over many years, of Australia's university graduates and it ignores the sacrifices of students and parents in the higher education process. Many parents must support or subsidise their student children; many students must work to help pay their way; and most students defer or interrupt earning a reasonable income by undertaking study for some years after they have left school or later in life.

The HECS provides another example of governments defining the national good in narrow economic terms while at the same time letting governments off the hook in relation to sensible and broad income tax reform and in relation to their obligations to provide at public expense, certain minimal services of which the provision of an excellent education system is but one.

The HECS is also another example of governments' failures to show leadership. Students must be able to attend university if our society is going to benefit from their potential. To make higher education fee free will be a public investment in the future of Australian society. (See attachment 2)

In our opinion, HECS is an abomination. It places successive generations of Australians in positions of uncertainty about how, by the time they or their children are entering university study, HECS will have been doctored by successive governments. It deters some able students from entering university and thus denies our society their optimal contributions. It ignores studies which indicate that those Australians who leave school before completion of Year 12 and who go into full-time employment, in general earn considerably more than those who leave after Year 12 and than those who proceed to university.

We believe that university attendance should be fee free in the interests of our national well-being.

After the abolition in 1974, of university tuition fees, it became apparent that the profile of university students remained skewed with a majority of participants in university study coming from well off families. Fee free university study was described as "middle class welfare".

That this was so, was not a reason for the introduction of the HECS. Those who pressed for the reintroduction of some system of users repaying some of the cost of their university study, failed to see the other side of the coin. That is that it is folly to look at higher education in isolation of the other levels of publicly funded education and that, even with fee free university study, the ancillary costs associated with attendance at university are prohibitive to many of the less well off.

What this means is that schools which are publicly funded should be funded adequately and the teachers in them should be well paid. Their students, many from less well off homes, should enjoy excellent facilities and teachers. If the students are able, they should be just as well prepared for university study, as their counterparts in the ritzy private schools. Today, we have the absurd situation that the Commonwealth, with its dodgy funding formulae, will soon spend more on wealthy private schools than on universities. No policy initiative is more deserving of the pejorative description - "middle class welfare" than the current level of Commonwealth funding of well off private schools.

As well, means tested living allowances should be provided to assist the less well off students to meet the ancillary costs of attendance at university.

If one takes into account the sacrifice of earnings while studying; the generally higher income tax payable by higher earners; and the financial sacrifices of the many parents who assist their student children, then the HECS represents a form of governmental double or triple dipping.

Recent media reports have indicated that the university courses of study which could be reasonably regarded as attracting the highest post study incomes (medicine, veterinary science, dentistry) and which attract the highest HECS liabilities, have been avoided by the less well off since about 1996. This strongly supports our contention that the HECS is inequitable. This is reinforced by Department of Education Science and Training research indicating that poor and older tertiary students are being disadvantaged by rising university fees. (See attachment 3)

We passionately believe that our point of view is correct and is very much in the national interest.

We recommend that the HECS be abolished and that students admitted to university be eligible to seek a living allowance, based on a means test and to be utilised to fund some of the ancillary expenses associated with attendance at university.

Occasionally, it is mooted that a higher education summit be held to identify the needs of universities and to suggest ways of providing them. We believe that any summit should be about Australian education in general so that serious attempts can be made to rectify the many serious problems with all levels of publicly funded education from pre-school to university.

IV. What is a university?

“Universities are the cathedrals of the modern age. They should not have to justify their existence by utilitarian criteria.” - David Lodge; *Nice Work*.

As the above quotation implies, universities are special places. They deserve to be treated as such.

It is as difficult to define a university as it is to define life. While it is possible to state many of the characteristics of living organisms, it is probably impossible to define the word “life” satisfactorily except in terms of words derived from “life” eg., “the state of being alive.” Similarly, it is possible to define many of the characteristics of a university but it is very difficult to define the word “university” satisfactorily. It is probably also impossible to define to the satisfaction of all, what a university does.

Our view is that any institution with the name “university” is not entitled to use “university” unless its teachings include some subject areas which constitute the humanistic and scientific cores. By “humanistic core”, we mean the classics, especially the classical languages, philosophy, including pure and applied mathematics, the histories, English and some modern languages eg., some romance languages, some Asian languages and some basic Australian Aboriginal languages; and by “scientific core”, we mean the so called enabling sciences such as chemistry, physics and biology.

Because of the tendency of successive recent governments to consider the national interest in only narrow economic terms and because of the difficulties associated with explaining what a university is and what a university should do, pressure is on the universities to provide mainly vocational courses and to develop undergraduate academic profiles which reflect the level of demand for various undergraduate areas of study in “the market”.

This is a very great pity. It is our view that students should study what interests them most and if they do, they will almost certainly succeed well in their studies and this in turn means that, provided they have no personality defects, their chances of getting a good job will be enhanced, not so much by what they have studied but by virtue of their good achievements. For example, we know of people with good degrees in the humanities, pure sciences and mathematics who have been employed by computer manufacturing and software firms and who have been lapped up by the defence forces, the public service, banks and agri-businesses.

It is also our view that the time has come for Australia to invest in the nation’s social capital through the education system as a whole but particularly through the higher education system. Higher education should not only provide a graduate with a meal

ticket but should have had a civilising effect on the undergraduate student. The ability to think analytically and creatively is of the utmost importance in our university graduates if Australia is to be in the forefront of those nations which are known as "clever countries".

If the importance of the paragraph immediately above is recognised, the achievement of "world class" by one or more of our universities will happen as a matter of course without the process being force fed by an over zealous bureaucracy which runs the risk of imposing more and more pressures and constraints on the majority of universities in an effort to have just one achieve "world class". It is worth noting that many Australian universities have been regarded as "world class" in a variety of fields, over the years. Within the Australian universities of the past, there have always been academic departments which have been recognised as "world class."

Research is an important component of the academic profile of any university that is worthy of the name. We do not agree with the recently mooted scheme to create another binary system of higher education based on a minority of our universities being funded for both teaching and also for research and a majority of our universities being funded for mainly teaching.

This suggestion of a 2-tiered university system is deplorable. It recreates the binary system on the basis of punishment for the majority of our universities and on the basis of reward for the outspoken, financially well off, minority of the mainly "sandstone" universities located principally in the capital cities. The enunciation of this policy has contained expressions of the view that regional universities are important but this expression seems to be merely lip service when set against the background of the suggestion proper.

This suggestion also ignores the reality that for a gifted academic to be able to teach without being able to conduct well funded research in his or her discipline is like teaching in a vacuum. It also pays scant attention to the difficulty that will be faced by the mainly teaching universities, of recruiting able staff.

Of course funds for research from the public purse are limited but those which are available should be allocated competitively through an application procedure open to all Australian universities by an organisation such as the Australian Research Council (ARC). (See "Research" below)

V. Re-establishment of an Australian Universities' Council-like committee and some more about Research.

a) An overarching committee

We believe that there ought to be an overarching small committee of highly respected and trusted academics to revitalise the Australian higher education system and to review academic developments to ensure that they are in the national interest. This committee must use its collective tools of inquiry, diplomacy, and persuasion.

The committee should, we feel, be fairly small consistent with the need to consult widely and frequently among some 40 universities. We think that about 8 would be appropriate. The committee should have a name something like the former Australian Universities' Council (AUC).

It should oversee all significant academic developments in the university sector.

It should consult fully, frequently and widely and its findings should be the subject of further consultation and where appropriate, negotiation. The committee would report to the Minister.

Above all, it should be independent and free of party political interference. It should in fact have some sort of written guarantee that its independence will be maintained and that it will be free of political interference.

b) Research.

We are of the opinion that, in the situation where research funding is limited, universities should be free to seek private funding for research projects.

There is a danger associated with this. We know that some recent private sponsors of university research have tried to influence and distort to their advantage, the findings of that research. This must be prevented and the equivalent of the ARC (qv.) should be empowered to detect and prevent this corrupt process. Vetting procedures to be applied by such a committee could be devised and all researchers gaining any outside research grants should be informed of those procedures and should have their outside funded research projects monitored by application of those procedures. Some interference with research findings might not come to light for some time, until a pattern develops but the knowledge of this probability might act as sufficient deterrent.

We are concerned at the frequent reports and commentaries which deride "curiosity" research. Academics should not be restricted in their pursuit of the research trail to wherever it might lead. There are many examples of wonderful discoveries of immense benefit to humankind which owe their origins to academic curiosity. It is particularly irritating that many potential sponsors of academic research, including governments, are inclined to fund only research projects with a clear chance of resulting in some commercially viable application. This is yet another extension of the faulty principle of regarding academic work only in pure economic terms.

We have considerable contempt for those with some influence within our society, who attempt to measure the worth of a research project on the basis solely of its title.

VI. The Nelson package.

We are generally opposed to the proposals not mentioned here but forming part of the fairly recently announced package sometimes labelled "the Nelson reforms." We do not wish to comment greatly on those which we have not mentioned in this document as others with greater expertise than we have will no doubt do so.

Some matters on which we wish to comment briefly are:

a) Compulsory student unionism.

The attempt to make so called student unionism voluntary seems to be based largely on a misunderstanding. Universities often have a number of student bodies to which students must belong. These often include a Union which is frequently a social and cultural organisation, a Sports Union or Association which provides sporting facilities and which often arranges sporting competitions and a Students' Representative Council or Students' Association which is the only one of the three which provides a form of collective negotiation with university administrations, among other things. Student

Associations often also provide benefits for students eg., grants and loans for needy students, facilities such as internet cafes, support for negotiations in relation to Youth Allowance and the like.

Our opinion is that it is short-sighted for any attempt to be made to make membership of these voluntary as the student organisations provide wide benefits such as employment which is an important factor in regional university towns.

It is also ludicrous to be mounting a campaign against obesity while, at the same time, effectively drastically reducing the funds to university sporting associations with wide youth membership.

The making of membership of the students' social and cultural organisation voluntary, also seems to be counterproductive if one of the benefits of a university education is, as we believe, from learning that takes place outside the lecture theatre and tutorial room.

b) Public funding.

Despite protestations to the contrary, public universities have been stripped over the years of substantial public funding. This seems to have been based mainly on a particular ideology. Whatever the cause(s), its effects have been profound. Academic staff have had to suffer increased student numbers (we know of one academic who is supervising 46 bachelor honours students), tutorials, once the means whereby students and academics could frequently exchange information and ideas and whereby students could clarify work covered in lectures, are now less frequent and examinations have in some cases been shortened as a cost saving mechanism.

The search for alternative funds has provided a significant incentive to grant undeserved passing assessments to full fee paying overseas students so that their annual course fees will not be lost.

It's all very well to have ICAC investigate such occurrences but universities would be able to maintain strict and acceptable standards if they were funded adequately and contributing culprits to this unacceptable behaviour are the parsimonious holders of the strings of the public purse.

c) The Higher Education Contribution Scheme hike.

This is unfair and unjust (see the HECS, above). It will no doubt exacerbate the deliberate avoidance of Band 3 courses of study on the part of the less well off.

d) Local full fee-paying students for whom entry requirements are lowered.

This defies the principle of entry based on academic merit rather than on the basis of ability to pay and is frankly, un-Australian.

e) Linking some university funding to compliance with certain conditions.

This smacks of bullying and treats universities as if they are biscuit factories.

We do hope that this submission is of assistance and that it adds constructively to the other information you receive.


Trevor Knight


Janice Knight

ATTACHMENT 1

Crisis in Our Universities

Broadcast Sunday 19 August 2001
with

Summary:

What's wrong with our universities? **Gideon Polya** from La Trobe University in Melbourne talks about new threats to academic freedom from outside university and within.

Once publically funded but highly independent, our universities, he argues, are shifting to being corporate money making organisations driven by a bottom line imperative to sell research and provide education to full fee paying students. Associate Professor Polya says academics are also bullied and victimized for speaking out.

Transcript:

Robyn Williams: There's trouble on the campus. Just in the last couple of weeks our oldest university, Sydney, has lost its Chancellor, the University of Adelaide its Vice Chancellor, and the University of Wollongong, having penalised Professor Ted Steele for his chidings about 'dumbing down' has had its decision thrown out of court. A turbulent fortnight indeed.

What does it signify? Well Professor Gideon Polya has a view and as you'll hear, it's a strong one. Dr Polya is a Professor of Biochemistry at La Trobe University in Melbourne.

Gideon Polya: There is currently a major financial and ethical crisis facing Australian universities. The situation is so bad as to require legally-empowered public scrutiny of these obsessively secretive but nevertheless public institutions.

There is of course a funding deficit, but the real nub of the problem is a major departure from the core academic ethos of commitment to truth, reason, free speech, free inquiry, collegiality and public responsibility.

Australian universities used to be publicly-funded but otherwise highly independent public institutions that served as critical incubators for intellectual life. They are now shifting to being corporate, money-making organisations driven by a bottom line imperative to sell research to private industry and education to fee-paying student clients.

The problem with this transformation is that the customer is always right, leading to dollar-driven perversion of the academic ethos and academic standards to keep industrial or student clients happy.

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Universities now have a major need for extra funding in addition to the Federal government grant and indeed about half of their income now comes from other sources, including full fee-paying students.

However economic realism does not mean that the core academic ethos has to be compromised. Further, while financial realities cannot be ignored, there are other critical public institutional attributes that can be budget-independent, for example, commitment to the core ethos, public service, intellectual diversity and rational public debate.

While more money for education and pure research is clearly needed, a more profound need is for a retreat back to decent values from our presently perverted university culture.

Dr Andrew Butfoy of Monash University has commented: 'Further cuts may be inevitable. Much here is in the hands of government and public opinion. But God help us if universities, of all places, confuse fund-raising with education, bullying with leadership and propaganda with truth.'

What has gone wrong in our universities?

Professor John Scott, a former vice-chancellor of La Trobe University, has commented: 'The prime roles of a university are threefold: to teach, to conduct research and to provide service, including constructive criticism, to the community ... The teaching role has been severely threatened ... Fundamental research is now difficult to conduct ... critical comments by university staff have been censored ... It is time that governments recognised that universities are not just an expensive luxury, but a highly important part of our national activity.'

Let us now consider these areas of concern, namely teaching, research and academic free speech.

First, teaching and the selling of degrees.

As the proportional funding of universities by the Federal government grant has shrunk to only about half of the total annual cost of about \$9-billion, universities have sought to increase income from fee-paying students and from selling otherwise highly competitive places to fee-paying students with lesser accomplishments.

The Business Review Weekly commented recently that the 'universities are behaving like used-car salesmen' in the selling of degrees.

Top universities are quite happy to provide flexible distance-learning options as long as they can charge the earth; degrees are dumbing down and accordingly being devalued to meet the desires of the student clients; the charging of fees for overseas postgraduate research students (major contributors to Australian university research) is a continuing impediment; downsizing former academic teachers, re-naming academic divisions and wiping out whole departments and courses is

robbing past students of institutional professional connections and devaluing their degrees.

Of course Australian degrees have necessarily been devalued over the last few decades by accommodating to the huge increase in participation in tertiary education. Degree value is hardly improved by anecdotal marking up of overseas full fee-paying students and supervisors having to significantly contribute to the postgraduate theses of students with inadequate English.

Australian universities have begun to financially exploit the avenue of Web-based education. However a well-established, extremely cheap scheme for provision of high quality tertiary education (for those capable of doing it) is the option of Reading Only Tertiary Education (or ROTE).

The acronym, ROTE is paradoxical, and the option profound because the student will buy the detailed syllabus and the prescribed top textbook by an international scholarly and didactic giant, study in a deep, holistic, absorbed and reflective fashion and ultimately sit a thoughtful accrediting exam set by a research-informed expert, and all of this for a mere \$100 per unit.

Compare this with the astonishingly marked-up, proposed price of \$10,000 per on-campus course unit for fee-paying students at a top university. What would the ACCC have to say about such a one-hundredfold price mark-up? Of course the bottom line is that university education requires educators who are active researchers.

Let us now consider the current downsizing of academic research.

Academics are expected to 'do research'. However the so-called Dawkinization of the universities (by Labor Minister Dawkins over a dozen years ago) meant (as a simplified generalisation) a fusion of vocational teachers from the Colleges of Advanced Education with the academic teacher-researchers of the traditional universities. The former were meant to be encouraged into research but the decline in research funding meant that simultaneously the latter were being pushed out of research.

Total Commonwealth support for Research and Development last year cost about \$4-billion. However most of this was for applied research. A critical source of pure research funding for about 35,000 academics is the Australian Research Council (or ARC), a pitiful dollop of only about \$100-million a year. The pure research funding in this country is a national disgrace.

A further source of pure research funding is the research-related component of university operating grants, this amounting to about \$1-billion a year. However there are huge differences in how this intramural academic trough is accessed by big pigs, little pigs and church mice.

Research funding has increasingly involved industrial

collaboration but pure research funding has become much harder to acquire. Thus fewer than 10% of academic in the overall system apply for large ARC Grants and of these only about 20% are successful. The vast majority of academics evidently do without any extramural research funding or operate with minimal funding.

The system demands that academic do research but simultaneously declines to permit them to do so. A *reductio ad absurdum* can be offered that if every Australian academic spent several weeks applying for a large ARC grant, then the total cost of actually writing the applications would be commensurate with the total money available.

The widely held expectation at the moment is that research funding and research strength in our universities will soon largely coalesce into first class institutions, mainly the Big Eight universities, with some specialist research outcrops elsewhere.

Finally let us look at academic freedom.

The core academic ethos involves commitment to truth, reason, untrammelled inquiry, free speech and collegiality, but this is increasingly being turned on its head by rampant anti-intellectual managerialism.

The University has been hijacked by a managerial clique that is now largely divorced from scholarship. Indeed such managerial academics have been described as 'refugees from scholarship'.

The intellectual core of our universities is in the humanities, social sciences and science, areas that are the sources of the international scholarly reputations of these institutions. Yet it is precisely these financially unprofitable but research strength areas that are currently being downsized in favour of business related vocational areas that can pay in terms of fee paying students.

Effective free inquiry within our universities can be constrained by Codes of Conduct that confine public comment to specific areas of expertise; by major limitations on research time, research funding and other resources; through the compromising of academic copyright; and by secret corporation-university no competing research legal agreements to which the constrained academics are neither privy nor signatories.

Time does not permit even a simple alphabetical listing of abuses suffered by academics in the new corporatising universities; they range from ageism, bullying, censorship and corruption through nepotism (familial and otherwise) to racism, secret constraining legal agreements, secret denigratory files, stalking, theft, threat and victimisation. What a disgrace. The elaborate academic courtesies seen at graduation ceremonies are a tremendous sham in the current environment.

A fundamental problem can be seen to be sustained academic unresponsiveness and self-censorship that is the more

extraordinary deriving from institutions of learning in an ostensibly open and free society. However our Kafkaesque, Orwellian universities are now a bully's paradise.

Australian academics are perceived to be highly intimidated in an environment in which there is increasing financial constraint, massive overwork, constraining codes of conduct, effective absence of tenure for many, massive downsizing, threats of downsizing and aggressive, rude management.

Some recent occurrences illustrate problems for vocal academics, including astonishing victimisation, gagging and threatening of dissenting academics.

This is Australia in the New Millennium. Commonplace Australian academic realities have now overtaken implausible satire.

Public scrutiny and action is now urgently required to halt and reverse the perversion of our universities.

Robyn Williams: Perversion! A view held by quite a few academics these days. Gideon Polya is an Associate Professor of Biochemistry at La Trobe University in Melbourne.

Next week, Ockham's Razor comes from Macquarie University and the subject is linguistics.

I'm Robyn Williams.

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Opinion

The Sydney Morning Herald

A measure of the common wealth

Social capital is an old, new concept. With its roots in 18th-century economics and 19th-century sociology, it puttered along until picked up in the late 1980s by academics of varying persuasions. Eva Cox brought it to Australian prominence in her 1995 Boyer lectures, while American academic Robert Putnam gave it pop status with his 2001 book *Bowling Alone*. Few can agree quite what it means, but elements of trust, of social norms, of networks and of relationships infuse all definitions.

Research into social capital is hampered by its varied definitions, difficulties in measurement and confusion between cause and effect. But if conclusions can be drawn, they include the following: that a richness in social capital can generally bring health, wealth and happiness; that health, wealth and happiness may help increase social capital; that social capital varies enormously between and within nations; that while usually positive, there are times when it is not (for example, the Mafia is rich in social capital); that it is probably declining in Australia and the United States. The situation is less clear in other developed nations.

Social capital moved from an academic construct to a point of interest to governments and international agencies in the mid-1990s. Agencies such as the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the Australian Bureau of Statistics are working to understand and measure social capital and determine its place in public policy.

Australian governments invest significantly in social capital, whether they use the term or not. On the grand scale, schools aim to develop not just knowledgeable students, but well-rounded people who understand social norms, have respect for others and know how to be good citizens. On a small scale, government-funded child health centres organise mothers' groups for women with newborns - women attending may develop social networks lasting years.

Last week the Productivity Commission, a bastion of dry economics, entered the debate, reviewing the concept of social capital and its application to public policy. While reaching no conclusions, the commission posed a vital question: how should social capital considerations be incorporated into mainstream policy analysis?

Governments can deal with social capital in many ways. One way is to maintain and increase deliberate efforts to build it through family support, through good urban design, through education, through support of community and voluntary organisations, through housing policy, through public libraries and through the myriad means by which people develop within themselves and form bonds with others. Another is to keep more firmly in mind the effects of social capital on policies regarding work arrangements, poker machine licences, hotel opening hours and the many other ways in which social capital could be built or diminished.

But another highly significant approach is to help answer the Productivity Commission's question by supporting further research into social capital. In government, numbers count. Until social capital can be given a number, it will rarely have the same impact as a dollar sign. And it should.

The privilege of higher education

SMAZ
5/8/03

Censorship is a harsh charge. Yet it is hard to see the deletion of sections of a politically sensitive Department of Education document – some time between its arrival on the desk of the federal Education Minister, Brendan Nelson, and its public release last month – as anything but political censorship. Material which showed poor and older tertiary students are being disadvantaged by rising university fees was belatedly deemed “internal research to inform the minister” after it was published in *The Sydney Morning Herald*. The finding itself is not surprising given the steady shift towards the user-pays principle in Australia’s universities since the tuition fee increases of 1997, and funding declines since. What is alarming is the selective suppression of research which might reflect unfavourably on the Federal Government’s higher education policies.

Good government demands open, informed and continual policy debate. Education and training is the key to Australia’s international competitiveness. One prominent British study concluded that about 80 per cent of future jobs will require skill levels equivalent to a university degree. Yet Australia’s universities and its students are under intense financial pressure, academic standards are under attack, classrooms are overcrowded and the personal debt burden of students and graduates has reached \$9 billion.

The Federal Government is committed to ensuring tertiary students – who benefit financially when they enter the workforce – contribute partially or fully to the cost of their education. This is partly in response to the free university years of the 1970s and the rising cost to the public purse that followed. Despite the abolition of fees in 1974 in favour of access on academic merit, universities remained largely the domain of the middle class, and costly fee subsidies became an increasingly costly form of middle-class welfare.

The debate since has been about what is a fair balance between public subsidy and private contribution. The Department of Education’s finding that fee increases are now discouraging poorer and older students – especially away from expensive, high-status courses such as law and medicine – is a crucial part of this debate. Broad access to higher education protects social and economic mobility based on merit and effort – a concept deeply embedded in the Australian psyche. Within the existing user-pays model, barriers to entry to universities could be addressed through means-tested scholarships or fee relief, for example. No solution, however, can be formulated unless all the facts are on the table.

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ATTACHMENT 3

SMAH 5/8/03

Damaging uni reports were buried: Labor

Aban Contractor

The Federal Government is sitting on at least four more reports on the detrimental impact of increasing student fees, the Opposition said yesterday.

The reports, which are believed to show poorer people are finding it harder to get into uni-

versity and meet study costs, were handed to the Government up to two years ago.

Yesterday the Opposition accused the Education Minister, Brendan Nelson, of doctoring critical data from publicly funded research in a bid to stymie debate. However, a spokesman for the Department

of Education, Science and Training said the reports were in "the nature of internal policy advice prepared for the deliberative processes of Minister Nelson".

Labor's education spokeswoman, Jenny Macklin, said the Government hoped to lift fees by another 30 per cent so it was not surprising data showing many

people were being priced out of an education had been deleted.

Labor's public service spokesman, Kim Carr, described the deletions as "further examples of the public service telling the Government things they don't want to hear and, as a consequence, their reports are no longer for public release".