

Submission to the Senate in Response to the Inquiry into Academic Standards of School Education.

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1. Executive Summary

The submission will address the variation across the states and territories in regard to measurement of attainment. There will be a focus on the process of articulation between interstate Universities, addressing the interstate admission process and credit transfer process. The submission also compares Australia's articulation process with Canada's, analysing statistics on successful admissions. Student's accessibility and equitability to tertiary education will be addressed, considering these two student rights are examples of what NUSA stands for.

This articulation process is closely related to the current debate on a National curriculum. While a standardising of qualifications may be beneficial to interstate admissions, it may have damaging effects to the tertiary education system.

NUSA has made recommendations towards the possible effects of a national curriculum on University funding. It is suggested that the Senate be aware of possible repercussions on University funding and resources. With the current situation on regional loading, it is a concern that a national curriculum reform will place further burden on the funding of the University of Newcastle. These possible effects are linked with New Zealand's curriculum reform, and the impact it had on their secondary and tertiary education system.

2. Introduction

2.1 NUSA Background and interest

Newcastle University Students' Association (NUSA) is the undergraduate student representative body on campus and it is the only undergraduate organisation on campus which is solely student controlled and focused. NUSA is a democratic organisation whose controlling body, NUSAC, is elected annually by and from the student body. It provides student representation on campus and state and national representation through the National Union of Students. In the past, NUSA have campaigned successfully on public policy issues such as the establishment of a railway station at the University of Newcastle.

NUSA is producing this submission to address concerns over an equitable University entrance scheme. There is concern over the problems students face when transferring an acquired senior schooling qualification of education to an opposing state or territory. This also relates to the Government proposal of a national curriculum, and how a national curriculum may have a detrimental impact on Newcastle University funding.

2.2 Terms of Reference

This submission is linked to terms of reference number 3.

“3. How such academic standards compare between states and territories and with those of other countries.”

The inquiry into academic standards of school education stated that the “committee has given the reference a broader scope than the title of the inquiry might suggest, taking 'academic' to embrace learning achievement at various levels of schooling across the whole curriculum” (Senate website). This concept of “learning achievement” will be analysed, with a focus on the University entry scheme of different state education qualifications.

It was also stated that there exists a concern about an “unacceptable variation across the states and territories in regard to measurement of attainment, and that Australia may be falling behind comparable countries in educational achievement” (Senate website). This concern over the measurement of attainment will be addressed, with focus on the complexities that arise in credit transfer arrangements. These complexities arise between the states and territories articulation process of University credit transfer arrangements and admission requirements. The concern that Australia may be falling behind other countries will be addressed in comparison to Canada’s system.

While addressing the different states and territories it is important to take in hand the proposed national curriculum change, and the possible side-effects. A National curriculum in public schools will not only affect the schools involved, but also the University with regards to policy formation and amendment – leading to a possible detrimental impact on funding and resources.

A comparison in educational policies with and New Zealand will also be discussed, in relation to Terms of Reference 3 which included a comparison “between states and territories and with those of other countries”.

3. University Entry Scheme

3.1 Articulation process

All Australian states have agreed on a common score for students who complete Year 12. The Interstate Transfer Index (ITI) is a national scale based on population statistics provided by the Australian Government Statistician and on Year 12 retention rates. It is a measure of the performance of students relative to other students who have attempted Year 12 in their state in the same year, but with an adjustment made in recognition that different proportions of students choose to enrol in Year 12 in each of the states and territories. The current rejections under this system are significant, suggesting a review of the process is needed.

Number of Interstate year 12 eligible applicants (aged 20 yrs & under) who did not receive an offer in 2005

NSW + ACT	785
VIC	924
QLD	664
SA	665
WA	470
TAS	75
Total:	3,683

(Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee website)

3.2 Problems of Australian credit transfers/entry requirement

Special entry requirements exist in Universities when a qualification does not match the qualification used by the University to determine entry. Credit transfers are available for a student who has completed a program at one institution and wishes to commence study at another. Both can include high school certificates, TAFE certificates and other vocational training. There is negotiation between institutions to evaluate each other's curricula to determine admission. Substantial enrolment increases have been demonstrated where credit transfer arrangements exist between co-located institutions. (Albrecht, AARE website)

However Universities across the States in Australia share insignificant relationships, bearing a resemblance to the high level of unsuccessful interstate applications shown in 3.1. Hunter Institute of TAFE NSW and the University of Newcastle have monitored the increase in enrolments in courses where credit transfer arrangements have been created, and noticed significant enrolment gains (Albrecht, AARE website). However where NSW students continue to benefit from this, interstate admissions continue to decline, as shown in section 3.3.

Without significant relationship processes between Universities, the admission arrangements are time-consuming to develop, and are subject to changes when programs and courses are revised. The publication of such arrangements can be burdensome to the institutions, involving ongoing production and publishing costs (Albrecht, AARE website).

3.3 University of Newcastle statistics on interstate admissions

The problems of the transfer progress are evident in the decline in admissions from States other than NSW. These States and Territories grant a different qualification than the New South Wales system, thus relying on a transfer process in which the problems have been outlined in 3.2.

Interstate Admissions at the University of Newcastle

2001-05

Northern Territory

The total number of Undergraduate student admissions have fluctuated but eventually dropped from 9 to 6. The level of yearly Undergraduate admissions hasn't risen above 10 between 2001 and 2005.

Queensland

The total number of Undergraduate students has decreased from 75 to 44. The number of Undergraduate admissions in 2001 was 75, and hasn't been within 20 admissions since.

Canberra

The total number of Undergraduate admissions has decreased from 59 to 58.

2003-05

Tasmania

The total number of student admissions decreased from 79 to 48. This includes Higher Degree Research, Undergraduate and Postgraduate students.

Western Australia

The total number of Undergraduate student admissions decreased from 16 to 9. The level of yearly Undergraduate admissions from Western Australia hasn't risen above 16 between 2001 and 2005.

Victoria

The total number of student admissions decreased from 176 to 151. This includes Higher Degree Research, Undergraduate and Postgraduate students.

2004-2005

South Australia

The total number of student admissions decreased from 51 to 47. This includes Higher Degree Research, Undergraduate and Postgraduate students.

(University of Newcastle website, Student enrolments and load report 2001-2005)

These statistics suggest that there is a problem across the States and Territories. With the current system of articulation between Universities, there is a noticeable decrease in Newcastle admissions from States other than NSW.

3.4 Canadian system

An innovative solution to this transfer problem has been devised on Ontario, Canada. Government funding was made available for the development of an online facility to record formal credit transfer arrangements between Ontario colleges and universities (Sundar 1996). Known as the Ontario Colleges and Universities Transfer Guide, (OCUTG) the guide makes it possible for all associated institutions to register and update arrangements online. The guide provides information to college and university students, institutional officials, high school students, their counsellors, and the general public that will enable them to plan and make choices from a growing array of collaborative postsecondary learning opportunities in Ontario (OCUTG website).

Canada also has another organisation named the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer. BCCAT has a long history of helping shape the policy and processes that support articulation and student mobility in Canada and in particular the British Columbia provinces. The group maintains BC transfer guides and education planners, supports articulation committees, commission's research, circulates discussion papers, reports, and information bulletins, sponsors workshops and resolves transfer problems by bringing together institutional representatives. Over 30 Universities and colleges are enrolled in the program, allowing great success in transfer arrangements between High schools, universities, colleges and other educational institutions. This is evident in the table below.

	March 31, 2003	March 31, 2004	March 31, 2005	March 31, 2006
Number of individual "sending" institution courses ⁵	7,669	8,146	7,921	8,757
Number of active course transfer agreements (agreements with either no official end-date or an end-date after March 31, 2005)	50,172	52,248	57,520	55,656
Number of active transfer agreements per course	6.5	6.4	7.3	6.4
Number of Block Transfer arrangements	602	774	786	759
Number of changes made to the database records	6,427	7,227	20,234	9,721
Number of grandparented course transfer agreements ⁶		20,900	27,506	36,208
Total number of agreements in the Transfer Guide (including active and grandparented agreements)		73,148	85,026	91,864

(British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer Website)

4. Problems of a National Curriculum

4.1 Vocational Education

A possible solution to interstate admissions could come with a nationalised curriculum, which is currently being debated. Therefore it is important to address previous problems with Australian nationalised curriculums. National training packages have become the mandated framework for course delivery in Australia's vocational education and training sector. These recent national curriculum changes to vocational education and training can be brought forth as an example to the problems of national reform. A national curriculum can threaten the current credit exchange process of Universities, similar to the impact that the reform had on vocational education, in which it "threatened the end of effective credit transfer between the vocational education and training and higher education sectors" (Wheelahan & Carter: 2001:303-316). After research into the effects of a national reform in the vocational sector it was suggested that "national training packages are not a good model for other countries and that Australia's current vocational education and training policy needs to be reviewed" (Wheelahan & Carter: 2001:303-316). It is therefore a concern that a national reform poses similar threats to the Newcastle University's credit transfer process.

4.2 New Zealand Curriculum reform and financial impact

The 1990 Education Amendment Act created the New Zealand Qualifications Authority and the National Qualifications Framework, aimed at streamlining the number of qualifications and the way these are delivered and managed in N.Z. (Sundar 1996)

The introduction of the NQF has spiralling compliance cost to providers in quality management systems, accreditation, moderation, health and safety, etc.

Approximately half the Qualifications Authority's funding comes from central government via Vote Education, and the other half from fees and levies, the total budget each year typically being a little over \$70 million (NZQA website).

The construction of the NQF was arguably a factor in the reduction of Government funding to tertiary institutions of 5 per cent by 1999 (Sundar 1996).

This is also linked with the New Zealand reduction on EFTS tuition subsidy from 79% in 1995 to 75% in 1999 (Todd, 1994:8-24).

An estimate by the Polytechnic sector showed their infrastructure cost has soared by some 30 per cent to meet the requirements of a national curriculum, without any increase in their budget. Reduction in teaching hours, lack of resources for classroom teaching and increase in workload are new phenomena of education reform facing tutors of today.

Curriculum Manager Arim Sundar also concluded that “the impact of the NQF on curriculum delivery has certainly given a structure that allows for seamless education. It has opened windows for opportunity in terms of flexibility and accessibility but, when it comes to issues of coherence and excellence in education, then it becomes murky. Spiralling costs to education in an uncertain environment is definitely negating the very essence of the change” (Sundar 1996).

It is with this research that NUSA is concerned with the economic impact a national curriculum will not only have on the secondary schooling system, but also the tertiary system in particular the University of Newcastle.

4.3 Current regional funding problems

With the detrimental effects in funding of a National curriculum on the Vocational education sector and New Zealand education sector, there is concern over the effects that a national education curriculum would have on University of Newcastle funding. The current funding situation of the University of Newcastle is an issue that is yet to be reviewed, and it is suggested that to prevent further detrimental impacts on University funding, the University of Newcastle can be used as an example.

The Commonwealth Grant Scheme Guidelines places variation towards the funding of Universities across all States due to the regional loading scheme. Regional loading is worked out depending on the internal student load at each eligible campus (excluding overseas students, full fee-paying domestic students, employer reserved places and work experience in industry load) and the distance from the nearest capital city. Under the current guidelines, however, Newcastle doesn't meet the criteria for eligibility:

- According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics's 2001 Census, the Newcastle Statistical Sub Division (SSD) has a population of 470,610 – well over the 250,000 limit set by the guidelines.
- Wollongong has only 257,510 (still over) but this covers a much smaller area: 1089.2 sq.km compared to the Newcastle SSD of 4041.8 sq.km.
- The population figures for the Newcastle SSD cover not only Newcastle (137,307), but also Lake Macquarie (177,619), Port Stephens (56,677), Maitland (53,803) and Cessnock (45,204).
- The figures for the Wollongong SSC only cover Wollongong (181,612), Kiama (18,827) and Shellharbour (57,071).

As the regional loading is campus based, it means that Newcastle does get some funding for its campus at Port Macquarie (SSD population 38,288), but nothing for Callaghan or Central Coast (Gosford-Wyong SSD has a population of 285,508). Newcastle is the only non capital city university that gets less than \$100,000.

From these findings, and New Zealand's history of curriculum impact, it is a primary concern that not only is the current regional funding situation creating problems, but a national curriculum could impact on University resources and funding. The next page shows a list of universities that received regional loading for 2005, and the amounts received (GST excluded). –Next page.

NUSA research departmentNSW

Australian Catholic University	159,937
Charles Sturt University	1,734,182
Southern Cross University	1,163,809
University of New England	2,253,727
University of Newcastle	32,858
University of Sydney	28,012
University of Wollongong	975,257

Vic

Deakin University	620,834
La Trobe University	986,629
Monash University	171,299
RMIT	29,935
University of Melbourne	35,341
University of Ballarat	1,220,140

Qld

Central Queensland University	1,967,181
James Cook University	3,600,734
Queensland Uni of Technology	23,125
University of Queensland	99,392
University of Southern Queensland	1,405,085
University of the Sunshine Coast	929,905

WA

Curtin University of Technology	155,910
Edith Cowan University	170,243
Murdoch University	210,724
University of Notre Dame	53,955
University of Western Australia	18,333

SA

Flinders University	18,511
University of Adelaide	57,266
University of South Australia	53,084

Tas

University of Tasmania	4,258,401
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NT

Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education	1,029,624
Charles Darwin University	4,749,829

Commonwealth

Australian Maritime College	202,213
Total	<u>28,415,475</u>

(Compiled by Justine Atkinson, Research Assistant for NUSA)

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The low numbers of interstate admissions into Universities suggests there is a problem in the education articulation process. This creates problems on the equitable accessibility of tertiary education to Australian students, suggesting a review of this process is needed. Canada has formed organisations to combat this problem, which have been successful in both the rise of successful transfers, as well as a high number of transfers. It is recommended to the Senate to therefore conduct further research into our own Interstate Transfer Index policy, and look at the successful Canadian approach and perhaps utilise some successful methods in these programs.

A national curriculum reform has financial consequences that need to be addressed. It is advised by NUSA, the Senate research possible effects of such an action on Universities across the nation. The curriculum reform in New Zealand was linked to a decline in University funding and resources, and the current situation on regional funding suggests any more decline in financial support would bring a negative impact on the University of Newcastle. It is therefore advised that a review of the regional funding scheme currently in place be considered. NUSA also advises further research into the impact of a National Education Curriculum, and while does admit there are benefits, advises that the Government consider the consequences which can arise.

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<http://www.bccat.bc.ca/pubs/ar05-06.pdf>

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<http://www.ocutg.on.ca/search/servlet/search?display=e-searchIndex>

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