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27 July, 2008

Ref: Review of Australian Higher Education 2008.

1. Introduction

Govt: The Review of Australian Higher Education will examine and report on the future direction of the higher education sector, its fitness for purpose in meeting the needs of the Australian community and economy and the options for ongoing reform.

The Review Panel will advise Government on possible key objectives ⁽¹⁾ for higher education in Australia, starting with the themes below, and how these could be achieved through reform of the sector and changes to regulation and funding arrangements.

Response:

⁽¹⁾ Industry practice dictates that any review (new look) of any processes looks first at the desired outcomes that those processes should produce. Australian Higher Education (AHE) should educate young Australians so that the society they build is more sustainable than anything that Australians have ventured to design over the last 200 years.

AHE's scientific programs should stop focusing on pseudo religious debates such as Evolution, Intelligent Design etc. NSW's mathematics programs should focus a little more on mathematics that is useful to educated Australians, rather than on convoluted Calculus models that have little application and may be built on a platform that has not been fully researched.

AHE should focus on doing what traditional Australian education has done for so long. It should produce educators to educate the next generation of Australians in Medicine, Astronomy, Lore, Language, Science, Water Management etc. It should produce politicians who can run our Councils and our State and Federal Governments. It should produce skilled craftsmen and women who can identify and build the products Australia really needs – we do not need to import them. AHE should train Australians to grow food locally – we do not need to import billions of dollars worth of food each year.

AHE should train Australians to manage our rapidly diminishing mineral resources. It should train Australians to manage our water and sewerage systems so that massive amounts of water and nutrients are not lost. It should train Australians to produce the energy we need, where we need it in a way that does not damage the environment. It should train Australians to build public transport systems that eliminate much of the need to import so many cars and oil that cause so much damage to the environment.

AHE should train Australians so that they can do research in topics that are relevant to our society and this research should be rigorous and honest, employing qualified mathematicians to ensure that the results stand up to ethical analysis.

In short, AHE needs to be revolutionized. Australia, richer by far than countries such as Saudi Arabia, can easily afford to revolutionize its AHE system once the process of squandering our wealth is stopped. Universities do not need to bludgeon students into studying for 12 months of the year and the Summer Course component of the curriculum should be dropped.

2. Diverse, high performing institutions with a global focus

Govt: Developing a diverse, globally focused⁽²⁾ and competitive⁽³⁾ higher education sector with quality, responsive institutions following clear, distinctive missions to provide higher education opportunities to students throughout Australia.

Response:

AHE's primary objective is to educate Australian students throughout Australia in subjects that are relevant to their lives and to their aspirations.

⁽²⁾ AHE does not have to be globally focused. While it does need to be aware of trends that are happening, many events, trends and challenges that countries such as The UK and Japan are facing are mostly irrelevant to Australia. This applies to many subjects, especially the subject of Economy.

An Economic theory that might work reasonably well for an importing and manufacturing country such as England might have no relevance whatever to Australia. Even stronger, an Economic theory that works reasonably well in Sydney might have little relevance to Melbourne, Perth or Rural Australia. The subjects that are taught need to reflect the goals and aspirations of the people who are being educated.

⁽³⁾ AHE does not need to be competitive and students are students not *customers*. There is no need to create a *level playing field* for multi-national institutions who try to train students from any society according to a predetermined formula.

AHE's primary role is to educate Australian students in subjects that are relevant to Australia's challenges, some of which are international. If clever students who have met their own country's educational standards wish to study in Australia under Australian conditions, then they are most welcome to come here for an Australian education.

Australia, massively in debt but still far wealthier than Saudi Arabia, does not need to completely redefine its Educational priorities in order to compete with other countries for international students.

3. Productivity⁽⁵⁾ and participation

Govt: Enhancing the role of the higher education sector in contributing to national productivity, increased participation in the labour market and responding to the needs of industry. This includes the responsiveness of the sector in altering the course mix in response to student and employer demand and an understanding of trends in the economy⁽⁴⁾, demography⁽⁶⁾ and the labour markets served by higher education.

Response:

⁽⁴⁾ *Economy* is a term that needs to be defined. Australia has the best Terms of Trade that it has ever had. It has also the worst Balance of Trade figures in its European history, along with the worst levels of personal debt, the worst housing affordability numbers etc. Some financial experts report that Australia has a magnificent Economy, but these people are mostly expressing the interests of foreign countries. Indeed Mr. Greenspan is reported to have conducted debt-experiments on Australia's economy (who commissioned it?) and we look forward to his report when it is completed. Australia may need to invent a local *Economy* before it can be a subject that AHE teaches.

⁽⁵⁾ *National Productivity* is also a term that needs to be defined. As Australia is drowning in debt, as our flora, fauna, water-ways, oceans and traditional cultures are being systematically destroyed, National Productivity in achieving these goals should be low, not high, to ensure some level of sustainability for the next generation. It is strange that National Productivity should be said to increase as we destroy our fishes' breeding grounds so we can import even larger amounts of products that we do not want, do not need, cannot use productively and cannot afford.

⁽⁶⁾ *Demography* is also a term that needs to be defined. Some people say Australians are Australians, whether they come from any major city or from the bush. Others express the traditional truth that Australia consists of many Sovereign Nations (gens), each with their own language, culture and economy. These contrasting views are being challenged as international students from different countries focus their learning activities in particular parts of different cities. If they don't get the results they demand, they tend to move to different suburbs or to different countries. Australian Lord Mayors who were born in countries such as England, Scotland, China, Italy, Holland have a disproportional influence on the direction AHE is taking. The same applies to foreign-born Chancellors and other senior university staff members who implement AHE policies.

AHE should be evaluated in terms of how it meets its fundamental objectives. Is it graduating Australian students with the necessary skills to gain skilled and responsible employment in Australia? As our manufacturing declines and our best jobs are exported, the evidence appears to be NO!

4. Effective and efficient investment ⁽⁷⁾

Govt: Improving funding arrangements for higher education institutions as they relate to teaching responsibilities, taking into account public and private benefits and contributions to inform the development of funding compacts between the Australian Government and institutions.

Response:

⁽⁷⁾ Many organizations throughout the globe have more focused on the Financial Management part of their operations, ignoring their key responsibilities, customers and skills. Many such organizations have found that investing in property has been very lucrative in recent years. Such organizations find it difficult to stay ahead of creditors and

bankruptcy proceedings as financial markets crumble and debt-instruments such as CDO's come home to roost.

Some sectors in Australia's AHE system have been given enormous funds to invest in property development and to attract wealthy overseas students. The result is that the legitimate rights and needs of Australian students have been given a low priority, or in some cases no priority at all. For example, Indigenous Australians have a right to receive education about subjects that are relevant to caring sustainably for their country in their country and in their language.

AHE organizations are not Investment Institutions and Australians do not expect them to fulfill the role of organizations such as banks. The funding they receive should be directed towards education Australian students in subjects that are important to them and to the nation.

5. Underpinning social inclusion ⁽⁸⁾ through access and opportunity

Govt: Supporting and widening access to higher education, including participation by students from a wide range of backgrounds.

Response:

⁽⁸⁾ Social Inclusion in higher level education programs is deteriorating rapidly throughout the western world, and perhaps in other countries as well. International reports indicate that it is easier for a stupid wealthy student to graduate than it is for a clever poor student. Indeed, many sections of AHE are closed to poor Australians.

Some Australian students do not want to participate in an education system that they perceive to be in conflict with their personal and national interest. It appears to be a crime to be poor in Australia in 2008 and the State punishes poor parents with the only penalty worse than capital punishment – the forced removal of a family's children.

It is strange to see foreign students, who may have done very badly in exams in their home country, getting language based PHD's in Australia and attempting to educate Australian students without mastering even the most elementary subtleties of Australian grammar. Standards are dropping.

Technological breakthroughs have increased the opportunity for wealthy students to cheat their way through any course. Standards are dropping.

Part of AHE's sustainable approach could include a discussion of social injustice that is inflicted on Australians in Australia. The greatest social injustice may well be to waste the people's water, as an inefficient and luxurious sewerage system flushes this precious resource out to sea where it causes further environmental damage.

6. Enhanced quality ⁽⁹⁾ and high standards

Govt: Implementing arrangements to ensure that quality higher education is provided by public and private providers and that this is widely understood and recognized by clients of the higher education sector.

Response:

⁽⁹⁾ Term such as *quality* and *standards* need to be defined using terms that relate to AHE's desired outcomes. Clichés such World Best Practice convey little information and should be avoided.

AHE is producing quality results when Australian-born students are expertly employed in jobs that meet the fundamental needs of Australia and of humanity. Students who have dropped out of their local education systems should not be allowed to study in Australia, no matter how wealthy their parents are.

AHE encourages students to undertake research into weird topics and these researchers, once they have received their PhD's, go on to influence the direction AHE is taking. One example that the media reported was "Men are attracted to attractive females" – the dictionary definition of the word *attractive* should have been sufficient to disqualify this applicant from doing research. Conversely, qualified people who want to undertake meaningful research end up in a Kafkaesque process that never terminates.

Some of the research results that are produced are extremely poor. Two examples of recent government documents illustrate this point, with the government's terms-of-reference being almost certainly at fault.

^{(9).1} **The government's 2005(?) Water Efficiency Labeling and Standards Scheme (WELS)** defines a sequence of steps that will gradually reduce the amount of water that each Australian toilet will use in the year 2050. The rate at which the amount of water-per-flush is being reduced is far too slow to be sustainable and other countries are doing better. All government websites should contain a date-of-issue.

^{(9).2} The CSIRO's 2007 report on the National Water Initiative (NWI) does not define what the required outcomes of such a report should be. It provides statistics about what Australians want, rather than concentrating on statistics that show how quickly our ground-water and other water supplies are being destroyed. The NSW Government does not even know in which direction Sydney's groundwater is flowing.

Putting people who have produced poor research results which may have been funded by lobbyists (this may not necessarily be the case for the above reports) compounds the problem of *low quality teaching*. Indeed many mathematics and science teachers are not qualified to teach their subjects and many overseas students regard Australian teachers with contempt.

The Scientific American reported over a decade ago that teachers in many countries were more professional than Western teachers. The response in Australia has been to *dumb-down* the teaching profession even further.

7. A broad tertiary education and training sector

Govt: Establishing the place of higher education in the broader tertiary education sector, especially in building an integrated relationship with vocational education and training.

Response:

A consistent approach that gives achieves good educational outcomes for all AHE institutions would be excellent.

Remuneration could be more consistent. The current approach of defining a *Super Teacher* as a teacher who awards at least Pass-grades to all students who can spell their name is counter productive. Students also reward super teachers when they feed them with amusing drivel and give them easy assignments. Conversely teachers who fail poor students, some of whom never attend class, are declared to be *bad teachers* and their contracts are not renewed.

Teaching was once a profession and teachers were community leaders. Now teachers are in charge of sweat-shops that have to get as many positive results as possible each term.

Let's make teachers professional people once more. They are far less corrupt than some members of other Australian professions and deserve respect for the noble work that they perform under very difficult circumstances.

8. Recommendations

AHE1: Define the outcomes that AHE (Australian Higher Education) should achieve.

AHE2: Move AHE's curriculum towards subjects that relate to sustainability of the human species, removing quasi-religious debate from science's program.

AHE3: Focus AHE on education Australian-born students so they can lead this country.

AHE4: Purchase a good dictionary and look up the meaning of technical words such as *Economy* before publishing the result of this report.

AHE5: Reverse the process of dumbing-down AHE in Australia and try to learn from skilled educators from more traditional and sustainable societies.

AHE6: Reduce the level of cheating in AHE. Controlled exams are the only way to guarantee AHE's standards.

AHE7: Recognize the rights of Indigenous Australians to study subjects that relate to the care of their land in their own language and in locations that are convenient to them.

AHE8: Replace AHE's current \$\$\$-focus with a more traditional Philosophy of Education.

Yours Sincerely

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