

Review of Australian Higher Education Discussion Paper Feedback

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Submission by Raffles College of Design and Commerce – Sydney by Professor Ron Newman, CEO and Professor Tony Shannon, Provost

Within this submission Raffles College (RCDC) is responding to areas that most dramatically affect its context and operation and we leave other areas to those “more expert”. RCDC as a private “for profit” HEP has a particular perspective of Higher Education delivery in Australia and internationally and we believe we are at the cutting edge of Australian HEPs in these areas.

RCDC delivers 5 degrees; BCom, BDes, BA (Vis Comm), MDes and MCom in Sydney and in 8 other 100% owned locations in 6 countries including China, HK, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

This submission has been organized in the same order of the discussion paper.

Higher education in modern Australia:

1. How adequate is the statement of functions and characteristics of higher education in modern Australia?

We believe that the summary of higher education in Australia is far to “Australia focused” and ignores the real; influential, cultural and economic role that Australian education plays both at home in Australia and internationally! To this end, we need to prepare productive professional graduates appropriate to the needs of the Asia-Pacific region and thus serve the future needs of Australian society. The pursuit of knowledge for its own sake is an important ingredient of future flexibility in the labour and market forces. At the same time labour markets are not the only context for discussions about economic well-being: the social framework, including the ethics of social justice, affect the attitudes, morale and happiness of a nation.

The second last paragraph on page one of the report is an example and we would reword the paragraph to read:

*“But higher education in a modern democracy does more than this. By deepening our understanding of health and social issues, and by providing access to higher levels of learning to people from all backgrounds **from all nations**, it can enhance social inclusion and reduce social and economic disadvantage **internationally**. By engaging with scholars from other countries and educating people from other countries it helps to create a nation confident and engaged both with its geographic region and the wide community of nations. By helping sustain and renew other institutions through its capacity to develop knowledge and skills, higher education acts as a cornerstone of the institutional framework of society, **ours and the societies of others.**”*

In the sections 1.2 the important export dollars earned by our higher education system is ignored as a function of higher education. Higher Education is truly an example of the much vaunted and illusive “Third Bottom Line” ie: providing cultural and social benefit while not ignoring the financial contribution of the commercial activity, which tuition fees are in both the public and private sector.

Similarly in 1.3.1 we should be talking about “labour markets” not the “labour market” and in 1.7.1 we should also acknowledge the “economic” contribution to the national and international communities.

The Strategic Context:

In our preceding comments one can see that RCDC strongly believes in the strategic importance to the Australian and international populations of our HE system, its contribution to communities economically, socially and culturally. In acting internationally we need to be responsible, understanding the real needs and the real contribution we are making to communities. Staff student and resource mobility is vital to this success.

On page 13 government intervention is canvassed and RCDC is convinced that government regulation and intervention should be kept to a minimum while government create standard/common global controls such as the new National Guidelines and Protocols, such as AUQA, such as Self Accrediting and University Status. Through these initiatives Government can manage quality and consistency in both the public and private sector while encouraging diversity and competition.

Additionally the graphs on page 10 and 11 indicate an unevenness and drop in state government commitment to higher education and indicates that State governments generally are not convinced of the economic, social and cultural importance of HE institutions. This attitude needs to be reversed if their communities are to benefit evenly.

Key challenges and issues for higher education:

A key challenge for “Australian” higher education is continue to contribute locally and internationally in the economic, social and cultural development of communities. The seven “capacities” on page 21 should be much broader and talk about markets in the plural and should talk about engagements not only with other sectors but with other nations HE systems. The questions below also focus on local needs only while our HE system is an international provider! Where is the question of how do we act responsibly regarding the needs of other nations?

2. Are there impediments to the higher education sector being able to innovate in the development of courses and programs? What are these impediments and how could they be removed?

There are no real impediments at the moment other than the slowness of the accreditation process in the private sector. A sustained move to “Self Accreditation” in the private sector would improve innovation across the sector. Demand-driven institutions which fill educational niches live or die according to the attention they pay to the student experience in terms of self-fulfillment and employability.

3. What are the appropriate mechanisms at the national and local level for ensuring

higher education meets national and local needs for high level skills? What is the role of state and territory governments in this area?

RCDC is convinced that government regulation and intervention should be kept to a minimum while government create standard/common global controls such as the new National Guidelines and Protocols, such as AUQA, such as Self Accrediting and University Status. Through these initiatives Government can manage quality and consistency in both the public and private sector while encouraging diversity and competition.

4. How adequate are the mechanisms for aligning supply and demand of graduates? How do pricing and labour market signals impact on student choices?

Regulation is an inappropriate tool. Government both Commonwealth and state providing financial support for discipline areas is a proven methodology for manipulating the system to provide for labour market needs and competition, ie: student choice impacts on the success or otherwise of institutions and causes them to raise quality and relevance.

Moves towards more articulation between vocational and higher education not only provide a seamless tertiary education sector but also offer more genuine choices for students and employers in tailoring programs to suit emerging needs, both individual and societal.

Freedom of operation in the private sector will increase competition which will in our view heighten relevance and response of institutions.

5. Are there particular examples of good practice where you can demonstrate either rapid response to skill shortages or successful initiatives to improve generic skills?

The increase of Medical, Nursing and Education places in many states has affected the output of the sector as a response to shortages and has caused established providers to “think again” about their offerings. State government support in Victoria and Queensland for the Creative Industries has focused economic growth in those sectors to those states. Moreover, quality research, and a more inclusive definition of research, should not be confined to some universities. Some universities might be ‘research-intensive’, but all private higher education providers should be ‘teaching-intensive’ with teaching and learning informed by research, scholarly and creative activities appropriate to their mission.

6. How effectively are Australian higher education institutions responding to demographic change, especially in providing lifelong learning to meet the challenge of the ageing population and the need for upgrading of skills and re-training?

In our view very well.

Opportunities to participate in higher education:

We should consider the context of “opportunity” not only to be “in Australia” but also internationally. We are surrounded by nations who are “under provided” in HE and we should consider it is Australia’s role to assist with scholarships and access, focusing on the long term benefits, such as those that were gained from the “Colombo Scheme” of the 1960s. Having said this there are communities in Australia such as our indigenous people who are also underrepresented and we need to develop further ideas to assist them in achieving any goals that they may have.

8. Should there be a national approach to improving Indigenous and low SES participation and success in higher education?

A single scheme of learning entitlements should be introduced in order to

- Reduce the current complexity of similar but different schemes now in existence, and
- Facilitate genuine student choice,
- Provide mechanisms for allocation of resources which could see private-public cooperation in tertiary education as now exists in some cities with transport and hospital cooperation.

9. If you support a national approach to improving Indigenous and low SES participation and success how do you see it being structured, resourced, monitored and evaluated?

The simple answer is yes, the difficulty is achieving success. In our experience both in the private sector and in the authors' previous public institutions success revolves around five key attributes:

- Relevance of courses to personal and community needs
- Tailored entry requirements taking into account the specific disadvantage
- Academic mentoring and assistance throughout the entire study
- Financial support for tuition and accommodation
- Proximity of the offering institution to the source community

Currently private providers contribute significantly to the provision of higher education in Australia and in the Asia-Pacific region without government investment in their infrastructure and with sometimes superfluous layers of government regulations.

Connecting with other education and training sectors:

The Australian HE sector already has dramatic diversity, with many high quality research institutions, many excellent teaching institutions, many dual sector institutions, many TAFE institutions offering degrees and many private providers in both sectors. Government action in this area has been a little ad-hoc, though the results are good with many excellent examples of articulation and innovative progression; public, private and across that divide as well.

The provision of FEE-HELP in the private HEP sector assisted these institutions to articulate students from the TAFE sector into their courses and the provision of FEE-HELP to VET students will further develop this area of activity.

19. By what mechanisms should research activities in Australian universities be supported?

The current ARC systems works well, the big issue is the limited funds. Double the research moneys available through the current peer assessed system and more institutions will be able to partake and the national productivity in research will lift accordingly. Forget all notions of an RQF system: it is a waste of money and will focus research on the measure rather than the community needs, wishes and desires.

20. On what principles and for what purposes should research activity be concentrated in particular universities or types of universities?

None forget it! It will advantage some institutions but not the nation or the international community. The problem is shortage of government commitment and therefore funds. Private

providers should be able to access public funding for research and research scholarships where a public good can be demonstrated.

21. Do you believe there is a place in Australia's higher education system for universities that are predominantly 'teaching only' universities? If so, why ?

Yes there is a place for teaching only institutions, public and private, and with the nomenclature University. Agreeing to the establishment of such specialized institutions will heighten competition and the diversity of the system. Students and the communities will decide which institution is a success not regulators.

Australia's higher education sector in the international arena:

RCDC delivers 5 degrees; BCom, BDes, BA (Vis Comm), MDes and MCom in Sydney and in 8 other 100% owned locations in 6 countries including China, HK, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. RCDC is owned by a Singaporean public listed company which operate 30 campuses in 10 countries.

We contend that Australia is such an important international provider of HEP that the reports consideration of the "international arena" is far too narrow and needs to take account of the "place" we have developed with public universities establishing branch campuses in other countries, with public and private providers franchising courses and with private providers acting internationally such as Raffles.

As indicated earlier we believe Australia's current international position will extend the economic, social and cultural reach of Australia and as a "good" and respected nation this can only have a good effect. The report needs to enhance and widen its view of the "international" place of Australian HE and advance a plan for it's dramatic future innovative development.

22. Are there any unintended consequences of the current approach to internationalisation of higher education in Australia?

RCDC believes the unintended consequence is the inflow of export earnings into the Australian economy and the beneficial growth of both the public and private sector over the last 20 years. Additionally Australia's influence as a place of learning has grown the public image of Australia internationally.

23. What is an appropriate role for government in assisting the Australian higher education system to internationalise? On what principles should this role rest and what purposes should it serve?

Government should through its agencies and departments such as Austrade, DEEWR, DIMIA, AEI and AUQA continue to promote and facilitate the offerings of the sector for inbound and outbound students, for marketing, for international research and learning collaborations and for access to markets. Increased regulation is simply not required or economically viable.

24. Can you provide any examples of good practice in encouraging local students to undertake study in other countries?

There are simply too many good examples to list, but we contend that this is a case of the bad news first: we hear about those programmes with issues and not the good examples including the

programmes of UTS, Monash, USYD, UNSW and so many others.

Financing arrangements and incentives for institutions:

Under the heading “Private Providers” the statement is made:

“Therefore most private providers operate in areas where: they are not in direct competition for students with the publicly funded institutions; or

- *the demand from fee-paying domestic or international students is high and the*
- *corresponding courses in public institutions are also offered on a fee-paying basis; and*
- *the costs of infrastructure and teaching are relatively low.*

Australia’s private higher education sector is therefore comprised mainly of small institutions providing a limited range of courses in specific areas, ranging from divinity and other forms of religious study to finance and business studies, natural therapies and hotel management.”

We believe the above statements contained in the report show a dangerous and complete non understanding of the private sector in Australia. RCDC and many other private providers offer courses in direct competition to the public providers at the same pricing and we have become the “institutions of choice” rather than being: niche, overflow or opportunist as suggested. RCDC itself has a 30 year history and attracts students through its quality of courses, teaching and therefore its reputation.

Under the new HE protocols and guidelines the “third category” as described above will grow dramatically as will a “fifth category”, the local campuses of international institutions.

RCDC believes that the current private provider developments are good for the sector and the nation providing more competition and diversity in the sector and more student choice for Australians and our international cohorts. The final report should encourage further development of the private sector: HEPs, Universities and foreign entrants.

31. Is it time to reshape tertiary education in Australia and streamline financing and regulatory arrangements? If so, what structural changes would you make and why?

The current HE systems works well, more funding is required for capital investment in public universities and in research across the sector and the new protocols and guidelines should become more consistent from state to state and should be supported

32. Is the level of regulation in the sector appropriate? If not, why not, and what should be done to reduce the level of regulation?

The level of regulation is adequate though streamlining and adding consistency to processes is urgently required. Further development of accelerated “mutual recognition” under the protocols is also required.

33. Does Australia’s Quality Assurance Framework need revision? If so, why? What changes would you make?

AUQA and the AQF is in place and working, they are both in the formative stages and should be allowed to develop and mature.

34. Are changes required to the Australian Qualifications Framework?

Development of the framework and adherence across the sector public and private would assist all. Dramatic changes are not required.

35. Is there more that could be done to improve university governance? How should this be done?

Yes, reduce the size of governing bodies and require an emphasis on expertise rather than representation. Institute maximum and fixed terms of members.

RCDC Recommendations and Responses:

1. Always characterise Australian HE as internationally important and significant contributor to economic social and cultural development of Australia and the international community (note not just our region)
2. RCDC is convinced that government regulation and intervention should be kept to a minimum while government create standard/common global controls such as the new National Guidelines and Protocols, such as AUQA, such as Self Accrediting and University Status for the private sector.
3. Australia should develop and national approach for support to both local and international disadvantaged communities and the approach should involve both the private and public HE sectors.
4. There is a place for teaching only institutions in Australia, public and private, and with the nomenclature University. The establishment of such specialized institutions will heighten competition and the diversity of the system.
5. We believe Australia's current international position will extend the economic, social and cultural reach of Australia. The report needs to enhance and widen its view of the "international" place of Australian HE and advance a plan for it's dramatic future innovative development.
6. Private providers are good for the sector and the nation providing more competition and diversity and more student choice for Australians and our international cohorts. The report should encourage further development of the private sector: HEPs, Universities and foreign entrants.
7. The level of regulation of the HE sector is adequate though streamlining and adding consistency to processes is required. Further development of accelerated "mutual recognition" under the protocols is urgently required.