



Adelaide University Union Bradley Review Submission

Section 1 Higher Education

The functions and characteristics of higher education as described in the Bradley Review are not flawed in themselves. They encapsulate the pivotal role that the tertiary sector plays in the growth and development of the Australian society and economy. However, we express concern about the lack of emphasis on education as a form of individual empowerment, particularly of Australia's youth. At the University of Adelaide in 2007, students aged 15-25 make up approximately 70% of the total student body. While the evidence in the Bradley paper shows that domestic undergraduates straight from high school are declining, they still make up a large proportion of students. The quality of the Australian higher education system has its greatest impact on youth, not just from Australia, but young people from all around the world. University communities enable young people to develop skills and participate in forums where they have the potential to be valued and recognised as active members of society.

At the Bradley student consultation in Melbourne, the panel's ostensible devaluation of the unique student experience that is offered by sandstone institution was noted. The campus culture and the high calibre of educational standards at a sandstone are what make it more attractive to both domestic and international students. It is interesting to note the disparity in philanthropic financial contribution between sandstone universities and other universities. It would seem to be community recognition of the sandstone universities' ability to nurture students and contribute back to the community in the form of quality graduates and HERD. Rather than encouraging a shift toward more corporate model universities, or "degree factories", it would appear that the Australian society appreciates a university that offers a more comprehensive education than one limited to the classroom.

Section 3.1 Meeting Labour Market and Industry Needs

The University of Adelaide has responded in recent times to the skill shortage in the areas of veterinary science, mining engineering and clinical nursing. There is no reason to believe the tertiary institutions do not have the capacity and willingness to meet labour needs as long as they are not financially worse off due to associated infrastructure costs. Likewise, universities should not be disadvantaged if they are more research intensive than others. There must be appropriate government compensation for the cost of research to a university to encourage rather than punish innovation.

The idea that HECS is not a disincentive to study, particularly for low SES students, is a complete fallacy. The British study is completely inappropriate to impose as an adequate comparison to Australia. While HECS must be accepted as a political reality, the rate of student contribution is obscenely high, in contrast to many other OECD countries and serves to reinforce social inequalities in Australia. If the government truly believes HECS is not a disincentive to study, then the obvious question is why did they bother to remove it for courses of national priority? If the tertiary sector is to adapt to an aging population where mature age education and re-education is essential, it would seem logical for postgraduate studies to be supported by the government in the same way as undergraduate studies.

Section 3.2 Opportunities to Participate in Higher Education

In both instances of indigenous and low SES participation, the pathways between school and university are of vital importance. The scope of the Bradley Review does not appear to be able to seriously address the dilemma of encouraging and empowering young people from such backgrounds, and their families, to believe that tertiary education is a viable possibility, which needs to be fostered from the time they are at primary school. To confront this problem requires long-term, broad-ranging policy that focuses on fundamental inequalities in Australian society. One suggested initiative is peer mentoring between university and school age students, since we know that young people respond well to peers of a similar age bracket. The South Australian State Government has administered a program like this in recent years through the Department of Education and Child Services, but despite its success, has either de-funded or restructured such programs. The Adelaide University Union is currently exploring its ability to deliver a similar program, but in a post VSU environment it is extremely difficult due to limited or tied funding. Government funding and University initiative on such programs would go some way toward beginning to achieve this aim.

Indigenous Participation

In 2007, there were 20 478 students studying at the University of Adelaide. Of those, 134 identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, representing 0.65% of students. The University was unable to provide data indicating the retention rate of ATSI students through their degrees but the national data presented by Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council from Higher Education Statistical Collection shows that in 2001-2006, 4000 ATSI students commenced education and only 1000-1300 completed their studies. The gap in these figures, in contrast to non-indigenous completion rates, would indicate that indigenous students are not receiving the support they need, be it financial or other, to complete their studies.

The University of Adelaide is to be commended for its in financial and philosophical support for Indigenous education. The University provides its own scholarships for Indigenous students and also runs a promising bridging program, Foundations. Commonwealth funding for indigenous support services at our campus is more than doubled by university contribution. However, there are several problems that can be identified with this situation:

1. That if this is the situation at our university, it suggests that other universities who do not have such support for their indigenous schools cannot possibly be funding indigenous services adequately from government funding alone,

2. That even at Adelaide, Indigenous services are reliant on the good will of the Vice-Chancellor and University Council which, when people in these roles change as they inevitably will, that good will is not ensured, and
3. That due to the year-to-year instability of funding from government and university sources, no Indigenous services on any campus can have the long term vision that is fundamental to their success.

The Bradley paper questions why indigenous participation, which was on the increase for some years, started declining in 2000. The answer is quite simple: in that same year, the eligibility requirements for ABSTUDY were restricted. If the Bradley Review fails to make a recommendation of adjusting ABSTUDY eligibility to enable more Indigenous students to access it, then the panel is not serious in its purported desire to increase participation rates.

A very simple yet highly symbolic step toward demonstrating the Bradley panel's genuine support for Indigenous students would be to recommend that undergraduate and post graduate student representatives be reinstated on the IHEAC. In a post VSU environment many campuses have been unable to support Indigenous student representatives, if they ever had them at all. There were such representatives on IHEAC in the past, which were abolished by Julie Bishop and it would seem that considering the previous government's disregard for Indigenous issues, to reinstate these student representative roles would be to recognise the current government's commitment.

In regards to recruitment of Indigenous students, a national co-operative approach on the part of universities would be potentially viable as long as there was a respectful approach to respective Indigenous communities. A recruitment program was once funded which enabled Indigenous students from rural areas, including ones outside the borders of South Australia like Broken Hill and Alice Springs, to come to Adelaide and experience the three universities. This program was a collaborative one between Flinders University, the University of South Australia and the University of Adelaide, however funding was reallocated by the former government away from the universities and went to the rural schools, which are often too under resourced and under staffed to initiate them.

Another significant element of Indigenous education is culturally autonomous tutoring services. Our Education Welfare Officers report that even at our university, some Indigenous Tutorial Support Officers feel that in the time they are able to give to their students, they are unable to provide the amount of support the students actually require. Adequate tutoring services are essential to increasing and maintaining Indigenous participation in higher education.

Low SES Participation

The recommendations that the Bradley panel make in relation to student income support will be seen by students as the great test of whether the review is serious in supporting student interests. The Australian University Student Finances 2006 report gives far better authority on this issue than our submission could even attempt to, although the Adelaide University Union's Education Welfare Officers provided 244 interest free loans and 188 small grants specifically for students who are in financial crisis. There has been a buoyant job market in recent years in Australia which for many people makes the choice of becoming a student and facing the associated financial strain, versus entering or

remaining in the workforce, seem ridiculous. The rate of income support for both dependent and independent brackets is unequivocally too low and accessibility to income support is too restrictive, the parental income test being the most obvious absurdity. The burden is most heavily placed on rural students, for whom the living and relocation costs are often too high to go supported only by families whose income just exceeds the threshold.

Section 3.3 The Student Experience of Higher Education

It is deeply disturbing that in the same period of time when the cost burden on students for their education has increased dramatically, the student:staff teaching ratios have increased, reducing the quality of a student's education. There is an argument to be made that when students are working on average 14.8 hours per week that less contact hours seem desirable to them in the short term when it is necessary for them to work to supplement their income. However, the long term effect is an overall decline in the quality of graduates. For example, in the Diploma of Education at the University of Adelaide, students are required to take extended subjects in their preferred area of teaching and are charged HECS for it, yet at the time of this report they have still to receive one hour of contact time with their course co-ordinators in this subject area in 2008. While these students are preoccupied with placements, this seems like an attractive arrangement, however the net result will be that they will go on to teach in areas in which they have been inadequately trained. Another effect of the poor student:staff ratio is that academic staff are overworked, particularly in regard to assessment. The way the faculties attempt to address this is to impose heavy penalties for lateness and exceeding word limits. For example, in the Politics Department, the worst for student:staff ratio at the University of Adelaide, a penalty of 20% is imposed for exceeding the word limit. This means that the student's final mark is less indicative of the quality of their work, but more by their ability to adhere to a rule which limits the time the staff must spend marking.

In regard to the increase of information and communication technology, the negative effect will fall primarily on mature age, low SES and Indigenous students who may have insufficient IT proficiency. At the University of Adelaide there is adequate support for students wishing to improve their IT skills, however this may not be the case at other universities. Also, the University of Adelaide provides an internet quota of 500 megabytes per domestic undergraduate and 1000 megabytes per international undergraduate. This is completely inadequate, particularly for international students and perhaps is another area in which national standards or co-ordination for IT provision at tertiary institutions might be beneficial.

National monitoring of postgraduate students' experience is of crucial importance. First and foremost, attention needs to be paid to the retention rates of postgraduate students. Monitoring of this phenomenon needs to be undertaken systematically and across institutions. Reasons for low retention rates likewise need to be systematically explored with serious revision likely to be needed of supervision practices and stipend rates.

Many postgraduate students are unhappy with the quality of their supervision, yet there appears to be little monitoring of supervision practices. Currently, there are few or no incentives for supervisors to devote substantial time to students. Supervisors are rarely given paid, allocated time for supervision and a corresponding release from undergraduate teaching and research responsibilities.

Stipend rates are likewise a substantial issue that impacts on postgraduate students and the quality of their experience at university. Low stipend rates mean that students often work as well as study. Anecdotally it is known that many students work far in excess of the eight hours allowed by scholarship rules. It is imperative that monitoring of postgraduate students' experience takes financial matters into account.

In summary, if universities are indeed moving toward increasingly corporate and managerial models, then there should be nationally monitored key performance indicators in areas such as class size and academic equity on which government funding is contingent.

Section 3.4 Connecting with other education and training sectors

It is difficult for a student perspective to adequately navigate the minefield of bureaucracy and red tape, which perhaps indicates the inaccessibility of the system. Any steps that can be taken to form better bridges between sectors, particularly when mature age re-education is increasing, can only be a good thing. We support income contingent loans for the VET sector. Further, we would support a nationalised VET system so that the absurd discrepancy from state to state funding could be amended.

Section 3.5 Higher Education's Role in the National Innovation System

First and foremost, research funding should take into account principles of academic freedom. The current reliance on industry funding does not pave the way for a fearless and vibrant research culture. Postgraduate students entering the academy should not be doing so on compromised industry "APAI" scholarships. All funding for higher study needs to come from the government so that postgraduate students can discover their fields without fear of interference by corporate funding bodies.

It is also of vital importance that the current focus on three year completions be reviewed immediately. Postgraduate students embarking on their first large intellectual endeavour need space to learn, discover and make mistakes. This endeavour cannot be squeezed into inflexible and restricted time periods. The current expectation of accelerated completion rates is out of step with international practice and creates unnecessary pressure for many dedicated students.

The prospect of "teaching only" universities is an unattractive one and perhaps provides one of the clearest distinctions between vocational and tertiary education. Universities are communities where a culture of scholarship at multiple levels should be fostered. Academic reputation and progression depends on maintaining a current research track record. Staff working in teaching only institutions would therefore be marginalised and trapped in these institutions. The existence of teaching only institutions would funnel recently qualified PhDs into jobs which do not realistically offer them a future as academics.

Section 3.6 Australia's higher education sector in the International Arena

The primary concern in regard to internationalisation of the sector is that since universities are increasingly reliant on international student fees, their necessity to recruit and boost international student numbers is greater than their ability to provide adequate support services to these students. This concern is further exaggerated in response to the Bradley Review, in that while the discussion paper has a lot to say about the international student market, it does not talk nearly enough about the associated welfare issues.

The University of Adelaide's 2007 International Student Prospectus states that it is possible to get inner city housing for \$90 per week. This is a total distortion of the cost of living in South Australia. International students often chose to study in Australia on the pretext that the cost of education and living is radically less expensive than the US or the UK, which it is, but the universities are not unprepared to stretch the truth still further.

It is important to note that the University of Adelaide's participation in the International Student Barometer suggests positive student response in the areas of arrival, learning, living and support services, which were all well above average. When asked about satisfaction in relation to opportunity to earn money while studying, the rate of satisfaction was much lower at 60.4%. In an article in *Campus Review* (vol 18, no. 25, 24 June 2008), Professor Christopher Nyland estimates that more than 70% of international students have jobs and that many of them are working illegally due to restrictive visa conditions, which means they are at risk of exploitation and are unprotected against workplace injury. Universities and government seem reluctant to investigate the extent and effect of this problem as it would be damaging to the market, and international students themselves are reluctant to come forward when facing the risk of mandatory deportation. Meanwhile, student organisations in a post VSU environment are struggling to survive, let alone lobby on more complicated issues such as this one.

There are deeper issues still, such as a worrying rate of female international student women who are having abortions. It is an inconvenient and uncomfortable problem for universities to address. While gender equity at a domestic undergraduate level is vastly improved, there are cultural and gender issues at play here that universities are ill-equipped to deal with considering the number and diversity of international students. Similar cultural problems arise when addressing problems of loneliness and depression, which are sometimes further compounded by language barriers and isolation from normal support networks like family and friends. Nyland says that in the past year there have been 40 international student suicides. Again, the international arms of many student organisations are unable to address these issues in a post VSU environment.

In the University of Adelaide ISB report, 63.3% of respondents were unsatisfied with the ability of making friends in Australia and 53.4% with meeting students from Australia. With students spending less time on campus due to work commitments and the corporate universities fostering this off campus model, where is this interaction supposed to take place? International students often choose to study overseas to experience a different culture from their own and, in slightly fewer cases, to improve their English speaking skills, but instead they often fall into their own cultural grouping on campus. Campus culture plays a vital role in facilitating this interaction, thus reducing the effects of loneliness and isolation but student organisations in a post VSU environment are running less events. Even when student organisations have the capacity to run events,

they are compelled by overall student demand to run alcohol based events which again serve to alienate some international student groups, while fostering substance abuse in those who do participate. In the Adelaide University Union's submission on VSU, it was highlighted that government and/ or universities could put in place KPI contingent funding for student organisations to run a diverse range of student events, including non-alcoholic ones, which is the nature of our funding agreement with the University of Adelaide. In the Generation Y group, peer to peer contact is the best way of organising and engaging participation, which is why student-controlled organisations are the best equipped to address issues such as these. Further, once interaction is facilitated between domestic and international students within Australia, domestic students may be encouraged to take their interaction to the next level and study overseas themselves, thus furthering the internationalisation of education.

Overall, we do not believe that the University of Adelaide has bad faith in its conduct toward international students; rather it actively wants to address international student welfare issues. However, due to the huge influx of international students which are vital to the financial viability of the sector, most universities are not able to deal with the range of issues and the effects are felt by vulnerable students.

A final note on this issue is in respect to the number of international students who apply for Australian visas after the completion of their studies. It seems that Australia takes international students, then uses it to boost Australia's own skilled workforce, whilst leaching talent from some countries that can ill afford it. Unless Australia wants to become the parasite of the higher education sector, then it needs to develop greater reciprocity of skills in this regard.

Section 3.8 Resourcing the System

The Bradley paper itself says that Australians do not contribute philanthropically to tertiary sector because they consider that by paying taxes, it is something that should be provided by the government. It is somewhat ironic that while this paper emphasises the role that the tertiary sector plays in relation to the market, it says little about how industry can better contribute to universities. The current funding system seems to be a minefield of inconsistencies which would suggest the need for a complete restructure of the system. It seems grossly inequitable that students, often the financially most vulnerable, are the ones contributing the most. One significant way of beginning to address this problem is to reevaluate the indexation of university funding to CPI and develop a sector-based indexation which reflects the true costs of the universities.

In the postgraduate field, supervisors have little financial incentive to systematically devote time and resources to new PhDs. They are not usually given paid time to perform this task regularly but instead must squeeze it in with research and undergraduate teaching responsibilities. Many postgraduate students are unhappy with the quality of their supervision for this reason. This means talented students may drop out of the sector altogether.

Universities are not systematically investing in the training of postgraduate students as teachers. However, much of the teaching performed at universities is by these postgraduate students, working as casual tutors. The lack of training available to them impacts on their confidence as teachers and may be having a significant impact on the quality of teaching they are able to offer. Postgraduate students need to teach in order to

build their skills, but they need to be supported systematically and effectively.

Postgraduate students have little incentive to continue working in higher education when they graduate. First of all, there are not enough jobs for new graduates, even though workload problems are endemic among working academics. The number of level A positions advertised is out of proportion to the number of new graduates. Many of these positions are taken by experienced researchers who have been working in contract positions. Secondly, a majority of jobs offered to new graduates are not ongoing roles but are medium length contracts that may or may not be renewed. Talented graduates may be deterred from taking these positions because of this insecurity. Job insecurity affects new graduates' lives in many ways. For example, it is likely to reduce their ability to enter the housing market, to begin a family, or save for the future. This is additionally significant because many postgraduate students are already grappling with a HECS debt. Therefore current funding models are in many ways inadequate to attract talented postgraduate students to consider a career in higher education when they finish their studies. The aging workforce in the industry substantiates these arguments.

Section 3.9 Governance and regulation

The Bradley panel made it clear at the student consultation that they were looking for campus based evidence from student organisations. One significant point to note is that post VSU, student organisations often do not have the resources to collect data in areas such as this. Even if we assume a corporate model for our universities, the student is the consumer and their opinions on the quality of the service that increasingly they are paying for must be a fundamental part of the process. At the Adelaide University Union since the implementation of VSU we have lost a great deal of services. It was a deliberate action by the former government that the part of student organisations that were hardest hit was the student voice. We have lost three research officers, all honoraria for student representatives which significantly diminishes their capacity to dedicate time to their positions and instead of spending time on advocacy for our members, we are often more preoccupied with restructuring and marketing of our organisation simply to survive. All these factors mean that the quality of student representation and input into the university process is drastically diminished.