

To HEreview@deewr.gov.au

Subject Griffith University initial submission

Dear Denise

Review of Australian higher education – Griffith University initial submission - the big picture

Thank you for your invitation of 4 April 2008 to the university to submit its vision for Australian higher education and to identify high level issues that your review might consider.

Vision

Griffith University's vision is of a higher education sector that:

- 1 conducts valuable teaching and research;
- 2 contributes economically, socially and culturally to the society that supports it; and
- 3 fosters social cohesion and a vibrant democracy.

Higher education's main means for achieving this vision are to conduct research and to educate bachelor and research graduates who:

- 1 are committed to scholarship, rational inquiry and truth;
- 2 have 'technically exploitable knowledge'¹, are ethical, and locate their practice within a broad context; and
- 3 represent Australia's diverse population and are active citizens.

The English higher education system provides a useful example of what Australia might aim for – desirably, it is not sufficiently systematically organised to be a model. Australia might draw these lessons from English higher education.

- 1 *Institutional variety.* England has a considerable variety of institutions by age, location, size, discipline spread, levels of programs and research intensity.
- 2 *Continuum, not disjuncture.* While England has university groupings, they are not discreet and they do not reflect a heavily segmented system. Membership of the groups overlaps, changes, and there is a continuum of higher education institutions from 'mixed economy' further education colleges which teach 12% of the country's higher education students, through teaching-only universities, to moderately and very research intensive universities.

¹ Habermas Jürgen (1970) *Towards a rational society: student protest, science, and politics*. Translated by Jeremy A Shapiro. Boston: Beacon Press.

- 3 *Institutional mobility.* England's arrangements allow for institutions to change their orientation over time, instanced by some universities increasing their research intensity and standing over a relatively short time.
- 4 *Preserved historical legacy.* England has not sought to remake all its institutions and arrangements in the image of its new policies from time to time, but has built its policy changes on its historical legacy. Many longstanding institutions and arrangements have been retained, despite being inconsistent with a new policy, thus allowing a considerable variety (and complexity) to develop. Thus, when England dismantled its binary divide it did not seek to change all institutions into medium sized comprehensive teaching and research universities, but kept numerous independent single discipline academies and colleges.
- 5 *Elite within a mass system.* England has preserved remnants of its elite universities and academies within its otherwise mass higher education system Trow, Martin (1998) *The Dearing Report: a transatlantic view, Higher Education Quarterly*, volume 52, no 1, January, pp 93-117, at p 103.. It has maintained special funding to preserve the elite Cambridge and Oxford universities and the Royal academies of art, dance, dramatic arts and music. At the same time it awards significant funding to support institutions with strong equity performance.

Strategies

To achieve this vision there needs to be a balance of:

- 1 core funding, competitive funding and funding that is allocated to special purposes;
- 2 short, medium and long term goals; and
- 3 regional, national and international orientations.

Geography

In the big cities with two or more universities – Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Gold Coast, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney – institutions may specialise and complement each other so that the institutions together provide a comprehensive service and contribution to their city. But outside those cities the major higher education institution is usually the only provider of higher education in their region and to the extent that they specialise they limit the higher education available in their region. One third of universities are based outside the big cities and of course many universities based in the big cities also have at least one campus in a regional centre. Together they serve 36% of Australia's population. This has at least two implications for the review.

1 Diversity

Any notion of diversity should take into account an institution's, or more precisely, a campus' location. The higher education campuses in Ballarat and Bendigo are similar in size, range of programs, engagement in research and service to their local communities. This is because the cities of Ballarat and Bendigo are similar in size, economy and social structure and so have similar needs for higher education. The higher education campuses in Ballarat and Bendigo would be considered similar in any general typology of diversity, but they are distinctive in being located in and serving different cities.

2 Balanced regional development

For various social, environmental, economic and strategic reasons Australia should ensure that it has vibrant societies and economies outside its big cities. To achieve this Australia needs a policy of geographically balanced development and higher education has an important contribution to such a policy. Special funding is needed to support campuses outside the big cities since they can't achieve the economies of scale available in the big cities. However, such support should not be provided indiscriminately as with the current regional loading. Arguably higher education campuses in cities of fewer than 100,000 people and certainly those in towns of fewer than 50,000 people should be combined with regional Technical and Further Education institutes to establish a regional dual sector institution.

Research

Although research and specifically Excellence in Research for Australia is not within the Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and Social Inclusion portfolio, research policy is important for universities and clearly has a significant bearing on the review's terms of reference. Griffith observes that progress thus far with Excellence in Research for Australia is pushing universities to fit their research into the discipline based Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classification. This undermines interdisciplinary and problem based research on issues such as climate change, Indigenous Australians' health, urban development, etc. Griffith is also concerned that too little attention is being given to the community impact of research, undermining efforts to strengthen universities' contribution to social inclusion. It also seems that the emphasis on excellence in disciplinary research in Excellence in Research may pull universities into a different direct to the review of the national innovation system which may argue the need for more knowledge transfer and outcomes oriented research.

There have been various well founded criticisms of hubs and spokes as a mechanism for concentrating universities' research. Yet the Australian Government is committed to concentrating universities' research. If hubs and spokes would be either an undesirable or ineffective mechanism a better mechanism should be proposed. Griffith proposes that the Australian Government offer universities from new funds matching grants towards their centres of research concentration. By offering matching grants the Government would require universities to reallocate resources from elsewhere in the university to match government funding for their centres. The Australian Government could offer matching grants in the ratio of 2 Government dollars for every 1 university dollar. Centres of research concentration may be decided by each university and the Australian Government jointly. A national designation or perhaps appellation as a national research hub would help universities gain internal support for concentrating their research more heavily. An appropriate model might be the Chinese Government's three designations and funding levels of national laboratories, key laboratories and research centres. The Government would observe evidence of its desired research concentration in a greater disparity in staff:student ratios within universities, in the increased variation of teaching loads amongst academic staff, and in increasing numbers of academic staff being designated as teaching or research only and teaching or research intensive.

Some 32% of England's 91 universities are ranked in the top 500 in the world in Shanghai Jiao Tong University's academic ranking of world universities. Australia does rather better with 44% of its 39 universities ranked in the world top 500, indicating a more even scientific research performance of Australian universities, all of which have a research role.

It will be noted from the table below that Australia's distribution of universities in the world top 500 are in two clusters, with a cluster of Group of Eight universities in the band 101 – 200 and a second cluster of IRUA and strong regional universities (UNE and Tasmania) in the band 401 – 500. It is likely that this is an artefact of historical funding patterns. In contrast England's distribution is more like an inverted pyramid, with 11% of its universities in the top 100 falling to only 2% of its universities in the band 401 – 500. This is probably the result of the very high concentration of research block funding following the research assessment exercise since 1986. While this conforms to the English pattern of a continuum of research performance, Griffith submits that the research assessment exercise has concentrated research in English universities excessively and that a better shaped continuum for Australia is of a pyramid, with most universities doing at least some research relevant to their region, about half performing at a level to be ranked, a quarter to be in the top half of the rank, and one at the apex. This would ensure that there is a reasonable geographic distribution of research performance and establish a solid foundation for the universities performing at the top in research.

Table 1: Proportion of universities ranked in Shanghai Jiao Tong University's academic ranking of world universities by band, Australia and England, 2007

Band	Australia	England
1 - 100	5%	11%
101 – 200	13%	8%
201 – 300	5%	8%
301 – 400	5%	3%
401 – 500	15%	2%

Source: Shanghai Jiao Tong University (2007) *Academic ranking of world universities*, <http://ed.sjtu.edu.cn/rank/2007/ranking2007.htm> (accessed 18 April 2008).

Funding mechanisms

A variety of funding mechanisms is needed to meet the various aspects of Griffith's vision of Australian higher education.

- 1 *Block funding* is needed to fund institutions' core and long term goals.
- 2 *Special purpose allocations* are needed to support special missions such as regional contribution, students with special needs and any subject of national priority.
- 3 *Competitive funding* is needed to fund excellence wherever it occurs and to encourage institutions to perform at their highest level.

While Griffith supports competitive funding since it is necessary to support to the development of new potential concentrations of excellence, over the last decade the balance has moved too far to competitive funding, particularly in view of Australian institutions' heavy reliance on fees from international students. An increase in the proportion of block and special purpose funding is consistent with university compacts.

University compacts

A university compact should not be a comprehensive and detailed blueprint for the institution's activities, for these reasons.

- 1 Even were the Australian Government to start increasing the share of block and special purpose grants to universities, a very high proportion of universities' revenue would continue to be derived from competitive sources at least over the medium term. Universities will need flexibility to respond to the market.
- 2 In comparison with overseas universities, Australian universities are big and have multiple campuses – an average of 3.4 campuses. Because many universities have multiple campuses in different regions, a detailed compact would require a different plan for each campus. This would make compacts too unwieldy to negotiate, monitor and administer.
- 3 Detailed compacts would have to be negotiated by a body with considerable resources, the capacity to exercise academic and financial judgements, and independence from political interests. In overseas jurisdictions compacts are negotiated by buffer bodies, such as the Tertiary Education Commission in New Zealand and the postsecondary education commissions (however styled) in many US States. While some universities advocate the reestablishment of a buffer body in Australia, such a body would be too bureaucratic and cumbersome and too intrusive into universities' strategic planning. Griffith, along with other members of Innovative Research Universities Australia, has not had good experience with earlier Commonwealth buffer bodies in the Universities Commission and the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission: it found them intrusive and it locked the university into the status quo.
- 4 There is not a major crisis or urgent problem with university planning which requires a sudden break from current arrangements.

Griffith therefore submits that university compacts should develop from the previous educational profiles and the current institutional funding agreement. The Australian Government should develop compacts in line with its increased block and special purpose grants to universities.

Big issues

In addition, Griffith suggests that the review consider these big issues, which it lists under the review's terms of reference.

Productivity and participation

- 1 What, precisely is meant by 'productivity' and how would it be measured? Should there be targets for higher education to contribute to national productivity, in which case, how would they be set?
- 2 Should Australia adopt a target for the overall size of its higher education system, and if so, should this be expressed as the number of graduates (Dawkins), proportion of graduates in the population, student load, participation rate, net entry rate, or some other measure?

Effective and efficient investment

- 1 How may student income support be improved?
- 2 What should be the share between student fees and government funding for financing teaching overall and for each discipline?
- 3 Should the Australian Government revisit the relativities in funding rates between disciplines, and if so, what method should be used to determine appropriate relativities?

Underpinning social inclusion through access and opportunity

- 1 What are the implications of social inclusion for current higher education equity policy established in 1990 by *A fair chance for all*?
- 2 The review of *Participation and equity* for Universities Australia shows there has been no significant improvement in higher education equity since 2001. Furthermore, Australia is the only country amongst 7 studied that showed no improvement over 20 years in access for people from low socio economic status². What major lessons can Australia learn from overseas to improve dramatically its equity performance?

Enhanced quality and high standards

- 1 How suitable is the current higher education quality assurance process for assuring that higher education institutions meet the criteria set out in the national protocols for higher education approval processes?
- 2 Should Australia have a national process for administering the national protocols for higher education approval processes? (Part of this is being considered by a review by the Australian, State and Territory governments' Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs.)

A broad tertiary education and training sector

- 1 To what extent should vocational and higher education be developed as complementary and coordinated parts of an integrated tertiary education system?
- 2 To what extent are the differences between vocational and higher education in government coordination, government policies, financing, allocation of Commonwealth supported places, student fees, curriculum, quality assurance and institutional arrangements desirable to further the different missions of vocational and higher education, and to what extent are these differences legacies of the past that are open to harmonisation over time?

² backgrounds Clancy, Patrick and Goastellec, Gaële (2007) Exploring access and equity in higher education: policy and performance in a comparative perspective, *Higher Education Quarterly*, volume 61, no 2 (April), pp 136–154, at p 151.

- 3 Australian post compulsory education is becoming increasingly vertically integrated from above: public universities are establishing colleges to offer upper secondary, preparatory, transitional and vocational education programs; and from below: public Tafe and private vocational education providers are increasingly offering higher level programs. However, this vertical integration is almost exclusively for private fee-paying students, regardless of whether the institution is public or private. To what extent should the Australian Government support these developments directly, and to what extent should these arrangements be extended to publicly supported postcompulsory education?

Policy links

- 1 How might continuing policy links be established between vocational and higher education and between higher education and research? Is there merit in establishing a body responsible for policy discussion across the sectors?
- 2 How might statistics of vocational education, higher education and research be made more commensurable? The UK's Higher Education Statistics Agency might be a useful model for Australia since it was established to achieve more 'coherence' in higher education statistics and helped establish 'an integrated higher education system throughout the United Kingdom'.

Griffith looks forward to participating further in the review.

Regards

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