Welcome to the second issue of i.research produced by the Institutional Research Consultancy Unit at RMIT. After overcoming some initial delays we now aim to release the newsletter on a monthly basis. As you will see we have made up for some lost time with this issue, and have added a section on developments and news in information technology. Thank you to everyone who has submitted views to this issue. We hope that you will find it both informative of the issues relevant to postsecondary education and that it will raise awareness of developments that are impacting on the tertiary sector that are particularly relevant to the work of RMIT.

The IRCU is committed to scanning issues and emerging trends, analysing and interpreting such currents and sharing them with the RMIT community. As well as the monthly newsletter, we issue environmental scanning alerts as topics of interest arise. We welcome your feedback.

A synthesis and round up of current events in Australia relevant to the work of the postsecondary education sector.

The Commonwealth's Figures on Projected Student Demand
10 October, 2002

Historically the distribution of new places in higher education has been made against criteria taking into account projected growth in the university-aged population, unmet demand and participation levels. Now forecasts suggest that there will be a faster rate of population growth in some States in the relevant age groups and a likely decline in others.

Over the long-term, these projections show an overall flattening of the age group likely to enter higher education nationally, reflecting the ageing of the population. These forecasts indicate that while the appropriate level of places to be provided nationally to meet the projected future demand for higher education is important, the issue for governments in the long-term may be more one of the appropriate distribution of the available places across States and Territories.

Issues being examined in the Review of Higher Education include whether a revised criteria may be warranted for the allocation of future places or whether greater emphasis should be placed on selected criteria, including changes in Year 12 participation, access and student demand. In recent years, increases in fully funded places have been greatest in Queensland and Western Australia. However, New South Wales and Victoria have also experienced significant increases.
Projections show that there is likely to be an increase in the 17-19 year-old population of around 4 per cent over the next decade. Following a peak, this will reduce significantly until 2020 when levels will return to those experienced today.

For actual projections on student demand for the university sector see:

Review of Higher Education Symposium Wrap-up

A symposium in Canberra on 3-4th October at Parliament House considered issues that have been put into the public arena over the last six months as part of the Review of Australian higher education. The Minister of Education, Science and Training’s media release claimed that key priorities for the Government in relation to universities will be equity, sustainability, quality, and an adequately funded system for the future. The forum brought together the Australian Vice Chancellors Committee, representatives from different universities the length and breadth of Australia, Vice Chancellors from the larger research intensive universities and representatives from smaller universities which are predominately in the regions of the country. Representatives from business and industry and the broader community, unions and representatives of students including the president of the National Union of Students were also in attendance.

At the forum the Minister ruled out the possibility of the higher education reform leading to a demise of the financial and educational base that support the universities in the regions. “There will not be real interest rates applying to student loans, nor are we indeed going to come up with a policy prescription which is for a free unfettered market for higher education”, he said.

In relation to the proposed target of 60% of Australians to attend university the Minister alluded to the current participation rate of 45% and deflected the question by stating that success comes in other forms of education and career choices other than university.

Victorian Government Statement on Knowledge and Skills

The Minister for Education and Training, Hon. Lyn Kosky, released on the 3rd October a statement on the future directions for Victorian higher education, Knowledge and Skills for the Innovation Economy.

It comprises the Victorian Government’s proposed strategies to best position Victorian universities in the future, and forms a response to the Commonwealth Government’s Review of Higher Education. As might be expected, the proposals for action relate to the State Government’s regulatory role and its social and economic stake in higher education.

The statement is strongly critical of the Commonwealth’s withdrawal of funding for higher education but does not propose any specific state – funded initiatives to fill the gap. Instead, it calls for a new model of ‘partnership’ between State and Commonwealth Governments and public universities, and offers a framework for increasing state involvement in the operations of Victorian universities.

Opportunities arise from increased State Government engagement with higher education, insofar as it may provide a framework for lobbying for increased funding to enhance institutional activity – for example, through partnership agreements; or through the work of the proposed interdepartmental committee. More active State Government involvement – for example, through the Council of Ministers for Higher Education proposed here – may also increase the political pressure on the Commonwealth to address funding issues.

A number of the Government’s stated priorities for Victoria’s social and economic development over the next decade are clearly relevant to the work of universities. In particular, the Statement emphasises the role of universities in building an ‘Innovation economy’ and in increasing the prosperity of regional Victoria.

- State government to develop ‘partnership agreements’ with all public universities through the Office of Higher Education;
- Establishment of a Victorian Higher Education ‘Ministerial Round Table’;
- State Government pursuit of partnership agreements between Government, industry and universities in priority areas of innovation, research and development;
- Encouragement of credit transfer through establishment of a panel of senior university and TAFE representatives to promote a uniform approach to this issue, and through encouragement of courses that provide dual sector outcomes with cross-sectoral credit (through ‘nested’ qualifications);
- State Government to seek commitment from universities to coordinate provision in regional Victoria;
- Requiring universities to commit to ‘community engagement’ alongside teaching and research in their mission statement, priorities and strategic plans and academic position descriptions; and
State Payroll Tax Stripping Universities.
11 October, 2002

An analysis by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) has revealed that the States and Territories are collectively removing more than $291 million from Australia’s universities in payroll tax.

At the same time they are supporting universities with state grants worth only $175 million – effectively stripping universities of $116 million each year.

The State Governments of Western Australia and Tasmania are net supporters of their universities. While New South Wales removes a net $83 million each year from that state’s ten universities, Victoria removes a net $25 million each year from its universities, and Queensland removes a net $14.5 million and South Australia $2.3 million. Regional universities contribute nationally more than $62 million to state coffers.

Productivity Commission Report
Tuesday October 8, 2002

As a part of the Review of Higher Education, the Productivity Commission examined how Australian higher education compared to some overseas experiences. The Productivity Commission has now completed a draft of its report; University Resourcing: Australia in an International Context.

The release of the draft report has created significant media coverage, with most commentators accepting the findings at face value. Irrespective of the veracity of data included in the report (to date untested), its findings have been and will continue to be used in the political arena in the context of the Crossroads Review.

The draft report found most Australian universities received a higher proportion of revenue from students than universities in nine other countries, including the United States. HECS and student tuition and course fees accounted for up to 45 per cent of total revenue for Australian universities. The Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (AVCC) says Australia’s universities will need to change significantly if they are going to compete at a respectable level with universities across the world.

However, the statistical analyses and conclusions drawn from them should be viewed with caution due to major problems with the report, particularly that there are no productivity measures used, the data are not always comparable and the sample used is limited. RMIT has provided advice to the Productivity Commission on how the final report may be improved. Please contact David Rutherford on x54013 for a copy of RMIT’s submission.

National Research Projects
1252 new research projects to be funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC) from 2003 with total approved funding at $94.7 million (majority of this for Discovery projects $75.5 million).

For more information about these projects see http://www.arc.gov.au/ngr/outcomes/default.htm.

Research Specialisations
After calls from the Commonwealth for Universities to identify their research strength, DEST has released a report that provides a national snapshot of research capabilities. Of the 513 areas of research strength identified, 35 per cent are in science and technology, 40 per cent are in arts, humanities and social sciences and 13 per cent are in health and medical science.

The paper draws together material from universities’ research and research training management reports, a requirement that came out of the 1999 innovation statement. In their reports, universities set out their research objectives and what directions they want to go, in a policy culture that has encouraged them to carve out niche areas.

The paper acknowledges that the 40 institutions used a variety of approaches to identify their research strengths. These range from traditional indicators such as research income, the number of research active staff, the number of publications, higher degree by research completions, and success in winning research grants.

AVCC Supports Call for Major Research Funding
Calls for an increase in contestable research funding for the nation’s university sector have received the backing of the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee. Head of the Group of Eight, Professor John Hay, called for a $385 million funding boost to 'safeguard future research and the associated economic benefits.' AVCC President, Professor Deryck Schreuder said...
Australia's universities need greater investment of funds to serve the nation appropriately.

Incentives for New Apprenticeships
The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) has conducted a review of the Commonwealth New Apprenticeships Programme. The review sought to identify opportunities to improve the targeting and administrative processes of the programme. This was done in consultation with employers, industry, Group Training Organisations, States and Territories and other interested parties to ensure that the programme is as targeted and as simple to communicate to employers as possible.

Changes to the Commonwealth New Apprenticeships Incentives Programme include consolidation and simplification of incentive payments for employers and an extension of the Disabled Apprentice Wage Subsidy. Most of these changes announced will take place from 1 July 2003.

Report Cards for Victorian Schools
9 October 2002
The Victorian Government announced recently that from 2003 all parents of Years 3, 5 and 7 students would be provided with their child’s literacy and numeracy performance against the national literacy and numeracy benchmarks.

Victoria now joins Western Australia, the Northern Territory and the ACT in reporting to parents against national literacy and numeracy benchmarks.

From 2003 all Year 7 students in Victorian Government schools will be assessed against the national literacy and numeracy benchmark at Year 7.

This decision means that Victoria now joins all other States and Territories in conducting full cohort assessment at Year 7. Full comparable data of how students perform against literacy and numeracy standards will be made available.

It was claimed by the Minister that this will ensure that any students that require additional support to attain critical literacy and numeracy skills will now be able to be identified. However other reports were critical of this move to increase transparency of student performance by school. As reported in The Age (9th October), some principals and teachers are wary of publishing detailed performance information for fear of being branded "under-performing." They have argued that not all schools could be fairly compared with each other without considering students' particular needs, especially where there were welfare and language issues.

Review of National Protocols
DEST media release 11 October, 2002,

Legislative amendments will be introduced shortly to bring Australian external territories into line with Australian states and territories in complying with MCEETYA Protocols on Higher Education. This will stipulate that only institutions listed as self-accrediting on the AQF will be permitted to operate as universities in these territories, and would effectively outlaw Greenwich University's attempts to market itself as an 'Australian University'.

The proposed amendments to the Higher Education Funding Act (HEFA) will, for the first time, bring external territories such as Norfolk Island, Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) group under the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes.

The amendments will require higher education providers wishing to establish themselves in Australia's external territories to meet the same standards as those applied to providers in Australia's mainland States and Territories.

The Bill will override the operation of the Greenwich University Act 1998 (Norfolk Island). Greenwich University was assessed by the Commonwealth in December 2000 as not meeting the standards expected of an Australian university and has since had over 18 months to address deficiencies and provide evidence that it could meet expected quality standards.

In the meantime Greenwich University has continued to operate and market its courses overseas, describing itself as an institution approved by legislation of an external territory of Australia and formally approved by the Commonwealth of Australia.

Under the legislative amendments, the Minister for Education, Science and Training will become an accreditation agency for any providers wishing to operate in the external territories.

Also, a public warning about fake degrees and unauthorised higher education institutions has been posted on the DEST website at:

Australian Science: Investing in the Future
The Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies (FASTS), has put forward a comprehensive set of policies aimed at driving Australia into the top third of OECD countries by 2012.
There are actions for government, for business, for the education system, and for scientists.


September 2002

**THEMES AND CURRENTS**

An in-depth analysis of policy issues, trends and developments.

**Update on the Higher Ed Review: Emerging Issues and Arguments**

Five Issues Papers have now been released, dealing with teaching and learning, funding, institutional specialisation, and Indigenous participation in higher education. RMIT is preparing responses to these papers, which are due on 13th September. Issues Papers on Governance and the VET/Higher Education interface will also be published over the next few weeks.

Those wishing to access the Discussion papers should visit www.dest.gov.au/crossroads. RMIT’s responses to the Review are at http://www.rmit.edu.au_future/he-review.

If we consider the Government’s Discussion Papers as the development of a series of propositions, the following themes emerge.

Reliance on market mechanisms to increase funding to the sector: All of the models mooted for increasing funding to the sector involve market mechanisms, whether they are student fees or increased commercialisation of university research and services. Even the models for allocating public funding involve market mechanisms, with an emergent preference for competitive tendering. This positions Government as a ‘purchaser’ of university education and research services.

These arguments give weight to the Minister Nelson’s statements that there is not likely to be any significant increase to public funding arising from the Review. It also means that his denial that the government intends to introduce teaching-only universities should be taken with a grain of salt. Increased reliance on market mechanisms for funding allocation, and the extension of public subsidies for specialist private providers, will probably result in a cluster of institutions – mostly private providers - that do little or no research. Whether or not they are called ‘universities’ is a moot point.

No strategy for growing participation: The papers to date have been disappointing in their lack of attention to the need for lifelong learning and the role of universities in this context. The AVCC’s proposed targets for participation by 2020 are so far ignored. The government’s priority appears to be directing subsidised places into targeted areas rather than building participation across the board.

*Tension between regulation and deregulation:* With Government positioned as funding activity rather than institutions, and fee deregulation/commercialisation the major source of growth funding, one might expect less Government regulation. However, this is not necessarily the case. While the Government may take a more ‘hands off’ approach to universities’ commercial activities, it is likely to insist on a stronger role defining the activities and outcomes to which public funding is tied. For example, the options flagged in *Striving for Quality* and *Varieties of Excellence* suggest that government might take a more active role in the accreditation and approval of courses, in the accreditation of university teachers, and in the direction of university partnerships.

The papers propose no major changes to university governance, beyond arguing that governing bodies should be smaller, less focused on representation, and better equipped to respond flexibly to commercial opportunities. It is acknowledged that the nature and role of governing bodies, as well as the removal of accounting and auditing duplications between State and Commonwealth government, will need to be negotiated with the States.

Increasing emphasis on a mixed system of public and private provision: Much of the discussion to date is driving towards greater support for private providers as part of a mixed system characterised by specialisation and diversity.

The undeniable premise that universities do not have a monopoly on knowledge generation and transmission, and that public universities are not the only providers of higher education, is developed into an argument for broadening the public position on what constitutes a university. This leads to the suggestion that the National Protocols on Higher Education Accreditation be interpreted broadly, or revisited.

This has interesting implications for public institutions, which may find themselves in increased competition for private providers for public funds. This may well extend to competition with international public and private providers, depending on the outcome of negotiations around the General Agreement on Trade in Services in relation to education.

*Equity neglected.* Despite the Minister’s rhetoric, no mechanisms for improving participation by underrepresented groups have been proposed, and equity has received scant attention. Therefore, this is
likely to be an area where stakeholders need to find some common ground to propose policies to facilitate increased participation, rather than simply responding to the content of Issues Papers.

**Partnerships emphasised:** From RMIT’s perspective, perhaps the most positive aspect of the debate so far is the strong emphasis on, and support for, institutional partnerships with communities, industries and regions. Cross-sectoral partnerships are also emphasised in the Review. Therefore, there is a continuing opportunity to sell RMIT’s partnerships strategy as a model for the sector, although RMIT will also need to address the issue of partnerships between institutions (particularly in light of varying opinion around the extent of ATN collaboration emerging in submissions from within the group).

Submissions to the Review (responding to the Issues Papers) closed on 13th September, and a final Stakeholder Forum (comprising representatives of peak bodies, members of the Review Reference Group, and individuals selected by the Minister’s Office) was held in Canberra on 3-4th October.

The Review Secretariat is being disbanded and there is unlikely to be a final Report. A Cabinet submission – comprising a number of costed options – is being prepared, and is scheduled to be presented to Cabinet before the end of the year, in time to feed into the May Budget deliberations. However, the two imperatives of drought relief and possible war will strongly influence spending decisions.

In addition to the Overview paper, *Higher Education at the Crossroads*, RMIT has prepared responses to the six Issues Papers released as part of the Review. Copies of the Review’s Issues Papers are at www.dest.gov.au/crossroads

These were forwarded to the Review Secretariat in September, and are included in an information/advocacy kit being prepared for Council. RMIT representatives participated in a series of consultative meetings organised by DEST in early September, focused on the Review Issues Papers. In addition, RMIT has continued to engage and have input into submissions prepared by other stakeholders, including the AVCC, the ATN and TAFE Directors’ Association.

Documents relating to RMIT’s engagement with the Review are at http://www.rmit.edu.au/future/he-review

**Joint Statement from States and Territories**

The Federal Shadow Education Minister, Jenny Macklin and Australia’s State and Territory Education Ministers released a joint statement on higher education on the 8th October. The Shadow Education Minister began a press conference with the following concerns:

*We are very concerned about what is happening in our universities and in vocational education. We know that they have suffered severely as a result of significant cuts from the Commonwealth particularly to universities and TAFEs. Over three billion dollars has been taken from our universities and the response of the Howard Government has been to significantly increase the amounts that students have to pay to go to university.*

The joint statement sets out five major concerns with the direction of the Review of Higher Education, namely in relation to the issues of funding, fair distribution of resources to all Australians, equitable participation, research and internationalisation. The statement develops a set of principles to underpin reform:

- Increase Commonwealth investment in higher education.
- Opposition to the deregulation of tuition charges.
- Ensure contribution of universities to regions by ensuring that resources are distributed fairly, recognising that all universities have research strengths, rejecting the creation of ‘teaching only’ or ‘undergraduate only’ universities.
- Address high level of unmet demand for university places, particularly in areas critical to the community, such as teaching and nursing.
- Ensure equitable participation in education that benefits people from diverse backgrounds. Bandaid measures such as scholarships are not a solution.
- Declining Commonwealth investment is threatening standards and undermining public confidence in university quality. Any reforms should enhance the quality of teaching, learning and research and ensure all Australians have access to a broad range of courses irrespective of location.
- Research capacity should be developed according to discipline and merit, rather than on an institutional basis, and be fostered through co-operative, as well as competitive, funding systems.
- Improve links between the two systems must be developed, including clear and consistent procedures for Recognition of Prior Learning.
between the two sectors, while retaining their distinctive roles.

- Focus the social and cultural benefits of internationalisation of higher education.

http://www.alp.org.au/media/1002/20002487.html#top

The AVCC’s Response to the Review of Higher Education

Forward from Crossroads sets out the AVCC’s response to all Crossroads Discussion papers. It reiterates the four symbols developed by the AVCC in Positioning Australia’s Universities for 2020 that should define the Australian university sector by 2020.

- Australia will be ranked within the top five nations for levels of university Education.
- Australia will have at least one recognised, world class, research centre in each significant academic field.
- Higher education will be one of the top three ‘value-adding’ Australian exports
- Australian investment in higher education will be 2% of GDP

Most significantly, it sets out the AVCC’s proposed finance model designed to achieve the benchmarks contained in these four symbols. The AVCC calls for significant reinvestment of public funding in the university sector. It also contains policies to grow participation, in part supported through proposals for reform to student income support.

The model advocates deregulation of HECS, and contestability of additional funding in the areas or research, partnerships, infrastructure and regional engagement and includes the following key planks:

Student places: Each university is funded for publicly funded student places. The range is set annually in response to student demand, participation rates and university performance.

Operating grants: Each university receives an annually indexed base grant for its base activities of teaching, research and community engagement. No university will receive less for its existing profile of student loads.

HECS: Standard HECS is charged for Government funded places set at the current rates and indexed. Universities are able to vary, up or down, the HECS rate for each course, with a Government set upper and lower limit.

Competitive funding: An effective mix of core research funds and competitive project and infrastructure research funds is distributed each year. Core funding increases each year and is distributed based on an evaluation of each university’s relative research performance and potential. Project funds are distributed based on competitive assessment of project proposals.

Regional engagement: Contestable funds specifically provided and targeted to university engagement with regional Australia.

Specialisation: To encourage specialisation, diversity and efficiencies within universities – through rationalising courses, removing unnecessary overlap, preserving important but otherwise unviable disciplines, and forging partnerships and strategic alliances – there are contestable funds specifically provided and targeted for such purposes.

For a more detailed summary please contact Chris Raab at Chris.Raab@rmit.edu.au

Public Sector Transparency and Accountability

A recent report from the OECD on Public Sector Transparency and Accountability states that High standards of public governance are the essential foundation for achieving sustainable economic growth and social cohesion. The report dialogues practices and processes in different countries, but also includes attachments on OECD best practice / policy and ethics guidelines. To download the report see http://www.sourceoecd.org/data/cm/00007934/4202081e.pdf

Business Council of Australia Advises Universities

The Business Council of Australia (BCA) has produced two reports that have received wide media attention in the context of the Review of Higher Education. These are Higher Education in Australia: Developing a New Data Framework and International Comparisons and Issues, released 27th August 2002, and Developing a Framework for the Financing and Governance of Australian Universities, released 20th September 2002.

The Data Framework Report draws together previously published data to provide an assessment of input and output indicators used in higher education, and draws from this information a series of conclusions.

The Report contains two arguments that are of significant concern:

Firstly, that the higher education system lacks adequate output indicators on which to base further decisions about funding and corrective policy measures. The paper argues that this inadequacy diminishes the validity of any argument that falling inputs has led to worse outcomes, and suggests that there is still room for efficiency. The report notes that while research outcomes can be
adequately assessed by number of refereed publications and patents etc, information about governance in universities is by its very nature qualitative. In addition little is known about the quality of learning outcomes, with only proxy metrics, such as employment rates and labour market trends, available. The report concedes that this is not an issue peculiar to Australia, with failed attempts in other OECD countries to develop metrics of student learning outcomes across higher education systems.

While we do need to think about what indicators are meaningful in justifying investment in higher education to the community, the nature of universities lead to the inevitability of proxy measures. Learning is a complex phenomena. One could argue that while continued higher employability rates of university graduates may be a ‘proxy’ measure of student learning outcomes, it is nonsense to try to measure the direct value added-ness of ‘learning’ that institutions make to individual students.

Perhaps the BCA are really addressing the vexing issue of comparable standards across the higher education system. This is a more worthy topic than the limitations of using proxy measures to assess learning outcomes.

Dangers arise when narrowly-conceived sets of indicators are tied to funding decisions. One obvious danger is the creation of a ‘feedback loop’ whereby institutional activity will be increasingly geared towards delivering only outputs that can be measured and are recognised for funding purposes, rather than those which may be just as valuable but less easily quantified (eg development of entrepreneurial skills in students; development of independent learning styles). Such a ‘feedback loop’ may also slow the capacity of institutions to respond to emergent needs.

Secondly, the report argues that Australian tertiary education is not badly resourced by international standards, and that this means that there is not a strong case for increasing public investment. The report uses OECD data on expenditure per student factors in private expenditure, therefore while overall expenditure per student may appear relatively healthy in relation to other OECD countries (although it is by no means high), it masks the high level of system dependence on student fees. This raises the question (not addressed by the BCA) of whether we can rely on fee income as the primary source of income generation; and whether we can afford to increase the debt burden for students.

The OECD data excludes expenditure on income support. Therefore, questions as to whether income support for Australian students is adequate are not addressed in this analysis. A third major problem with the analysis of this data and the policy conclusions that flow from it is that, in analysing the relative health of funding in the Australian higher education system, it does not take account of increasing cost structures in higher education (in particular arising from unfunded enterprise bargaining). Across the sector, operating costs are increasing more rapidly than revenue; external borrowings have increased by nearly 60% since 1997 and the current ratio has fallen from 2.1 in 1996 to 1.5 in 2000. This gap will accelerate unless substantial revenue growth is achieved, and the impact on institutions will vary significantly.

The Financing and Governance Report draws on international comparisons made in the Data Framework Report to recommend updates to the financing and governance framework currently used in Australian Universities to reflect changes in the operating environment. The BCA believe that a funding system that gives greater flexibility to universities and ties funding more strongly to students would best allow the sector to achieve equity and excellence.

The BCA argues that funding students rather than institutions is advantageous in that it maximises strong performance incentives for institutions and maximises student choice. These arguments are situated against fundamental principles that underpin the development of an appropriate longer-term financial framework that provides equity of access, is sustainable and includes incentives to encourage excellence. However as we have seen from experiences in New Zealand with a student voucher system, funding students in fact penalises those who do not complete in time, due to the constraints placed on the ‘voucher’. This system, while appearing to maximise student choice, does not accommodate the fact that a proportion of students will always require more resources than they’re entitled. In addition, because funding is student based and not strategic, it is bound in total by influences from market forces. The danger here is that the market may not necessarily guarantee diversity within the system.

Recommended reforms to governance in universities explicitly attack the representative nature of university governing bodies. These include:

- ensure the role of governing bodies is clearly articulated by legislation and each university - including a clear statement that the role of the governing body is to act in the interests of the university as a whole and not advance particular sectional interests and to achieve the stated core objectives;

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1 Higher Education for the 2002-2004 Triennium. While universities’ external borrowings and debt to equity ratio generally remain low by private enterprise standards, this is not an argument for increasing debt; as the bulk of universities’ assets cannot be redeemed against debt.
• review board appointment processes and remove ‘quotas’ for board members from particular interest groups; and
• consider significantly reducing the average number of State government/Ministerial appointments to governing bodies.

Assessment against good practice is strongly supported by RMIT, and has also been endorsed in moves by the Australian Universities Quality Agency to establish a good practice data base which includes criteria for assessing and defining good practice. Definitions of good practice need to be aligned to the particular missions of universities. While there is a sound argument to be made for governance frameworks in higher education becoming more aligned to an operating environment marked by increased commercialisation, the natures of universities remain holistic, with their missions focussed on serving the public good and meeting the knowledge needs of local, national and global communities.

The issue raised in the report on the restrictions imposed by quotas of interest groups on governing bodies is based on achieving membership profiles for governing bodies that will sufficiently fulfill the changing needs of an increasingly commercial environment. The assumption made is that traditional quota membership restricts the flexibility upon which profiles can be constituted. However evidence from the University of South Australia dismisses this claim:

*The tension between ‘delegate’ or ‘trustee’ conceptions of the roles of Council members has not been an impediment to progressing good governance at the University of South Australia because of the understanding of Council’s primary responsibilities to serve the objectives of the university has been made explicit through induction and review and continuously reinforced though the Council leadership (p. 33)*

While the report reviews a number of studies that have been conducted in recent years to formulate principles for university governance (such as the Hoare Report and Review of University Governance conducted by the Victorian Government), it does not adequately review progress made to date in the sector in response to these reviews. The report admonishes universities by suggesting that governance arrangements are variable across institutions in the sector. Why this is necessarily inappropriate, given their differing missions, is not elaborated on. Therefore while one can endorse the BCA’s call for further raising of governance standards across the sector, claims of inefficiencies and detrimental effects of “interest” groups on governing bodies are unsubstantiated.

To download the reports see http://www.bca.com.au/default.asp?pnewsid=846&menu=true

**Women in VET**

Work is underway to give Australian women a better deal from training. Education and training groups, women's organisations, enterprises, unions, industry groups and government bodies across the country are having their say about changes needed to ensure women get better outcomes from training. ANTA Board member Leonie Clyne, who is overseeing the gender equity project, says five key result areas were identified at a women’s forum earlier this year and specific actions suggested for each. She said that women are still doing lower level qualifications in limited occupational fields which lead them to part-time jobs and lower pay, and the gender equity project will give practical ideas about how to tackle gender inequity so that Australian women have equal opportunity to make choices about their work and life. Initial consultations were held earlier this year and included a two-day forum involving women from a broad range of private and public sector and community organisations. Forum participants are now among a growing band of people seeking input from around Australia that will shape future directions for gender equity policies and actions in VET. A survey can be completed in hard copy or online at www.anta.gov.au/dapEquity.asp

The consultations on future management of women’s issues coincide with the development of the next overall national strategy for VET. ANTA will report on the project in mid 2003 to State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers responsible for vocational education and training.

For further information email equityinfo@anta.gov.au or visit www.anta.gov.au/dapEquity.asp

Source: VET & ACE e-News* vetenews@edna.edu.au

**Post Johannesburg Thoughts**

Governments are frequently accused of paying lip-service to the idea of sustainable development. The OECD asked ministers from a cross-section of countries - South Africa as a non-OECD country and host to the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development; Finland as a smaller, though environmentally progressive, OECD member; France, whose government has recently instituted a sustainable development portfolio; Mexico, as one of the largest and poorest OECD countries, and the United States as the OECD’s biggest and perhaps most environmentally important member to answer questions about the steps they are taking to progress towards achieving their goals.
Conference Board\(^2\): The Road to Sustainability: Business' First Steps'

by Meredith Armstrong Whiting and Charles J. Bennett

Introduction

From the early 1980’s the term ‘sustainable development’ was used interchangeably with ‘environmental performance’. However, ‘sustainability’ encompasses more than just environmental management, it is about improving resource efficiency to a broader approach that includes economic and social improvement.

“Sustainable development [is] environmental protection, social equity and economic growth” (World Business Council for Sustainable Development).

While sustainability is the desired end, sustainable development can be described as the means of achieving that end.

Role of Business

Business is being held accountable for improving and managing worldwide sustainable development due to the fact that they:

- have the resources and global reach (more so than government)
- are a major part of the problem itself
- have a vested interest (in the ongoing use of world resources)
- are already reporting publicly on much of their progress in this area
- have investors which are screening them to ensure sustainable performance
- are a key actor in many areas of sustainability due to globalisation.

To achieve sustainable development, high-level corporate leadership is required. This is not limited to just the board and senior management, it requires input from all business operations and a broad organisational commitment.

- While the board sets the vision and direction of the organization, the CEO must take an active lead. A dedicated senior leader is vital for success.

Communicating the Commitment to Sustainability

Engaging Stakeholders 1999: The Social Reporting Report, summarises reasons for reporting on sustainability progress to:

- communicate and reinforce the core values and vision of the company
- identify areas of weakness
- promote stability
- explore stakeholder perspectives
- assist all organizations to manage intangibles such as reputation and trust
- provide a credible means to communicate with stakeholders
- attract, understand, motivate and retain employees.

The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), which attempts to walk organizations through the sustainability reporting and verification process, reported that some 2000 non-traditional corporate reports were produced in 1999. It is expected that this figure has increased dramatically by the demand from business and the general public for a show of good faith and transparency of their operations.

\(^2\) Research Report R-1309-01-RR
While many companies agree that some form of Triple Bottom Line (TBL) reporting is desirable – the means to achieve this is not simple. The Dow Jones Sustainability World Index (DJSWI) aims to provide a bridge between sustainability practices and potential investors. It attempts to quantify corporate sustainability strategies in financial terms.

Other reporting mechanisms include the Global Compact (introduced in 1999 and World Economic Forum at Davos), and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, developed to provide voluntary principles and standards for responsible business conduct.

Case Studies
The paper goes on to discuss the progress and current status of four leading companies in the field of sustainability: Dupont, ABB, Proctor and Gamble, and Baxter International. While each of these companies takes a different approach, common themes are found throughout:

- Sustainable development is the most viable course for multinational business.
- Virtually every aspect of corporate operations must be attuned to the issue.
- Transparency through reporting is crucial.

Key Findings
- Sustainability ideas are evolving, while at the same time becoming more complex and challenging.
- The general public along with many businesses do not understand the true concept of sustainability.
- Associated ideas of corporate social responsibility and corporate citizenship are adding to the confusion.
- Thousands of company’s worldwide have already begun to embrace sustainability issues; many others are observing their progress from a distance.
- The drivers for sustainability include internal corporate awareness and self-governance standards along with external pressures such as stakeholder activism and codes of conduct.
- Much of the implementation to date has touched on environmental / resource management, environmental health and safety, community outreach and economic development initiatives.

- Products and services are being developed by leading sustainability companies to stimulate economic and social development, whilst still improving their own economic performance.
- Public reporting on sustainability practices and achievements is gaining popularity, but there is currently no consistency or standardisation. However, several initiatives are underway to achieve this.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Round up of current events and developments in relevant to information technology and education

Universities Online – A Survey of Online Education and Services in Australia
DEST Occasional Papers Series March 2002

This report is based on a survey of online programs, courses and services at 40 Australian Universities in 2001.

The key finding were:

Online Programs: There were 207 fully online programs at 23 universities, of which 65 (including 2 from RMIT) were delivered only by on-line mode.

Most online programs, 90%, were at the postgraduate level, and tended to be specialist programs.

Management and Commerce 26%, Education 17% and Health 15% dominated the provision of online programs.

Duplication of programs was limited to graduate diplomas in e-commerce or e-business (5 universities) and graduate certificates in online learning or flexible learning (4 universities).

Online Courses: Internet usage in courses ranged from 99 or 100 percent (7 universities) to a low of 9 percent at one university.

Web supplementation of course delivery was the dominant form of course delivery at 46%, (RMIT 83%) whereas fully online courses comprised 1.4 % (RMIT 1%) of all course delivery.

Nationally Management and Commerce, Education, Information Technology and Health have the highest percentages of fully online courses.

Information and Technology courses make the highest use of the web where 40% (RMIT 7%) of IT courses are fully online or web dependant. Areas where RMIT
has a higher percentage of fully online or web dependant courses are Natural and Physical Sciences 35%, Architecture and Building 28%, Health 27%, Management and Commerce 21% and Society and Culture 17%.

Online services: Most universities provide an intranet for students with 70% providing access from off campus.

Almost all universities (92.5%) provide handbooks and/or calendars online.

University library catalogue access is high at 95%, online journals are accessible via the Internet at 90% and 82.5% of universities allow online reservation of books.

The most frequently used courseware management systems are WebCT (29 universities), in-house systems (20 universities) and Blackboard (17 universities) and RMIT uses all three of these.

The use of online registration and enrolment is not widespread, 27.5% offer these services to new students and 40% to existing students.

Only 30% of universities offer online payment of fees to all students.

Learning support online is available at 57% of universities and 45% provide online training in information, communication and technology.

Comments:

Universities with small proportions of web delivery tend to make these courses web dependant but universities with large proportions of web delivery allow a mixed mode of study. RMIT’s current business approach is to use mixed mode delivery with pure on line delivery focused in narrow areas of postgraduate study.

At semester one 2001, there were just under fifty thousand enrolments in the distributed learning system (DLS). There were 8,613 students using the DLS representing 17% of total RMIT enrolments at that time. There was a significant difference between sectors, with higher education students more likely to use the DLS than VET students.

RMIT is continuing to develop new postgraduate programs for online delivery in the areas of health and business. Compared to national data, RMIT is currently strong in its fully online or web dependant courses for Natural and Physical Sciences at 35%, Architecture and Building 28%, Health 27%, Management and Commerce 21% and Society and Culture 17%.

The full report can be obtained at http://www.dest.gov.au/highered/occpaper.htm#200

Access and Equity in E-Learning in Australia

An initiative under the auspices for Australian Flexible Learning Framework for the National Vocational Education and Training System 2000-2004 is investigating the needs of three equity groups in e-learning, learners with literacy needs, Indigenous learners and learners with disability. In 2001 the needs of three additional equity groups were established, Women e-learners, Rural and Remote Rural e-learners and isolated Metropolitan e-learners. Research in 2001 included issues for e-learners around the Digital Divide.

http://the.flexiblelearning.net.au/accessequity/content/introduction.asp

Satellite Technology Enriches LOTE Learning

A new TV satellite dish launched recently by (Queensland) Education Minister Anna Bligh will give Languages Other Than English (LOTE) students access to education programs in eight languages. The satellite dish, which is installed at the Queensland LOTE Centre in West End, is able to receive programs in French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese and Indonesian.

http://statements.cabinet.qld.gov.au/cgi-bin/display-statement.pl?id=8658&dB=media

Working Together Online

Technology developed by researchers from Griffith University in Queensland is set to transform the way users collaborate via the Internet. A team of researchers from the University’s School of Computing and Information Technology has developed software which allows real-time collaborative editing of documents by geographically-dispersed computer users. http://www.gu.edu.au/er/news/2002_2/02sep18.html

Online Work Skills for Postgraduate Success: a Collaborative Venture

Postgraduate research students at the Australian Technology Network's five universities have started using online modules to upgrade their work and employment-related skills. The modules, offered collaboratively by the ATN universities cover five topics which are research commercialisation, public policy, leadership and communication, entrepreneurship and project management.


This report, from the National Center for Education Statistics, United States, presents data on Internet
access in US public schools from 1994 to 2001 by school characteristics. It provides trend analyses on the progress of public schools and classrooms in connecting to the Internet and on the ratio of students to instructional computers with Internet access. http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/2002018.pdf

How Students are Living in the Future with Today's Technology (US)
The Pew Research Center has recently released a report that shows that college students are heavy users of the Internet compared to the general population. The report claims that the use of the Internet is a part of college students’ daily routine. It is integrated into their daily communication habits and has become a technology as ordinary as the telephone or television.


Online Materials Used First
In the US a study of the information-gathering habits of students and faculty members has found that they first turn to online materials, although most view print as a more reliable source of information.


The report, published by the US National Center for Education Statistics, presents data on Internet access in U.S. public schools from 1994 to 2001 by school characteristics. It provides trend analysis on the progress of public schools and classrooms in connecting to the Internet and on the ratio of students to instructional computers with Internet access.


Conquering The Digital Divide - One Library at a Time
Dedria Bryfonski (Executive Vice President, Global Markets, and Customer and Market Services) discusses the gap between those who have access to and then the knowledge to use telecommunications and online services, and those who do not. The author expresses her concern that the gap is widening as advanced countries harness the Internet and other forms of communications as true staples of daily life in offices, classrooms and living rooms, while many in the developing and underdeveloped world struggle to find the resources to pay for new information and communications technologies.


The Failed Colonisation of English
A United Nations Symposium on multilingual Internet use has been told that by 2007 Chinese will outrank English as the most used language on the Web. Most Internet users will soon have a mother tongue other than English, and by 2003, a third of all web users will be using another language online, according to the World Intellectual Property Organisation.


Budget Cuts
As the Australian post compulsory education sector struggles for increased resources, we should spare a thought for our colleagues in the US. Budget cuts have prompted Appalachian State University to send administrators to the classroom - some for the first time. The Chronicle of Higher Education (11th October), reported that a group of administrators at the university, some of whom have never taught before, volunteered to teach a course this semester. Appalachian State, which is part of the University of North Carolina system, was forced to cut $6.7-million from its budget last year because of declining state revenues. Consequently, the college cut back on hiring both adjunct and full-time faculty members. “To make up for that loss, administrators with the appropriate expertise are chiming in".

UK to Charge Students £15,000 a Year

The implications of deregulating student HECS fees as discussed in debates in the Review of Higher Education in Australia are forecasted in moves to deregulate fees in the UK. Students will be forced to pay fees of up to £15,000 a year under plans being drawn up by one of Britain's leading universities. The figure is quoted by Sir Richard Sykes, the rector of Imperial College, London, in the most detailed blueprint yet devised for top-up charges. Sir Richard, expects that the government will remove the cap on fees in its forthcoming review of higher education. A confidential paper, seen by The Times Higher Education Supplement, calculates that it costs Imperial £10,500 a year to teach each undergraduate - £2,800 more than it receives in fees and government grants for home and European Union students.

Source: News Report sourced in the Times, Financial Times, Guardian, Daily Telegraph, Friday 18th October

Student Loan Implications for Ethnic Students

Latino high-school graduates of all ages go to college at a higher rate than most other major racial or ethnic groups in the United States, but they trail all other groups in earning undergraduate degrees, a new study by the Pew Hispanic Center shows. The report cites data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau from 1997 to 2000, which show that about 10.1 percent of Latino-American high-school graduates of all ages were enrolled in some form of college during those years, a greater percentage than the national average and most other ethnic or racial groups.

Despite the high proportion of Latino students accessing higher education, they do not graduate in the same proportions. The report suggests several possible reasons for this include statistics showing that Latino-Americans are less likely to enrol in college during the traditional college-age years, are the least likely of all college students to attend school full time, and are more likely to attend two-year colleges. These institutions are attractive because they charge a lower tuition and are often designed to accommodate students who hold jobs outside of class, but more than half of the students who enrol at two-year colleges never complete a degree, according to the report.

The report is available at http://www.pewhispanic.org/index.jsp

Fears Elite Split Grow While Universities Must Compete or Close

The debates in Australia in relation to the review of an appropriate financial framework for higher education are eerily paralleled by the implementation of similar reforms in the UK. In the face of pressures to generate non-government in the U.K., The Guardian (September 10th 2002) income elite universities were warned at a meeting of vice-chancellors not to go it alone with top-up fees and "pull up the ladder" behind them. Fears of a binary split were fuelled by reports showing a growing gulf between new and old universities, particularly over research.

However, in contrast, plans for further deregulation of higher education in the UK means that universities will have to compete for students or close under government plans to unleash a "free market" in degrees. (The Daily Mail, The Independent, The Times, September 10th 2002).

Non-traditional Students

The international trend towards lifelong learning is reflected in a report published by U.S. Education Department and reported in the Chronicle of Higher Education (4th June 2002) which shows that almost 75 percent of today's undergraduate students are considered "non-traditional" because of their age, financial status, or when they enrolled in college.

Each year, the U.S. Department's National Centre for Education Statistics prepares a report, "The Condition of Education," for Congress. The 2002 report presents 44 indicators, representing agreed significant national measures of the condition and progress of education for which accurate data are available. In addition to the annual information, the 2002 report looks at the rise in the number of non-traditional students in tertiary education. Although the department offers an inexact definition of what makes a non-traditional student, such students typically are a few years older than most high-school graduates, and many attend college part time. Students can also be identified as non-traditional based on the degree to which they are financially independent, the amount of time they work, and whether they have dependents.

Only 27 percent of U.S.’s undergraduates are "traditional" students who have a high-school diploma, enrol full time right after high school, and depend on parents for financial support. Of the remaining 73 percent, those who are "highly non-traditional" because they met many of the criteria defining such students, are most likely to attend public two-year colleges. But the study also found that 37 percent of students at public four-year institutions and 35 percent of students at private, nonprofits institutions are moderately to highly non-traditional.

**Astronomy Research Archive**

Through a new digital archive, the University of Pittsburgh is making six decades of astronomy research available to scientists and armchair astronomers alike. The archive, called the Parallax Project, collects 10 volumes of data published by the university’s Allegheny Observatory—information dating back to 1910 that remains relevant to researchers today.  

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**PUBLICATIONS, REVIEWS AND REPORTS**

A regular round-up noting and reviewing recent publications, and reporting on interesting conferences

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**Results of First Survey of Commercialisation of Research**

In November 2001, the Australian Research Council (ARC), the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) conducted the National Survey of Research Commercialisation. The study sought data on the commercialisation of research (invention disclosures, patents and plant-breeder rights, licensing activity and income, and start-up company formation) in 2000 from 34 universities, 15 medical research institutions and all 21 CSIRO research divisions.

The survey collected, for the first time in Australia, comprehensive information about the commercial activities that are occurring as the result of research conducted in universities, medical research institutes and CSIRO. The ARC and NHMRC also commissioned work to establish international benchmarks of research commercialisation based on data from the licensing survey conducted in North America by the Association of University Technology Managers (AUTM), against which the data collected in the National Survey of Research Commercialisation in Australia could be compared.

Key findings address:

- **Number of patents** (encompassing patents and plant-breeder rights)
- **Nature of licences** (encompassing licences, options and assignments): A very high proportion of licences executed to start-up companies were exclusive. This suggests that the ability to grant exclusive licences is important to company start-up activity, a key contribution to the overall economic impact of licensing by universities, medical research institutes and CSIRO.

**Licence Income:** There appears to be a positive relationship between an institution’s income from licences and the length of its experience in managing commercial licensing activities

**Inventor involvement in licensing:** Inventor involvement appears to be an important element of strategies employed by universities, medical research institutes and CSIRO to manage their commercial licensing activities

**Start-up companies:** In total, 47 new start-up companies were formed in Year 2000 as a result of research conducted within the respondent institutions; of these, 91% had their headquarters in Australia.

**International Comparisons:** The National Survey of Research Commercialisation generated information about the extent of research commercialisation activity occurring in universities and medical research institutes in Australia. An analysis was undertaken to compare that information with information about commercial activities occurring in similar institutions in the USA and Canada.

Overall, and in an international context, Australia’s performance at commercialising its research is mixed. In some areas, for example income from licences and start-up company formation, our performance is above that of either the USA or Canada, relative to expenditure on research and the size of the national economy. In other areas, for example number of licences executed and, in particular, US patents issued, our performance is below that of both the USA and Canada.

To download the report go to:

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**National Review of Nursing Education**

Our Duty of Care is the final report of the National Review of Nursing Education 2002. The Review was established by the Commonwealth Government to examine the future nursing educational needs of the health, community and aged care system and to advise on appropriate education policy and funding frameworks. According to the report, more than 22,000 nurses would leave the workforce over the next five years, making up the bulk of the 31,000 vacancies expected by 2006. The report suggests that support be given to providing 400 additional places specifically for nurses at universities to boost numbers in the longer term. It also suggests that all course units that form part of undergraduate nursing courses required for initial registration should be allocated to the lowest of the three HECS bands. RMIT has provided comment
to Government on recommendations arising from the report.


**Scoping Industry**

Focus groups are being conducted across Australia in October with up to 100 individuals and up to 200 representatives from businesses and training providers as part of Shaping our Future, the project to develop the next VET national strategy for 2004-2010. The focus groups will provide feedback on the world of work and training, how things might change in 2010 and what this means for VET. In-depth interviews have been completed with 10 national industry leaders on the future of VET and their thoughts captured in a report "Initial Scoping Interviews with 10 Industry Leaders". For copies go to http://www.anta.gov.au/dapStrategy.asp or contact Joyce Turnbull. Ph: (07) 3246 2482, email: turnbullj@anta.gov.au

**OECD Report: Reviews of National Policies for Education Lifelong Learning in Norway**

According to a recently released OECD paper, there is strong support within Norway for lifelong learning as a next logical step for a highly developed country with a highly educated population, confronted with challenges ranging from economic re-structuring, to an ageing workforce, the contradictions of labour shortages and increased leisure time, and an increasingly diverse society. Even in Norway institutional arrangements and policies fall short of a systemic approach to lifelong learning. The most obvious shortcomings concern adults where there are daunting issues regarding the governance and finance of adult learning. Leadership is a vexed issue insofar as successful implementation depends on concerted action by several ministries as well as the social partners. Choice, equity and quality are in many cases conflicting objectives and difficult trade-offs have to be resolved. Lessons from the experience with this approach can be usefully applied in other settings. This study is divided into two parts: the background report (which was prepared by the Norwegian authorities) and the OECD Examiners' report. http://www.oecd.org/EN/home/0,EN-home-4-nodirectorate-no-no--4-log96484_00.html

**Guidelines for Course Developers**

The States and Territories have agreed on new guidelines and a template to assist course development for accreditation. The guidelines and template will help people develop and document vocational education and training courses that lead to an Australian Qualifications Framework qualification or statement of attainment. Where courses are already under development, course submissions documented against the Queensland template that was available in the booklet How to Accredit Training Products, will be accepted up to 31 December 2002. The guidelines are available at: http://www.anta.gov.au/publication.asp?qsID=345

**Review of Recognition of Prior Learning**

The Recognition of Prior Learning Project is being undertaken by the School of Social & Workplace Development at Southern Cross University on behalf of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). Broad Recognition of prior learning refers to learning that has taken place outside of formal education and training, and is an alternative, informal learning pathway towards a qualification under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). Interested colleagues are asked to go to the site below: http://www.scu.edu.au/research/rpl/

**How do VET Brokers do it?**

Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) are increasingly becoming VET brokers, and research is being conducted to find out more about it. Working Group chair, and ANTA Board deputy chair Bill Mansfield, says that many RTOs are working either on their own or in partnership with other organisations, such as New Apprenticeships Centres, industry training advisory bodies and employer associations, to provide brokerage services. "This type of work could represent an emerging role for RTOs with real potential for benefits for enterprise clients," he says. The commissioned research will include the development of several case studies of public and private RTOs that are currently providing intermediary and brokerage services to enterprises. A full report is due back to the working party at the end of October. This is the first major project for the Enterprise and Training Provider Working Group, which was appointed earlier this year to advise the ANTA Board. Membership of the group includes individuals drawn from public and private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and enterprises.

For further information contact Wendy Katz, ANTA Ph: (03) 9630 9800, fax: (03) 9630 9888, email: katzw@anta.gov.au

**Measuring up 2002: U.S. Report Cards for Higher Education**

Measuring Up 2002 is the second in a series of biennial, state-by-state report cards for higher education. This report grades states on their performance in five categories: preparation,

This Web site provides the capacity to compare any state with the best-performing states in each performance category, compare indicator scores and state grades for any performance category, obtain source and technical information for indicators and weights, and download or order the report.

**You Value What You Pay - Dussoldorp Report**

The Discussion Paper, prepared by the Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training (ACIRRT) for the Dusseldorp Skills Forum focuses on the role of employers in the development of a highly skilled and innovative labour force and economy in Australia. It concludes that there is a major weakness in the funding base for skill development arising from a declining investment in the training effort by employers.

Comparisons with OECD data show that:

- Australia is spending less on education and knowledge than comparable countries
- Employers are reducing their stake in and financial commitment to training with the rise of non-standard forms of employment such as casual work
- Individuals are being forced to take greater responsibility for their own development.

The report warns that current productivity growth levels are unsustainable and ongoing growth requires increasing the skill levels of the workforce. According to OECD data Australian employers have been amongst the worst in the world in creating high skilled white collar jobs:

- Australia ranked 16th out of 21 nations in terms of annual average growth in high-skilled jobs.
- Australia's low-skilled base is growing faster than any OECD country except Ireland and Austria.
- Australia's investment in knowledge as a proportion of GDP is deteriorating, while most OECD nations are increasing.
- Australia’s funding for education as a proportion of GDP is also falling. In 1997 it ranked 25th out of 29 OECD nations in terms of direct public expenditure on education.

The shift in the Australian labour market from permanent full-time work to tenuous employment has undermined the training drive:

- expenditure per employee is trending down from $191.25 in 1993 to $185.49 in 1996.
- average hours spent on training has fallen from 5.7 hours per employee in 1990 to hours in 1996.
- more employers are spending less than 2.5 per cent of their payroll on training now than a decade ago.
- 31 per cent of employers are not sure what their financial commitment to training is.
- the vast bulk of training is unstructured, ad hoc, ’on-the-job’.
- tertiary-educated, high-skilled workers are more likely to receive training than low-skilled workers
- employees in non-standard employment are less likely to receive training. Only 50.5 per cent of casuals receive training.

The decline in government and employer support has placed an increasing onus on workers managing their own training.

- 90 per cent of wage earners aged between 20 and 24 participate in some form of training
- the participation rate of mature workers (aged between 45 and 54) in VET and higher education has risen rapidly, due to retrenchments and restructuring.
- unemployed or people marginally attached to the labour market are going to greater lengths than ever before to improve their vocational and employability skills.

The report canvasses a number of international examples where governments and employers have worked together to improve the skill formation capacity of enterprises. Tax rebates and statutory contribution schemes exist in a number of countries in Asia including the Philippines, Taiwan and Singapore. Outstanding examples from Europe are also discussed.

The report can be downloaded from: [http://www.dsf.org.au](http://www.dsf.org.au)

**How Young People are Faring - Key Indicators 2002**

The Dusseldorp Skills Forum (DSF) Report, September 2002, is an update about the learning and work situation of young Australians. The data sources
for this report are the Australian Bureau of Statistics Labour Force for May, and the annual Transition from Education to Work series (now Education and Work). The paper also draws on Applied Economics' Young Persons Education and Training Outcomes with Special Reference to Early School Leavers.

This series gives particular attention to those young people who are not in education and not in full-time work as a means of identifying those most at risk in contemporary labour markets.

The concept of risk is a useful means of helping to identify those young people who are more vulnerable than others in encountering prolonged difficulties in finding and sustaining stable employment. The at risk group is defined as those young people who are:

- in part-time work and not studying, or
- are actively looking for work (the unemployed), or
- not in work and not considered as actively seeking work (not in the labour force).

A snapshot view of changes over time in young people's labour market participation shows that there has been a small increase in the number of teenagers not in full-time education or full-time employment (15.4 per cent or 211,000 young people) in May 2002 compared to the same time last year. And still some 25 per cent of young adult women and 19 per cent of young adult men were at considerable labour market risk in that same month. The research displays significant variations across States and Territories. For example Victoria has recorded the lowest level of teenagers in any state in at risk activities over the past four years, while Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia record consistently high levels.

- The national completion rate of Year 12 in schools is 67 per cent, and just 61 per cent for teenage men.
- The proportion of all school leavers at risk activities five months after leaving school is 26.5 per cent; more than 40 per cent of early leavers were in at risk activities compared to 18 per cent of Year 12 completers.
- An overwhelming majority of teenagers are working part-time as casual workers without the benefit of leave entitlements.
- Young people who have not completed Year 12 make up a dis-proportionate share of those receiving Centrelink employment related benefits.

Managing Study and Work

The report, published by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), by McInnis an Hartley (2002) explores the impacts of paid work on full-time students' experiences of university life and their academic performance. It also briefly reviews how universities are responding to these challenges. The survey is based on a survey of 1,563 full-time enrolled working students.

The report’s authors found evidence of high levels of commitment to university, and contrary to expectations did not find that high levels conflict between study and work led to missed lectures or a decrease in student performance. Instead they found that students were using a range of strategies to deal with conflicting pressures. However they did find that the quality of on-campus experience of students did suffer for full-time enrolled working students.

OECD Report: Responding to Student Expectations

This volume arises from two seminars, held in Brisbane and Paris respectively, to examine some of the key issues facing universities as they confront challenges posed by the increasingly diverse nature of students’ backgrounds and expectations. It offers perspectives and experience drawn from contributors from Australia, Europe and Canada, including the views of student leaders. Authors include some notable leaders from the Australian higher education sector including Ruth Dunkin, Peter Coaldrake, Richard James and Micheal Gallagher.

The report presents a series of propositions rather than any real conclusions. However this is not surprising given the complex nature of changing roles of universities and students. Students appear in various guises as citizens, consumers, and clients. They are increasingly combining work and study. In many countries students are paying more for their university education, and expect high levels of standards and service.

Similarly universities are institutions with multiple roles, and must balance the needs and demands of their students with the expectations placed upon them by government, industry and the wider community. Such a balance must be struck in the face of increasing pressure on university budgets. Effective action to meet student expectations therefore poses major management challenges for universities.

The nature of these complex relations between student and the university (and between universities and the community as Ruth Dunkin notes) are further conflated by the reciprocity between individuals and intuitions,
Richard James reminds us that, "the higher education process not only shapes student expectations, the education processes itself influenced by the characteristics of student expectations".

The report is available at: http://www.oecd.org/EN/home/0,,EN-home-4-nodirectorate-no-no--4-log96484,00.html

Study Finds Australian University Costs Amongst the Lowest

Australian Education International and IDP Australia have released a report, Comparative Costs of Higher Education Courses for International Students in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. This study clearly shows that it is cheaper to study in Australia (for both course fees and cost of living) than the United States, the United Kingdom and about the same as in Canada. New Zealand was the only country where costs were lower than Australia.

http://www.dest.gov.au/ministers/nelson/sep02/n178_230902.htm

Australian Apprentice & Trainee Statistics 2002


SURVEY: Job Index Survey

Since 1995, TMP Australia (formerly Morgan and Banks) has published a quarterly survey of employment expectations (the Job Index Survey). The most recent, published July 31st, surveyed over 5000 employers across the range of industries. The survey methodology measures employers' predications of their likelihood of hiring staff in various categories over the next three months.

Overall a net 28.5% of employers indicated that they will increase staff numbers (the net figure is made up of those employers who will take on extra staff, discounted for those who expect a decrease in their staff levels). This is down 2% from the previous survey findings and 0.5% from equivalent findings this time last year.

An industry-by-industry and state-by-state analysis is included. In contrast to previous quarterly finings, Victorian employers are more reserved about the future than their national counterparts. Sectors showing the greatest likelihood of employment increases include non profit, legal, construction / property, and information technology. Of those industries recording pessimistic outlooks for the coming quarter, resources is the most pessimistic with the media, transport, Food/FMCG industries equally also recording negative outlooks.

The analysis is also undertaken by state, size of firm, level of employment and discipline. Disciplines in most demand are sales, computer/IT, accounting and finance, clerical and administrative and marketing.


Conference Report – The Australian Universities Quality Forum

Over 160 delegates participated in the inaugural Australian Universities Quality Forum (AUQF) held in September 27-28th, Brisbane. The conference program comprised on key note speakers and workshops (online and face-to-face). Key note speakers included Professor Peter Sheehan AO, Vice-Chancellor, Australian Catholic University and Member, Prof. Peter Swannell, Vice-Chancellor, University of Southern Queensland and Dr. Peter Shergold, Secretary, DEST. RMIT was very well presented at the conference as well as behind the scenes. Roni McDowell (Head, Statistics and Reporting) and Josie Palermo are members on the Joint Steering Group for the AUQF. Angel Calderon and Josie Palermo were also invited to present workshops at the event. Professor Helen Praetz was a panel member invited to comment on Dr. Shergold’s address. For more information and workshop summaries see http://www.auqa.edu.au/auqf/index.htm

Conference Report- Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) State Conference

Copies of presentations (papers and slide shows) made at the 2002 Victorian TAFE Association (VTA) State Conference held on 30-31st May are available on the VTA web site.

Each presentation provides useful insight/ideas/reflection on VET policy and directions.


ARTICLE: Is the Information Revolution Dead?

W. Brian Arthur, Business 2.0 March 2002 Issue

This article refutes the suggestions that the information revolution is “dead” as a result of the recent dot.com crash. It draws extensively on historically significant economic developments, in particular the development of railways in US and Britain in the 19th century, to suggest that recent failure of the speculative dot.com market is a cyclical phase with historical precedent.

The argument is that a more sustained growth cycle is likely to occur with more integrated take up of the technology over the coming decades, which will see changes in the infrastructure of business to
accommodate and integrate technologies rather than to bolt technologies to an existing business framework.

http://www.business2.com/articles/magi/0,1640,37570|2,FF.html

**ARTICLE: Gartner Predicts 2002: Top 10 Predictions**

Although released in January 2002 as a predictive piece for this year, this short piece on IT has relevance for business planners over the next 3 years. Predictions are sorted into 3 categories:

**External Forces:** The IT industry will remain challenged, facing accelerated job losses and significant vendor consolidation.

Safeguarding people, knowledge, systems and nations will take priority.

Consumers will go online, finally, with the number using online account management doubling by 2005.

**Business Behaviour:** Short-term focus on expenses will squeeze IS organizations in 2002 as business demand for IT increases.

Outsourcing and trusted suppliers will take more control as capital spending reduces in favour of operating budgets.

Through 2004, businesses will continue to view the discipline of CRM as a critical component of corporate strategy.

**Applications and Technology Trends:** During 2002, despite budget restraints, operational IT infrastructure will still need to anticipate and fulfill critical IT initiatives.

More than 50 percent of mobile applications deployed at the start of 2002 will be obsolete by the end of 2002.

By 2004, Web services will dominate deployment of new application solutions for Fortune 2000 companies.

During 2002, leading-edge businesses will exploit application integration to generate business innovation.

This piece goes into further detail on each of the above areas. Many Gartner publications are available through the RMIT library: [http://www.rmit.edu.au/library](http://www.rmit.edu.au/library)


**WEBSITE: The Strategic Audit of Victorian Industry**

The Strategic Audit of Victorian Industry is a Victorian Government initiative being conducted by the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development. It aims to identify both current business needs and the long-term strategies needed to realise the growth potential of Victorian industry.

Audits either complete or in development include automotive, environmental management and renewable energy, financial services, metal fabrication, precision engineering, professional and technical services, textiles, clothing, footwear and leather, transport, distribution and logistics and sport and recreation. RMIT has contributed to a number of these strategic audits.

A Strategic Audit Overview has also been completed. This identifies industry trends across the Victorian economy, including interstate comparisons, export performance, the innovation agenda, infrastructure requirements and case studies. It is a useful and accessible analysis of the state of Victorian industry.[http://www.strategicaudit.dsrd.vic.gov.au/web/savi/dsrdsav2.nsf/frameset/SAVI?OpenDocument](http://www.strategicaudit.dsrd.vic.gov.au/web/savi/dsrdsav2.nsf/frameset/SAVI?OpenDocument)

**COMING UP**

It's our intention to profile forthcoming conferences, events and tenders in this section of the newsletter. If you want to alert us to any such happening, contact us at ircu@rmit.edu.au

**VETnetwork Australia Biennial National Conference**

23-25 October 2002, Brisbane

VETnetwork Australia is the national peak body supporting vocational education and training in schools. The 2002 Biennial Conference will be designed to inform and inspire a critical mass of people within the vocational education and training environment to embrace change, explore innovation, achieve success and celebrate enterprise. Brisbane Convention Centre, Queensland, Australia.

Funding and Financing Strategies for Education
28-29 October 2002, Dockside, Sydney
Leading education practitioners who are successfully accessing new sources of funding and maximising the use of existing resources will present case studies at the conference. In particular, there will be opportunities to extend alliances with the corporate sector, run a fundraising campaign, recognise and take advantage of alternative sources of income, reallocate existing funds, access non-traditional markets, and maximise the gains of future ventures.

The Seventh Quality in Higher Education International Seminar,
Scheduled to take place in Melbourne, Australia 30-31 October 2002, will be entitled Transforming Quality. This will be a joint endeavour of two research centres in the antipodes of the world: the Centre for Research into Quality in Birmingham, UK and the Centre for Management Quality Research, in Melbourne.

The Online Conference offers several new features, including an International Online Debate, a Cyber Classroom Tour and the limited and supervised participation of highly recommended senior students. The first phase of the Online Conference will take place between 13 and 26 October; the second phase will take place between 24 November and 7 December. Register at http://www.cybertext.net.au/tct_registration/

International Conference on Globalisation, Education and Language
15 November 2002
The development of globalisation, amid increasing opposition, is having a dramatic impact on nearly every aspect of human existence. Tamkang University invites scholars from all relevant fields to explore language, education and related issues in a global world.

Online Educa Berlin, 27-29 November 2002
Meeting the networking needs of the international e-learning industry, the Online Educa Berlin Conference is the key networking venue for strategists and practitioners from all over the world. Online Educa Berlin is the largest gathering of e-learning professionals in Europe, and thus enables participants to develop multinational and cross-industry partnerships, as well as enhance their knowledge, expertise, and abilities.

Research forums on on-line learning in VET
Online learning: find out the latest in online learning research at NCVER half-day research forums in November and December. To register go to http://www.ncver.edu.au/news/conf/online.htm

Pathways 6 Conference
1-4th December 2002, Sydney Convention & Exhibition Centre
The Pathways 6 Conference is intended for professionals who work with students with disabilities in education, and for students with disabilities. The conference will focus on issues of access, participation and outcomes for students with disabilities in education and training settings. The theme 'Inclusive Education Through Universal Access' has been chosen to highlight the progression of inclusive practices in education for students with disabilities and to build frameworks for implementing these practices in a range of environments.
For more information on the conference format and topics, please visit www.iceaustralia.com/pathways/ or contact the conference organisers. Email: pathways@iceaustralia.com

ACE National Conference 2003: Quality Teachers, Powerful Learners, True Professionals
The Australian College of Educators' National Conference in 2003 has the theme 'Quality Teaching, Powerful Learning and True Professionalism' which promises to provide considerable scope for those wishing to submit papers and conduct workshops.

NCVER Research Forums - Online learning - What does it mean for teachers and trainers?
NCVER presents a series of short forums which is part of an initiative within the Australian Flexible Learning Framework for the National Vocational Education and Training System 2000-2004. Online learning has been widely embraced by the VET sector but what do we know about its impact on teaching, learning quality, student needs? NCVER will host short, half-day forums focused on research into online learning and its implications for teachers and trainers.
The forums will be held in Melbourne, 29 November.
For more information, or to register to attend:

UMREC 2003: Leveraging the Magic of Information and Technology
Orlando, Florida, May 11-14, 2003
The CUMREC Program Committee and EDUCAUSE invite you to submit a proposal for CUMREC 2003.
View additional information and submit your proposal at:
Read more about the 2003 conference tracks at:

Just in case you missed it...
Professor Peter Coaldrake has been appointed as QUT's Vice-Chancellor. He was Deputy Vice-Chancellor for seven years. Next April he will succeed Prof Dennis Gibbson.
Professor Ken McKinnon has been appointed interim Vice-Chancellor at the Northern Territory University. He takes over from Prof Ron McKay who stepped down because of health reasons.
Bill Mansfield has resigned from the board of the Australian National Training Authority.
Mr Peter Wills AC, has resigned as Chairman of the Board of the Australian Research Council

In memoriam
Michael Argyle, interpreter of 'body language' and nonverbal communication and one of the handful of British psychologists to have gained an international reputation, died on 6 September 2002, aged 77.

Parting thought
Housework makes you depressed
Scientists have proved what many housewives (sic) have known for years - that washing dishes, dusting, ironing and cleaning can make you depressed.
Researchers from the University of Glasgow discovered that housework lowers people's mood.
That's good enough for me!! (Editors note)
(Reported in Daily Telegraph, Daily Mail September 30th)

The Institutional Research Consultancy Unit
The IRCU's mission is to:
• Assist and contribute to informed decision-making
• Contribute to strengthening the efficiency and effectiveness of RMIT's activities and programs
• Be proactive in the study and advancement of tertiary education
• Manage, share and create knowledge for the benefit of RMIT

The main function of IRCU is to coordinate the collection, organization and analysis of institutional data and other quantitative and qualitative information to support institutional management, operations, decision-making and planning functions of RMIT University. The IRCU is also engaged in applied educational research, performance measurement, evaluation and assessment; and is proactive in the study and advancement of higher education.

The IRCU Staff are:
Angel Calderon  Head
Andrew Brion   Business Analyst
David Garner   Strategic Advisor - Industry
Ann Hornsby    Executive Assistant
Josie Palermo  Institutional Research Advisor
David Rutherford  Strategic Economist
Neil Wentworth Institutional Research Systems Coordinator

The IRCU, along with the Quality Consultancy Unit and Statistics and Reporting, is part of the Planning Group.

Email ircu@rmit.edu.au

This issue was edited by Josie Palermo with additional contributions from Julie Wells, Chris Raab and Suzy Ballantyne.