Welcome

In this issue VET gets degrees while HE gets Charles Darwin University and the Group of 6. Perhaps not a fair trade, but the ever-moving currents in Australian tertiary education are by no means lacklustre!

Included in this issue is a summary of the current international debates surrounding the release of the White Paper – the Future of Higher Education, and voucher system proposal in the US. Some of the proposed changes are uncannily familiar to those in Australia, as our countries grapple with similar challenges in funding education. These debates will at the very least help to prepare us for the outcomes of the Review of Higher Education that will at last be released Tuesday 13, May.

On the tail of a successful seminar on GATS hosted by RMIT’s Globalism Institute, the International Office and the Institutional Research Consultancy Unit, i.research includes a special feature on trading international education.

Also reviewed the latest reports on the Graduate Skills Assessment in higher education and VET.

Previous issues of i.research are available on-line.

Your feedback and comments are welcome

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TAFE gets the go-ahead to offer higher education

The Vocational Education and Training (TAFE Qualifications) Bill 2003 has been introduced to the Victorian Parliament for consideration.

The Bill includes provision for amendment to the Vocational Education and Training Act 1990 to enable TAFE Colleges to conduct courses in higher education and to issue higher education awards. The Bill also makes provision for it to be proclaimed on 30 June 2003.

The Bill requires that all submissions from TAFE institutes to offer and confer higher education awards be assessed in accordance with the Tertiary Education Act 1993 and so the Ministerial Guidelines issued pursuant to that Act. Detailed advice to applicants is available on the website: http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/highered/otherprovider/default.htm.

A number of institutes, including RMIT have been allocated funds to develop higher education courses in their 2003 Performance Agreements. Subject to passage of the legislation, these funds will be disbursed through regular financial plan payments.

The opportunity for TAFE institutes to offer and confer higher education awards will represent a landmark initiative in post-compulsory education in Victoria.
Its effects on the rest of the tertiary system are yet to be determined.

**Charles Darwin University**

In a move that could be interpreted as a thumbs up for dual-sector institutions in Australia's tertiary system, Brendon Nelson, the Commonwealth Minister for Education, will establish a new university in the Northern Territory, Charles Darwin University.

The Northern Territory University (NTU) will amalgamate with the Centralian College, a large VET provider in the territory. The legislation to establish the new University will go before the Territory Parliament by mid-2003.

The Commonwealth Government has committed $3 million over 2002-03 to assist the University in implementing reforms.

The move is an obvious solution from the Minister to the ongoing problems of the cash-strapped NTU.


**Group of 6 to rival G8**

Tracy Peacock and Jane Richardson, The Australian, 19th March

The universities left out in the cold in the lead-up to the Nelson review have linked to form a new higher education industry grouping. The six — Flinders, Griffith, La Trobe, Macquarie, Murdoch and Newcastle — have become Innovative Research Universities Australia.

The IRU members share a common history, having been founded during the 1960s and ’70s as research-based universities. Together they have about 15 per cent of Australian enrolments.

The group looked in danger of falling between the cracks of the review, not able to benefit to the same extent as the Group of Eight research universities from market-based reforms, or from more welfare-based concessions to regional universities. None of the group’s vice-chancellors were included in the review's reference committee.

Benchmarking against one another, professional development initiatives, e-learning and new information and communications technology, income-generation, and industrial issues were other areas of co-operation.

ATN development and communications director Tony Tate said it was important for universities to differentiate themselves to offer choice to potential students.

**Blow to Voluntary Student Unionism**

The Australian, 7th May 2003

A landmark decision by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission last week granted Townsville’s James Cook University immunity from threatened legal action for requiring students to join the union and pay fees.

Labor, the Democrats and the National Union of Students welcomed the ACCC decision, but Education Minister Brendan Nelson attacked compulsory unionism and said the Howard Government was committed to abolishing it.

The ACCC reversed a draft decision, published in October, in which it found the practice could be challenged under a provision of the Trade Practices Act. Had the draft decision stood, it would have opened an avenue for the Howard Government to pursue the goal long denied it by the Senate of undermining compulsory student unionism.

Universities would have faced the prospect of legal challenges if they continued to allow unions to levy fees on enrolment.

But University representatives convinced the commission that the practice had a public benefit that supported an exemption from legal challenges.

In the final decision, ACCC chairman Allan Fels highlighted the public benefit of unions maintaining some independence from the university administration in order to represent their members. The ACCC ruling closes off one avenue for the proponents of voluntary student unionism to challenge student associations.

**Record Numbers at University**

16 April, 2003

Student numbers at Australian universities reached record levels in 2002. The report, Students 2002: Selected Higher Education Statistics, shows that there were more than 700,000 domestic students undertaking study at Australian universities in 2002, an increase of 17,500 on 2001 (a 3.9% increase).

Domestic undergraduate student numbers increased by 11,300 (12%) in the year since 2001, to 531,527. Of this number, places for commencing undergraduate students were maintained at 142,000.

There were 123,760 domestic students enrolled in postgraduate coursework degrees in 2002 compared with 111,060 students in 2001.

However the news is not as good as it sounds. While Postgraduate student numbers might be mushrooming, the core business of universities – undergraduate education – is flagging.
Last year the number of Australian undergraduates starting university fell 1.1% on the previous year despite a 6.5% increase in total student numbers. It is a pattern likely to accelerate under the federal Government's pending higher education blueprint, which is likely to create incentives to get students through university faster and to set the scene for more fees. The package will be revealed in the May 13 federal budget.


Universities' Unmet Demand

14 April, 2003

Despite reports of record numbers enrolling in higher education in 2002, the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AV-CC) annual Survey of Applicants for Undergraduate Higher Education Courses, found that 18,700 and 25,700 of those eligible to enrol did not secure a place in university this year.

Because of a surge in applications (up 3% from 2002) and a decline in offers as some universities sought to reduce their marginally funded overenrolled places, the number who missed out increased.

Last year unmet demand was between 14,000 and 20,000. In 1992 the comparable range was between 35,600 and 54,700.


Changes to Migration Scheme to Boost Student Numbers in Regional Universities

Adjustments to the bonus points regime for overseas students applying to migrate will be introduced from 1 July 2003. The objective is to encourage a greater proportion of students to consider studying at and eventually settling in regional Australia. Key aspects of this proposal are:

- Providing additional bonus points for overseas students who have recently completed their qualifications by studying and living nearby for a period of at least 2 years at the campus of an Australian university, TAFE or private education provider in regional Australia or a low population growth metropolitan centre, and

- Increasing the period of time students are required to attend a tertiary institution in Australia to be exempt from the work experience requirement from 12 months to 2 years.


Commonwealth funds extra UMAP places

DEST Media release, 19 March 2003

International scholarships will be provided to 350 Australian university students under the Australian University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) program to enable them to experience first-hand what it's like to live and study in the Asia-Pacific. This is the largest number of students ever to be supported in a single round to study in Asian-Pacific university supported by both the Commonwealth Government and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC).


Integrity of Higher Education a Must - AVCC

AVCC Media release, 4 March 2003

Australia's universities are to participate in a nationwide survey of their policies and procedures to protect university titles and awards. The survey, to be conducted by the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, (AVCC) is designed to provide a map of individual university policies and processes relating to the protection of university titles and awards, and the associated issues of plagiarism and other cheating.

AVCC President, Professor Deryck Schreuder, said the issue of fake degrees, and bogus and unauthorised award granting institutions, struck at the very heart of the integrity of the Australian system.


Inquiry into VET in Schools - Public Hearing

The rapidly growing area of vocational education and training (VET) in schools is being investigated by the House of Representatives Education and Training Committee. The inquiry is examining the range, structure, resourcing and delivery of VET programs in schools.

This will include teacher training, and the impact of vocational education on other programmes. The Committee will speak to representatives of the National Council of Independent Schools' Associations (NCISA) about the issues concerning independent schools across the eight State and Territories.

The Committee invites interested persons and organisations to make submissions addressing the terms of reference by 14 October 2002

Funding Boost for Social Sciences and Humanities

The Commonwealth Minister for Education Science and Training has announced additional Commonwealth funding of $790,000 for two national institutions, the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia and the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

The Academies will use the money to build programs and exchanges which raise the profile of Australia’s social sciences and humanities disciplines both nationally and internationally. The Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA) will also use the funds to pilot a special workshop and mentoring program for Indigenous postgraduate students.

$34.8 Million for Australian Brain Gain

Following the Commonwealth’s initiative to retain top researchers in Australia, the 2003 Fellows have been announced. 24 recipients include four eminent scientists from Cambridge University, UK; two from US universities; one from Germany; six Australian international researchers; two high profile overseas researchers; and several outstanding young Australian researchers.

They are regarded as among the best in the world in their chosen fields which include the study of extreme climate events such as bushfires, revolutionary clean energy alternatives, brain development and function, disease detection, new digital media, the precise detection of underground natural resources, salt tolerant cereal crops, and sustainable management of the Murray-Darling Basin.

Australian Employers Commit to Training in Record Numbers

The release of Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures showed that during the year ended June 2002, 81% of all Australian employers provided training for their employees.

According to the ABS, 41% of employers provided structured training and 79% provided unstructured training.

Between 1997 and 2002 the proportion of businesses providing training increased by 20 percentage points, up from 61% in 1997.

Net expenditure on structured training has increased by 52% since 1996. According to the Commonwealth Minister for Education, Science and Training, this demonstrates industry and employer confidence in Australia’s system of vocational education and training and recognition that professionally skilled employees are essential to business efficiency and growth.

Publicly funded vocational education and training underpins the performance of the Australian economy and provides services to more 1.7 million Australians (or more than 13% of Australia’s working age population) who are seeking to enter the workforce, or if they are already employed, to build upon their existing skills and enhance their career prospects.

The results of the third tender round for New Apprenticeships Centres mean employers and people looking for training will have access to more outlets - increased from around 300 to around 500. The New Apprenticeships Centres will help employers sign up an estimated total of 770,000 Australians for training in a New Apprenticeship over the next three years.

Further information regarding the ABS report "Employer Training Expenditure and Practices, Australia" is available at www.abs.gov.au

Funding Announced for Research Partnerships in China

AVCC Higher Education News – International Issue 3 2003

The Federal Government has announced funding of $585,000 to further strengthen research partnerships between Australian and Chinese universities. The Government says the funding will enable Australian universities to take part in a new

The initiative aims to promote education, training and research cooperation between Australian and Chinese universities, to raise the profile of Australia’s research and education system within China and to promote a greater awareness of the benefits of working together.

Two-way research exchanges are encouraged through a range of activities including onsite visits and postgraduate research training opportunities in China.

Eight Australian universities were selected by application to take part in the program. The successful projects cover a broad range of key research areas of mutual interest to both Australia and China including science, economics and social sciences.
An in-depth analysis of policy issues, trends and developments.

GATS and Tertiary Education

The Institutional Research Consultancy Unit (IRCU) has added to its web portal a section about the General Agreement on Trades and Services (GATS) and its implications for tertiary Education.

The IRCU has released an Environmental Scan volume which provides an overview of the history of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). It considers the theory and practice of GATS; provides an overview on the current status of GATS, and considers issues relating to policy decisions on GATS.

Below is an excerpt of an article published in the OECD Observer, December 2002. This article is available via SourceOECD.

The learning business: Can trade in international education work?

Kurt Larsen and Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin OECD Observer No. 235, December 2002

Education is largely a national affair, but it is fast becoming a worldwide service industry too, even for publicly-funded systems. Does trade in education help and can education be traded on the global market without compromising on issues like cultural independence or quality? These questions raise important challenges for governments, educators and students alike that will grow in the years ahead.

Until recently, it would have been incongruous to refer to international student mobility as international trade in educational services. However, in some OECD countries, there are clearly business motives as well as traditional cultural and political rationales behind policies to internationalise higher education. The current talks on educational services in the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) negotiations in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) highlight the importance of these trends, as well as raising awareness of issues, especially in relation to post-secondary education.

International student mobility to OECD countries has doubled over the past 20 years. Between 1995 and 1999, the number of foreign students rose almost twice as fast as the total number of tertiary-level students in OECD countries (9% for the former as against 5% for the latter). Most international trade in higher education services takes place within the OECD area, which received 85% of the world’s foreign students.

Trade issues

But is liberalisation the answer? Not according to the 2002 Porto Alegre Declaration, which was signed by Iberian and Latin American associations and public universities. The Declaration is radically opposed to international trade in educational services. The signatories maintain that promoting international trade would lead to deregulation in the education sector with the removal of legal, political and fiscal quality controls, that national governments would abandon their social responsibilities, and that other outcomes would include an increase in social inequalities, the weakening of ethical and cultural values, and a standardisation of education, thus negating the sovereignty of the people.

The Joint Declaration on Higher Education and the GATS, signed by four associations representing 5,500 American, Canadian and European institutions, takes a cautious, though more ambivalent stance: rather than coming out against international trade in educational services, the signatories call for a freeze on WTO trade negotiations on educational services. In their view, there is no need for trade negotiations, particularly since they might significantly jeopardise the quality, accessibility and equity of higher education and restrict the right of national authorities to regulate and publicly subsidise their higher education systems. Meanwhile, student representatives from OECD countries see trade and market competition in the education sector as a threat to public funding and intellectual freedom in higher education.

There is clearly uncertainty about the repercussions that open trade and direct competition among educational service providers will have on national higher education systems, especially as far as funding, cost, quality, diversity and stability are concerned. But as international trade in educational services has had no need of the GATS to achieve high growth in the
past, the WTO negotiations will probably not have a major impact on growth in the near future. They may accelerate the development of international trade in educational services with no student mobility (offshore campuses, e-learning, etc.), but not in trade involving student mobility. More important there are the potential barriers from host-country visa and immigration policies, and these do not fall within the scope of the GATS. Nor does the assurance of quality in international educational services, which is one of the major brakes on the expansion of trade in education (see below).

Most requests for market opening under GATS concern educational services in the private sector. The United States, for instance, has confined its request for market opening to private post-secondary education, making it explicit that it does not apply to public higher education.

http://www.oecdobserver.org/

Seminar on GATS

On Tuesday 29th April RMIT University hosted a forum on current policy developments related to the World Trade Organization’s General Agreement on Trade in Services and how these developments may impact on Australian tertiary education. Australian institutions are highly reliant on international trade in education services and the Australian government has been one of the most ardent advocates of trade liberalisation in international forums. At the same time, there are widespread concerns that the GATS could have major implications for domestic tertiary education policy.

Presentations as well as a summary of the proceedings from this forum are available via the Institutional Research Consultancy Unit page.

http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/planning/ircu/gatsforum.php

Shaping the Future of VET through Research and Dialogue

The Ministerial Statement Knowledge and Skills for the Innovation Economy included a reference to the Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission (VLESC) to provide advice on a new strategy for establishing strategic directions and priorities for Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Victoria’s innovation economy.

A framework incorporating a research program, strategic dialogues with key stakeholders and consideration of resource allocation processes is guiding the work being undertaken on the development of this advice.

The research program provides a systematic analysis on data on VET demand and supply. The research provides forecasts and projections that are modelled over a range of time horizons, specifically providing an analysis of industry and community needs, demand drivers and the supply of VET between 1997-2006.

For more information see:


In early February 2003 strategic dialogues were conducted at which preliminary research from the project to develop this advice was discussed. This research has been substantially revised in the light of stakeholder feedback. A second round of dialogues was scheduled for 28 April to 9 May 2003 to seek feedback on the content and conclusions of redrafted research.

Information from the forums, other submissions and comments, and the previous six months of research and consultation is now being used to develop a national strategy to be considered by State, Territory and Commonwealth VET ministers in mid-2003.

Six key themes discussed during dialogues were:

**Building skills for Australian industry**

More and more Australian industries are realising the bottom line successes that result from investing in skills development. But what can the vocational education and training (VET) system do to make it easier for employers to make such an investment?

**Supporting communities**

VET has proven to be a powerful influencer in addressing the challenges of social, economic and environmental change in communities. This is especially true in regional, remote and outer urban fringe areas, where there is a real need to address inequality and build community capacity through skills and learning.

In the future, local employers may choose to work together in industry clusters as a cost-effective way of doing business and investing in local skills.

**Enabling individuals to learn throughout life**

As the labour market steadily changes and traditional long-term careers disappear, individuals will increasingly need to keep learning and to up-skill to stay working in a global economy.

It is essential that the system provides a 'whole-of-life' approach to meeting individual needs, particularly for people facing barriers to training. Research indicates the people also want a quality and user-friendly statement that records their skills and learning through life, which they can show to potential employers.
Renewing and sharing Indigenous learning culture

Indigenous Australians experience the lowest standards of health, education, employment and housing and are over-represented in the criminal justice system.

National VET is widely recognised as being a key tool to increase the social and economic wellbeing of Indigenous communities. Multidisciplinary solutions that better respond to the interrelationship of education, training, health and justice are seen as an important approach for assisting families and young people. It is also important to incorporate Indigenous leadership, knowledge and learning approaches in VET programs.

Guaranteeing quality products and services

One of the challenges for the national system is guaranteeing quality against the background of a rapidly expanding learning market and an increased focus on individual needs. Research indicates that registered training organisations are somewhat overwhelmed by demands for individualised training and assessment. However, enterprises and individuals expect more training and assessment to stay competitive and some question the system's ability to provide it.

Investing in Australia's skills

Australia’s economic, social, and environmental wellbeing depends on an adequate investment in skills. In 2001, there were 1.75 million people enrolled in publicly funded VET. Ten years ago, there were less than a million. Now, there are calls to expand the national training effort even further.

But what will it take to expand the national training effort and how should this be funded? There is a need to move towards a sustainable model for financing VET into the future that optimises the contributions of governments, enterprises and individuals.

There is general agreement funding models need to be more flexible to support innovation at the local level to assist responsiveness to changing demand for work skills.

In the process of developing a national strategy for vocational education and training 2004 - 2010, ANTA has released a number of reports which can be downloaded from their web site. Some of those reports include an environmental scan that provides a range of views of what sort of society Australia might become. It includes twelve meta-analyses which examine national and international literature on key issues considered in the development of the VET strategy.

For more information see the project's web site at http://www.anta.gov.au/dapStrategy.asp

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

“Please Sir! Can we have more!” - The Fees Debate in the UK

When the White Paper was released earlier this year, UK Education Secretary Charles Clarke warned, in an article in THES, 26th February, that if universities collectively fixed prices so that all students faced the prospect of a £3,000 "top-up fee" the government would step in to bust the cartel. He hinted that he might turn to the Office of Fair Trading if there were evidence of fixing. He did however urge universities to discriminate in favour of students from poorer backgrounds. Mr Clarke said he considered it his job to ease the path of poorer students into elite universities such as Bristol and Edinburgh, despite complaints from independent schools that their pupils were being unfairly turned down.

However as the debate ensued, UK universities were reported in THES, 19th March, as urging the government to lift its proposed £3,000-a-year cap on charging top-up fees. Former polytechnics and vice-chancellors representing the Russell Group of the older universities were united in saying the figure was not high enough, and should be more like £5,000 when top-up fees are introduced in 2006.

Meanwhile the forecast for students was looking grim. Students were expected to graduate with debts averaging £12,500 in 2003, according to a report published in THES 18th March, "Graduate debt is set to rise by 13 per cent this summer on top of the 17 per cent rise in 2002, when the average was £10,997". The study for Barclays Bank suggested that the rate was slowing after a jump of 44 per cent in 2001.

In this flurry Charles Clark assured MPs, in an interview in THES 19th March, that only middle class student would be hit by the full force of fees. He also suggested considering waiving the fees of poorer students when the new charging regime is introduced in 2006. Forty per cent of students do not pay the annual £1,100 fee because their family income is below £20,480 a year. Under Mr Clarke’s White Paper reforms they would be liable to pay £1,900 a year at universities charging the full £3,000 fee, with the government paying the rest. Mr Clarke told the Commons education select committee that he could subsidise the full amount if students were deterred from applying to the most expensive universities. Some £300 million set aside to restore maintenance
grants of up to £1,000 a year could be diverted to pay fees.

Access Regulator Appointed

Lord Birt, the ex-BBC head, who needs a new job after two years dreaming up strategies on Downing Street's payroll had landed the job of "Access Regulator" which basically involves making universities take more disadvantaged students.

According to THES Thursday 27th March, his impeccable working-class credentials, make him the perfect candidate to carry forward the government's plans to discriminate against middle-class children under the guise of helping disadvantaged ones.

All Eyes on Voucher Initiative

Judith Graham, Denver 19th March, The Australian

In a groundbreaking higher education experiment, Colorado could become the first US state to implement a voucher system for public universities under legislation introduced recently. The Colorado proposal would represent one of the most innovative attempts at an overhaul of financing for public higher education and is being closely watched internationally.

In Australia, awaiting details of the federal Government's restructure of higher education, Education Minister Brendan Nelson has ruled out a voucher system but for some, Kemp's early attempts at a voucher scheme for the nation is still the preferred financing method.

Instead of appropriating money to Colorado's 28 universities, four-year colleges and community colleges, the state would give each resident undergraduate a voucher worth $4000 a year and let the student decide where to spend it. Only public institutions would qualify.

Masters students studying in the state would receive vouchers of $8000 a year. Research institutions would get additional payments in the form of block grants to help compensate them for extra costs.

Though its passage through general assembly isn't certain, the proposal's focus on consumer-driven competition and greater access to higher education has won support from conservative Republicans who control the state legislature, college and university presidents, and liberal Democrats.

The bill is available online at: www.state.co.us/gov_dir/stateleg.html

Old Stone Hit by Economic Downturn

It happens to the best of them! Stanford University is freezing faculty and staff salaries for next year to help deal with an estimated $25-million deficit. While such freezes have become common at public colleges and less-elite private institutions, the step may be the first of its kind for the nation's top private universities in the current economic downturn.

http://chronicle.com/daily/2003/03/2003030401n.htm

Canada Revamp for Humanities

Canada could change the way it funds the social sciences and humanities by grouping researchers into areas of social issues and not just by their academic disciplines, according to The Times HE (Mar 28).

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, one of the three main federal granting bodies for university research, has been given the go-ahead by its board to look at setting up a structure of separate research institutes, organised by areas such as democracy and human rights, poverty and aboriginal affairs.

The SSHRC is in talks with the government and is looking at a scenario where half the money it provides for research grants, C$143 million for 2002-03, would be organised on an institute model.

Credit Transfer and Recognition Made Easier

AUS Tertiary Update 6(7) March 13th 2003

In an unprecedented positive move, students changing tertiary courses or training institutions will find it easier to transfer credits for courses they have already passed under a new policy announced recently. Unfortunately this is not an Australian initiative but from the Tertiary Education Minister of New Zealand, Steve Maharey. NZ Tertiary providers have agreed to implement the Supporting Learning Pathways Credit Recognition and Transfer Policy. "We want to make sure that students who change the direction of their learning from one education provider to another or towards a different qualification, have every opportunity to have their previous achievements recognised."

The policy is supported by the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications, which will be online in July this year and will enable the public to view and compare all qualifications that have been quality assured in New Zealand. It was developed by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, working with a group from across the tertiary sector.
European Union launches a Portal on Learning Opportunities

The European Commission has launched a web portal on learning opportunities throughout the European Space. Ploteus will assist users to find out about education and training available throughout Europe. The site covers all levels of education, from primary schools through to postgraduate learning opportunities and adult education in all 15 Member States and 10 Future Member States of the European Union, plus Norway, Iceland and Switzerland. The site is divided into different sections depending on the kind of opportunities you are looking for. There is a 'Learning opportunities' section, which allows for a search under different thematic headings. Users can find out about educational exchanges that give you the opportunity to complete part of your studies in another European country. Users can also search for more information on different national education systems, look up national contact addresses and even find general information about moving to another European country.

The portal also includes a section containing explanations of the educational and training systems across Europe.

Click in the link below to access the web portal: www.ploteus.net

Indian Universities Boycott the US and UK

Fourteen Vice Chancellors in India, critical of "America's aggression on Iraq," have agreed that their universities will boycott all educational programs sponsored or financed by the American and British governments. The decision has led to the cancellation of an electronics conference that was scheduled for later this month at the University of North Bengal.


University Sector takes appropriate precautions with SARS

Several universities across Australia have suspended courses and postponed graduation ceremonies in countries believed to be at high risk due to the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and have actively discouraged visiting delegations from these countries.

The Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (AV-CC), has released a summary of responses to a survey it has conducted in which universities were invited to share information on how they are responding to the SARS outbreak.

It indicates that a number of universities had taken appropriate precautions to ensure the continued safety of both students and staff. Some have developed specific websites of their own, with links to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and World Health Organisation websites and are regularly updating university policy and advice as circumstances change. Several universities have also banned student travel to high risk countries, whilst some have advised that students must sign an indemnity form should they choose to travel to prohibited destinations against the advice of the university.

Developments abroad have been somewhat more vigilant. According to The New York Times, 7th May, The University of California, Berkeley, has taken the unusual step of turning away about 500 summer students from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore because of the large number of SARS cases reported in those areas.

Other American universities have not taken such dramatic steps, but are being cautious about visitors from SARS-affected areas. Stanford, Duke, Syracuse and other schools have posted advisories on their Web sites. Many have temporarily halted university-funded travel to SARS-affected countries. Colleges are also pulling back students from study-abroad programs in these areas, and have cancelled summer programs.

China has banned foreign tourists from visiting Tibet and placed new travel restrictions on Beijing's university students, according to The Toronto Sun, 3rd May.

However for some, crisis is opportunity The Financial Times 2nd May reported that one e-learning enterprise may reap the rewards of the SARS crisis. Hong Kong authorities have accepted an offer from Edinburgh's Interactive University to make its online teaching package available to 30,000 students. The online materials will enable the China-based students to study from home, rather than risk infection by attending classes.

Information about SARS for RMIT staff and students can be found at: http://www.rmit.edu.au/ps/sars

Britain’s 2003 League Tables Released

Oxford has retained its position as Britain’s top university in this year’s Times ranking of British universities. It is followed by Cambridge, but there is a widening gap between them and the rest of the Ivy League. According to Times they are becoming the Manchester United and Arsenal of the intellectual premier league. Further information: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/seaction/8,716.00.html
On the other hand, "developing and retaining potential leaders" remained quite high. Dell explains that a lot of activity in competing for talent was based on talent that could help with new initiatives. And so that sense of "war for talent" in so-called hot areas had been cut down in recent times.

Another major change was the increase in the number of CEO's who were concerned about downward pressure on prices.

While the number of CEO's concerned about "stakeholder relations" and "corporate citizenship and reputation" increased, they were still low - 11 percent and 4 percent, respectively.

This survey was conducted just before the real waves of disclosures about these issues. However overall results, with their theme of caution, show that the sort of go-go mentality that comes with expected growth has changed to strict management accountability and accurate reporting, both of which have been major concerns in terms of stakeholder relations and reputation.

"Corporations are really thinking that one of the keys right now in terms of survival is getting everybody on the same page and moving in the same direction. There's a lot more attention not only to governance on the external side but to collaboration and focusing of resources internally. That means really getting common processes in place across companies and aligning vision and values. When things get tight, the last thing you want is people being confused about direction".

http://www.conference-board.org/membersonly/index.cfm?pubid=598

Graduate Skills Assessment: Stage One Validity Study

Sam Hambur, Ken Rowe, Le Tu Luc, Australian Council for Educational Research, Evaluations and Investigations Programme, 03/02

Stage One results from the Graduate Skills Assessment (GSA) test have been released. The GSA was designed to assess a set of valued and widely applicable generic skills that may be developed through the university experience, and which are relevant to university achievement and graduate work.

This GSA validity study was commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training).

The study addresses the validity of the first two Graduate Skills Assessment (GSA) tests, GSA Exit 2000 and GSA Entry 2001 (Stage One). A total of 3663 students drawn from nine broad fields of study.
across 27 Australian universities were involved in one or other of these tests.

Each component of the GSA aims to present tasks that are generally meaningful, accessible and contextually appropriate, so that specialised knowledge is not required. Whereas Year 12 literacy and Year 9 numeracy is assumed, higher-level meta-strategic and meta-cognitive skills need to be applied.

Findings
Factor structure and discriminant validity
In support of test validity, confirmatory factor analysis indicates that the test does measure five coherent and distinguishable (discriminant) dimensions in line with the test construct. That is, the Critical Thinking (CT), Problem Solving (PS), Interpersonal Understandings (IP), Written Communication: Argument (ARG) and Report (REP) components.

Variables related to student performance on GSA
Findings with respect to variables related to student performance on the test include the following:

There are distinctive profiles of student performance on the GSA components related to field of study that seem meaningful according to known strengths of field of study groups (e.g., humanities students do relatively well on Writing and Critical Thinking).

Relationship between performance on GSA and other measures of student achievement
While it is too early to investigate the relationship between students’ GSA scores and their work performance, the data collected suggest that student performance on each GSA component is significantly correlated (statistically) both with TER and GPA performance for most university cohorts. In most cases, the GSA-GPA correlation was as good as or better than the TER-GPA correlation. For cases where performance on the GSA did not correlate significantly with GPA, neither did TER.

However the predictiveness of the GSA components varied with the university cohorts, and this observation may be related to the field of study composition of the cohorts or other sample idiosyncrasies.

The fact that performance on a short test of generic skills like GSA correlates significantly with measures like GPA and TER, which are related to a wide range of curriculum knowledge and skills, suggests the importance of generic skills in academic performance and supports GSA validity.

Review of test construct and items
In the discussion with the group of other stakeholders, it was apparent that there were dramatically different views about aspects of the test, and to some extent these views were related to the background of the stakeholder (e.g. humanities academic vs engineering professional).

In general, issues of concern for these stakeholders included: the possibility of league tables appearing; whether there are generic skills outside disciplines or work situations; privacy of results; whether universities actually teach such generic skills; limitations of multiple-choice items; relevance of interpersonal skills to researchers; audience specification and scaffolding for writing; relevance of the test to all university students; relevance to post-graduate work; cultural and ESL bias; and so forth.

Graded Assessment in Vocational Education and Training
Graded assessment in Australian vocational education and training has developed a range of practices. This study examined the current practice for graded assessment and identified policy issues that need to be addressed.

The research identified that ‘good’ practice in competency-based assessment itself, let alone graded competency-based assessment, is still not fully understood nor universally implemented across the national training system. It has been difficult to draw general conclusions about the nature and extent of grading practices because of the inconsistent and fragmentary implementation of graded assessment in the VET sector.

Nevertheless, a number of key findings can be identified:

Significant initiatives, such as state-wide trials in Western Australia and Queensland, are under way. In spite of this, however, support for graded assessment is not universal across stakeholders.

Stakeholder groups considered graded assessment to be as important as, or more important than, other pathway mechanisms, such as articulation or partnership arrangements.

Consistency in graded assessment across national qualifications was deemed to be the most important consideration for a large proportion of the respondents.

Few policies or guidelines exist to assist registered training organisations in implementing graded assessment in a valid and consistent manner. Even where policy guidelines exist, there is variation in the way graded assessment is carried out.

Instances of ‘good’ practice incorporated features such as professional development of assessors, provision of
policy and/or guidelines, provision of exemplars of assessment tools and grading schemas as well as validation processes.

Limited information is available and findings are mixed regarding the additional costs that may be incurred in implementing a graded assessment system. Indeed, there appears to be little will to explore this issue at either registered training organisation, state or national level.

The lack of transparency in reporting is of major concern. The wide variation in grading methodologies employed by registered training organisations leads to significant discrepancies in what the grades represent. Transparency in reporting is essential to make the grades meaningful to stakeholders.

http://www.ncver.edu.au/cgi-bin/srchCat.pl?list=909&action=show&action=show

Training Packages Improving Over Time

A series of interviews conducted by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) revealed that most people believe training packages are getting better. Results will be used to inform a project aimed at improving the overall user-friendliness and consistency of training packages.

The 44 interviews were conducted with representatives from a spread of public and private registered training organisations, state training authorities and secondary schools from around Australia.

Almost all interviewees commented that training packages are improving as time goes on. Overall, respondents welcomed a streamlined template for developers although some had concerns about maintaining an individual industry focus.

Although comments from interviewees varied significantly, there was a general feeling that most new training packages are user-friendly.


A Survey of Learning Communities

This survey provides an overview of the recent development of learning communities and to explore some of the surrounding issues It profiles the current state of learning communities in the UK through set of extended case studies of learning community partnerships, together with a number of thematic studies of key activities such as learning centre networks. It is aimed at practitioners in learning and regeneration partnerships, policymakers, including those in the new English Learning and Skills Councils, and all those interested in the ways that learning can promote an urban renaissance. It has been written by LCN – the Network for Learning Communities.

The main argument is this: there is underway a process of transformation affecting education and training, with a new system emerging alongside the old. The old or mainstream system reflects the learning needs of previous decades, whilst the new – mainly funded from Europe-- is inventing solutions for rapidly evolving learning needs. The survey argues that the key tasks of learning community partnerships are to:

- help bring about an integration of the two or at least to create a permeable membrane between them.
- develop new forms of governance which reflect new learning needs and new types of learners.

Using the findings from the case studies, the survey suggests that there are four main types of learning community partnerships:

- For regions, mainly business driven, typified by strategies to promote innovation in industrial clusters and sectors.
- For towns, cities and counties, driven by the search for a new role or identity in a time of rapid change, characterised at best by a comprehensive and overarching strategy for regeneration.
- For neighborhoods, using learning in all three senses to reverse decline and to promote active citizenship through new forms of community management.
- For education and training providers and users, creating local Learning Partnerships to promote collaboration, shared use of resources and to widen and deepen participation in learning.


Pathways to Knowledge Work

This study, based on analysis of Census data in 1986 and 2000, looks at how the occupational structure of the Australian labour market has evolved over recent years. The study includes a detailed look at occupational change and identifies the fastest growing occupations as well as jobs on the rise and jobs on the decline. The central question the study investigates relates to knowledge of work - whether jobs now demand more knowledge of workers and what this means for vocational education and training.

The top three employing jobs in rank order were sales assistants, secretaries and personal assistants, and
cleaners, collectively accounting for 860,000 jobs—roughly one in ten of all jobs held during that time. Computing professionals more than tripled in number, but the number of sales assistants increased by over the same period, more than double the number of new computing professionals.

Occupations which grew rapidly in both absolute and percentage terms included computing professionals, project/program administrators, general clerks, and child-care and special-care workers. It is not possible to adequately understand the dynamics of change by observing two points in time, but there is some consistency in what has happened across a range of fields to identify three different kinds of change which appear to have occurred.

First, in a number of fields jobs have become ‘professionalised’, reflecting growing sophistication in service delivery. Second, productivity gains due to technological improvement leads to the shedding of jobs. Third, general productivity gains, in turn, generate new jobs which are best seen as the product of affluence—among the rapidly growing jobs have been dieticians, financial advisors, massage therapists, fitness instructors, travel agents, cleaners and waiters. These new jobs range across all skill levels.

While a university degree provides the surest passport to attaining a knowledge job, it has also been the case that vocational qualifications generally improve the odds of doing so, more so for men than for women, and more so for those with a skilled rather than basic qualification. Over the last five years there has been a rapid expansion in the number of people participating in the VET system, whether through new apprenticeships or in technical and further education (TAFE) and equivalent courses. The question must be whether recent cohorts of VET graduates have been able to obtain work which takes full advantage of the skills they have acquired, or whether they too will experience skill wastage.

http://www.ncver.edu.au/cgi-bin/srchCat.pl?list=927&action=show&action=show

**Expertise of High-Skilled VET Practitioners**

Young, Susan; Michell, John; Wood, Sara

This paper changes the emphasis found in the literature on staff development needs for VET personnel. Most of the recent literature on this topic uses the deficit approach: that is, the literature points to challenges facing VET personnel and where the gaps are in their skills.

The new emphasis in this paper extends the work of Smith (1998) and Johnston (1999) and shows that a range of VET personnel involved in managing staff development is already highly skilled and more staff development could be provided to similar staff throughout VET.

The high-skilled VET personnel identified in this paper include staff development and human resource managers and organisational development managers.

http://reframingthefuture.net/research/ripvet10701.pdf

**Selected Education and Labour Force Characteristics**

The Selected Education and Labour Force Characteristics publications (2017.0-8), released on 18 February 2003, cover a range of education and labour force statistics obtained from the 2001 Census. The publications contain census population counts and selected census data describing the labour force and education characteristics of people 15 years and over living in each area. More information can be found in this link:


**Tertiary Education Statistics**

The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) has released statistical information collected in relation to university activity in 2002. DEST web site includes time series statistics and these can be accessed from


The National Centre for Vocational Education Research collects information about training outcomes, and information about the Student Outcomes Survey can be accessed from


The Graduate Careers Council of Australia administers the Graduate Destination Survey and the Course Experience Questionnaire to university graduates. Information can be accessed from

http://www.gradsonline.edu.au/gradsonline/

and

http://www.avcc.edu.au/students/gradlink/gcca/

RMIT statistics can be accessed via

http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/rp/uni_stats.html

RMIT at a Glance

http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/planning/pocketstats.php
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

TAFE goes country
11-14 May, Albury/Wodonga
What are the challenges for delivering TAFE programs in rural and remote Australia? The TAFE in Rural and Isolated Communities conference will explore this question. ANTA is sponsoring the event and there are several guest speakers, including board members Dr Evelyn Scott and Vince O’Rourke, as well as Joyce Turnbull from the National Strategy team.

Find out more at: http://www.wodonga.tafe.edu.au

Conference on international education
Victoria University, City Flinders Campus May 29 and 30, 2003

“Internationalising Education: Risks and Returns” will explore the new challenges for internationalisation of education in a rapidly changing national and global context.

The three keynote speakers are: Dr Robert Lapiner, Dean of Continuing Education and UCLA Extension, Dr David Woodhouse, Executive Director, Australian Universities Quality Agency, and Professor Alan Lindsay, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Monash University.

The conference will be held at VU's and further information can be downloaded from:
http://www.vu.edu.au/Conference

The Skilling of Australia - What Skills and Whose Responsibility?
18 - 21 May 2003 Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI)

Everyone agrees that in order for Australia to compete in a global economy, we must educate and up skill our workers for the future, but what skills are needed, and whose responsibility is it really? Business Services Training Australia is sponsoring the 'Skilling Australia Debate'. The debate, moderated by John Vines, CEO of the Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists & Managers, Australia and Chair of Business Services Training Australia will bring together union and employer representatives to debate the issues surrounding the future skilling of the Australian workforce.


The Australian Universities Quality Forum
11-13 June 2003 Melbourne
After the success of the inaugural forum in Brisbane in September 2002, the AUQF Joint Steering Group is delighted to announce an extended AUQF for 2003. This Forum has the overall theme ‘National Quality in a Global Context’, and includes parallel paper presentations, as well as keynotes and workshop sessions.

The target audience for the Forum is primarily, but not exclusively, senior executives with the primary responsibility for quality assurance, chairpersons of Academic Boards, university staff working in the area of quality assurance and improvement, and interested government agencies.

For further information:

The 12th annual VET Research Conference/Workshop
8-11 July in Perth, Western Australia

This event, sponsored jointly by NCVER, Central Institute of TAFE and WA Department of Training, is intended for those involved with vocational education and training research. The aims of the conference are to bring together university, TAFE and training research staff to strengthen research networks; to present and discuss current or recently released research papers; and to discuss issues of methodology. The conference will be held.


First National Conference on Educational Integrity
November 2003. The University of South Australia

With major themes including Plagiarism and other perplexities - the intention of this forum will be creating dialogue around the many issues of ethics and integrity that threaten the quality of education at all levels from primary school to university.

Sub-themes include issues of workload pressures, cultural issues and assessment practice. As well as academic staff, the organisers want to invite educators from schools, TAFE colleges and universities to workshop their ideas in a participative, interactive environment.
More information is available at http://www.unisa.edu.au/educationalintegrity

HERDSA Conference - Learning for an Unknown Future

Christchurch, New Zealand 6-9 July 2003

The Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia will explore the challenges which unknown futures present to tertiary learners and teachers. Keynote contributions will be offered by:

Professor Ronald Barnett, Professor of Higher Education at the Institute of Education, London.
Professor Janet Donald, Centre for University Teaching and Learning, McGill University, Montreal.
Associate Professor Michael Prosser, Director of the Institute for Teaching and Learning at the University of Sydney. Dr Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Director of the International Research Institute for Maori and Indigenous Education, University of Auckland.

Please also visit the Institutional Research Consultancy Unit website for An Overview of IRCU’s Activity – First Quarter 2003

Click in the link below: http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/planning/ircu/ircu_home.php

The Institutional Research Consultancy Unit

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. For more information see: http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/ircu/docs/ir_intro.ppt

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This issue was edited by Josie Palermo. Please note that i.research can be accessed on the new Planning Portal / IRCU home webpage http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/planning/ircu/newsletters.php