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Dear Reader of i.research,

For those who were afraid they have dropped off our distribution list, do not despair—we are back with another interesting issue. Since the last issue there have been some important developments in tertiary education that you may have picked up via one of our regular 'alerts' or 'environmental scans'.

During the past few months we have been working on several projects that we hope will have a lasting impact on post-secondary education. We are uploading our new reports and data on our web portal – it’s recommended that you check it regularly! We are also happy to share with you some of our research findings over a round-table conversation. Needless to say that we are only a call away to answer any question you might have.

In this issue, we highlight some interesting national and international developments, including an important piece of scenario planning undertaken by the Business Council of Australia. We also give you an update on transnational educational trends in the Asia-Pacific region. Closer to home, we provide a brief overview of RMIT’s graduate outcomes for the past three years.

We appreciate the feedback you provide each time we circulate an alert or scan. It is very pleasing to know that the information we provide is of interest to you.

Happy reading!

The IRCU Team

About 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.

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

NATIONAL NEWS

Forces of Change in the Australian Tertiary Education Sector

There are a number of forces that are transforming society and economy in general. Some of the major driving forces of change that are having an impact on the Australian tertiary education system are included below. Understanding those forces is paramount for institutional repositioning and for taking advantage of the opportunities these provide.

In terms of the macro environment:
- Globalisation, borderless society/economy
- Competition and trade liberalisation (either in the form of bilateral or multi-lateral agreements)
- Ageing and demographic changes
- New and emerging technologies and sciences
- Sustainability
- Convergence and other developments

In terms of the national agenda
- Deregulation and decentralisation
- Marketisation of education
- User pays
- Quality assurance

In terms of policy direction:
- Commonwealth: Higher Education Reform (Backing Australia’s Future)
- AUQA
- State: Knowledge and Innovation Statement: Assessing Demand
- International: quality assurance

Dr Frank Newman, director of the US Futures Project, has described the broad trends affecting higher education worldwide and their implications for institutional autonomy. Some of these trends are:

- Increased national and international competition among institutions (eg. US markets entering China)
- The use of market or quasi-market mechanisms to structure higher education
- The appearance on the scene of for-profit organisations competing very effectively for the more lucrative areas of higher education
- The impact of information and communications technologies, including the Internet
- The growth of transnational education and the impact of globalisation
- A change in the approach to students, from treating them as recipients of academic wisdom to purchasers of educational services
The demand for greater transparency and accountability for efficiency and cost-effectiveness as well as quality assurance

Aspire Australia 2025

On March 15, 2004, the Business Council of Australian (BCA) released their "Aspire Australia 2025" project, which identifies key challenges and opportunities for Australia over the next 20 years, through the development of scenarios.

Following extensive consultation and a number of workshops, three scenarios have been identified - Riding the Wave, Stormy Seas and Changing the Crew - which cover the period to 2025. The BCA’s website summarises them as follows:

Riding the Wave explores the consequences of a breakdown in trust between people and institutions. It is a story about reform fatigue and complacency. In this scenario a loss of faith in institutions eventually undermines Australia’s capacity to grow. A lack of long-term focused investment and reform ultimately leads to economic and social decline and a re-examination of our political structures.

Stormy Seas focuses on Australia's international relationships. It explores Australia's policy options in a future where there is a sustained decline in Asia Pacific stability and security. Regional instability challenges Australia’s international and economic relations and as a result Australians become more nationalistic, more cohesive.

Changing the Crew examines the potential tensions between generations as baby boomers, who have dominated Australia's policies and values, are moving into retirement in unprecedented numbers.

In addition, there are a number of pieces on specific issues written by participants in the process, including one by RMIT’s Vice-Chancellor.


Backing Australia’s Future Website Update

DEST has advised that the reforms section of the Our Universities: Backing Australia’s Future website has been updated to reflect changes to the original Higher Education reform package released in May 2003. The changes came into effect when the Higher Education Support Act 2003 was passed by Parliament in December 2003.

The following parts have been updated: Fact Sheets, At a Glance and the Student Information. Please note that the Policy Paper has not been updated as it is an historical document.


DEST has also been publishing a regular “Backing Australia’s Future” newsletter that aims to keep the higher education sector informed of progress on the reforms. It is being published on a semi-regular basis throughout the implementation period.


Learning and Teaching Performance Fund Issues Paper

The Australian Government has introduced the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund to reward institutions which best demonstrate excellence in teaching and learning. The Government believes that this will promote the overall quality of the sector, by enabling excellence in learning and teaching to achieve equal status with research excellence in terms of contribution to Australia’s knowledge systems.

The paper notes that “for too long teaching has been considered by many to be a ‘poor cousin’ to research in our universities.” For this reason the $2.6 billion Higher Education Reform package includes $251 million for a Learning and Teaching Performance Fund to commence in 2006. The purpose of the fund is to reward institutions that best demonstrate excellence in learning and teaching.

The paper outlines the two-stage process for allocation of the Performance Fund to specific institutions:

- The first stage will require institutions to prove eligibility for access to this fund through demonstrating a strong commitment to learning and teaching. This will include strategies, practices, policies and systematic student evaluation of the quality of teaching to be made publicly available on an institution’s website.
- The second stage, once eligibility has been established, will measure institutional performance in learning and teaching using a range of measures which may include performance indicators such as student progress and graduate employment outcomes, and will be developed in consultation with the sector.

Important issues raised for consideration and discussion include:
- The Australian and overseas experience in rewarding excellence in learning and teaching in higher education;
- The principles for assessing allocation models; and
- The strengths and weaknesses of possible models.

"Learning to Work" Report

The Victorian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training has released a report on the inquiry into vocational education in schools titled Learning to Work.

The report argues for the status of vocational education in schools to be raised so that it is considered an integral part of the mainstream school curriculum rather than an added extra or a second-rate option for less capable students. Related to this is the need to raise the status of a broader range of career options, including the traditional trades and others experiencing skill shortages.

Expatriate Professionals Return to Australia

A report prepared for the Department of Immigration by Bob Birrell of Monash University shows that in 2003 a record number of Australian professionals returned home. As a result, Australia’s net annual increase in skilled workers arriving in the country has almost doubled in the past five years. The exodus of lawyers, accountants and bankers during the late 1990’s is reversing. Over the past two years, the number of expatriate Australian professionals returning to the country has risen by almost 25%.

At the same time the number of Australian skilled workers leaving the country has stabilised. There has also been an increase in the number of skilled foreign workers emigrating to Australia. The change in migration patterns has come as Australia’s economy outperforms most comparable countries.

Economic Impact of AUSFTA

The Centre for International Economics has released a report on the ‘Impact of the bilateral free agreement with the United States’.

The report argues that the agreement will lift economic growth and welfare in Australia by increasing GDP by 0.7% per year and GNP by $5.6 billion per year ten years from now. Investment liberalizations will make the biggest contribution to overall economic growth and welfare.

The report notes that one area of potentially significant benefit is the possibility of mutual recognition of qualifications in professional services. This is important both for trade in professional services and for trade in educational services. The liberalisation of trade in services will be gradual, however, with changes unlikely to become apparent for some time.

Victoria and NSW are expected to gain the most from the liberalization of trade in merchandise, services and government procurement. The partial opening of the dairy market and the increase in motor vehicle and component parts manufacturing will benefit Victoria in particular.

The agreement includes a multilateral extension of intellectual property commitments, however the report suggests that the incremental costs will be marginal.

Real Learning Real Futures - Dusseldorp Skills Forum

This report from the Dusseldorp Skills Forum (DSF) on the Real Learning Real Futures (RLRF) Program is provided to assist schools and areas to examine one response to the diverse needs of young people within and through secondary schools.

A national seminar convened by the DSF in June 2003 brought together approximately 20 educators to share ideas around ‘alternative education’. This seminar focused on the need for ‘alternatives within’ rather than ‘alternatives to’, challenging the ‘mainstream/alternative’ concept, and proposing the need for other models that were inclusive, appropriate and challenging.

The DSF was also interested in the example provided by ‘production schools’ in Denmark, in which students learn through organising and implementing hands-on and productive projects.

Various Australian examples were also provided of programs within schools, between schools, within communities, in partnerships and so on. Real Learning Real Futures stood out as a model on three grounds: first, it involved ten schools and a District Office working in collaboration; secondly, it strongly argued...
that students ‘at risk’ should not be isolated into an ‘alternative program’; thirdly, it was grappling with issues about ‘authentic learning’ in which students were engaged in ‘real’ and community-based projects.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

English University Reform and Saving for Learning

In January 2003 the Blair government released the white paper “The Future of Higher Education” in which it set out its vision for the future of higher education. Inevitably the focus of debate has been on tuition fees as a result of the following reforms to be introduced from 2006:

- Institutions will be able to set their own fees up to a maximum of 3,000 pounds;
- New packages of student support will be introduced (yet to be detailed);
- Up-front fees will be abolished, fees to be payable after graduation and earning exceeds 15,000 pounds per year.

In similar fashion to the Australian experience in relation to HECS increases (as a result of the Nelson reforms), most English universities are expected to charge up to the maximum allowed.

Research commissioned by the UK Learning and Skills Development Agency indicates in years to come students will have to further contribute with the cost of gaining a tertiary education. The research findings also indicate that in the UK experience individuals have not traditionally saved to fund for their own education. In a report entitled “Saving for Learning 2020” the Agency presents three scenarios of what could happen.

In scenario one “Crowding out” the policies are set to encourage saving for education, which include tax relief on savings, income contingent loans, education trusts and tax incentives to encourage employers to invest in education and training.

In scenario two “Competing forces” the policies are similar to the ones in existence at present, except the focus has shifted to targeted groups. Other policy settings include tax incentives for alumni donations and income contingent loans at real interest rates.

In scenario three “On your own” there is a shift towards individuals bearing the cost of their education and training and matching funds they receive from government. Overall, government decreases public subsidy on education and training but spends more or pensions, health and long-term care.

Irrespective of what scenarios eventuate, the fact is that future generations of students will have to contribute more towards the cost of their education and training.

Malaysia to use league tables to regulate foreign universities

It was recently announced that applications to offer franchised programmes from foreign universities in Malaysia will only be approved if the foreign university is sufficiently highly ranked in national league tables. For example, in the case of the United Kingdom, the university must be ranked in the top 60 by the Times Good University Guide, Financial Times or Daily Telegraph. In the United States, the Malaysian government will rely on publications such as Peterson’s US Colleges & University Handbook. The move is part of Malaysia’s bid to boost its reputation as a high quality destination for foreign students—already attracting over 40,000 students in 2003. The announcement comes at the same time as New Zealand announces its first official higher education league table, and the UK seeks to improve tracking and regulation of private providers to tackle the growing problem of ‘bogus’ students and institutions.

First foreign for-profit providers to secure 'approved' status in China

Undergraduate programmes from two US foreign for-profit higher education institutions (Western International University, ITT Educational Services) have secured 'approved' status from the municipal authorities in Beijing. The programmes are offered in China in partnership with the Canadian Institute of Business & Technology (CIBT, part of a corporate development firm well-established in the Chinese market) and Beijing Polytechnic University. According to the Beijing Municipal Education Commission (BMEC), these are the first foreign bachelors programmes to achieve this status in Beijing.
Domestic and foreign university initiatives in Vietnam

The Vietnamese government has declared its intentions to build a new ‘International University’ with foreign partners by Autumn 2004, seeking to attract both Vietnamese and foreign students. Work is underway to bring together the dispersed branches of the country’s Hanoi National University, aiming to turn it into a powerhouse for national development. RMIT Vietnam continues its expansion with the construction of its second campus and Vietnam’s Hue University has signed an agreement with University of Hawaii to offer a joint bachelor program in tourism.

http://www.obhe.ac.uk/news/

Thailand: a new ‘regional education hub’ in South East Asia

The Thai government has announced plans to increase the number of international students in the country and make Thailand a regional education hub. Citing the substantial financial loss of tens of thousands of Thai students studying abroad each year, ministers want to encourage more domestic students to pursue higher education at home. At the same time, foreign university interest in Thailand is on the increase. In recent months, universities from China, Egypt and the United States have announced plans for branch campuses and other in-country activity. Against the prevailing trend, Swinburne University of Technology, which has operated a branch campus in Thailand since 1998, has decided to move away from academic awards, and concentrate on corporate training.

http://www.obhe.ac.uk/news/

REVIEWS AND REPORTS

Schooling for Tomorrow
Networks of Innovation: Towards New Models for Managing Schools and Systems

What are the gains and risks of modern alternatives to current education systems? This new report explores the practical implications of the profound changes underway in education.

OECD countries are increasingly characterised as “network societies”, raising the possibility that educational networks could progressively supplant cumbersome bureaucracies both for management functions and as sources of innovation and professionalism. As schools become more autonomous and the world more complex, what forms of organisation and governance will ensure that education does not just fragment into chaos? Such questions inspired seminars organised in Hungary, the Netherlands and Portugal with the OECD’s Center for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI). The resulting analysis is published in this latest report in CERI’s Schooling for Tomorrow series, useful for both shapers and students of educational change.

http://oecdpublications.ofnb.com/cgi-bin/OECDBookShop.storefront/EN/product/962003041P1

VET and social capital: A paper on the contribution of the VET sector to social capital in communities

This paper by Peter Kearns identifies eight areas the VET system can contribute to social capital:

- building social capital in firms;
- building networks of businesses, especially the small business sector;
- developing employability skills;
- fostering values and norms that underpin social capital;
- contributing to inclusive and cohesive communities; initiating and contributing to learning community initiatives;
- using information and communication technology innovatively to build virtual communities;
- and contributing to society as a good citizen.

It also discusses indicators for measuring social capital, and implications for VET policy and practice.


Identifying the key factors affecting the chance of passing vocational education and training subjects

This report by David John identifies student characteristics - demographic and life-stage factors - which influence successful completion of of vocational education and training (VET) subjects. It finds the likelihood of passing is significantly reduced for people who are Indigenous, have a disability, are of non-English speaking background, are unemployed or are aged 19 years or less.

Training needs of emerging industries

This study by Josie Misko and John Saunders examines the training requirements of emerging industries and the role Australia's vocational education and training (VET) sector plays to develop further employees' skills and knowledge.

As innovative companies often operate at the leading edge of their technological fields, the training they require is highly specialised and sometimes unique. While the VET sector already provides customised training for employers, there are opportunities for the sector to advance the currency of its knowledge, develop programs to deliver special training, and extend the expertise and knowledge of its teachers.


ISIHighlyCited.com

ISIHighlyCited.comSM is an accessible Web site tool that identifies individuals, departments and laboratories that have made fundamental contributions to the advancement of science and technology in recent decades.

ISIHighlyCited.com details the people behind the accomplishments in 21 broad subject categories in life sciences, medicine, physical sciences, engineering and social sciences. According to ISI, these individuals are the most highly cited within each category for the period 1981-1999, and comprise less than one-half of one percent of all publishing researchers--truly an extraordinary accomplishment.

ISIHighlyCited.com will grow to include the top 250 pre-eminent individual researchers in each of 21 subject categories who have demonstrated great influence in their field as measured by citations to their work--the intellectual debt acknowledged by their colleagues.

http://hr3.isiknowledge.com/home.cgi

IRCU UPDATE

Economic Industry Analysis

The IRCU has prepared a detailed environmental scan of Australian industries to bring into focus a discussion of the future trends and directions. The paper provides additional context to the eighteen industry dossiers currently being used in the profile planning process to help determine program relevance.

By analysing industries using a range of economic indicators, the paper is able to demonstrate the relative importance of selected industries in terms of impact on the economy and level of growth.


VET Alignment Update

As part of the VET realignment project across Victoria to assess demand and priorities, RMIT has been contributing to the debate about how its profile will be realigned. This activity is currently being carried out by the Office of Training and Tertiary Education (OTTE) in relation to regional and industry analyses, and its potential impact on RMIT's VET activity.

OTTE has signalled that over a quarter of RMIT's government funded student contact hours could be realigned. The targeted areas are in non-traineeship delivery and traineeship delivery to persons aged over 25. The extent of this realignment will depend on the profile discussion between OTTE and providers to occur between June and September, 2004.


Improvements to the CEQ Analytical Tools

A number of improvements have been made to the CEQ Analytical Tools to help you more easily access the information you need. Output tables can now be dynamically generated in multiple formats.

The new tools also allow comparisons for the Good Teaching Scale with other institutions as well as national, ATN, Group of Eight and state averages by:


New Additions

RMIT Key Stats 1999-2003 and 2003 Pocket Stats
http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/planning/pocketstats.php

CEQ Ranking Tables 2001-2003

Volume 3 Student Life-Current and Emerging Trends

The following summary has been prepared by the IRCU to provide an indication of the changes in graduate outcomes over the past three years. The analysis applies to RMIT graduates 2000 to 2002.

Higher Education

Employment:
RMIT has remained 2-3% above the national average for Australian-based bachelor degree graduates obtaining full-time work in each of the past three years. Of 2002 graduates, 82% of those available for full-time work had obtained it four months after graduating compared to a national figure of 80%.

Enterprise Formation:
The proportion of RMIT self-employed graduates appears relatively stable at around 5-6% of graduates. RMIT usually produces a higher proportion of self-employed graduates than the national average.

Full-time study:
Compared to the national average, RMIT generally has a smaller proportion of graduates continuing in further full-time education. Over the past three years, this figure has remained stable at around 20%, compared to the national average of around 23%.

Good Teaching Scale:
Only 41% of items relating to ‘Good teaching’ elicit a favourable response (ie agreement) from RMIT’s graduates. While RMIT has improved its CEQ scores in each of the past couple of years, this has still left RMIT behind most Australian institutions.

Generic Skills Scale:
Around 60% of items relating to ‘Generic skills’ elicit a favourable response from RMIT’s graduates. This has generally left RMIT ranked below 30th out of 42 institutions over the past three years.

Overall Satisfaction:
Approximately 60% of RMIT graduates agree that they were satisfied with the quality of their course. Despite lifting its score in the latest survey, this is still a relatively poor performance in comparison to most Australian institutions.

Work Relevance:
Broadly speaking, graduates said that their course benefited their future work (68%) and developed useful and relevant skills (68%). However they were not as positive when asked about preparedness for the workforce (51%).

TAFE

Employment:
RMIT has at least matched the state average for employment outcomes in each of the past three years, maintaining employment levels of around 78%.

Enterprise Formation:
The number of RMIT graduates in enterprise formation has been relatively stable between 5% and 7% of employed graduates in each of the past three years.

Enrolled in Further Study:
The number of RMIT VET graduates enrolled in further study has been marginally higher or equal to the state average ranging between 38% and 44%.

Enrolled in Higher Education (Base enrolled in further study):
Interestingly, although the percentage of graduates enrolled in further study is close to the state average over the three years, the percentage of these students enrolled in higher education was a massive 30% higher than the state average in 2003. This probably reflects the relatively high proportion of AQF 5 and 6 programs taught at RMIT.

Satisfaction –program rated 7 or more out of 10 for the overall quality of training
In terms of the overall quality of training, RMIT graduates have consistently rated their programs 6-9% below the state average over the past three years.

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