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Dear Reader of i.research,

The second edition of i.research for 2004 highlights recent activity in post-secondary education across the globe.

With the forthcoming national election, this issue takes the reader through some of the key differences between the Coalition and ALP higher education policies. Readers also have the opportunity to hear more about higher education issues prior to the election by attending the Monash Seminars on Higher Education (details below).

Recent publicity surrounding the impact of the slowing growth of the international student market in Australia is mirrored by similar developments in the USA. An article by Philip Altbach explores the negative impact of recent events in America, described as the ‘tipping point’, that has resulted in a significant decline in international student numbers. Interestingly, Altbach argues that this situation opens up greater opportunities for Australia.

Relationships between Australia and the USA are set to change with the signing of the free trade agreement and this issue tells you how to keep abreast of these important new developments.

Closer to home, we provide a brief summary of the some of the recent IRCU achievements that may be of interest to you. For a full report of IRCU activities go to ‘What's New in Institutional Research’ at:

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

We hope that you enjoy this issue of i.research and we welcome any feedback.

Happy reading!
The IRCU Team

NATIONAL NEWS

Analysis of ALP and Coalition Higher Education Policies

This paper, prepared by RMIT’s Dr. Julie Wells, makes a comparison of the ALP’s higher education package (Aim Higher: Learning, training and better jobs for more Australians) and the Coalition package released in May (Backing Australia’s Future).

The release of Aim Higher means that both major parties have released comprehensive, costed packages for higher education that positions them as diametrically opposed on the future of the sector. Aim Higher is pitched towards entrenching and strengthening the current system of higher education provision in Australia, in contrast to the Government’s stance, which is to reorganize the sector around deregulation, competition and specialization.

While the Government proposes to increase funding per student (through contestable funds), greatly expand the number of full-fee-paying students and extend public funds to private providers; Labor plans to increase the number of publicly-funded places and increase indexation of operating grants to existing institutions. Labor has pledged to oppose the Government’s proposals to tie operating funding to workplace reform; to oppose increases to HECS and interest-bearing loans, to abolish full-fee-paying places and to reject the governance protocols. Its package is costed using the money allocated to Backing Australia’s Future, reduction in the diesel fuel rebate to the mining industry, abolition of a tax break to foreign executives, and opposing the abolition of the Austudy Loans Scheme.

The Government has attacked Labor’s costings on the basis that it has underestimated the cost of transferring maths and science students from HECS Band 2 to Band 1, claiming that this creates a $219m hole in Labor’s costings, and that it has not taken account of income foregone by lowering the HECS threshold. The Government argues this cost will be borne by universities, but as levels of HECS do not affect funding to universities under current arrangements this is not necessarily the case.

A detailed comparison of the two packages is outlined in the paper, which can be viewed at:


AUSFTA Legislation Passed

The Australian Senate has passed enabling legislation to enact the Australian-United States Free Trade Agreement (AUSFTA).

The round of negotiations was successfully concluded in January 2004 and the legislation enabling the agreement passed the Australian Parliament in 13 August 2004, allowing the agreement to be implemented as early as January 2005. For the United States, this FTA is the first with a developed country since the agreement with Canada and Mexico in 1988.

The Australian Trade Commission (Austrade) has launched the Australia-United States Free Trade
Agreement Newsletter. The monthly newsletter provides a summary of the latest developments on the AUSFTA, address questions about the Agreement and give details of relevant up-coming seminars and events. To sign up go to:

http://www.austrade.gov.au/australia/layout/0,,0_S2-1_4-2-_3_PW8110419755-4_5_6_7_00.html

Further information on GATS and trade liberalization can be found on the IRCU website at:

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

Monash Seminars on Higher Education Policy

This series aims to explore higher education policy issues in advance of the federal election.

The first seminar focused on ‘Higher Education in an Election Year’ with a presentation by Michael Gallagher entitled ‘Purchasing Differential Status versus Funding a Lack of Diversity’.

Key points include:

- Increasing the private rate of contribution for commencing students will risk the future developments of human capital needs in Australia.

- The numbers of students directly transferring from Year 12 to University study is at its lowest point nationally for a decade. The level of unmet demand is historically high, similar to the early 1990’s. The decline of young people’s access appears to be a supply side constraint, as universities are limiting the number of year 12 entrants in order to improve TER cut offs.

- The UG market in Australia should not be deregulated. The argument that because international students pay for full-fee places Australian’s should be granted the same opportunity is spurious because students and their parents already contribute through taxes to the support of the HE system.

- Recent studies on the private rate of return have shown that the public rate of return now outweighs the private return. Recent modeling on the private rate of return from investment in higher education has shown that the private rate has fallen for UG graduates due to the increases in costs for higher education and the decline in the relative rates of pay for graduates.

(Above summary by Michael Murphy -Planning Group)

Forthcoming seminars are:

‘When the ballot’s lost and won, where is “scholarship” heading?’

Date: Tuesday 7 September

‘What happens to internationalisation after the election?’

Date: Tuesday 5 October

For further details, including seminar papers, see:


Australia’s Looming Skills Shortages, ACTU Background Paper

A recent report by the ACTU shows that Australia is facing a severe skills shortage in the coming years-largely as a result of an ageing industry workforce and a decline in the rates of apprentices in training.

The report highlights three key points:

- There is a shortage of apprentices which is likely to increase over next to years at a high cost to the economy

- Age profile in traditional trades is increasing

- Federal government approach (new apprenticeships scheme) is biased against traditional trades because of longer training times and because assistance is not targeted at areas of most need.

ACTU’s suggested actions are as follows:

- Federal government to commit to employing more apprentices, to create structured training places as part of govt tender contracts

- Provide mentoring support for young apprentices

- Establish partnership initiatives within enterprises to support structured training including pathways for young people and mature workers

- Supplement and increase wages for young people and mature workers.


Australian VET Statistics: Students and Courses 2003

This summary report by the NCVER shows that in 2003, one in eight people of Australia’s working population (aged 15 to 64 years) undertook training in the nation's public vocational education and training (VET) system. This equates to 1.72 million students studying at a wide range of providers, including TAFE and other government training organisations,
universities, community education providers, and registered training providers.

During 2003, the total number of students enrolled in the training sector increased by 2.3%, and there was strong growth in: older students aged 65 years and over (up 11.8%), and students aged 45 to 64 years (up 6.7%); students indicating a disability (up 11.8%); students who speak a language other than English at home (up 5.1%), and; full-time students (up 5.2%).

More Apprentices and Trainees in Industries with Skill Shortages

Strong growth in the number of apprentices and trainees commencing training in several industries experiencing national skills shortages is evident, according to the latest national apprentice and trainee statistics released by NCVER. These areas include: automotive manufacturing (up 21%), automotive repair and servicing (up 14%), construction (up 29%), electrotechnology (up 36%), hairdressing (up 18%), and metals and engineering (up 19%). The growth in these industries is well above the overall growth of 1% nationally in the number of people commencing an apprenticeship or traineeship in the year to the end of March 2004.

New Council to Boost Collaboration Between Business and Universities

A newly established Council will foster greater collaboration between Australian higher education providers, business, industry, and communities. The Business/Industry/Higher Education Collaboration Council (BIHECC) will be chaired by Mr David Murray, Chief Executive Officer of the Commonwealth Bank.

Responsibilities of the Council will include:

- advising the Government on priorities for selecting projects for funding;
- marketing the Graduate Skills Assessment (GSA) to a broad range of employers;
- facilitating the involvement of small and medium enterprises in collaborative arrangements;
- promoting regional engagement between universities and business and industry;
- establishing and administering new Awards for Business/University Collaborations; and
- developing initiatives to further facilitate the commercialisation of intellectual property.

A Voice for Indigenous Higher Education

Indigenous Australian students, teachers and academics in higher education will have a new voice following the creation of the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council. The Council will provide policy advice to improve outcomes in higher education for Indigenous students and staff relating to their participation, progression and retention both in study and employment.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

American Universities Facing Challenge

According to Philip Altbach, the USA administration must change policies if the American academe is to retain its place on the global stage.

Using the popular theory outlined in Malcolm Gladwell's best-selling book 'The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference ', Altbach argues that the "tipping point" - the large number of little things that add up to a major change - is now in action in international education as the US loses its central role as the preferred destination for students and scholars worldwide.

For the first time in decades, the number of international students in the USA this year has not grown - remaining virtually stagnant at 586,000 - and the immediate future looks bleak. Numbers taking the graduate record examination are down - by 50% in China, 37% in India, 15% in South Korea and 43% in Taiwan. These countries are among the largest senders of students to the USA. Many universities have seen foreign applications fall, eg. Princeton University reported a 50% decline in Chinese applications and a decline of 28% in overall foreign applications.

At the same time, the demand for foreign study remains high - about 2 million students study abroad, and that number is likely to grow to 8 million by 2025. The USA crisis creates unprecedented opportunities for the UK, Australia and others in the increasingly competitive market for international students and programmes.

According to Gladwell, the "tip" occurs when there is a preponderance of precipitating forces. Altbach argues that for the USA, September 11, concern about security, the Patriot Act and other restrictions have
created a profound change in attitudes and perceptions within the USA and abroad. Many tales of difficulties experienced by students and scholars in obtaining visas, the perceived disrespect for visa applicants shown at USA embassies and delays inherent in the entire immigration system have been significant deterrents.

Altbach suggests that the most important implication of America’s declining presence in worldwide academe is not the $12 billion-plus that international students contribute to the economy annually, but rather the future of USA scientific and intellectual leadership. He argues that if the present barriers are allowed to remain, the USA will see a decline in the quality and the influence of its universities - and this will have lasting implications for the economy, for science and research, and for America’s role in the world.

Summary of article by Philip Altbach, The Times Higher Education Supplement, May 7 2004

European Study Exchanges to Grow

The European Commission is considering a dramatic expansion of its flagship Erasmus Mundus student exchange programme. European leaders want the €230 million initiative to rival the Fulbright programme by the end of its first phase in 2008 and there are firm plans for up to 5,000 scholarships for students from non-European Union countries to join its core masters programmes. A further 4,200 students from the EU are expected to receive grants to study in third countries as part of the masters programme. Additional funding will also be made for out-going students, concentrating on Asian nations that are not members of the OECD.

The EC is to set up an expert group to advise on how to make the expanded EU more attractive to international students in the increasingly competitive higher education market. The plan envisages 90 to 100 European masters programmes offered by consortia of at least three universities in three countries. Development of Erasmus Mundus is proposed to take place in parallel with convergence through the Bologna process, designed to simplify Europe's higher education systems for would-be international students.

Summary of article by David Jobbins, The Times Higher Education Supplement, May 7 2004

First-generation Retention Study in the US

Financially needy first-generation college students are much more likely to complete an associate degree if they attend an institution with reliable class schedules and an easy-to-navigate bureaucracy, according to a recent American study.

The researchers conducted detailed interviews with students, administrators and faculty members at public community colleges and private occupational institutions that offer associate degrees. Most students had low family incomes and relatively low levels of high-school preparation.

Researchers identified several organizational structures that seemed to raise graduation rates:

- "One-stop shopping" that enables students to enrol, register, and apply for federal financial aid by working with a single person in a one sitting.
- Predictable and streamlined curricula. Low-income students are much more likely to complete an associate degree if they can be confident that their courses will be offered in a regular sequence at convenient times of the day.
- Low counselor-student ratios that closely monitor their students’ progress.

The survey found that 43% of students at the public colleges said that it would take them at least a year longer to complete their associate degree than they had originally expected, compared to 24% of students at the private institutions. Such delays make it significantly more likely that students will drop out.


The Impact of Competition on Program Quality

This article from the USA shows how competition can impact on program quality and suggests ways to improve the delivery of education in a rapidly changing environment. The author argues "an institution's ability to plan for the future will depend on its assessment of whether and to what extent growing competition might impact the quality of its programs and how it ought to respond".

The author indicates that paying attention to five mediating factors will help to understand how academic programs might be affected by competition:

- **Market size** (synonymous with the number of students interested in studying a particular field – eg in a large market a new provider could enter the market without taking share away from existing providers);

- **Product similarity** (where multiple programs in the market are, or appear to be, similar and whether such programs have distinguishing
features that make them dissimilar – e.g.

- **Student behaviour** (e.g. students have varying preferences which may change given different instances or conditions; students value different things and this includes quality, price and mode of delivery)
- **Profitability** (the ability of a program in a competitive market to make a profit will impact its ability to achieve, maintain and continuously improve program quality).
- **Provider behaviour** (again if students’ behaviour is difficult to predict, programs facing competition may equally be hard to predict their behaviour). Providers may respond different at times of challenge such as entry of a new provider to the market.

The article concludes by stating five key points:

- Competition focuses attention on the market: what students and employers want and are willing to pay;
- Competition focuses attention on current practices: pay attention to developing different methods to achieve one’s ends;
- Competition forces programs to realise that they are in a competitive arena and do not stand unquestioned or unchallenged;
- Competition can force a program to assess the need to change, and
- Competition focuses attention on leaders and managers and their ability to assess the nature and extent of competition, design effective responses, implement and continually assess renewal programs.


### Proving and Improving Volume II: Tools and Techniques for Assessing the First College Year

This collection of short essays on the topic of assessment tools and techniques is the second in a series of monographs focussed on assessment and the first year experience in American higher education.

The monograph covers the following areas:

- A primer on assessment that identifies good practices for starting an assessment initiative,
- including use of existing data such as institutional records
- Methods for collecting, analysing and using the ‘student voice’ in first year assessment
- Specific assessment survey instruments, focussing on cognitive development and specific student traits

A useful reference guide to assessment instruments, the essays posit assessment to be a means to improving the first year of college for all new students.

Proving and Improving Volume II: Tools and Techniques for Assessing the First College Year, 2004, Ed. by Randy L. Swing (Available from the IRCU)

### WTO to Free-up Trade in Agriculture

In a ‘historic’ breakthrough, the World Trade Organisation’s 147 member governments recently approved a package of framework and other agreements that will abolish all forms of agricultural export subsidies. The WTO agreed to substantial reductions in trade distorting domestic support in agriculture. Governments agreed to launch negotiations to set new rules streamlining trade and customs procedures, assigned ambitious guidelines for opening trade in manufactured products and set a clear agenda for improving rules that will greatly benefit developing countries. It is predicted that the progress now made in agriculture, non-agricultural market access, development issues and trade facilitation will provide substantial momentum to WTO members’ work in other important areas such as rules, services, environment, reform of dispute procedures and intellectual property protection.


### Sharing Quality Higher Education Across Borders

International educational organizations have released a statement, ‘Sharing Quality Higher Education Across Borders’, that aims to facilitate an international consensus on a fair and transparent framework for managing higher education across borders.

The International Association of Universities (IAU), Association of Universities and Colleges Canada (AUCC), American Council of Education (ACE) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) argue that transnational provision largely fails to live up to higher education ideals of critical pedagogy,
disinterested research, and personal and cultural development.

The document calls on providers to focus on more than imparting discipline-specific knowledge and skills and to 'contribute to the broader economic, social and cultural well-being of communities in the host country'. The signatories argue against the inclusion of higher education in free trade agreements, maintaining that such mechanism assume a purely commercial transaction and may undermine the protected position of publicly-funded higher education in many countries.


**Closure of Foreign Universities in South Africa.**

Australia's Bond University will close its South Africa campus once enrolled students have completed their current courses. This follows last month’s de-accreditation of ten MBA programs in South Africa, including the Bond MBA. From a total of four officially registered foreign universities in early 2004, three are pulling out as a result of the de-accreditation.

Bond SA was established by Bond University in cooperation with the South African education, human resource and recruitment group AdvTech. The institution commenced its MBA programme in 1997; in 2000 undergraduate courses were added and Bond SA currently offers seven bachelors degrees in business, IT and communication in addition to the MBA.

In response to the deaccreditation, AdvTech suggested that the criteria used in the accreditation process focussed on process and governance rather than graduate outcomes. Further, AdvTech argued that the method of assessment favoured local public provision compared to private provision, and therefore Bond SA was disadvantaged.

The fate of Bond SA raises important questions about the extent to which transnational higher education must adapt to local conditions. South Africa continues to stand on its own to the extent which it regulates transnational higher education, with the result that virtually all transnational provision has ceased. The key question is whether domestic capacity and participation will suffer as a result.


**Chinese Foundation Programs Open in China**

China has signed deals with IDP Education Australia (IDP), the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), and the Canadian International Management Institute (CIMI) to offer foundation programs in China that would potentially allow students access to higher education abroad. Foundation programs are post-secondary qualifications, often in vocational studies, designed to meet labour shortages and provide 1-2 year further education opportunities. They allow graduates the possibility of gaining access to university level studies upon completion.


**The Global Education Digest 2004: Comparing Education Statistics Across the World**

This is the second in an annual series of UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) global statistical reports that provides the latest key education indicators from early childhood to higher education. It is a fundamental reference work for a general readership interested in comparing education systems and trends across nations. This report also provides an additional analysis of school life expectancy, progress towards education goals and a survey of national compulsory education standards.


**REVIEWS AND REPORTS**

From Training Reform to Training Packages

This book examines the growth and change in the VET sector in terms of the tensions between the interests of industry, government, individuals and organised labour. It facilitates understanding of the VET sector by describing the complex issues of training reforms and the nature of VET curriculum in simple terms.

Part one of the book provides an overview of the evolution of VET in Australia, the reasons why large scale reform of the system was undertaken and a description of the major features of the VET system, including the most recent changes. Part two focuses on curriculum issues: the nature of competency based training and the way in which training packages are developed and delivered. In part three the implications of VET policy and VET curriculum for teachers and trainers are considered.

From Training Reform to Training Packages, Erica Smith and Jack Keating, 2003 (Available from the IRCU)
The Higher Education Managerial Revolution?

This book offers a unique comparative analysis of the emergence of managerialism in eleven different countries by examining the response and adaptation of higher education institutions to their external environments. The authors address the key question of how changes in management thinking and practice are affecting internal institutional dynamics in different countries. They share a common view that managerialism as an ideology has not imposed a single, convergent model of behaviour on higher education systems and their institutions. Governments have espoused managerialism, whether as ideology or as practice, to differing degrees and institutions have responded in very different ways largely influenced by their historical, economic, social and cultural backgrounds.

Lynn Meek's paper "Governance and Management of Australian Higher Education" provides a valuable perspective of the managerial push in the Australian context. In this paper Meek questions whether the threat of the new managerialism in Australian higher education to 'traditional' academic norms and values in the long term actually weaken the contribution of academe to a knowledge based economy and society.

Alberto Amaral's paper "A Managerial Revolution?" argues that managerialism, as an ideology has not imposed a single, convergent model of behaviour on higher education systems and the institutions. Governments have espoused managerialism, whether as ideology or as practice, to different degrees or not at all, and institutions have responded in very different ways, largely influenced by their historical, economic and social backgrounds.

There appears to be some detectable patterns, including growing financial strictures, an increasing awareness among academics of financial limits and of the need for more efficient financial management, the growth in power of central administrations, and a growing awareness among academics of a loss of social standing.

The paper also reveals that the attempted imposition of new managerial culture and values has been met almost everywhere by counter-movements of resistance, and that these have so far averted the complete victory of the new ideology, even in those countries where its emergence was more virulent. It remains to be seen if the new ideology will turn out to herald a permanent change, or will it fade into organisational history as a new but transitory management fad.

Education Research in the Knowledge Society: Key trends in Europe and North America

This report examines the key trends in Europe and North America in finding more effective means of strengthening the impact of educational research on practice. It analyses trends to accumulate, communicate and achieve stronger interaction and interface between research, policy, and practice. The author suggests that the knowledge development process in vocational education and training should involve three stages - the first stage providing initial research information, before moving toward an 'intermediate' and then a 'mature stage' of evidence building through feedback and testing of the research.

The Implementation of Training Packages in Rural Australia

This report investigates the implementation of training packages in five rural communities, and the strategies providers, community and industry stakeholders use to achieve positive outcomes. Providers in the rural communities reveal that flexibility is the key to successful training. However, some funding and delivery policies/regulations hinder their efforts. The authors find that policies and incentives that support collaboration will assist training diversity in non-metropolitan Australia.

Innovation Agents: VET Skills and Innovation in Australian Industries and Firms

This study examines the role of vocational education and training (VET) and occupations in innovative industries and firms. The authors find VET is vital to developing knowledge and practical skills across a broad range of occupations, and people in vocational occupations are among principal sources of ideas for technological innovation. Further, innovative firms reported a high level of satisfaction with public and private training, which the authors conclude is due to the high level of consultation between firms and TAFE. However, firms identified the need for employees to develop generic skills, such as working in teams and developing problem-solving and communication skills, as an opportunity for the VET sector to meet unmet demand.
IRCU UPDATE

Industry Toolkit

The IRCU has prepared a toolkit to provide guidance to people who require access to information on industries, occupations and employment outcomes when considering program renewals, development of new programs or profile issues. The information is presented as Frequently Asked Questions to direct users to the sites of most relevance. This industry toolkit complements the environmental scanning guide prepared by the IRCU last year.

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

CEQuery: Qualitative Comments

The IRCU has prepared reports on the analysis of the open-ended comments made by graduates about the best and worst aspects of their programs. This analysis was made possible by the development of a software package (CEQuery), which allows for the detailed and systematic analysis of the qualitative comments contained in the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ). This software has been made available, free of charge, to all Higher Education institutions by the Graduate Careers Council of Australia (GCCA). The report (presented at portfolio level) and the software are available at


VTAC Analyser

The VTAC Analyser, an interactive web-based tool developed by the IRCU that enables analysis of university and TAFE applicants, has recently been updated using 2003/04 data. The update includes information about secondary school last attended; program preference, ENTER score, fee type, category of selection and other useful variables. There are two components to the tool: specific information about RMIT programs and inter-institutional comparisons. Information and training sessions are scheduled for September 7th and 10th. Please contact the IRCU for details.


Media Analysis of RMIT

Marketing and Public Affairs recently commissioned an analysis of RMIT’s media performance in the second half of 2003. Results revealed overwhelmingly positive coverage of RMIT over this period (68%) with only 5% of coverage unfavourable (27% of coverage was neutral).

The leading favourable topic was professional opinion pieces, followed by university research. RMIT financial issues generated the most amount of negative press.

Print media was the most common form of reportage, with The Age providing the most favourable print mentions. Both radio and television coverage was dominated by the ABC (774 ABC Melbourne and ABC Channel 2).

The strongest demand for news stories came from the postgraduate sector, followed closely by the undergraduate sector. University Administration and the Faculty of the Constructed Environment rated the most mentions.

Staff who made a significant contribution the media were recently recognised by an awards ceremony hosted by Marketing and Public Affairs.

For full details of the Media Analysis contact Marketing and Public Affairs at RMIT. Phone 51001.

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/planning/ircu/ircu_home.php

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