

amount of autonomy these institutions command contra the environment. The basic difference is that between the Anglo-Saxon type of universities and the continental one as exemplified by Germany and Sweden. If autonomy is of such crucial value to university organisation, how do systems with a low degree of autonomy manage to survive and develop? If autonomy is **the** value of university organisation, are systems with a low degree of autonomy to be considered inferior to systems with a high degree? Of course not. Institutional autonomy varies between different areas of activity. A high degree of autonomy within purely academic matters, like the basic principles governing research and the basic principles governing instruction, is a *sine qua non* for university organisation. No university can operate without the institutionalisation of the principle of academic freedom. But in other areas of activity like recruitment of staff, physical construction, the organisation of departments and schools, and the principles of curricula, a high degree of autonomy contra the government or the state is not **the** value of the system. The value of university organisation is professionalism or academic competence. Autonomy is one way to safeguard that value, but it is not the only one. Whereas the Anglo-Saxon model protects the institution of professionalism by means of autonomy, the continental European type protects academic competence by means of influence over the decisions of central authorities which govern the life of these universities. Autonomy is vital to the survival of the university system; however, even more important is the protection of professionalism and that institution may not only be challenged from the outside as German<sup>36</sup> and Danish<sup>37</sup> experiences show.

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## THE IMPACT OF THE STEADY STATE ON THE PROFESSIONAL LIVES OF ACADEMICS

### Introduction

The great majority of contemporary academics commenced their careers in a professional environment which was dramatically different from that which surrounds us today. They experienced what appeared to be unbounded growth in student enrolments, budgets and the size and number of institutions offering post-secondary education. Governments and electors shared a common faith in the worth of higher education, if not for its own sake at least as the key to economic and social development. It was a period of confident expansionism which offered the academic profession many rewards in terms of job mobility, rapid promotion, salary increases and a higher level of community regard than it had been accustomed to receiving.

All of that now belongs to another era and most of us are seeking to accommodate to a situation which is disturbingly unfamiliar in terms of our previous experience. The expression "steady state" is rapidly becoming an inaccurate descriptor as enrolments decline, budgets are pared and career opportunities diminish. The study to be reported here was an attempt to gauge the impact of these changing circumstances upon the working lives of academics.

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The investigation was an exploratory one aimed at improving our understanding of how academics view the current situation, establishing some base-line data so that comparisons might be made in the future, and providing information relevant to institutional decision-making.

The study was a collaborative one between researchers at Monash University, the University of New South Wales and the Western Australian Institute of Technology. The initial design envisaged a sample of 24 academics from each institution drawn from tenured staff appointed between 1972 and 1975 to the Faculties of Arts and Science. Tutors and professors were excluded from the sample. The object was to identify a group of staff who had been in post long enough to recall pre-recession days but who were still likely to have an expectation of advancement. For a variety of reasons the criteria for drawing the sample had to be made rather more flexible and the character of the group from each institution was as follows:

### MONASH.

*Humanities: three senior lecturers and nine lecturers. Science: one reader, six senior lecturers, two lecturers. Two were untenured.*

## UNSW.

Arts: one associate professor, five senior lecturers, six lecturers. Science and Biological Sciences: one associate professor, five senior lecturers, six lecturers. Two were untenured.

## WAIT.

Thirteen lecturers from the School of Applied Science; fifteen lecturers from the School of Business and Administration. Three were untenured.

After initial telephone contact had been made these 73 staff members were interviewed between June and October 1979. Each interview lasted for about one hour and was structured to elicit comments relating to the major areas of an academic's responsibilities and the ways in which institutions were seen to be responding to external constraints. At Monash and UNSW the interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed. At WAIT detailed notes were made during and immediately after each interview. Assurances were given that confidentiality would be maintained.

This procedure yielded a large and very rich body of material. For the purposes of this paper the major outcomes have been briefly summarised. Detailed reports of institutional data may be obtained from the research units listed at the end of the paper. Three points need to be emphasised. First, the data relate to a small number of staff in three institutions and it is not possible to generalize the results. Second, the study was intended to explore ways in which academics viewed the contemporary scene and how they saw themselves and their colleagues as being affected by it. In other words, it is the perceptions of seventy three academics which are being summarised here — not whatever might be supposed to be the realities of the situation as defined by others. Third, very condensed summaries of interviews inevitably tend to eliminate the individual flavour of many responses and thus suggest an unwarranted degree of uniformity. Quotations will therefore be used both to indicate widely held points of view and to illustrate the varied character of the data.

## Teaching

Nearly half of the university respondents claimed that their teaching workload had increased. This was mainly attributed to a reduction in the number of tutors and there were many comments on the effects of this upon the quality of teaching. Science teaching was also being affected by reductions in the number of technical staff available to service laboratory classes. These changes in staffing levels resulted in larger classes, more marking and preparatory work, and less contact with students.

*It is starting to be played out at the hackwork level as previously graduate students were employed to do casual teaching, particularly marking... which has resulted in the multiplication of courses where less correction is now required.*

*At the beginning of the year we had changes in which we looked at all our practical sessions and went through and in each cut out sessions that were particularly labour-intensive. We didn't cut them out because we didn't want them in — we realised with the staffing situation as we have, we couldn't manage.*

At WAIT all but two respondents reported an increase in workload. This was associated with larger classes, the need to teach both a wider range of courses and more courses at an advanced level, the work involved in preparing submissions for course accreditation purposes, and reduced numbers of tutors and demonstrators.

There was widespread concern, especially at UNSW, about the reduction of resources for the support of teaching. Some of this centred upon the difficulties which libraries faced when their budgets regularly failed to match rising costs. This was resulting in a heavier reliance upon basic textbooks, shorter opening hours, and severe restrictions on the acquisition of material. Other concerns were reductions in laboratory staff and teaching materials: "It's getting to the stage where you wonder whether there is enough money to run the classes."

At the universities there were very few reports of increases in administrative workload. At WAIT, however, all but one of the respondents claimed to be more heavily involved in administrative tasks. These were often delegated to them by more senior staff, or were an outcome of the increased use of part-time and non-tenured staff which placed greater administration and co-ordination responsibilities on tenured staff.

## Research

There were very few reports of research being hampered through lack of funds: the great majority were either unaffected or actually better off. There was a good deal of evidence of more effort being devoted to seeking outside funds — efforts which were often successful.

*(Funds) have never been better, as far as I'm concerned anyway... Special research grants have given it a boost. Also there is a greater tendency to go outside for money. In this field there is quite a bit of money floating around for particular projects... if you are prepared to orientate things in a certain direction.*

*The funds we get from the University for research is a pittance. We get money for research from outside the University and that has stayed about the same.*

A similar picture emerged with respect to the secretarial, technical, library and equipment resources available for research. With regard to contact with colleagues elsewhere, however, there were signs of constraints operating. The major one related to study leave and there was a widespread feeling, especially in the universities, that the quality

of both research and teaching would deteriorate if there were fewer opportunities to consult and work with colleagues overseas.

*In my field, unless one limits oneself entirely to Australia... one cannot stay in this country to do any kind of serious research. If it comes to the point where one is not allowed to leave the country in order to do research then I feel that I can no longer stay in the country and I'd leave.*

Most anticipated that they would obtain study leave but expected greater difficulty in doing so. There were several reports of reductions in funds for conference travel but most people said that they had not been affected.

At WAIT all but one respondent reported an increased emphasis upon research activities on the part of the institution. This was leading to difficulties for staff partly because of insufficient internal funding but largely because of lack of time due to heavy teaching loads. A frequent comment was: "I do too much teaching at present to be able to do research." Another was: "Research is not recognized in our work conditions and we don't get a time allowance for it, but the word from the Dean is to do it."

## Career opportunities

Almost everyone commented on the lack of job mobility and reduced prospects of promotion although attitudes to this varied. Some simply accepted it as a fact of life: "One has to trim one's sails." Others were optimistic and determined: "Eventually I will get a senior lectureship because if I get my study leave I will come back and in the next few years that will develop into x number of publications so I'm not pessimistic." Some claimed that they were not ambitious and so considered themselves unaffected. A characteristic of the WAIT responses was a stress upon the need for more explicit promotion criteria and the giving of less weight to such considerations as "playing the game" and "the old boy network".

There were a number of comments on the demoralizing effects upon junior staff of reduced career opportunities.

*One of our tutors is leaving at the end of the year and won't be replaced. A few years ago they had a much greater stake in the place — now they have one eye on any other job that comes up. The lack of tenure... I would hate to be in that position.*

*The situation for tutors is desperate. This is tragic. We are going to have an ageing academic population with no new blood.*

*I would hate to have an untenured position at the moment because I would not be able to concentrate on any real work at all. The pressure to publish anything regardless of quality would be very great, everything would be rushed and you wouldn't have any sense of security or continuity.*

With regard to the effects of reduced career prospects on publication activities most of the university respondents denied that they felt any increased pressure to publish. Despite this, almost half of the UNSW group said that they were publishing at a higher rate than usual.

## Institutional life

Some of the interview questions sought to explore attitudes towards work and the quality of life in the institution. The first of these is a sensitive topic and responses are likely to be somewhat guarded. Most people considered that there had been no significant changes beyond a general feeling of uneasiness with regard to the future. The few negative comments were about colleagues who were alleged to be neglecting their teaching or spending less time on campus: "Teaching sometimes gets lost, I've seen it in my own department where people begin to write a book and they totally neglect their students." In general, there was a sense of "business as usual" despite changed circumstances. A few staff at WAIT admitted that their attitude to work had been affected with the result that they were now "working less for WAIT" and seeking satisfaction in professional activities off-campus.

Most comments indicated little change in this area: "People are carrying on much the same"; "We still work very conscientiously and do the best we can"; "The department goes to the staff club less often because we are too busy with teaching". There were, however, some indications of a sense that the attractiveness of academic life was losing some of its drawing power.

*The lifestyle doesn't have the appeal that it used to have. Increased workload and fewer privileges such as sabbatical leave are influencing people away from academia. Lack of funds removes people's incentive to do research. The result is that people tend to just coast along, not pushing too hard for promotion.*

*People who can't get funds tend to just opt out. People are feeling bitter about what happened to study leave. There seems to be much more of people saying "Well, I think I will take my long service leave, grab as many holidays as I can."*

Although in general there was not a great deal of evidence of major changes in this area there was a widespread feeling of anxiety and uncertainty about the future: "Many of us have a sort of feeling up and down our spine about where it is going to take us."

## Institutional responses

Reactions to these, and suggested alternatives, were very diverse and hence difficult to summarise. In general, there was dissatisfaction with the way institutions were responding but no consensus as to what should be done. Most of the criticism was

directed at staffing policies and especially at the trend toward more short-term appointments. Opinions on this were often expressed in strong language and respondents spoke of "bitterness", "hostility", "manipulation" and "tragic situations".

*We have lost numerous staff members, they have all been young, the most energetic, the most involved pedagogically...If you freeze the department it can only get worse; there is no influx of new ideas and new people.*

*The whole business of fixed-term appointments, temporary appointments, has become one of manipulation...they say "You might get promotion if you can get this done."*

*Fixed term contracts affect the quality of teaching. I think rigid rules about contract employment will cripple the intellectual growth of the University.*

*The most dramatic effect is that the young ones have no career prospects. It's messing them about disastrously. In some cases they've been committed to becoming academics...*

Monash respondents were asked their views on alternatives. Some saw fractional appointments as exploitative or unworkable. Early retirement was viewed more favourably provided it was not compulsory. Other suggestions included: development of new courses to attract students, introduction of staff exchange schemes, and active seeking of support from industry.

Most respondents at UNSW were critical of institutional policies but there was no consensus as to what ought to be done. Suggestions included: more equitable distribution of resources, a review of tenure provisions, reduction in the number of students, creation of shared positions, and a heavier commitment to continuing education.

Almost all respondents at WAIT claimed that policy changes had resulted in a decline in conditions of employment. Many stressed the need for changes in leadership style towards a more consultative mode. Almost everyone mentioned the need to strengthen institutional links with the community. A number argued for the introduction of doctoral programmes and there was considerable support for contract appointments to be extended from three to five years.

### Conclusions

At the end of each interview the respondent was asked to reflect generally upon the positive and negative effects of the current situation upon the professional lives of himself and his colleagues. The major negative effect was seen to be through staffing policies which lowered ceilings, increased the proportion of contract appointments and reduced the number of tutors and support staff. The long-term consequences were seen as being intellectual stagnation, a decline in the quality of teaching, and increasing feelings of stress and uncertainty. There

was also a widespread feeling that the quality of academic life had declined as study leave provisions and career opportunities were eroded.

The positive effects, although much less prominent, included: greater pressure to introduce new courses, being forced to think more rigorously about what one was doing, more efficient allocation of resources, and a more co-operative departmental spirit "because of a feeling that we have a common enemy".

Allowing for the fact that the data relate only to a small number of staff in three institutions, the overall conclusion must be that the working lives of academics had not at the time of interview been very much affected by budget reductions and the end of an era of rapid system expansion. Research activities have been influenced to a negligible extent. There has been a small but widespread increase in teaching loads and it seems likely that the quality of teaching has been impaired although the extent and nature of this is very difficult to gauge.

Several themes which are unrelated to the impact of current conditions are identifiable in the data and these could well provide topics for further research into the academic profession. Staff appear to be not greatly concerned about students except insofar as declining demand for entry affects their view of their own situation. A number of staff display a rather low opinion of some of their colleagues. There is a good deal of evidence in the data of a lack of awareness of and concern for the institution as a whole: the department appears to constitute the academic universe for many people.

There were few marked differences in the pattern of responses as between institutions. The progressive development of CAEs is leading to an increased emphasis on research in contrast with the early remit to concentrate resources upon teaching. There is evidence in the WAIT responses of tensions being created for staff when they are asked to increase research productivity without any compensating reduction in teaching load. A number of UNSW staff claimed that because resources had always been inadequate any cutbacks inevitably had a greater impact. Some also cited the size of the University as an explanation for what they saw as the impoverished quality of campus life.

The major impact of the changed circumstances in which academics now find themselves has been upon morale. If a substantial proportion of the profession comes to feel that its work is undervalued and subject to increasingly hostile scrutiny then this will have serious implications for the future well-being of our universities and colleges. Effective leadership is likely to play a crucial part in the maintenance of morale and there is a good deal of evidence in the data that staff are very much aware of this. Senior administrators and departmental heads need to attend closely to their responsibilities in this area if the decline is to be stabilised or reversed.

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## FAUSA AND THE ACTU: THE CASE FOR AFFILIATION

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At the 1979 FAUSA Representative Council Meeting and again at the 1980 Annual General Meeting the question of whether FAUSA should affiliate with the ACTU was debated. A decision has been deferred until the 1981 Annual General Meeting to enable further consideration to be given by member associations. Although the present level of support for affiliation is not high<sup>1</sup> it does appear to be increasing. That the question of affiliation is being seriously considered does, however, represent a significant change in attitude on the part of university academic staff associations. Even as recently as five years ago consideration of this question would not have been entertained. The ACTU would have been seen then as it still is by many academics, as having nothing to offer members of the academic staff. Indeed, academics have traditionally seen their interests as at best tangential to, and in many instances in conflict with, those of the ACTU. The ACTU has been seen as representing the interests of blue-collar workers whereas academics have, by and large, seen themselves as an elite professional group with little if anything in common with other groups of workers and with the union movement generally. The present moves to affiliate with the ACTU must be seen then as reflecting changes both in the conditions of employment of academics and in the structure and image of the ACTU. The aim of this paper is to detail these changes and to show that FAUSA has much to gain from affiliation with the ACTU.

### Unionisation of Academic Staff

The view once held quite widely among academics that they formed an elite professional group with no need to concern themselves with the supposedly mundane matters of conditions of employment has suffered a decline in credibility in the face of the steady erosion of these conditions in recent years. A worsening of the student staff ratio due to funding cuts to universities; reductions in and controls over

study leave; an increasing number of fixed term appointments and threatened attacks on tenure have forced academics to the realisation that they are vulnerable to such unilateral actions undermining their working conditions. The response by academic staff has been to seek the protection of industrial legislation in state jurisdictions and to make some moves to gain federal industrial registration. In New South Wales, for example, the University Academic Staff Associations of New South Wales (U.A.S.A.NSW) gained registration as an industrial union and is currently seeking to have an agreement on conditions of employment at the University of Newcastle registered. It is also affiliated with the New South Wales Labor Council.

These moves on the part of academic staff reflect the realisation by them that they do have much in common with other sectors of the work-force, particularly in the need to protect conditions of employment. Academics seem to have realised that they are no longer, if indeed they ever were, an elite group with secure working conditions. This realisation has done much to bridge the gap between academic staff associations and the union movement.

### The ACTU

The Australian Council of Trade Unions is the major peak trade union body at the federal level. Formed in 1927<sup>2</sup> it has traditionally been dominated by blue-collar unions. This, however, is in a process of change. At the 1979 ACTU Congress the major peak trade union body representing white collar workers, the Australian Council of Salaried and Professional Associations (ACSPA) merged with the ACTU. ACSPA currently forms one of eight industry groups within the ACTU and as such elects one member of the executive. In addition, one of three vice-presidents of the ACTU who is also a member of the ACTU executive, is elected by the unions in the