

"FACTORS TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT" AND "PRINCIPLES OF CONDUCT": THE COMMONWEALTH'S APPROACH TO FUNDING UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES OF ADVANCED EDUCATION

Introduction

Recurrent grants are those monies allocated to institutions to provide for their general teaching activities (in the case of CAEs) or teaching and research activities (in the case of universities). Since 1 January 1974, the Commonwealth has assumed responsibility for the determination and provision of recurrent grants to universities and CAEs, although it has generally taken account of the advice of State post-secondary education co-ordinating authorities in determining grants for CAEs. This paper discusses a number of aspects of the Commonwealth's approach to these determinations and identifies changes which have occurred in the approach — these being largely due to changing economic and demographic circumstances together with an increasing Commonwealth role in the formulation of higher education policy.

Major Factors Influencing Recurrent Grants Determinations

According to the brief and generally stated comments on recurrent grants determinations found in the various reports of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) and its predecessors, the Commonwealth's determinations are primarily based on consideration of each institution's total student load taken together with the range and relative sizes of the institution's discipline groups. While the respective Commissions and Councils concerned with higher education have never stated any hard and fast rules in relation to the foregoing factors, their reports do at least provide some exposition of how these factors operate and their relative importance.

Total Student Load

The single most important factor determining the magnitude of recurrent grants to individual universities and CAEs has been the institution's total student load and, in general, the larger an institution's student load, the larger its recurrent grant. This relationship is not linear, however, in that an institution with a relatively small student load tends to receive a larger grant per unit of student load than an institution with a relatively large student load.

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This is demanded by the "critical mass" type of requirement that even an institution with a relatively small student load must still provide a certain minimum spread of fields of study if it is to remain viable as an autonomous institution of higher education. Similarly, each field of study must itself provide for a minimum spread of courses if it is to offer genuinely advanced study in that field. This tends to result in, amongst other things, lower student/staff ratios in institutions with smaller student loads and, therefore, larger recurrent expenditure per unit of student load than in institutions with larger student loads. The Williams Committee recognised this issue and commented on it in the following terms:

There is a critical size determined by the minimum level of necessary staff, class rooms, laboratories, library books and facilities required to provide reasonable conditions for teaching and learning. Where that critical size is not reached in a field of study, or in an institution with several fields of study, the cost per student might be higher than in fields of study or institutions that have reached an economical size.¹

Range and Relative Sizes of Discipline Groups
Considerations relating to the range and relative sizes of discipline groups introduce other important factors into the determinations of recurrent grants for individual institutions.

The range of discipline groups in an institution is not necessarily related to the overall size of an institution (as measured by student load) in that two institutions can have similar student loads while differing significantly with respect to the range of discipline groups in which courses are offered. In such a situation, the institution offering the wider range of studies tends to be the more expensive to fund. The reason for this, referred to above, is that each discipline group needs to provide for a certain minimum spread of courses if it is to offer genuinely advanced study in that field and this requirement tends to demand a greater academic staffing involvement (and, hence, larger recurrent grants)

from the institution offering the wider range of studies.

The relative sizes (in terms of student load) of the discipline groups in an institution also influence recurrent grant determinations. This is because there is a clear hierarchy of average expenditures per unit of student load for the various discipline groups such that the most expensive discipline group costs four to five times more than the least expensive discipline group.² Thus, even if both the total student load and the range of discipline groups are similar for two institutions, one institution can still be significantly more expensive to fund if the distribution of its student load exhibits a stronger bias towards the more expensive fields of study.

Other Factors Influencing Recurrent Grants Determinations

There is a considerable number of factors of lesser importance which the relevant Commonwealth authorities have claimed to "take into account" in their determinations but which have received little or no discussion in terms of either:

- the principles upon which they operate (i.e. the manner in which these factors are "taken into account"); or
- the extent to which they enter into recurrent grants determinations (i.e. the extent to which they are "taken into account").

Little can be said about these factors, therefore, other than to note that they may affect cost relativities between institutions in fairly predictable ways. The (not necessarily independent) factors being referred to include such things as:

- the age of the institution, its stage of development and its rate of growth;
- the nature, age, and number of campuses, including the extent to which the institution relies on rented accommodation;
- geographical circumstances peculiar to the institution;
- historical circumstances peculiar to the institution;
- policy decisions peculiar to the institution;
- modes of student enrolment, that is the proportions of full-time vs part-time, internal vs external, and higher degree vs other than higher degree enrolments;
- the nature of external studies programmes;
- commitments to staff that are salary related, for example
 - arrangements for superannuation
 - benefits to retired staff

- long service leave provisions
- payment for the supervision of teaching practice or clinical work
- policies or perceived obligations relating to promotion.

Recurrent Grants Determinations: A "Proper" Method or a "Matter of Judgement"?

In 1972 the Fifth Report of the Australian Universities Commission referred to the "method of assessment" used to determine recurrent grants as "a proper one".³ By 1978, however, the Tertiary Education Commission was referring, more realistically, to its refinement of the same "method" (i.e. taking all the factors discussed "into account") as "ultimately a matter of judgement":

Grants for individual universities and colleges of advanced education have depended largely on the size and faculty mix of their student body; in addition, a number of other factors has been taken into account in what has been ultimately a matter of judgement in allocating funds.⁴

Given the number of factors and circumstances that can (and should) affect recurrent grants determinations, and the complexity of their possible interactions, it seems futile to expect that such determinations can ever be grounded on a firmer basis than that offered by the considered judgement of people whose experience has afforded them a sensitivity to the range of issues involved. This applies whether a formula-based approach is used or not, since a formula is, in this instance, merely a mathematical articulation of prior judgements. Nevertheless, the unsurprising fact that recurrent grants determinations are ultimately matters of human judgement does not imply that these judgements are in any sense whimsical. The preceding discussion has indicated that, at least with respect to the major factors of total student load and range and size of discipline groups, a number of quite logical "rules" govern the Commonwealth's determinations of recurrent grants. These "rules", which are based on the assumption that other factors remain constant, are summarised below.

- An institution with a larger student load tends to require a larger recurrent grant than an institution with a smaller student load.
- The relationship of recurrent grants to total student load is not a linear one in that an institution with a smaller student load tends to require a larger recurrent grant per unit of student load than an institution with a larger student load.
- An institution with a greater range of discipline groups tends to require a larger recurrent grant than an institution with a lesser range of discipline groups.

- An institution with a greater proportion of student load in the more expensive discipline groups tends to require a larger recurrent grant than an institution with a lesser proportion of students in the more expensive discipline groups.

Principles for Allocating Recurrent Grants Prior to the 1982-84 Triennium

In addition to taking the various factors discussed "into account", the Commonwealth authorities have, prior to the 1982-84 triennium at least, been guided by a number of what might be referred to as "principles of conduct". It will later be argued that this conceptual distinction between "factors taken into account" and "principles of conduct" is an important one in terms of understanding changes that occurred in the Commonwealth's approach to recurrent grant allocations for the 1982-84 triennium. Here, however, it is sufficient to note the more salient principles which guided the Commonwealth's recurrent grant determinations prior to the 1982-84 triennium. These principles have included: representing the needs of institutions to the Commonwealth Government, observing a practice of non-disruption of institutional activities, and recognising institutional autonomy.

Representation of Institutional Needs

While the Commonwealth authorities have acknowledged that "the portion of the community's resources which is available for university education in any given triennium is not unlimited"⁵ and that "the state of the economy must affect the level of resources which can be made available for tertiary education,"⁶ it has nevertheless been the case that these authorities have tended to adopt a "bottom-up" approach in their recommendations. That is, as the following extracts indicate, the approach has tended to be one of assessing the needs of institutions and, within reason, thereby arriving at a recommended total for recurrent grants:

The (Australian Universities) Commission's task is to assess the financial assistance required by universities⁷

... questions relating to the level of resources are ultimately ones for governments. For its part, the (Tertiary Education) Commission, while having regard to general economic conditions, must exercise its own judgement in assessing needs.⁸

Non-disruption of Institutional Activities

Irrespective of the recurrent grants determinations that would be made if the Commonwealth adhered to a strict formalisation of the factors previously discussed, institutions have a very limited degree of freedom within which they can alter their patterns of recurrent expenditure from year to year — that is, unless staff numbers are significantly reduced.

Approximately 80 to 85 per cent of recurrent expen-

diture in universities and CAEs is attributable to academic and non-academic salaries. Of the non-salaries costs, approximately three-quarters is attributable to inescapable commitments such as water, power, lighting, postage, stationery and so on. It is only the remaining quarter of non-salaried costs (representing approximately four per cent and five per cent of total recurrent costs for universities and CAEs respectively) that is "potentially open to adjustment in a declining enrolment situation unless staff numbers are to be affected."⁹

Moreover, given that "the level of non-academic staff (and therefore their cost) is to a large extent determined by the level of academic staff",¹⁰ it follows that the areas which absorb this remaining four per cent or five per cent of expenditure (such as library acquisitions and routine maintenance of buildings, equipment and grounds) are virtually the only ones in which costs can be reduced in the absence of a reduction in academic staff numbers.

As a consequence of these constraints on recurrent expenditure patterns, the Universities and Advanced Education Councils of the CTEC have recognised that any major changes in the level of recurrent grants to institutions would cause considerable disruption. Recommendations by the Councils have, therefore, been based on a principle of non-disruption. The following extracts indicate the Councils' views on this issue:

The (Universities) Council recognises that it would not be practical, in the short term at least, to make major changes in its approach to determining recurrent funding levels. Abrupt or significant movements in... existing levels of (recurrent) grants for individual institutions are not feasible... (because such movements) would cause serious disruptions to academic programs and put at risk the pursuit of excellence which (the Universities Council) sees as central to the university system.¹¹

In making its recommendations for the distribution of funds to individual colleges, the (Advanced Education) Council... accepts that major changes in the level of recurrent expenditure in individual colleges can only be achieved over a period of time.¹²

Recognition of Institutional Autonomy

Prior to the 1982-84 triennium it was clear that the Commonwealth authorities made no attempt to take account of differences between institutions which arose from their individual decisions on the allocation of their resources. For example, an institution would not receive additional compensating funds if it decided to teach a particular discipline in a way which was more expensive than the way in which the discipline was taught in other institutions. The Commonwealth funding authorities argued that such decisions (e.g., to teach in a more expen-

sive way) were reasonable ones for autonomous institutions to make, but that it was not appropriate to provide additional funds to meet the additional costs involved as this would imply that the funding authority should have some say in whether these decisions were acceptable or not. In the past, at least, the Commonwealth funding authorities have not wanted to become involved in the decision making process at this level of detail.

It has also been quite clear that while the Commonwealth funding authorities provided funds to institutions on the basis of some notion of cost relativities for particular discipline groups, they have not necessarily expected institutions to allocate resources internally in a way which reflected the Commonwealth's approach or which took account of resource allocation practices in other institutions. Thus, there has been steadfast resistance by the CTEC and its predecessors to making public any of the so-called funding "formulae" on the grounds that their publication might result in pressures within institutions for resources to be distributed between discipline groups in a way which parallels the relevant funding formula. This argument also relates to the CTEC's traditional resistance to "ear-marking" recurrent funds for particular purposes.

This type of approach to funding sits comfortably with notions of institutional autonomy and responsibility. Funds have been provided to institutions on the basis of particular assumptions regarding costs but institutions have, in the past, been relatively free to determine the internal allocation of resources between competing claims.

Funding for the 1982-84 Triennium: A Matter of Principles

While the "factors taken into account" in recurrent grants determinations prior to 1982-84 necessarily remain relevant, it can be strongly argued that the "principles of conduct" that applied prior to 1982-84 have been changed or, depending upon one's rhetorical style, abandoned — at which point a cynic might observe that the result has been unprincipled resource allocation by the Commonwealth. To adopt a more even-handed attitude, however, it is not surprising that the transition of the higher education system from an expansionary phase to a steady-state or mildly contractionary phase would be accompanied by some significant departures from the funding approaches of earlier years. Nevertheless, the Commonwealth's relative disregard for each of the "principles of conduct" which guided prior recurrent grants determinations is deserving of special comment.

Representation of Institutional Needs

While presenting a reasoned case for the provision of additional resources for the higher education system, the CTEC, in Volume 1 of its *Report for 1982-84 Triennium*, proposed a major rationalisation and reallocation of resources in higher educa-

tion. In both the *Review of Commonwealth Functions* (April, 1981),¹³ and the *Statement on Commonwealth Education Policy and Financial Guidelines* (June, 1981),¹⁴ the Commonwealth Government indicated its support for this approach which was seen as involving, *inter alia*:

- the consolidation into larger units of thirty CAEs;
- the reallocation of effort, and resources, from teacher education to the technologies and business studies;
- the phasing out of Engineering at a number of institutions;
- the assessment of grants for two universities to be based on a greater sharing of resources and collaboration between the two universities.

The Guidelines also indicated that the Government

expects the (CTEC) to continue to promote the most efficient use of resources available for tertiary education and requests it to consider the opportunities for greater efficiency and savings by reducing unnecessary duplication of effort among faculties and schools.¹⁵

As might be expected, the Commonwealth Government's instructions were accepted by the CTEC and, in fact, pursued with some vigour: institutions were consolidated, resources were reallocated and Engineering was phased out at some institutions. This prompted some commentators to observe that the CTEC's role had become less one of independent advice to Government on the needs of institutions and more one of policing the responses of institutions to expenditure constraints imposed by Government in the absence of adequate prior consultation.

This shift in emphasis from a "bottom-up" to a "top-down" approach is clearly evident in the CTEC's approach to recurrent funding for the 1982-84 triennium. Reflecting the Commonwealth Government's priorities, the CTEC has indicated that savings will be forced upon institutions over the triennium and that these will be achieved by a combination of:

- greater collaboration and resource-sharing between institutions; and
- selective reduction of the ranges of activities within institutions, that is:

The Commission held the view that the reduction in recurrent funding which the Guidelines provided should not be reflected simply in reduced grants across all institutions and activities, but that the two Councils and the State authorities and institutions should be selective in making the financial savings which are required (our emphasis).¹⁶

Non-disruption of Institutional Activities

In formulating institution-by-institution funding recommendations for the 1982-84 triennium, the CTEC was constrained by the level of funds which were specified in the Guidelines. However, while the funding provision was less than had been recommended as necessary to enable a programme of rationalisation and reallocation of resources to take place, the CTEC persisted with its policies of

*redistributing resources from teacher education to the technologies and business studies in such a way that by 1984 there will be an appropriate relationship between funding and enrolments in individual institutions.*¹⁷

The extent to which resources have had to be reallocated to meet this objective will clearly result in substantial "disruption" for a number of institutions, and it seems likely that at least some institutions will have to resort to redundancy provisions in order to balance budgets by the end of the triennium. Indeed, this situation was acknowledged by the CTEC which noted that the necessity "for savings to be forced from the consolidated institutions" would, in a number of cases, "result in problems of staff redundancy."¹⁸

In addition to this disruption of institutional activities in practice during the 1982-84 triennium, the Commonwealth Government has also violated the principle of non-disruption *qua* principle. The *Review of Commonwealth Functions* designated thirty colleges for amalgamation and stated that, if these colleges did not amalgamate, then: "... the Commonwealth will not be prepared to continue recurrent funding of the colleges concerned after the end of 1981."¹⁹

In the event, the majority of institutions concerned did proceed with plans for amalgamation while the others were granted extended deadlines. The situation has, therefore, not yet arisen where Commonwealth funds have been withheld. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the threat to cease funding intransigent institutions represents a total violation of the **principle** of non-disruption of institutional activities.

In view of the CTEC's mandate to "consider the opportunities for greater efficiency and savings by reducing unnecessary duplication of effort among faculties and schools,"²⁰ it takes little imagination, particularly in the light of recent experience overseas, to see that the "Razor Gang's" violation of the "principle of non-disruption" may have sequels. That is, institutions which are urged to shed particular courses may not be funded for those courses and/or may be threatened with no funding whatsoever if the "offending" courses are continued.

Recognition of Institutional Autonomy

In addition to violating the "principle of non-

disruption", the scenarios outlined in the preceding paragraph would also over-ride the recognition that institutions are free to allocate their funds internally as they see fit. Even if these scenarios prove to be fictions, however, it is clear that such recognition of institutional autonomy has, in any case, been seriously undermined in Volume 2 of the CTEC's report for the 1982-84 triennium. For example, in its Advice to the CTEC, the Universities Council stated that:

*It expects that universities for their part will need to adopt a similar approach (to that of the Universities Council) toward their internal distribution of funds.*²¹

And the CTEC explained that:

*... in recommending recurrent funds for individual universities and CAEs, (the CTEC) has not sought economies by cutting funds for all institutions, but, by being selective, has aimed at keeping as high as possible the quality of the system as a whole. By the same token, it expects institutions themselves to be selective in making necessary savings: it expects them to examine the range of their activities and to achieve savings by shedding particular courses or subjects where these have low priority, little student demand, or duplicate similar activities in neighbouring institutions, rather than by making reductions across the full range of their activities.*²²

It is clear, then, that the CTEC's previous wisdom regarding internal resource allocation has been supplanted by the advice: "Do as we do".

Conclusion

The process of determining recurrent grants for institutions of higher education is a complex one involving a variety of considerations. In the Australian context a number of factors related to the total student load and the range and relative size of discipline groups has exerted a pervasive influence on funding determinations for particular institutions. Also of importance, however, have been a number of "principles of conduct" which, until recently, guided the Commonwealth authorities in their overall approaches to funding. The adoption of these principles, identified in this paper as representing institutional needs, accepting a policy of non-disruption of institutional activities, and recognising institutional autonomy, resulted, prior to the 1982-84 triennium at least, in a relatively close relationship between the Commonwealth funding authorities and institutions. It is, perhaps, not too much of an exaggeration to say that the Commonwealth authorities were seen as wise benefactors who recognised the importance, and the legitimacy, of institutional activities and were prepared to represent institutional needs without interfering in their internal activities. It is not surprising, therefore, that the setting aside of these "principles of conduct" by

both the CTEC and the Commonwealth Government in the process of determining recurrent grants for the 1982-84 triennium has resulted in the development of a new, and rather more antagonistic, set of relationships between the CTEC and institutions.

Of course, an argument for the setting aside of these "principles of conduct", or at least some modification of the traditional funding approach, can be made quite easily in respect of the changed economic and demographic circumstances facing Australia in the 'eighties, changing perceptions regarding the value to both the individual and the community of higher education, and the apparent inability of at least some institutions to develop decision-making procedures and management styles which would enable them to respond effectively to these changing circumstances. Certainly considerations such as these have influenced the CTEC's approach to funding. In addition, however, the Commonwealth Government's interest and involvement in the formulation of higher education policy appears to have increased substantially in recent years. A number of commentators have pointed out that the Guidelines of June 1981 indicate quite clearly that while

*The States have the primary responsibility for the administration and delivery of educational services, particularly at the School level ... The Commonwealth believes it has a particular role in identifying and bringing resources to bear on educational issues of national importance.*²³

It seems likely that the changes we have identified in the CTEC's approach to the determination of recurrent grants also reflect this heightened Commonwealth Government interest in influencing Australian higher education policy.

The developing interest by the Commonwealth in higher education policy poses some problems for the CTEC. If it is to be seen by the Commonwealth as "earning its keep" then it must be seen both to be implementing government policy and participating in the formulation of policies which are by and large acceptable to the government of the day. At the same time the CTEC must, if it is to maintain its credibility with higher education institutions, be seen to adopt a stance somewhat independent of government. The dilemma facing the CTEC, then, is to find and maintain an appropriate balance in meeting the sometimes conflicting objectives and needs of the Commonwealth Government and the higher education institutions. Judging from the approach adopted by the CTEC in determining recurrent grants for institutions for the 1982-84 triennium, however, it would presently appear that this balance has shifted decidedly towards meeting the objectives of government. It remains to be seen whether the previous balance is restored by again adopting the "principles of conduct" referred to earlier in this paper, or whether the 1982-84 experience will guide

the CTEC in its funding determinations for the 1985-87 triennium. If the former course is chosen then the 1982-84 triennium might in retrospect appear as a "triennium outside the triennial progression"²⁴ in terms of the Commonwealth's approach to funding. If, on the other hand, the 1982-84 experience can be taken as an indication of the funding approach that will be adopted for the 1985-87 triennium then we have witnessed a fundamental change in the Commonwealth's approach to funding: a change, moreover, that demands thorough revision of the meaning of "institutional autonomy" and, more generally, some rethinking of the objectives of post-secondary education. The likelihood that the Commonwealth's approach to funding for the 1985-87 triennium will be influenced by the extent to which institutions demonstrate during the current triennium that they are able and prepared to respond to changes in ways which meet with the approval of the Commonwealth authorities will, no doubt, be of little comfort to those involved in the management of higher education institutions.

References and Notes

1. *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Education and Training* (B.R. Williams, Chairman), Vol. 1, AGPS, Canberra, 1979, p 58.
2. The maximum variation in relative costs between **different** discipline groups **within** an institution is in the order of double the maximum variation in relative costs **between** institutions for the **same** discipline group.
3. Australian Universities Commission, *Fifth Report*, AGPS, Canberra, 1972, p 110.
4. Tertiary Education Commission, *Report for 1979-81 Triennium*, Vol. 2, AGPS, Canberra, 1978, p 27.
5. Australian Universities Commission, *Fifth Report*, op. cit., p 19.
6. Tertiary Education Commission, *Funding of Tertiary Education: Statement by TEC to Joint Committee of Public Accounts*, AGPS, Canberra, 1979, p 37.
7. Australian Universities Commission, *Fifth Report*, op. cit., p 19.
8. *Funding of Tertiary Education: Statement by TEC to Joint Committee of Public Accounts*, op. cit., p 37.
9. *Report for 1979-81 Triennium*, op. cit., Vol. 2, p 27.
10. *ibid.*, p 27.
11. Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, *Report for 1982-84 Triennium*, Vol. 1, Part 2, AGPS, Canberra, 1981, pp. 118, 116.
12. Tertiary Education Commission, *Recommendations for 1978*, AGPS, Canberra, 1977, p 102.
13. Prime Minister's Statement to the Parliament, *Review of Commonwealth Functions*, 30 April, 1981.

14. Statement by the Minister for Education, The Hon. Wal Fife, *Statement on Commonwealth Education Policy and Financial Guidelines to the Commonwealth Education Commissions*, 4 June 1981.
15. *ibid.*
16. *Report for 1982-84 Triennium*, op. cit., Vol. 2, Part 1, p 28.
17. *ibid.*, p 33.
18. *ibid.*, p 4.
19. *Review of Commonwealth Functions*, op. cit., p 24.
20. *Statement on Commonwealth Education Policy and Financial Guidelines to the Commonwealth Education Commissions*, op. cit.
21. *Report for 1982-84 Triennium*, op. cit., Vol. 2, Part 2, p 23-4.
22. *Report for 1982-84 Triennium*, op. cit., Vol. 2, Part 1, p 22.
23. *Statement on Commonwealth Education Policy and Financial Guidelines to the Commonwealth Education Commissions*, op. cit.
24. In the light of the 1975 budgetary situation, the Government set aside the reports of the Universities Commission, the Commission on Advanced Education, and the Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education which recommended financial assistance for their respective sectors for (what was to have been) the 1976-78 triennium. Instead, the Government decided that, for funding purposes, 1976 would be treated as "a year outside the triennial progression".

AN AGREEMENT ON TRAINING UNIVERSITY TEACHERS: THE UK EXPERIENCE

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to review the pattern of full-time higher education in Great Britain and in the light of national needs and resources to advise Her Majesty's Government on what principles its long term development should be based...

The Committee's report was published in October 1963 and contained a total of 178 wide-ranging recommendations.⁵

Only one of these related directly to academic staff training — namely, that "all newly appointed junior teachers should have organized opportunities to acquire the techniques of lecturing and of conducting discussion groups." In arriving at this recommendation, the Committee noted 'excessive complaints' from both university teachers and student organizations concerning methods of instruction.

In its consideration of teaching, the Robbins Committee confined itself to general questions connected with the use made of teaching resources. This was because in March 1961, only one month after the appointment of the Robbins Committee, the University Grants Committee (the funding authority for all UK universities) appointed a Committee on University Teaching Methods, under the Chairmanship of Sir Edward Hale. The terms of reference of the Hale Committee were

to make a comparative study of undergraduate teaching methods and practices current in the universities and colleges of Great Britain in the fields of arts and pure and applied science.

The Committee's report was published in November 1964.⁶ As did the Robbins Report, the Hale Report referred to criticism of the universities on the grounds that university teachers are insufficiently trained for their work. The Committee inquired into the extent to which university teachers should receive training or instruction in how to teach. As a result of discussions with university delegations, it became clear to the Committee that any proposal to make full-time course of training a mandatory prerequisite for university appointment would receive no support at all. Nevertheless the Committee expressed the view that the haphazard nature of existing arrangements for training resulted in much university teaching being less effective than it should be.

The Origins of Academic Staff Training in the United Kingdom

Universities have for centuries rejected the idea that academic staff require any formal training for their jobs other than that which is subject-matter based, and it has long been the tradition that staff need receive no formal training whatsoever in teaching administration — or indeed in research.

Only in the last forty years has this tradition been openly challenged in any real measure. Truscott, for example, argued that the only effective remedy for 'appalling' teaching is for lectures to be made better by "subjecting all would-be university lecturers to a specific course of training,"¹ and this theme was pursued by a growing number of individuals over the next decade.² Despite such concern however, the ranks of academe remained largely unmoved. Radcliffe noted that the idea of training new recruits to university teaching was largely "shrugged off with a quantity of humorous or supercilious comment."³ Nevertheless, this period marked the beginnings of a recognition in the United Kingdom of the need for professional training of university teachers and a growing questioning of the tenability of the traditional view of university teaching as either a self-taught art or a craft passed on informally from master to apprentice.

This post-war period also marked a beginning interest by the AUT (The Association of University Teachers) in the improvement of university teaching, and twice during this time (in 1945 and 1954) the union approached the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) on the question of training for academic staff.

National Initiatives

The period from 1961-1974 (when the Agreement on Probationary Procedures and Criteria came into being) was remarkable for a number of national initiatives in the university sector which were subsequently to colour the whole area of academic staff training in the U.K.⁴ Of all these initiatives perhaps that which has had the most far-reaching consequences for the UK university system was the Report of the Robbins Committee on Higher Education in 1963.

The Committee on Higher Education, under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins, was appointed in February 1961 by the Prime Minister