

## Strategies for improving access

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A major and continuing thrust of Government policy, has been to improve access to higher education and this policy has been reflected in specific initiatives to support this policy. The Review of Efficiency and Effectiveness (better known as the Hudson Report<sup>1</sup>) indicated that the main responses were:

- to concentrate growth in outer metropolitan and regional areas.
- special admission schemes.
- specific initiatives to enhance access and equity.

The White Paper<sup>2</sup>, reiterated the Government's commitment to improving access and suggested that improvements in access and equity were heavily dependent on growth in the system and specific strategies at the institutional, state and national level.

This paper traces the development of the varied strategies which have been introduced in order to improve access for disadvantaged groups in one large metropolitan university and looks at possible strategies which may flow from likely amalgamations with other institutions from the other side of the rapidly disappearing binary divide.

### Where did the initiative come from?

Strategies do not suddenly occur, the initiative has to come from someone, or some pressure group or from some research finding. In examining the strategies which have been developed at Monash University over the last fifteen years we traced the initiators of each strategy and they fell into three broad categories:

- Initiatives by individuals who introduced a new idea to the university community and argued persuasively for its introduction. An example of such an initiative is the Junior University Programme.
- Initiatives by a section of the community or by a Government body, or a combination of the two; examples are the Monash Orientation Scheme for Aborigines, the Youth Guarantee Scheme, the Alternative Year 12 Admission Scheme and the Women into Engineering and Science.
- Initiatives which stem from basic research, for example the Mature Age Special Entry Scheme and the Schools Link Programme.

### An institution wishing to attract minority groups must respond to the problems of loneliness, of feeling different to the majority.

Each of these initiatives is briefly described.

#### Junior University Programme

Our attention was drawn to the annual Leo Howard Vacation School at the University of Queensland, by a student representative on the Monash University Council.

The summer vacation school for year 11 students entering year 12 is long established in Queensland and draws together up to 500 students from all parts of the State for a residential programme of academic and non-academic activities designed to inspire interest in tertiary study and positively assist in the process of transition from secondary to tertiary study.

Monash University has initiated and developed a Junior University Programme for the benefit of year 11 students. This year's programme will be the fourth. On the academic side, lecturers are chosen from University staff and employers of graduates to inspire interest in specific areas of tertiary study and its relationship to the workforce. There is, for example, opportunity to learn about practical applications of mathematical concepts, astronomy, medical ethics, the operation of our legal system, current issues in politics and the Australian economy. There is also the chance to attend presentations by a range of employers in professional practice, including scientists, lawyers, merchant bankers, engineers and so on.

The lectures are supplemented by visits to faculties and talks, and an ingenious Magical Mystery Tour organised entirely by Monash students. The discovery tour is a splendid means of exploring the campus with a purpose in mind. There is the added incentive of rewards for certain discoveries.

Extra-curricular activities are an integral part of the Junior University Programme and include social events in the evening and making use of University resources such as the careers library and computer assisted career guidance on campus.

A significant feature of the programme is the scheduling of three lecture events

simultaneously at each time slot during the day. This means that students need to choose which lecture they would like to attend. Freedom to make decisions is much a part of the life of tertiary students. An underlying purpose is indeed to promote a sense of self responsibility among the participants.

There is obvious good will amongst the participants and an easy opportunity for new friendships. The mix of students is broad from country and metropolitan areas and from both independent and State schools. The students are challenged by different values, attitudes and interests.

Evaluation surveys reveal that what the participants do find uniting is their interest in further education. Many comment, in addition, on how encouraging it is to meet students from all over the State who are about to enter the VCE year together.

Monash is determined to extend its commitment in this activity. By necessity the number of participants in the December event is restricted to less than four hundred, a maximum of three students from each school. More than 150 schools were represented in last year's Programme.

Our future strategy includes development of smaller scale programmes directed to specific career and study areas, for example science and engineering.

The follow up study on participants in the first programme at Monash reveals a greater than 70 percent transference rate to tertiary study. More than 30 percent of the students entered courses at Monash University.

There is clear evidence that the Junior University Programme assists in the transition process breaking down barriers associated with entry to a large tertiary institution.

'Somehow it does not seem so frightening after all' draws together the comments of many teenagers who have participated. The Programme, moreover, has had a positive influence on their attitudes to the VCE year.

#### The Monash Orientation Scheme for Aborigines

The Monash Orientation Scheme for Aborigines (MOSA) arose initially from the ideas of the Koorie people and organisations. Monash University was prepared to respond to these ideas and to acknowledge the unique disadvantages suffered by Koorie people in university study. The MOSA offers a full academic year of specific preparation for university study, bridging the educa-



Photo by Richard Crompton

Female Graduates, Faculty of Engineering, Monash University, 1988

tional and cultural gap which often exists between Koorie people and first-year university students.

MOSA has a bridging course function but also it provides an "enclave" through the provision of specific staff, rooms and support mechanisms for candidates during their orientation year and throughout their time at Monash. MOSA provides a sense of territory, of educational support and a sympathetic community encouragement. This sense of support may be just as important as the more formal academic preparation in improving the likelihood of successful completion of a tertiary degree. Previously, Koorie undergraduates have commented on the loneliness of their student years as disadvantaged individuals in a large and frequently impersonal institution and for this reason Koorie groups have urged the creation of such enclaves. Any institution wishing to attract minority groups must respond to the problem of loneliness, of feeling different to the majority. Changing attitudes, providing role models and building enclaves will be themes which will recur throughout this paper.

The success of MOSA can be gauged by the fact that 29 students are currently enrolled in regular courses at Monash from undergraduate to doctoral level and two ex-MOSA students graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in 1989.

### Role models are important, so it is pleasing to see the increasing number of female graduates in engineering.

#### Youth Guarantee Scheme and Alternative Year 12 Direct Entry

Monash has been allocated a significant number of places for Victorians under the State Government's Youth Guarantee Scheme. The purpose of the scheme is to promote the admission of students from groups who have not traditionally participated in tertiary study or who are under-represented in tertiary courses. Factors such as family background and special circumstances, the school environment and resources available are taken into account in considering students for a place under the scheme.

In addition Monash has established an Alternative Year 12 Direct Entry Scheme in an attempt to broaden its selection policy. Students attempting Year 12 programmes such as STC, T 12, Group 1 and 2 subject combinations which do not satisfy the usual entrance requirements, are eligible to apply

for entry to Arts, Engineering and Science courses.

The selection process includes supplementary testing in the form of an Australian Scholastic Aptitude Test and additional testing in mathematics and science for the science based courses.

Under both schemes school recommendations and reports form an integral part of the selection process. Youth Guarantee places may be awarded to students who enter under the Alternative Year 12 scheme.

#### Women into Engineering and Science

The participation rate of women in current engineering courses in Australia is about six percent, when it is 42 percent in Medicine and 21 percent in Architecture. The barriers to female entry were examined in a Workshop on Women into Engineering held in Canberra (March 19-20, 1987) and considered to be "... wider society influences on girls causing them to reject maths and science; lack of tertiary level support schemes for the few women engineering students, a 'macho' image of engineering and significant barriers to the entry and re-entry of mature age women into engineering." (p.6)

The Monash approach was to tackle the problem of the reluctance of girls to enter

engineering, by encouraging discussion between the Faculty of Engineering and the secondary school community. The objectives of this approach are to change the attitudes of girls, their parents and their teachers towards engineering as an attractive profession for females. Role models are important, so it is pleasing to see the increasing number of female graduates in engineering. Several of the suggestions which have come from these interactions between the faculty and the school community are under active consideration and two in particular are already underway, namely, bridging courses in science and mathematics and a special version of the Junior University Programme (mentioned above). This scheme cannot be cited as the reason why the percentage of female engineering students has moved from 11 percent in 1988 to 14 percent in 1989, but the Dean of Engineering believes that there are now enough female role models to ensure that the numbers will grow rapidly from this point on. In an interview after being awarded the Ove Arup Scholarship, Lizi Sironic, who had just graduated with first class honours after being dux of each year from second year on, said that the only thing she had wished for was a close female friend in engineering. Minority groups, whether they be women in engineering or Koorie students, or mature age students, need a large enough group of similar people with whom to talk and share their feelings.

### The Mature Age Special Admission Scheme

Having a significant group of 'minority' students will not in itself be enough to create an enclave, the institution must be aware of the presence, and then the needs, of the newly emerging group. The origins of the special admission scheme for mature age students provide an interesting case study of this very point.

Every even-numbered year the Higher Education Advisory and Research Unit collect detailed sociological data on all students entering Monash University for the first time, as first-year undergraduates. In the middle seventies a peak started to appear in those students in the age group of 25 years and over. This was an unusual phenomenon at that time and so we were keen to know who they were, why they had come and how well they performed. The results of these investigations<sup>3,4</sup> are now well known. It became clear that this population of older people were in fact good students and were to be encouraged to enter tertiary study.

### Special Entry Scheme

The Monash Special Entry scheme has been operating since 1974. In the early years two schemes were in existence; the Early Leavers and Educational Disadvantage schemes.

The aim of the mature age Special Entry

### The selection process recognises that quality cannot be measured simply by reference to a selection score.

scheme was to attract students to courses at Monash who for special reasons identified as disadvantage did not complete the normal year 12 or comparable qualifications and therefore did not satisfy university entrance requirements. The majority of students admitted to courses under the scheme have entered the Faculty of Arts aged in their late twenties, although many students were older than that.

The major distinguishing features of the scheme and method of operation were:

- A case of educational disadvantage had to be documented by each applicant and a decision made, in accordance with guidelines set by the University, on whether the circumstances constitute disadvantage.
- Applicants considered eligible on grounds of disadvantage were invited to sit for an Australian Scholastic Aptitude Test assessment run by the University. The results of the ASAT test were converted to an Anderson score on the basis of statistical research and data developed by the University's Higher Education Advisory and Research Unit.
- Applicants are then considered by faculties on the basis of disadvantage and ASAT performance. Selection procedures invariably include an interview.

The scheme was limited both by the requirement of disadvantage and the quota on the number of students admitted to courses. For many years entry under the scheme was limited to four percent of the intake in any faculty.

It is the prerogative of faculties to increase the quota on admissions if they wish and the Faculty of Arts recently increased the quota to 10 percent of the first year intake.

The success of the Scheme is well documented in terms of the success rate of mature age students admitted to courses over the years.

From 1989, selection into the Monash University Special Entry Scheme was broadened so that all persons with permanent residence, aged 23 years or more who had not satisfied university entrance requirements by completing a group 1 VCE year 12 or comparable programme, were eligible to apply for admission.

One of the outcomes of the many interviews conducted with the mature age students over the period since 1973, was the realisation that these students needed a place where they could meet other similar

students; because until they had become enculturated into the tertiary scene they were marginal people and felt uncomfortable not only in their new environment but also in the environment from which they were just emerging. The classic case of this is shown vividly in the film "Educating Rita". The Mature Age Students' Lounge situated in the Student Union building provided the 'half-way house' which was necessary support for the mature student.

### The Schools Link Programme

One of Monash University's special initiatives to enhance access and equity was developed more than three years ago. Critical to the development of the concept of the Schools Link Programme was the study of results of first year students in courses at Monash University<sup>5</sup>. The study revealed that students from independent schools needed to achieve an Anderson score of about 20 points more than students from State schools in order to achieve the same level of performance in the first year of tertiary study. A survey of first year results at The University of Melbourne<sup>6</sup> had revealed a corresponding difference in performance at first year of tertiary study by State school students and those admitted to courses from independent schools.

In our school leaver intake to courses, the so called N11 admissions, the proportion of students selected on academic merit according to score from independent and State schools is about 65:35.

Our attempt in establishing the Schools Link Programme was to encourage more teenagers, particularly those in year 10 to aspire to tertiary education with particular emphasis on a university education at Monash.

There is a high concentration of State schools in the Link Programme and many of the schools included are those where retention from year 10 to 12 and subsequent tertiary participation could be improved. The focus of career education activity in the Programme is therefore very much on the year 10-11 group.

Activities developed with schools include:

- Provision of work experience for year 10 students in various departments of the University.
- Tours of the campus, including visits to specific departments, observation of practical classes in session and library orientation.
- Residential visits to the campus for school camps which include a variety of academic and non-academic activities.
- Course and career guidance involving employers of graduates.
- Participation in parent/teacher evenings in schools or on campus.
- Visits to schools by academic staff members to address students with

specific study interests.

- Presentation of study skills, time and stress management seminars.
- Workshop and practical sessions in developing interview presentation skills for course selection (and job seeking).

Special admission arrangements to courses at Monash have been developed as a further incentive. Schools are invited to nominate students in year 12 for admission to courses on criteria such as likely success in tertiary study and non achievement of potential. Schools are invited to provide an outline of circumstances which may have hindered academic performance particularly in year 12. On the basis of the school reports and recommendations, nominated students who obtain an aggregate selection score within 15-20 marks of the cut-off required for a particular course can be awarded bonus marks to allow them admission to that course.

The progress of students admitted to courses under the Programme is monitored, particularly during the first year of tertiary study. Additional assistance is offered where appropriate and a special tutorship scheme has been established in one faculty. Assistance is offered to students experiencing difficulty in adjusting to tertiary life which for many involves living away from home. A meeting between students from schools in the Link Programme, academic staff, careers advisors and student counsellors is held early in the first semester of study.

Probably the most significant indicators of the effectiveness of the Programme so far are: the number of students from schools in the Programme who have sought and gained

entry to courses; the influence of the Programme on the aspirations of year 10 and 11 students.

More than 80 students have been admitted to courses at Monash from schools in the Link Programme. Over half of them gained admission without the need for bonus marks. In the evaluation process, study aspirations of students over the past three years have been surveyed. There is clear evidence of changed student aspirations in several schools, reflected in increased retention to year 12 and increased tertiary participation.

The success of the Programme will be ultimately measured in terms of completion rates of students admitted under special arrangements and of all students admitted to courses from the schools included.

All students admitted to courses with bonus marks in the past two years, have proceeded to the next year of study. The first group of graduates will emerge from three year degree courses this year.

The underlying objective of Monash in developing the Programme is to increase access to tertiary study by students who have not traditionally aspired to that level of education and its rewards. It is an attempt to attract more better quality students to courses who are motivated and will benefit from the experience.

The selection process recognises that quality cannot be measured simply by reference to a selection score.

A major expansion of the Programme will be developed in the next three years with an emphasis on developing links with more country schools. The Programme will focus on encouraging greater participation in mathematics and science studies to year 12,

and subsequent tertiary participation in science and engineering based courses.

Employers of graduates will be included in the career education activities to be developed in consultation with schools. The programme is funded by a major grant under the Higher Education Equity Programme and includes further development of tertiary support services for Link and other students.

The Monash University mission statement<sup>7</sup> asserts that Monash will continue to improve access for disadvantaged groups, and the new status of Monash as a Distance Education Centre widens the means whereby this objective might be achieved.

### References

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## Access to tertiary studies: The case of mature age students

### Introduction

The Federal Government through programs such as the Participation and Equity Program (PEP) has had as its overall objective higher retention rates in secondary school and greater access to tertiary studies for disadvantaged groups. The groups identified as disadvantaged are those from less favoured schools and home backgrounds; Aborigines and women are also specifically mentioned. Even though PEP at the secondary level has been discontinued, the Labor Government, through its White Paper on Higher Education (1988), has reiterated its concern to achieve greater equity for disad-

vantaged groups within the higher education system. Increasing the participation of school leavers in tertiary studies is seen by the Federal Government as an important mechanism for the reduction of education inequalities.

This paper will focus on the Federal Government's policy announced in 1984 of increasing the participation of school leavers in tertiary studies and the possible effect this may have on access to tertiary studies for mature age students. This policy has not been altered with the release of the White Paper by Dawkins in December 1988. The authors question the Hawke Labor Govern-

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ment's assumption that increased participation by school leavers in tertiary studies will necessarily bring about greater equity, particularly if this means that the proportion of mature age students will be reduced.

In 1984 the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) documented the decline in the participation rates of young people between the ages of 17 to 19 over the period from 1974 to 1984 (see Table 1). The Commission wrote: "A decline of one fifth in the participation of young people in higher education is surely a matter for community concern" (CTEC, 1984:8). The Commission, although con-