

ALTERNATIVES IN EDUCATION— A LIBERAL POLICY FOR AUSTRALIAN TERTIARY EDUCATION

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1. COLLEGES OF ADVANCED EDUCATION AND UNIVERSITIES

IN Australia we have created a strange confusion in tertiary education that has now resolved itself into that diverse body of institutions called universities and colleges of advanced education (hereafter referred to as C.A.E.s). Despite the great differences between universities such as Macquarie and Melbourne, and between C.A.E.s such as Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, various Commonwealth committees and various academics have asserted that C.A.E.s can be distinguished from the universities.

The basis of these assertions has been a desire to give identity to these C.A.E.s.

Whereas universities have an identity which has been based on tradition, the C.A.E.s which have "grown up" from the technical colleges have been divorced from their tradition. The technical colleges, with one or two notable exceptions, such as R.M.I.T., have been seen as part of the secondary system. The colleges are now tertiary, and, as the Swinburne College of Technology tells you, the title (however affectionate) of "Swinburne Tech" is no longer appropriate.¹

Whatever their origins, the newer C.A.E.s which sprang up on new sites were developed as "new" institutions in their own right and not as extensions of the technical colleges.

The C.A.E.s are tertiary, but they are not universities. What is to be the basis of their prestige? What is their role and function?

Policy prescribing definitions provided at various stages by politicians and Commonwealth bodies have done little to help the colleges identify their role *vis-à-vis* the universities, and many of the inherent problems in early statements are well covered by L. N.

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¹ Swinburne College of Technology (all faculty handbooks), 1972, p. 7.

Short.² If the C.A.E.s looked overseas for guidance, they could find little with which to identify, with the exception of the British colleges of technology which were also having similar problems of identity.^{†3}

It is a pity that the Commonwealth committees did not consider closely enough some of the results of the British experiment in a binary system of tertiary education, for many of the problems of defining the role and status of the C.A.E. were foreshadowed by the experiences of the C.A.T.s.

Of the various definitions of the role of the C.A.E., as distinct from the university, the most often invoked shibboleth is that the colleges are to produce readily employable graduates—readily employable because their courses are vocationally oriented; thus C.A.E. graduates can immediately enter, well armed, into their chosen professions. It is, however, I would argue, a moot point whether anyone is ever prepared for a work situation, and especially a particular work situation, by three years in an academic situation.

Teachers' colleges are now C.A.E.s. This further undermines the rationale of C.A.E. difference. Will the diplomate from a C.A.E. teachers' college emerge significantly better equipped (or more readily employable) than a university four-year-trained teacher? It seems both are regarded as equally readily employable by State education departments. And for that matter, does not a university-trained doctor, lawyer, engineer, dentist, architect or commerce graduate go just as well prepared into his profession and does he not begin to function as immediately as the C.A.E. graduate engineer or accountant?

Certainly the universities produce generalists who might appear to be developing their "mind" at the expense of their employability. These people, however, are readily employable as teachers and public servants. Some State education departments allow graduates who aren't teacher trained to gain this qualification in service. One of the complaints made of the British Civil Service, and to some

² L. N. Short, "Universities and Colleges of Advanced Education: Defining the Difference", *The Australian University*, Vol. II, No. 1, May, 1973. For earlier discussions, in particular see: E. A. B. Phillips, "Colleges of Advanced Education: In Search of Identity", *The Australian University*, Vol. 5, No. 1, April, 1967; G. D. Hermann, "Advanced Education: A Critique of the Two Work Reports", *Australian Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 4, No. 2, December, 1971.

^{†3} To summarise some of the issues which have affected the CATs: how were the polytechnics to have parity of esteem without adequate facilities compared with the universities?; what was to be the status of the nationally awarded CAT degrees *vis-à-vis* university degrees and especially those conferred at honours "level"?; and to what extent were the CATs tied to the local education authorities in view of national body award of degrees and government encouragement of greater self-management?

⁴ N. Johnson, "Polytechnics and Inequalities", *The Universities Quarterly*, Winter, 1968. See also: R. Layard *et al.*, *The Impact of Robbins*, Penguin Education Special (Harmondsworth, 1969).

extent the Australian Commonwealth Public Service, is that they *prefer* to employ generalists.

On the other hand I have seen newspaper reports of two surveys (one State, one national) made three years ago that stated that it was science graduates who were the most unemployed. Certainly newspaper articles make much of the unemployment/under-employment of science graduates in the U.K. and U.S.A. And I well remember the plight of the "vocationally oriented" university geologist and the C.A.E. mining engineer when the "bottom fell out" of the Western Australian mining boom, and how my generalist friends were employed in the public service or teaching.

Ironically, despite the concern for employability and vocational orientation the C.A.E.s are now producing graduates in the Arts (sociology and psychology mainly). Furthermore, the C.A.E.s inherited from the technical school art education, which many of the universities have shunned. Although there is facility for the more employable, commercial aspects of art such as teaching, design and advertising, it is still possible for C.A.E.s to produce "pure" artists concerned solely with the pursuit of art. This graduate appears to be just as unemployable (if he wants to be) as a university graduate who majored in Icelandic, Sanskrit, Latin or Ancient Greek.

Another of the supposed distinctions between the C.A.E.s and the universities is that one is told that the C.A.E.s produce professionally trained people who aren't research oriented, i.e. there is a concentration on first qualifications. If this is so, then it could be argued that all pass degrees, and especially vocationally oriented pass degrees such as in law, medicine, commerce and engineering, ought to be transferred to the C.A.E.s.

It may be said that the C.A.E.s are different by deficit—they don't have a law or medical degree—but the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology has proposed to the Victoria Institute of Colleges that it offer a law degree. Perhaps the distinction then soon will only be the presence or absence of a medical faculty—if one ignores the presence of paramedical studies and pharmacy in C.A.E.s. All this is about as meaningful as saying that La Trobe is not a university because it doesn't have a medical faculty.

It has been said by various Commonwealth committees on advanced education, and (particularly) Liberal politicians, that the C.A.E.s would concentrate on teaching, as distinct from the universities which are said to have a research orientation. If one is going to concentrate on teaching, then it is presumably meant that the C.A.E. is sufficiently staffed to give more personal attention than a series of one-hour lectures to a lecture theatre packed with 150

undergrads. Unfortunately, of course, the virtues of personal attention in small classes do not accord with political realities. To get the funds for courses the C.A.E. must have the student numbers. In the sciences and accounting there is a need for detailed preparation and effective stage-by-stage assessment to see that the "essentials" have been learned and understood. But many colleges do not have the staff to do so, and if they did have a staff-student ratio that allowed a high degree of personal attention then the college is running the risk of being starved of developmental funds.

Perhaps to aid teaching there could be greater use of audio-visual aids in the colleges. For example, I believe at the Western Australian Institute of Technology biology practicals are taught by video and a student can "book" a carrel repeating play of parts of the practical he is unsure about. But few of the colleges are so wealthy.

Ironically it is the universities which have developed such things as research units into university education and use of audio-visual equipment. The University of Western Australia can contemplate the luxury of centralising its audio-visual and photographic facilities, but many C.A.E.s have barely the basic equipment. It seems that seeking out a difference between C.A.E.s and universities by saying that one concentrates on teaching is really illusory, because many of the resources for efficient and effective teaching are not in the C.A.E.s. These facilities are more likely to be in the longer established and better funded universities.

It is in Victoria that inequities in C.A.E. funding are most evident. In this State there are 32 C.A.E. campuses and only three university campuses. There are more C.A.E. campuses in Victoria than the rest of Australia, but these 32 campuses had to share 87.6 million dollars during 1970-72, whereas the three campuses of W.A.I.T. shared 30.9 million dollars.⁴ Money has been spread "thin" in Victoria, although on a money-for-student basis the allocation would appear to be quite equitable. There are no prizes for the C.A.E.s if they aspire to the universities' ideal of one "effective" full-time member of academic staff to 11.5 "effective" full-time students. The C.A.E.s, having no postgraduate students doing theses, do not have the statistical luxury of being able to count some students twice.* If concentration on teaching means small group

⁴ *Australian Commission of Advanced Education Report Triennium 1973-75* (1972—Parliamentary Paper No. 121), p. 17.

* The AUC gives a weighting of 2 to a full-time postgraduate student doing a masters or doctorate, although I have found sufficient evidence in a staffing review I participated in at one university, and have read of a British study which came to the conclusion that, in terms of contact hours, this weighting is exceedingly generous. From memory the British study suggested postgraduates should be weighted as point eight and undergraduates one.

teaching, adequate staffing *vis-à-vis* student numbers and educational technology backup, then certainly the Victorian C.A.E.s are too under-financed to try to live up to the ideal to the fullest extent. The arithmetic of fund allocation and the politics of education ensure that matching resources to demand is not possible, and the C.A.E.s must build up student numbers beyond what can be coped with in the hope that relief will come in the next triennium.

A.U.S. in its submission to the A.C.A.E. said that the C.A.E.s should "... be able to take a fresh look at academic organisations, teaching methods, assessment procedures, new subjects for study and new ways of teaching old subjects".⁵ If this is a distinctive feature of the C.A.E. then it is very plainly a condemnation of the universities as places of no academic experimentation. This is far from the truth if one is familiar with assessment procedures at Flinders, the academic organisation at Murdoch and Griffith, and the flexible degree structure at Macquarie. I think this highlights a point made by a visiting British educational administrator from a polytechnic who said in comment on the Australian C.A.E.-university system that "Much of the analysis of this problem [of the role of the C.A.E.s] that I have read in Australia I find unsatisfactory because it presumes a 'steady state' situation in higher education. . . . We read, for example, that the C.A.E.s are to be complementary to the universities, to do the work that the universities are not doing, to apply the knowledge that the universities are discovering. I find this type of analysis unsatisfactory because it presumes that the universities have a fixed, clearly defined role and I do not think this can be so. We must seek a definition of the role of the colleges, not only fitting into the pattern of education, but . . . fitting into the pattern of drastic changes in education . . . even the very idea of a university . . . [is] in the melting pot . . ."⁶

Certainly the newer universities are up with the more progressive C.A.E.s. One C.A.E. principal in South Australia, after listening to a talk by a senior academic from Griffith University, ruefully remarked that he thought that the universities were stealing the best ideas of the colleges.

The A.C.A.E. in its report for the 1974-75 triennium makes much of the contacts that exist, and it hopes will develop, between the C.A.E.s and industry. There are C.A.E.s which have good relations with industry and there are those that do not, and the same could be said for the universities. There is no C.A.E. that has good relations with industry such that its academic payroll is subsidised

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶ E. G. Robinson in *Challenges Facing Advanced Education*, eds. Golding et al., Hawthorn Press (Melbourne, 1970).

to the extent that was the case of the University of Western Australia in 1971. (This included a number of mining companies paying the salaries of six staff in the Japanese studies unit.) No doubt there are C.A.E.s that are envious of the profit of some of the universities in this regard. It must also be stated that university research of the applied kind is a strong foundation of the universities' links with industry. As Professor D. W. George puts it:

"That Australian universities are, and should be, vitally concerned with the development of research activity in industry is hardly likely to be in dispute . . ."

Professor George goes on to say,

"Of all the issues debated publicly and in academic circles in recent times possibly none has raised more concern (or higher temperature) than attempts to divide university research into 'pure' or 'basic' on the one hand and 'applied' on the other. The concern arises primarily of course through certain 'official' statements regarding the proper relationships between the universities and the newer colleges and institutes of advanced education and technology, into which governments are currently pouring very large amounts of money with the intention that these institutes should emphasise teaching and research of 'relevance to the present needs of industry and commerce'. It is clear that many important policy-makers believe that the future of technological education lies in these institutions rather than in the universities and would like to see most research of an 'applied' nature carried out in them.

"... it is important to state clearly that a distinction between so-called 'pure' and 'applied' research is often very difficult to make and can be on occasions quite meaningless. Universities have always been engaged in research which will lead to the solution of practical problems (at the University of Sydney, for example, something like one half of the present research grants from outside organisations fit into this category), and as long as professional training in applied science and engineering remains in the universities it is essential that research appropriate to these fields be carried out."⁷

Whereas the C.A.E.s can point to the industrial research and advisory services of S.A.I.T. and W.A.I.T., the universities can just as well point to University of N.S.W.'s Unisearch Limited and various A.R.G.C. projects.

The A.C.A.E. sees college councils as part of the link between the

⁷ D. W. George, "Universities and Industrial Research and Development", *The Australian University*, Vol. 10, No. 1, April, 1972, pp. 1 and 7.

C.A.E.s and industry, but university senates are no less composed of influential businessmen.

It would appear that the colleges in inheriting various courses from the technical schools have come upon a veritable vocational, and even more significantly a "professional", goldmine. It may be as much sheer historical accident, as much as far-sighted planning, that the C.A.E.s are responsible for much or most of the teaching of the newly emergent professions such as accounting, nursing, advertising, graphic design, film, hotel management, personnel management, public relations, journalism, and various forms of social services. This happy combination of technical school inheritance, fortune and planning should not, however, allow the C.A.E.s the belief that all that is applied, vocational or professional, is their domain. Such a belief could only come from some unreasonable stereotyping of what a university is.

2. DEGREES AND DIPLOMAS

To me the injustice that stands out above all else in the binary system of Australian tertiary education is that two matriculants after following three years of full-time study can emerge from the system with qualifications that are accorded differing status by various employing and professional bodies.

The C.A.E.s when offering diplomas preferred to stress "employability" and "equal but different" type arguments to attract support for these awards. (Lecturers themselves might confide to their students that the courses were really of "degree" standard.)

When the C.A.E.s offered degree courses, however, they generally turned back to "not up to degree standard" type arguments and many have required lengthy periods of extra study for the diploma holders seeking conversion to degree status.* It seems a moot point that there is some presumably measurable difference between diplomas and degrees, i.e. some sort of "knowledge deficit".

The universities by their *ad eudendum statum* policies have reinforced the belief that diplomas are not "equal" to degrees. There are few universities that have developed any policy on those seeking to move from one stream of the binary system to the other. Macquarie University will give 26 first level credit points and 8 above first level credit points for a diploma and 32 first level and 18 above first level credit points for a C.A.E. degree towards that university's 68 credit point degree.

But it would seem that this university is an exceptional case of

* I must admit however that various CAEs have differing views of the status of their diploma courses. WAIT seems to be the most confident CAE in Australia in many aspects, and perhaps not surprisingly conversion from Associateship in Social Sciences to Bachelor's degree is a matter of one or two semester units.

early reaction to the existence of C.A.E. courses. There are still many academics who regard the C.A.E.s as "jumped up" technical colleges, and they may "tch tch" at the thought of the colleges offering degrees.

The diplomate with a maximum of shopping around, internationally, could find a highly reputable U.S. university or U.K. university, C.A.T. or polytechnic which would allow him to do a Master's degree. Having "proven" himself abroad, the former diplomate would return with his M.A. from Sussex, M.Ed. from Wisconsin or M.Sc. from Bristol to find that he was now quite acceptable to an Australian university.

But let me not give the impression that the Australian universities are some monolithic front against the diplomate. Just as a diplomate may be able to find an overseas university that accepts him for higher degree studies, it is possible that there may be an Australian university that will do the same. A Yallourn Technical College diplomate may be able to enter the M.Eng. programme of the University of Newcastle, N.S.W., but this is an unusual case.* On the other hand, the Diploma in Accountancy at Perth Technical College is not accepted for entry to the University of Western Australia's Commerce Degree. This diplomate, however, could gain entry to the W.A.I.T. associateship course, and might even get some minor exemptions. After completion of the associateship at W.A.I.T. there is policy to allow entry to the third year of the university's Bachelor of Commerce.†

There are many small, but irritating, discriminations that a diplomate has to suffer. One particular university does not cite diplomate in this case is seen to have no qualifications. I have heard engineers complaining that when they receive their society's journal they do not have Dip.Eng. printed after their name on the address label. Degree-holding members have B.Eng. printed after their names on the address label. Once again the diplomate is seen to have no qualifications.

All this of course does raise some interesting questions. C.A.E. staff are generally university trained. Having tasted the fruits of

* I must admit that university non-recognition of non-university courses does have its more humorous moments. A friend who completed his accountancy studies at the technical college and a degree in economics at a university entered an MBA programme on the strength of his degree. When he mentioned to the admissions officer that he was a qualified accountant and lecturer in accounting, he was told that the university was only concerned with his degree studies. My friend is certainly going to keep up his good grades in his course because he is required to do an introductory unit in accounting. If he had done a degree in accounting he would of course be required to do a higher level accounting unit. Needless to say, some of his fellow students feel he has somewhat of an unfair advantage over them.

† It is ironic that it is possible that B.Comm. course structure may not meet the requirements of the Australian Society of Accountants and the university graduate may have to complete some CAE units to become a member of the Australian Society of Accountants.

degree level study, and because there is little tradition of what "diploma level" is in the new C.A.E.s (although there was a tradition in the now left-behind technical colleges), how do these academics teach at diploma level? I have found no one who can give me a satisfactory answer to this question and usually get responses like "There is no difference", "I just teach to an intellectually worthwhile level", or "I really never thought about it like that". On the other hand, is it presumptuous for C.A.E. academics who completed technological diplomas in the technical college system to now start planning degree programmes when they themselves have never been instructed to degree level? (I think it will be agreed that these are really non-questions, but they show the lunacy that can be created by some logical extensions of the diploma/degree distinction.)

3. DOUBLE CERTIFICATION

Much of the problems of tertiary education administration seem to be created by name-calling—the diploma and degree controversy I have referred to previously. Much of this name-calling is, in fact, double certification. For example, one may complete a Diploma of Business (in accounting) and after appropriate work experience gain associate membership status with the Australian Society of Accountants. If the important and final certification is issued by the A.S.A., why should the college present the diploma? If one is studying to become an accountant, why should one bother to write Dip.Bus., A.A.S.A. after one's name at the end of it all and not just A.A.S.A. which are the letters that state that one is recognised as an accountant?

To be realistic, colleges and universities should offer courses which meet the educational requirements of the professional societies, but if professional society membership is what is really sought, and these bodies determine some, much or all of what is being taught in the subjects and courses, then the letters which denote society membership are the real accreditation, and not the degree or diploma.

4. TOWARDS THE ABOLITION OF AWARDS

One of the problems of the award of a testoma after an accumulation of a number of units, credit points or whatever, is that it allows society to divide people into the have's and have-not's. This black and white thinking is fundamental to Western culture⁸ but I do think there is a very good case for shades of grey. Until you have the 24 semester units for a degree you cannot claim to have anything. A teacher may not be regarded as fully trained if he is missing one semester unit towards his diploma. In many cases the financial rewards for study only come when all the requirements are

met for the award of the degree. This is as obstructive as it is unjust.

It is possible that some people may only be interested in one particular discipline, but course regulations and the pressure to get letters after one's name may prove irresistible and the student will be forced to study something he does not wish to do (a sort of intellectual conscription). Is a person who completed a major in sociology any less knowledgeable in that field than a person who completed a degree and also majored in sociology? If the answer is no, then should not this person be allowed to enter the post-graduate programme in sociology without having taken out the degree?

Very often courses for the award of degrees create obstacles. For example, it would be possible to create quite a good course in administration by combining some Dip.A. and some Dip.Bus. units. This combination would probably meet the requirements of the Institute of Business Administration, Australia. But the student might not be able to do the course if the college was strict on course regulations. The student would have to resign himself to being a not-quite-diplomate, with whatever prejudices this may entail. There might be students who could construct a meaningful course for themselves out of B.A., B.Sc. and B.Ed. units. It might even be someone's wish to study a wide range of first year units for three years. Such a course of action is usually very difficult within the restrictions of course regulations. Often one's study intentions are only regarded as "serious" if one is bent on getting a degree or diploma within the minimum time required.

There may be vocational arguments for the reduction of course regulation restrictions and the obsession with completed courses. "... by the end of the decade . . . most jobs *will* require training beyond high school. In other words, the new technologies and service industries have created a new middle ground of job opportunities that call for one or two years of training beyond high school, but do not require a . . . degree. Blue collar jobs as we have known them in the past are fast disappearing. All this says we need to stop indoctrinating our young people with the notion that any career not based on an academic or professional degree is somehow demeaning, somehow unworthy of becoming one's life goal. To continue this fallacious idea is a disservice . . ."⁹

⁸ W. Kauffman, "Dualistic Thinking—Mani to the New Left", *University: A Princeton Quarterly*, Autumn, 1965.

⁹ J. R. Ottina, "Career Education is Alive and Well", *Journal of Teacher Education*, Vol. XXIV, No. 2, Summer, 1973, p. 85.

5. TOWARDS THE ABOLITION OF GRADINGS

Assessment is a subjective task. There is ample evidence that there is great variability in the marks given if the same examination paper is marked by a number of different people. Certainly society requires its passes, subjectively obtained as they are, but can a system of As, Bs, Cs and Ds be defended as accurate in any way? Not only is the task of grading of dubious exactitude, but it is often pointless. A teacher who got As in his diploma course gets no more pay than one who got bare passes. Unless one is concerned with going to graduate school, there is decreasing significance in the marks one got as one progresses in one's career. For those who are concerned with going on to graduate school there are many ways other than gradings that can be devised, including references.

Certifications are incredibly complex documents due to gradings and the recording of fails, withdrawals, etc., normally in some complex code. The units passed and failed towards a diploma of engineering can take up most of two foolscap pages. This length means cost of paper, typewriter, typist, proof-reader and, incidentally, embarrassment to the student where fails are recorded. Transcripts should only show units passed.

One must be realistic. Society requires its passes, however subjectively assessed, unless a more reliable method of assessing competence can be devised. In some cases safety demands this. Would you prefer to be treated by a doctor or dentist who had passed all the units required for registration or one who had failed the units?

6. PROPOSITION FOR LIBERAL ALTERNATIVES

- (a) All tertiary institutions to be called universities (the name is not important, but university is most readily understood).
- (b) Abolition of all degrees and diplomas and issue of certification of units passed *only*.
- (c) Abolition of barriers between courses.

FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY STAFF ASSOCIATIONS

Report of Representative Council Meeting 27th & 28th February, 1975

The first Representative Council Meeting held under the Federation's new Constitution was held at the Chevron Hotel, Potts Point, Sydney, on Thursday and Friday, 27th and 28th February, 1975.

The Meeting was attended by the President, Vice-President, the four Executive Members, one representative, and alternate representatives, of each Member Staff Association, the Editor of *Vestes* and the Secretary.

The Meeting was called to review progress on resolutions of the 1974 Annual General Meeting and in particular to receive and discuss reports and recommendations from the Tutors/Demonstrators Committee and the Tutors/Demonstrators Working Party, and also to deal with the appointment of a Secretary to succeed Mr. G. W. F. Smith, who was retiring.

Federation's Constitution

The constitutional amendments made at the August 1974 Annual General Meeting had been ratified, a reprint of the new Constitution had been obtained, copies were available at the Meeting, and it had been distributed in bulk to Staff Associations in numbers sufficient to enable one to be handed to each member, and to provide for new members for the next three years.

It was decided to amend Section 5 (1) of the Constitution to provide that the Principal Editorial Officer should no longer have a vote at Council Meetings, but should be entitled to be present as a non-voting member, and this has since been referred to Staff Associations for ratification in General Meetings.

Selection of Secretary

The Executive reported that having considered the Report and further Report of the Selection Committee, it endorsed the recommendation that Mr. L. B. Wallis be offered the position of Secretary under the terms and conditions specified by it; that it drew the attention of the Meeting to the fact that Mr. Wallis would accept the position only if the FAUSA office was moved to Melbourne; and that accordingly it recommended to the Meeting that it give special attention in this context to the implications of relocation of the office.

It was decided after consideration that the position be offered to Mr. Wallis at the top of Senior Lecturer range (i.e. \$17,900 p.a.)