ONE IN ALL:

FAUSA AND THE ORIGINS OF THE ACADEMIC SALARIES TRIBUNAL

Origins

In 1974 the Academic Salaries Tribunal was established under the Commonwealth Government's Remuneration Tribunals Act. It was founded as a Commonwealth agency as the state representative to attempt to resolve two issues: first, whether differences in the character and function of CAEs and universities implied a difference in the level of salaries to be paid to academic staff working in institutions in either sector; and, second, the need to institute a mechanism to provide national guidelines for regular and equitable adjustments to academic salaries. At its inception the Tribunal was empowered to determine the salary rates for academic staff at the Australian National University and Canberra College of Advanced Education and to report to the Commonwealth Minister for Administrative Services in relation to academic salary rates for State universities and advanced education institutions. Since that time, while State Governments and State-based tertiary institutions have not been legally bound by the Tribunal's recommendations, they have generally adhered to the academic salary rates suggested. As a result, the salaries of various categories of academic staff have remained uniform across Australia.

This was not always the case. It was a series of discordant and ad hoc arrangements in the 1960s which led to the establishment of the Academic Salaries Tribunal as a Commonwealth agency. During that period public policy on making academic salaries more comparable and equitable was not satisfactory. In 1968 and again in 1970 an independent review by the National incomes Commission recommended that the State Governments should be responsible for setting and defining a programme, particularly as the Commonwealth Government was sensitive to a possible accusation from the States that it was becoming involved in "wage-fixing" in universities.

Throughout the 1960s, with considerable reluctance, the predecessor to the Universities Council of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (the Australian Universities Commission (AUC), found itself increasingly involved in attempts to resolve the academic salaries issue. Despite its moves to avoid a disinterested stance, the AUC had to take part in determining as the component of the recurrent grants devoted to academic and non-academic salaries by each university was so large.

In some ways, similar paths were followed in Britain and Australia, although parallel developments occurred a decade earlier in Britain, and the British University Grants Committee (UGC) played a more active and sustained role than its Australian counterpart, the AUC. Early in the post-war years Britain established a rough uniformity of academic salaries. In the 1950s the British Association of University Teachers (AUT) sought to negotiate academic salaries with the universities, but this strategy was based upon the tacit bargaination on a trade union model. During that time the UGC maintained a unique and important role in the process of reviewing academic salaries. There was no workable pattern of negotiation between employers and employees and the UGC did not act on behalf of universities but in its own right.

The AUT put up to the government successive "claims" based on the comparability principle used by the Civil Service Commission and specifically on an attempt to negotiate academic salaries with the UGC and the Treasury by direct bargaining on a trade union model. During that time the UGC maintained a unique and important role in the process of reviewing academic salaries. There was no workable pattern of negotiation between employers and employees and the UGC did not act on behalf of universities but in its own right.

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ing decisions which would influence the level of funding and institutional autonomy of universities based in the Commonwealth was anxious to avoid the accusation of usurping traditional state powers.

The AUC’s First Advice on Academic Salaries

The Commonwealth’s first involvement with academic salaries was the adoption in November 1957 of the recommendations of the Murray Committee on academic salaries which had been submitted to the Commonwealth by the AUC. The Commonwealth was concerned to see that the funding and institutional autonomy of universities was not undermined by the Murray Committee’s recommendations. Consequently, the Commonwealth Government decided to establish an academic salaries committee to report on the Murray Committee’s proposals.

The Committee of Inquiry into Academic Salaries

The AUC’s First Advice on Academic Salaries

In February 1960, at a meeting of the newly established AUC, the Australian Vice-Chancellor’s Committee (AVCC), requested that the Commonwealth Government appoint a national committee with the necessary authority to undertake a review of academic salaries throughout Australia. The committee felt that the level of academic salaries should remain as their responsibility.

The First National Enquiry into Academic Salaries

In its First Report on Australian universities in mid-1960 the AUC justified its establishment as an academic salaries committee in terms of the need for triennial reviews of salaries to account for an appropriate general level of academic salaries. At the same time, the AUC firmly stated that the final determination of salary scales was a responsibility of individual universities.

...absolute determination of salary scales is not implied in this mandate. This is properly the matter of the various university governing bodies. In determining such salary scales each university is likely to take into account a number of circumstances, including availability of finance and the salaries paid in other Australian universities.

Some of the universities were concerned that the AUC salaries committee might decide to make an extensive inquiry into matters such as terms and conditions of employment which could adversely affect the autonomy of universities. However, the salaries committee was not prepared to do this and the AUC’s recommendation was limited to the salaries only.

Having made these recommendations, Martin turned his attention to the establishment of the first national committee to inquire into academic salaries. Martin felt that it would not be easy to appoint a suitable committee with the necessary stature from sources outside the AUC and the Commonwealth Government. Eventually, Menzies approved the establishment of the Committee and, in response to the need for representation, from the States asked that Mr Seaman, Under Secretary, South Australian State Treasury, be included.

In the absence of Menzies’ overtures, the establishment and terms of reference of the committee to advise the AUC on academic salaries were announced by the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr John McEwen, on 27 May 1960. The statement had to be carefully phrased so that it defended the right of the Commonwealth to concern itself with movements in university salaries and yet not give the impression that the Commonwealth was either moving into an area of State responsibility or could be blamed if the recommendations of the Committee went awry.

The acceptance of the salaries committee was particularly low in Canberra where both the University Staff Association and some senior administrators at the Australian National University (ANU) disapproved of the AUC’s recommendation for an academic salaries committee. Nevertheless, after the Murray Report as the AVCC became a pace-setter in the academic salaries area, together with changes in salaries provided by the periodic judgements of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, particularly under the Engineer’s Award, and changes in the salaries of university staff associations and the Commonwealth Government, the AUC’s salaries committee saw a clear difference between their work and that of an arbitration tribunal. As their concern was with the salaries committee’s recommendation for an academic salaries committee, the AUC did not wish to be involved, even to the extent of giving an opinion on what was the best possible salary.

Despite the alacrity with which the committee discharged its task, there was a long delay of six months before the round of visits commenced. Despite this, once the round of visits commenced, representatives of the AVCC and FCUSAA met with Martin to seek his reaction. Martin gave them clearly to understand that the AUC did not wish to be involved, even to the extent of giving an opinion on what was the best possible salary.

In June 1962 the AUC began to prepare for its triennial visits to the universities. At that time the AVCC informed the AUC that sufficient objections to the first AVCC-FCUSAA report had been put forward to make it unworkable and that as a result both parties were backing away from their original recommendation that the AUC should prepare the report. Martin hoped would provide for periodic reviews of academic salaries and that any more prepared to discuss salaries issues.

Despite this, the round of visits commenced and the AUC was asked to state its position. During discussions with the staff association at Monash University, Martin suggested the AUC could again draw the attention of the Prime Minister to the significant changes in salaries and other areas of the economy; however, the Commission was most reluctant to do this as it did not consider itself a salary-fixing body. Martin suggested that the universities might wish to have their case considered by some independent body. Martin felt that he was not concerned about this procedure as he felt that the universities could take a
The First Eggleston Inquiry

The Commonwealth Government, after some delay, as it wished to weigh up the consequences of the NSW judgement, eventually agreed to seek out a suitable person to conduct an independent inquiry into academic salary fixation. The basic traditional practice of academic salary fixation was to be completely reviewed and public hearings were held during which the AUC had to be heard. Sir Richard (then Mr Justice) Eggleston was appointed in May 1964 and commenced his work in mid-July.

Eggleston approached his task consciously that the need for the inquiry had arisen as a result of the lack of any national authority with power to determine salaries in all academic disciplines. He was sensitive to the request of Manning that the inquiry should proceed in an informal way without such legal procedure as sworn evidence, cross-exams and public hearings. Eggleston conducted his inquiry in this spirit by making his hearings 'administrative rather than quasi-judicial in character'. He had assessor Professor (now Sir David) Det- ham, then Dean of the Faculty of Law at Monash University and Mr M.C. Timms from the Australian Atomic Energy Commission.

Universities and staff associations were invited to make submissions to the inquiry and Mr Justice Eggleston with his assessors visited each university for discussions. The findings of the inquiry were adopted by the Commonwealth Government in November 1964, the new rates being retrospective to 1 January 1964. The recommendations established for academic salaries were the same as the basic salary for Professor, a salary for Readers, the maximum point for Senior Lecturers and the minimum for Lecturers.

After conducting the inquiry, Eggleston was in favour of continuing the practices of what he termed periodic reviews of academic salaries. He strengthened Martin's decision not to have the AUC perform such a task at that moment the matter was out of everybody's hands. The AUC itself resigned and simultaneously the New South Wales Industrial Commission took over the inquiry.

In December 1962 before the New South Wales Industrial Commission took over the AUC's inquiry and concluded that salaries could not be guaranteed, it was suggested to the FCUSAA that it was desirable to conduct an inquiry into academic salaries. The FCUSAA decided on a national and not a state differential approach. The AUC recommended that the inquiry be conducted on a national level. Eggleston had already decided on a national level inquiry to avoid the dangers of growth except an inquiry for a period of five years.

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The AUC and the Staff Associations had the right to form a joint committee, which would then formulate policy for academic salaries. The AUC had already decided that the inquiry should be conducted on a national level. Eggleston had already decided on a national level inquiry to avoid the dangers of growth except an inquiry for a period of five years.
As there was unease within the AVCC about the lack of consultation with governing bodies of universities, a delegation from the AVCC met with Hewitt to discuss the proposed academic salary increases. Hewitt explained to the delegation that the recurrent expenditure formula, provided the Commonwealth Government policy remained unchanged, would be considered whenever prima facie data seemed to suggest its timeliness.1

At their August 1967 meeting the AVCC expressed considerable disquiet at the way in which the decision was announced and noted that the Commonwealth Government’s version of the academic salary increases would be granted retrospectively to 1 July 1967. As the AVCC felt, this was an ‘unhappy story’ particularly as the salaries of Lecturers and Senior Lecturers whose qualifications were assessed by the Commonwealth Government then agreed to support the proposal. Both the Commonwealth and the States agreed that any salary increases resulting from the inquiry needed to be retrospective to 1 January 1970.

Early in 1970 Sir Richard Eggleston was called upon for the second time by the Commonwealth Government to inquire into academic salaries. The increasing influence of the Commonwealth in shaping policy occurred in a series of fits and starts; the movement towards a national resolution was steady but gradual from the mid-1960s onwards. From 1968, with the tremendous growth in the CAE and university sectors, consideration was given to the Commonwealth’s role in the attempt to establish and maintain a work-value parity between academic salaries in both sectors. Throughout the 1960s, the AUC was intermittently involved in the academic salaries issue. Unlike the UGC in Great Britain, the AUC was never happy to accept the role of a reviewing agency for any length of time. The AUC played a key role in keeping the issue evenly poised. As governments, the AVCC, university governing bodies and university staff associations were involved in a solution. In conflict and at other times in co-operation, the presence of the AUC allowed a fallback position to be adopted before further attempts were resumed.

There is no body in Australia that has the power to determine academic salaries in all disciplines for the whole of Australia. The solution was accepted on the basis of asking me to make a recommendation which could be used by the AUC for the purposes of recommending grants to be made to universities by the Commonwealth... with the concurrence of the States.2

Eggleston’s recommendation that professional, associate professional and reader’s salaries be increased by 20% and the commencing salary of a lecturer by 17% were accepted by the Commonwealth and the State Governments as was his recommendation that, from January 1971, academic salaries be subject to National Wage Case decisions.

Sensing the mood in academic circles, Eggleston recommended a more thoroughgoing review of the structure of academic salaries. At that time, New South Wales and Tasmania expressed support for the idea of establishing permanent machinery for periodic reviews. They were later supported by the other States. Consequently, in 1974, a new academic salary statement of intent was instituted. The Hon. Mr Justice W.B. Campbell was asked by the then Minister for Education and Science, Mr Malcolm Fraser, to examine the work value of university academic staff and recommend new salaries for them and to advise on the establishment of permanent machinery for future salary reviews. On 16 May 1973, Campbell presented his report to the then Minister for Education, Mr Kim E. Beazley, and his recommendations as to salary levels were adopted by the Commonwealth and the State Governments. As a consequence of the Campbell Inquiry, the Academic Salaries Tribunal was established in October 1974.

Conclusion

Professional remuneration on academic salaries in Australia in the 1960s was haphazard, complex and subject to considerable change. Until the late 1960s the specific role of government in the issue was surrounded by uncertainty. The resolution of the academic salaries issue by the establishment of a permanent review mechanism at national level took so long because of the tensions between preservation of institutional autonomy and ‘States’ rights’ on the one hand and the need for the Commonwealth Government to try to account for its expenditure on salaries on the other. The increasing influence of the Commonwealth Government in shaping policy occurred in a series of fits and starts; the movement towards a national resolution was steady but gradual from the mid-1960s onwards. From 1968, with the tremendous growth in the CAE and university sectors, consideration was given to the Commonwealth’s role in the attempt to establish and maintain a work-value parity between academic salaries in both sectors. Throughout the 1960s, the AUC was intermittently involved in the academic salaries issue. Unlike the UGC in Great Britain, the AUC was never happy to accept the role of a reviewing agency for any length of time. The AUC played a key role in keeping the issue evenly poised. As governments, the AVCC, university governing bodies and university staff associations were involved in a solution. In conflict and at other times in co-operation, the presence of the AUC allowed a fallback position to be adopted before further attempts were resumed.

It is important to point out that in terms of the tension between institutional autonomy and public responsibility, the establishment of the Academic Salaries Tribunal greatly limited the autonomy of universities in the area of wages and salaries as academic salary rates became largely determined by a national tribunal. Yet it was the underlying egalitarian approach adopted by the university staff associations and the AVCC, at times collectively and at times separately, which led to this solution. Through many years of persuasion these bodies exerted strong pressure to establish a national system to provide for similar salaries and similar conditions of work for academics.

References

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