THE RATIONALISATION OF OFF-CAMPUS STUDIES IN AUSTRALIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR FAUSA

A History of Rationalisation

Rationalisation (and its cognates — mergers, amalgamation, collaboration, co-operation, consolidation) describes the tertiary education agenda for many years. It has been a leitmotiv since the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission Act of 1957. It has been part of Federal Governments unwilling to fund tertiary education adequately will look to rationalisation as a partial solution to some of their problems. It is clear from the Federal Government's response to CTECs 1985-87 Triennium Report that pressure will be kept up along the lines of subject reviews and co-ordination.

Particular stress is put upon rational co-ordination of external studies courses. Such specific concentration of attention requires that FAUSA prepare itself, and creating a policy is one necessary step.

Rationalisation first became a FAUSA concern with the Williams Report of 1979 on Education, Training and Employment. It developed a comprehensive report of 1982-84 Triennium Report. Initially, there was a great concern for rationalisation in the provision of teacher education. While there had been implications for engineering, management courses, and clearly duplication and an inefficient process of concentration of external studies and rationalisation, so one is not consistent with the maintenance of quality of output and achievement of higher education standards by the federal and state governments.

In 1985, the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) released its latest consolidated policy document referred to as the National Guidelines for external studies. The report was a leading concern of FAUSA, and expressed the need for rationalisation. It was perceived as a result of the amalgamation of the traditional regional universities and the merging of the various sectoral co-operation, given the different types of academic staff found in universities and CAEs. FAUSA's latest consolidated policy document reflects its experience with the amalgamation issue. FAUSA opposes enforced amalgamations and deplores the absence of a coherent national policy to improve the tertiary education sector's relative efficiency in terms of productivity, grounds and goals. FAUSA insists on a number of minimum conditions where amalgamations are considered: consultation, preservation of existing rights and entitlements, funding to be provided by the Commonwealth, and so on.

Amalgamation is only one form of rationalisation and amalgamation between a university and a CAE only one instance of this. As yet, FAUSA policies do not exclude any institution as regards the specific matter of the rationalisation of the off-campus field within tertiary education. Given recent CTEC and Federal Government pronouncements, it is important that FAUSA formulates a policy with regard to these general matters.

A Brief History of External Studies in Australia

External studies at tertiary level (originally referred to as correspondence studies and subsequently as distance education or off-campus studies) has existed in Australia for over seventy years. Before the Second World War, the establishment of the National Institute of Adult and Extension Education, a government body, was offering external studies. During the Second World War and immediately afterwards, there was a significant provision of correspondence education for service and ex-service personnel. Moreover, at the time, the significant level of interstate co-operation was achieved and co-operative schemes between Australia and some Asian neighbors developed under the auspices of the Commonwealth, although this was not long-lived. However, in 1955, the University of New England (UNE) began offering external studies. The area in the teacher education field. Unlike Queensland, where distance education was the function of a Department of External Studies, UNE adopted a system of co-operative arrangements with other off campus students were taught by the same personnel. All universities in Australia which have sub campuses engaged in external studies, have also adopted this model. Macarthur early specialist in external work was part of the Commonwealth over the external offerings of the University of Western Australia; in 1977 Deakin was founded with a specific rationale for the provision of external studies.

The integrated model involves problems of its own, but it is the Queensland model which, in a way, has established some grounds in the field of rationalisation towards external studies. Feelings about second rate education provided by an understaffed department lacking adequate facilities and professional
The 1970s were years of economic and social strains in Australia which affected the development of external education. The Government established a committee to inquire into Open Tertiary Education. It reported in 1974. Questions were raised about the value of external courses, and the costs of tertiary education in Western Australia. It was suggested that external studies provided greater access, and allowed for flexible learning. The committee opposed the establishment of a single institution to support external studies. For the British Open University, external studies could cost £78,000 per student. In 1978-79 there were 17,000 students, representing 8.7% of the total. It should be noted that, with 19 universities in operation, there were 47,182 students, representing 8.7% of the total. It should be noted that, with 19 universities in operation, there were 47,182 students, representing 8.7% of the total. The committee was critical of existing providers who would strongly oppose such an idea.

Paradoxically, through the steady state period in tertiary education, as conventional education became strained, as student enrolments failed to increase significantly, distance education experienced real growth. From 1975-80, university off-campus students increased by 50%, and the CAE sector by 90%. In 1981, there were five major university providers of external education: the University of Western Australia, the University of W.A., the University of W.A., the University of W.A., and the University of W.A. In the same period, the number of students in external education rose from 2% to 12.9%. In 1981 there were five major university providers of external education: the University of Western Australia, the University of W.A., the University of W.A., and the University of W.A.

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remark, in general, that there has been a
chequered history where schemes have backfired or been abandoned. It is particularly dis-
appointing given the fact that co-operation with aca-
demic colleagues and non-academics is part of the
rationale for academics involved in creating dis-
tance education materials. The Williams Report
wanted a national plan for external studies with courses
shared by several institutions, with a wide-
ranging network of study centres and evaluation
procedures. Indecision, jealousy and hostility have
meant that such suggestions have been
made. When Deakin's position as the leading
provider of distance education in Victoria was con-
firmed, other state institutions were upset. The
posed scheme of collaboration between the
University of Queensland and Darwin Community
College risked real problems about the issue of
mixing staff of two types. Neil has spoken of suspi-
cions that collaboration involves some covert
persecution, threats to jobs, threats to one's preserve, not want-
ing to have to co-operate, which have
all worked to stall rationalisation moves. It is worthwhile
noting that in a world-wide review of distance educa-
tion, Neil, from the Open University, refers to the
lack of rational co-operation between the states in
Australia in the distance education field as being
horrific.5

Jevons brings together the economic stringency and
difficulties of institutional rivalry by suggesting
that we specifically turn the tight
funding situation into a momentum to achieve
rationalization, that perhaps cooperation is
possible in a situation of scarce resources which
would otherwise be hard to achieve. He goes on to
describe collaboration in a way indicating that
organisational links if academics are convinced of its
educational virtues and are willing even with
organisational links if academics do not believe in it.8
The other actor in the arena, of course, is the
Federal Government, who have done so well to
ponder on one further sentence. Apart from its
many educational virtues, the suggested scheme
appears to conform to criteria of the impact of
rationalisation measures which may have to be imposed because of resource
scarceities. It might be called a win-win strategy.

Jevons and Williams put forward a scheme that
is often dismissed as impractical. The
sceptics might argue that the scheme
impossible, have been overcome. Moreover, as
the authority of the national strategy and the voluntary co-operation means that the issue
of autonomy does not become a stumbling block.

Meanwhile VPSEC's
have also urged
the need for a National Centre for Distance
Education. Shott to the creation of the
National Resources Centre where educational technology, media expertise
and research would be concentrated.

Looking back over a decade we have, on the
one hand, in the form of scale economies, pooling
of expertise and rationalisation, yet there is a picture of inter-
sectoral and inter-institutional rivalry, fear, distrust and apathy
plus perhaps the perpetuation of the
feeling that somehow distance education is not well
enough to have serious attention. In actual fact
things are not so gloomy. The desirability for scale economies, of course, is
increasingly acknowledged, and, in the
last twelve months a considerable momentum has built
up in order to establish what is known as the "Toowoomba Accord". During July
1983 representatives of the administration and
distance education from five major distance
education universities — Deakin, Macquarie, Mur-
doch, New England, Queensland — put out a state-
mate of the creation of an
common pool of externally available courses from which students could select a
of distance education was
needed for the credit transfer arrangements to make this
practicable. The
chiefs of at least four of these uni-
versities have endorsed the proposal as has the
CTEC's Evaluations and Investigation Programme is now funding research into the whole area of
credit transfer, complementary enrolment, etc.

These are encouraging signs, and the possibilities
of such inter-university co-operation are already
emerging. The ACT is currently considering the
major in women's studies shared by Deakin, Mur-
doch and Queensland. All the problems of enrol-
ment procedures, quota, redistribution, etc., which
sceptics might argue would make the scheme
impossible, have been overcome. Moreover, as
the authority of the national strategy and the voluntary co-operation means that the issue
of autonomy does not become a stumbling block.

What areas of effective co-operation can be aimed for?
It should be remembered here that we are
talking not only about optimal usage of community
resources, but also about quality of education
offered: an uncoordinated external education field
not only wastes money, it also allows materials to
go out of date and makes life for academics and students
in distance education difficult. Effective
co-operation can bring about a great reduction in
the number of institutions catering to such a
small number of students. It remarked on the wasteful
duplication of effort and of talent quality of
some courses, and summarised the situation in
the absence of some co-operating institution in
these terms: the provision of off-campus studies has
been largely unplanned, with some tendencies
towards rationalization and cooperation
in some disciplines in the external mode and the
undersupply of others. It was also noted that nine
of the twelve universities do not have effective
external studies and that educational quality could
only be ensured by co-operation and the concur-
sion of experienced course providers. It was also seen that
the interests of students, institutions and the
community require the introduction of arrangements
for the continued provision of externally available
courses. This could mean that significant
future off-campus studies8 its classification of pro-
viders into 'general' and 'specialised' (the former
involving staff of two
edly working to
a system such as that outlined above. It8

(i) courses could be written by academic staff in
more than one institution, allowing greater exper-

(ii) courses written in one institution could be
evaluated by another;

(iii) courses written in one institution could be
used by all students of whatever institutions,

(iv) libraries in universities, CAEs and TAFE insti-
tutions could make their resources available to
all students of whatever institutions,

(v) institutions in the external field could operate a
central clearing house
for the use of institutions, enabling students easily to
de complete a degree by
enrolling in a number of

(vi) institutions in the external field could share
buildings and use, for a number of institutions.
Counselling services and media equipment could
be shared also,

(vii) concentrating educational technology, media
personnel, consultancy and research into the
large of instructional design in some institutions
would provide greater expertise and, if courses
were shared, would achieve economies of scale,
concerns which may not always readily dovetail. No one knows exactly the strength of will of the Federal Government to pursue distance education. Perhaps the distance education field involves some overseeing of the system at a national level. No one should adopt either a luddite or a millennial attitude to the question of technological change and educational change. It is clear that in the next generation, social and technological changes in Australia will take place to which the nature of educational provision must adapt. Given that distance education is growing and seems to be well in accord with these changes, distance education will have to become a central concern for all organisations deciding policy in the tertiary education field. Distance education is not something one can now afford to be ignorant of.

While, in his survey of distance education in Australia, White comments: "University history is replete with examples of innovations that have frequently been forced upon unwilling academics who later broaden their own horizons and learn to teach absorption". Towards the end of the twentieth century we face some very large problems. Shifts in technology, society, politics and economics may mean that the Cinderella of education becomes central in any future educational system. We have all heard of the thrust that the thrust is to provide an education for more Australians, but on the cheap.

All the above factors are complex. Rationalisation, for instance, by successful innovation may significantly improve educational quality: first-rate distance education may be of a higher quality than conventional education. At the same time, the educational needs of Australia at the end of the century are such that the University/CAE/TAFE boundaries are not always clear. Perhaps restructuring CTETC may strive to demoralise them. Behind these contentious issues there must be a lurking fear, if we get things wrong, we are partly our own fault. Even on the pragmatic level, when we have decided what to do, it is worthwhile pondering on the following words: "We should be able to take into our own hands responsibility for rationalisation and co-ordination of distance education in Australia, instead of waiting passively for our destinies to be determined by outside forces. Denial of information and assumptions may be inaccurate and/or unwise."

It is obvious, given the historical sketch provided in this paper, that the field of external studies and the question of the rationalisation of that field involve a number of extremely thorny issues:

(i) there is the unhappy history of rationalisation itself, which may threaten the autonomy of institutions;

(ii) there is the possibility that rationalisation will masquerade as efficiency and then it will certainly mean a number of painful transitions to be made by some staff and some institutions;

(iii) in the external relations sense FAUSA will be involved in different visions with FCA and the TAFE Teachers’ Association.

(iv) there is a suspicion perhaps that the Federal Government might be pushing external studies simply because it thinks an Open University system will make available cut-price education. As well as eroding the point of study, the thrust is to provide an education for more Australians, but on the cheap.

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FAUSA clearly needs a policy with regard to these important issues, and one of the problems here is that FAUSA has both industrial and educational interests in distance education. It cannot be easy to achieve, but without it, distance education in Australia has no chance of becoming a really effective form of educational provision. Learning at a distance is not easy; neither is it a teaching at a distance; neither are organisations and the existing of institutional forces. The foregoing collaboration and co-ordination of educational goals are put forward with a certain amount of idealism and hope, but with a recognition of political realities. Without some movement we will gradually abrogate our responsibilities for provision of the most effective forms of education at our disposal, and will reduce the educational opportunities available to large proportion of the Australian population. We may even sign the death warrants of some institutions which might otherwise meet the needs of particular communities. If we can re-imagine the image of distance education within tertiary education, co-ordinating authorities and governments, and the public, the image of the future possibilities, we will have a good chance of entering the 21st century with a first-rate national educational network."

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PURSUING PRODUCTIVITY, EXCELLENCE AND OTHER RESEARCH SNARKS: A Critique of Current Attitudes

Universities are ultimately responsible to the societies that sustain them for the quality of their research product. The ideas, explanations, theories, presuppositions, criticisms and reflections that together collectively comprise this product form an important part of the cultural development and, naturally, the productivity of this kind is commended and encouraged. Commission and encouragement are, however, no substitute for firmly grounded policy about the nurture of research. At present, research policy formulation in Australian universities seems to revolve around interlocking national research objectives, categorization and priority determination for bureaucratic ends, and exhortations to maximize productivity - with prejudice a little policy development that has its roots in an understanding of the complex ecology of the university itself and the attitudes, values, and mythologies that pervade the research realm. A contextual view, that includes an understanding of the rich and varied nature of research itself and the personal, professional and social realms that sustain it, is fundamental to informing policy making.

The Pursuit of Productivity

Who, in recent years, has not felt and resented the sense of urgency and promotion that surrounds any discussion or pronouncement about rates of research productivity. Under the guise of social accountability and utility researchers are exhorted to produce more. The imperatives of a recessionary economy, a conservative ethos and various policies that pervade the research realm. A contextual view, that includes an understanding of the rich and varied nature of research itself and the personal, professional and social realms that sustain it, is fundamental to informing policy making.

Ironically, the exhortation to maximize productivity reflects a misconception about the nature of research itself and the way in which it is deeply embedded in the complex ecology of the university itself and the attitudes, values, and mythologies that pervade the research realm. Some researchers with a more expansive view about ordered, regular thinking and production processes. In fact, of

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