A study of staffing patterns in faculties and departments of education in Australian universities

Warren Newman
Curtin University of Technology, Ascot Vale College of Advanced Education

Introduction

Staffing patterns and recruitment patterns in Australian universities have been the subject of considerable research during the past 25 years. The topic first emerged during the 1950s when it was observed that the universities, faced with a shortage of suitably qualified people to fill the growing number of academic positions throughout the country, began to rely more and more heavily on recruitment from overseas. This was due, in part, to a substantial decline in the number of students enrolling in the universities. There were a number of reasons for this decline, but the most important were the high costs of education and the low salaries available to young graduates. As a result, many students chose not to continue their studies beyond the undergraduate level. However, the universities were not able to recruit enough qualified students to fill their needs. This led to an increase in the number of overseas students, who were often recruited from overseas. This in turn led to an increase in the number of overseas graduates, who were then recruited into academic positions. In this way, the universities were able to maintain their academic standards despite the declining numbers of domestic students. The study attempts to answer the question regarding the staffing of faculties and departments of Education in Australian universities.

What types of qualifications are held by Education staff in Australian universities?

2. What are the sources of the qualifications held by Education staff?

3. What is the extent of overseas influence on Education staff in Australian universities?

4. What do you think does academic inbreeding exist in faculties and departments of Education in Australian universities?

Procedure

The study attempts to answer the questions put forth by the previous study on the analysis of types of awards. Across the total sample of 40 universities, the study concluded that the academic inbreeding was not a significant factor in the staffing of faculties and departments of Education in Australian universities.

Findings of the study

Table 1 lists the number of education staff at each of the universities studied and the total number of their qualifications. It can be seen that the total number of qualifications held by each faculty was significantly lower than the total number of staff at each university. This is due to the fact that the universities were unable to recruit enough qualified staff to fill the positions they had advertised for.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the universities were able to maintain their academic standards despite the declining numbers of domestic students. The universities were able to do this by recruiting more and more overseas students, who were often recruited from overseas. This in turn led to an increase in the number of overseas graduates, who were then recruited into academic positions. In this way, the universities were able to maintain their academic standards despite the declining numbers of domestic students.
TABLE 1
Qualifications held by Education Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Total Number of Education Staff</th>
<th>Percentage of staff with awarded qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>of staff</td>
<td>Diploma level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Trobe</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macquarie</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wollongong</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. What are the sources of the qualifications held by Education staff in Australian universities?

Table 2 indicates the origins of all qualifications of members of the sample. Twenty-three per cent of all qualifications are held by universities in which the staff are employed while an additional 22 per cent are from institutions within the same state. Expressed in another way, 50 per cent of all qualifications held by staff come from institutions in the State in which they live. Across the sample, there are twice as many qualifications from overseas as they are from interstate. With one half of all qualifications from within States and one third from overseas, it is obviously comparatively little interstate movement of Education staff in Australian universities.

The percentage of qualifications obtained by employing institutions varies from 1 per cent at Wollongong to 54 per cent at Melbourne. Tasmania clearly has the greatest international influence in its staffing while Sydney and Wollongong tend to have very little. Melbourne has the highest total proportion of Australian qualifications and the lowest proportion of overseas qualifications. New Zealand has the reverse, the lowest proportion of Australian qualifications and the highest proportion of overseas qualifications. Another figure of interest is the overall percentage of 33.5 from overseas sources. While this figure is for qualifications and not individuals, it suggests a level of overseas influence commensurate with that found in the studies earlier reviewed.

3. What is the extent of overseas influence on Education staffing in Australian universities?

Table 3 indicates the numbers of Education staff with one or more overseas qualifications and expresses these in percentages of the total Education staff in each university and in the overall sample. It will be seen, again, that New England has a very considerable overseas staffing influence. Only 4.6 per cent of all its staff having overseas qualifications. The overall average of 4.1 per cent for the sample must be considered to be a very significant factor in Australian university staffing. At some stage or other of their careers almost half of the Education staff in the sample had obtained qualifications from overseas.

Table 4 examines, by country, the sources of the various levels of qualifications held by members of the sample. Two patterns are immediately apparent: the strong influence of the United Kingdom and at diploma and first degree levels, tapering off at masters and doctoral levels; and the exact opposite influence of United States institutions with very strong influence at doctoral and masters levels, tapering off to almost negligible influence at diploma level. It is clear that United States influence at post-graduate level is much greater than influence from the United Kingdom. When the contribution of Canada is taken into account, two-thirds of all overseas doctorates and masters degrees were obtained from North America. Table 4 also shows that the proportions of first degrees obtained from the United Kingdom and in Britain are virtually identical.

The relative significance of overseas influence on Education staffing in Australian universities is summarised in Table 5 which provides a rank order listing of countries and overseas institutions in terms of the number of qualifications held by members of the sample. The influence from overseas universities at Sydney and Melbourne at the diploma, first degree and masters levels, is perhaps to be expected. Macquarie's influence at the doctoral level clearly exceeds that of any other Australian university. The University of New England appears to exert an overall influence on the study of Education in Australia which is out of all proportion to its size. Overseas institutions tend to exert the strongest influence at higher degree levels and the most significant of these would seem to be the Universities of London, Oxford, Rome and Paris.

Table 6 gives the proportions of the sample considered to have originated from overseas along with their countries of origin. It is found that 20 per cent of the sample were identified as overseas born. It is argued that this represents a more accurate reflection of those who had some earlier studies because it attempts to take into account the movement of returning Australians with overseas qualifications. The greatest proportion of those born overseas came from the United Kingdom. When Tables 6 and 7 are compared it is the interesting correlation emerges that while most higher level overseas qualifications in Education are gained in North America, most non-Australian recruitment is from the United Kingdom. The influence of overseas recruitment emerges in clearer perspective when those involved are considered in terms of the whole sample. Only 7.4 per cent of all Education staff in the sample were presumed to have originated in Britain and only 5.6 per cent in the United States. The proportion of overseas recruitment in the sample appears to be higher, at 4.9 per cent of the total, than that suggested by earlier reviewed.

4. To what extent does academic inbreeding exist in faculties and departments of Education in Australian universities?

Table 7 reveals the extent of inbreeding influence on the qualifications held by Education staff in the sample. The three categories employed are those whose birth was in 1960 degree study, to be included in this study. It will be seen that 13.5 per cent of the overall sample held all of their degrees from the institution in which they were employed. Variations from this overall average would seem to be extremely low cases of Adelaide, Queensland and Melbourne and Westfield New Zealand which have quite significant numbers of staff who would be classified by Saba as being perfectly inbred.

When the partially inbred with one degree only from their employing institutions are considered, Western Australia, Sydney and Macquarie draw attention to themselves. The least inbred institutions were Wollongong and New England. It is interesting to look at Sydney University in terms of inbreeding obtained in this study, and those obtained by Saba in 1968.15 This study considered only the Department of Education within the Faculty of Arts at Sydney whereas Saba considered the whole of the Faculty. The figures for the different categories of academic inbreeding are remarkably similar. For perfect inbreeding this study found 15.3 per cent while Saba found 11.3 per cent; for partial inbreeding the respective figures were 33.3 per cent and 34.9 per cent; and for no inbreeding this study found 49.3 per cent and Saba found 48.4 per cent. It would appear that the patterns observed by Saba at Sydney University a decade ago have remained essentially unchanged.

On the overall figures presented in Table 7, academic inbreeding appears to be especially prevalent in the Universities of Melbourne and Queensland. In both these institutions, significantly more than 50 per cent of Education staff hold one or
more degrees from their employing institutions.

Another way of looking at the question of academic inbreeding is to examine the numbers of staff who hold positions from their own institutions. Table 7 presents this information along with the figures for other Australian and overseas sources of doctorates. Of those Education staff with doctorates, almost 30 per cent held them from their own institutions. Queensland and Macquarie appear to rely very heavily on their own resources in this regard with over 50 per cent in each case. Only 16 per cent of all doctorates came from other Australian sources and by far the greatest proportion, 54 per cent, came from overseas institutions.

Table 7: Extent of Home Institution influence on qualifications held

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Holding only one degree from home institution</th>
<th>Holding no degrees from home institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Trobe</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macquarie</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wollongong</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

There are a number of conclusions which may be summarised from the above discussion:

1. In a sample of 517 Education staff drawn from 10 universities across all states of Australia it was found that 17 per cent of all of their qualifications were at diploma level, 34 per cent were at first degree level, 30 per cent were at masters level and 19 per cent were at doctoral level.

2. Fifty per cent of all qualifications held by members of the sample came from universities in the State in which they lived and only 16 per cent came from interstate institutions. Only one third of all qualifications were from overseas institutions. The University of Melbourne had the highest proportion of Australian qualifications and the lowest proportion of overseas qualifications. The University of New England had the reverse, the lowest proportion of Australian qualifications and the highest proportion of overseas qualifications.

3. At some stage in their careers, 45 per cent of all Education staff in the sample had obtained one or more qualifications from overseas institutions.

4. Overseas awards held by Education staff at the diploma level came predominantly from institutions in Britain and New Zealand.

5. Overseas awards held by Education staff at first degree level came in equal proportions from Britain and North America.

6. Overseas awards held by Education staff at masters and doctoral levels came predominantly from institutions in North America.

7. The overseas institutions which appear to exert greatest overall influence on Education staffing in Australian universities are the Universities of London, Oregon, Alberta and Illinois.

8. Twenty per cent of the sample were considered to have originated from overseas. While most overseas qualifications in Education were gained in North America, most non-Australian recruitment came from Britain.

9. Twenty per cent of all overseas recruitment in the sample was from New Zealand, an increased proportion on that reported in previous studies.

10. Academic inbreeding of Education staff was found to exist to some extent in all but one of the universities studied. The Universities of Melbourne and Queensland were found to have significantly more than 50 per cent of Education staff held with one or more degrees from their own institutions.

11. Almost 30 per cent of all Education staff with doctorates held them from their own institutions and only 16 per cent were obtained from interstate institutions.

12. Over 54 per cent of all doctorates held by Education staff in the sample were obtained from overseas institutions.

13. The study represents an attempt to survey current staffing patterns in faculties and departments of Education in Australian universities and to relate these data to those reported in earlier studies. It is not claimed to be exhaustive or definitive but rather to be a further statement in the ongoing research into university staffing practices and recruiting procedures.

References

13. See, for instance, Cropley and Hunnings, op.cit., p. 34 and Saha and Klovahl, op.cit., p. 58.
15. The first tertiary qualification of many Australian academics, certificate or diploma, is often omitted from lists of qualifications.
16. The entry labelled New Zealand in Table 5 refers to awards from the University of New Zealand, a federal university which was dissolved in 1965. See H. Parson, The University of New Zealand, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1979, p. 11.
19. Ibid.