The Johnson-Hinton Report on Continuing Education: Some implications for higher education

A. Introduction

As the first Commonwealth government-sponsored review since 1944, the Johnson and Hinton Reports is a milestone for continuing education. It addresses many of the lacunae in thepatchy data of adult and continuing education. More importantly, the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) has come to recognize the need to foster a coherent strategy and development role in relation to a major government priority — increasing access. Hence, the CTEC's role in strategy and development policy in this area is crucial and a review of the Johnson and Hinton report is needed.

B. Main features of the Report

Given the restrictions on time and finance and the lack of previous research to build upon, this report entitled, 'It's Human Nature', is necessarily descriptive rather than analytical. It is constrained to use 'impressionistic' data collection methods which limited it to a 'descriptive essay' of the field of adult and continuing education. The report also makes no attempt to outline immedinate action, touches upon some current needs and issues, identifies research requirements, and makes no attempt to articulate the CTEC policy in this area.

The specific goal of the review is an disadvantaged groups. Continuing education, particularly in the community and within State of Technical and Further Education (TAFE), is portrayed as the major means of providing disadvantaged groups with a second chance to enter the mainstream of formal tertiary education. There is particular emphasis on women, who are described as "almost owning" the field and can be sent as disadvantaged not only as students but also as teachers and administrators. The other major emphasis is still on increasing access to higher education in order to more equitably meet the need for continuing education programs to redress this situation.

The report acknowledges that it is, and has to be, somewhat restrictive in its description of continuing education programming. For example, commercial providers of continuing education are covered in a sensible and balanced way by industry and professional associations, and the continuing education function of various social groups have not been investigated. It has also not addressed in detail the role of universities and colleges of advanced education (CAEs) in continuing education, the extent of their provision, or the rationale for their current internal reviews and reductions in their involvement. In relation to higher education the report is concerned with the retention of existing CTEC policy on continuing education. Thus, there has been little progress in overcoming inconsistencies, anomalies and limitations in the scope of this policy. Perhaps the major anomaly is that students may obtain certain sets of knowledge and skill by either enrolling in an award course or enrolling in a fee-generating non-award course at an institution as "continuing education". Johnson and Hinton recognize this anomaly, but only discuss it in the context of TAFE Stream 6 fee-generating courses which may also be offered in Strains 1-5 as an integral part of a Certificate I/II, rather than a more specific need for developing a more coherent policy in the divergent requirements of general interest adult education and professional continuing education and the interface between the latter and the continuing education nature of masters' coursework degrees.

The report concludes with a number of suggestions which, if acted upon by the Commonwealth government, would make a useful contribution to improving the provision and standing of continuing education in Australia. There are suggestions in seven major areas:

1. The establishment of national goals and policies

It is proposed that the Australian Education Council consider the broadest possible basis of national goals and with particular emphasis on vocational continuing education, literacy and basic educational needs and that this involve to the Australian Educational Council to assess the current lack of coherence and ad hoc nature of the CTEC policy, both for continuing education and more generally for adults in tertiary education. The tendency of the Commonwealth to take upon itself the determination of national policy for tertiary education would be particularly inappropriate if repeated for such a decentralised enterprise as continuing education which relies heavily on local initiative.
would need to take into account the dangers of stifling such local initiatives in a search for a coherent national policy.

2. No fees for the unwaged:
The review recommends funding policies, believing that at least the costs of the tests of professional planning and coordination, but that fees cover some direct costs in providing courses and would be for the unwaged, more particularly for the development of basic education courses. This is indeed a progressive educational and social policy that deserves support from CTEC. However, its successful implementation would depend on funds for the unwaged, since none of the institutions have resources to subsidise such places.

3. Consolidation of current CTEC and other higher education institutions:
Three major thrusts of current policy are reinforced:
- All institutions funded by the CTEC are expected to engage in continuing education;
- Institutions have a responsibility to their graduates, particularly in the area of professional education; and
- Johnson argues that institutions should be able to offer a broad range of courses, and institutions are required to provide continuing education courses. These views are widely held by institutional representatives. Some institutions have already developed programmes for non-award courses, particularly for students in continuing education, and similar fee-exempt courses have been developed.

5. Implementation of the Horton Committee Report:
The transfer into public libraries was released in 1976 but its recommendations, including the involvement of public broadcasters, have never been adopted. If this proposal were implemented it would not only encourage the expansion of formal and informal institutions which is an essential prerequisite for the development of the community.

6. Establishment of a national network for distance continuing education:
The report states that such a network could be established with the cooperation of the adult education movement and thereby establish a broad-based and nationally-coordinated provision of continuing education in the distance mode would be a cost-effective means of increasing access, particularly for those disadvantaged by geography, family commitments or economic difficulties. Some institutions already have inter-institutional structures for such integration (for example, the University of Queensland, The Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education and Mitchell CATE). The report suggests that the CTEC should consider a range of options for providing continuing education to students who are not able to attend on-campus courses. The options include:
- developing new forms of distance education;
- establishing partnerships with other educational institutions; and
- exploring new technologies for delivering educational content.

7. Priorities for future research:
The report identifies a number of key areas for future research:
- improving the cost-effectiveness of distance education programs;
- increasing the range of courses available to students;
- exploring the feasibility of developing new forms of distance education; and
- evaluating the effectiveness of existing programs.

The only new suggestion is that institutions should consider allowing continuing education students to audit courses.

4. Provision of professional preparation for continuing educators:
There are currently very few courses for the professional preparation of continuing educators. The report recommends development of such courses. This proposal could be readily implemented, the report does not provide any information on the demand for such courses. However, in some universities and college of education, the interests of professional expertise could be assisted to reorient themselves towards this need.

The reason for continuing education's managerial need to pay is that the cost of continuing education will not be directly related to the educational benefits. The cost of continuing education is not entirely clear from the evidence provided, and it remains to be seen what extent higher education institutions are independently funded. This paper only identifies the unwaged to basic education and does not consider the continuing education in universities and CATEs, and the extent of a significant proportion of the unwaged will be neglected. Finally, the paper suggests greater provision of professional training for continuing educators, although no specific suggestions are offered. The current provisions for professional preparation for continuing educators are quite limited. A small number of higher education institutions offer specialist degrees or diploma and some others have training opportunities with other educational institutions. The extent of these opportunities and their effectiveness in upgrading their provision would provide a greater area for these schools of education at a time when demands for school-level teacher education is depressed.

D. Conclusion
Continuing education can make a major contribution to both individual and social prosperity. It has been overlooked by policy-makers for far too long. The main strengths of this review are its concern for establishing national goals; better preparation for continuing education practitioners; the need for the dissolution of the educationally deprived; and for reducing anomalies in the designation of courses. The report could have made a greater contribution by providing a stronger theoretical rationale; addressing the sources of continuing education’s marginality; and directly contributing to a coherent and appropriate government policy on continuing education. While the report has been welcomed by community-based educators, it is likely that it will be welcomed by all those involved with the provision of professional training for continuing educators.

References and notes