Strategies for improving access

A major and continuing thrust of Government policy, has been to improve access to higher education and this policy has been reflected in specific initiatives to support this policy. The Review of Efficiencies and Effectiveness (better known as the Hudson Report) indicated that the main responses were:

- to concentrate growth in outer metropolitan and regional areas.
- special admission schemes.
- specific initiatives to enhance access and equity.

The White Paper, reiterated the Government's commitment to improving access and suggested that improvements in access and equity were heavily dependent on growth in the system and specific strategies at the institutional, state and national level.

This paper traces the development of the varied strategies which have been introduced in order to improve access for disadvantaged groups in one large metropolitan university and looks at possible strategies which may flow from likely amalgamations with other institutions from the other side of the rapidly disappearing binary divide.

Where did the initiative come from?

Strategies do not suddenly occur, the initiative has to come from somewhere. In this case, it has been developed at Monash University over the last fifteen years we traced the initiators of each strategy and they fell into three broad categories:

- Initiatives by individuals who introduced a new idea to the university community and argued persuasively for its introduction. An example of such an initiative is the Junior University Programme.
- Initiatives by a section of the community, or by Government body, or a combination of the two: examples are the Monash Orientation Scheme for Aborigines, the Aborigine Extension Scheme, the Australian Aborigine Year Admission Scheme and the Women into Engineering and Science Programmes.
- Initiatives which stem from basic research: the programs for Mature Age Special Entry Scheme and the Schools Link Programme.

An institution wishing to attract minority groups must respond to the problems of "belongness, of alienation, different to the majority."

Each of these initiatives is briefly described.

Junior University Programme

Our attention was drawn to the annual Leo Huxley Vacation School at the University of Queensland, by a student representative on the Monash University Council.

The summer vacation school for year 11 students entering year 12 is long established in Queensland and draws together up to 200 students from all parts of the State for a residential programme of academic and non-academic activities designed to improve interest in tertiary study and positively assist in the process of transition from secondary to tertiary study.

Monash University has initiated and developed a Junior University Programme for the benefit of year 11 students. This year's programme will be the fourth. On the academic side, lecturers are chosen from University staff and employes of graduates in fields of interest in specific areas of tertiary study and it's relationship to the workforce.

There is, for example, an opportunity to learn about practical applications of mathematical concepts, astronomy, medical ethics, the operation of our legal system, current issues in politics and the Australian economy.

There is also the chance to attend presentations by a range of university professors in professional practice, including scientists, lawyers, medical doctors, architects.

The lectures are supplemented by visits to factories and workplaces, and an ingenious Magical Mystery Tour organized by Monash students.

The discovery tour is a splendid means of exploring the campus with a purpose in mind. There is the added incentive of rewards for certain discoveries.

Fifty-particular activities are an integral part of the Junior University Programme and include social events in the evening and raids on the premises of University resources such as the career library and computer assistance service for courses.

A significant feature of the programme is the scheduling of three lecture events simultaneously at each site during the day. This means that students need to choose which lecture they would like to attend. Freedom to make decisions is much a part of the life of tertiary students. An underlying purpose of the scheme is to promote it as a matter of self responsibility among the participants.

There is obviously good will amongst the participants and an easy opportunity for new friendships. The mix of students is broad from country and metropolitan areas and from both independent and State schools. The students are challenged by different values and interests.

Evaluation surveys reveal that what the participants do find pleasing in their interest in further education. Many comments, in addition, on how encouraging it is to meet students from all over the State who are about to enter the VCE year together.

Monash is determined to extend its commitment to this activity. By necessity the number of participants in the December events tends to be in four hundred, maximum of three students from each school. More than 150 schools were represented in last year's Programme.

Our future strategy includes development of smaller scale programmes directed to specific career and study areas, for example science and engineering.

The follow-up study on participants in the first programme at Monash reveals a greater than 70 percent transferance rate to tertiary education. This is 30 percent of the student body entered courses at Monash University.

Junior University Programme assists in the transition process by bringing down barriers associated with entry to a large tertiary institution.

It seems now as if frightening after all drawings together the comments of many teenagers who have participated. The programme is less threatening than the VCE on its face and has an influence on their attitudes to the VCE year.

The Monash Orientation Scheme for Aborigines

The Monash Orientation Scheme for Aborigines (MOSA) arose initially from the ideas of the Koori people and organisations. MOSA was prepared to respond to this demand and to acknowledge the unique disadvantages suffered by Koori people in the university study. The MOSA offers a full academic year of specific preparation for university study, bridging the educational and cultural gap which often exists between Koori people and first-year university students.

MOSA has a bridging course function but also provides an "entrance" through the provisions of specific career, and support mechanisms for candidates during their orientation year and throughout their time at Monash. MOSA provides a sense of relevance, of educational support and a sympathetic community encouragement. This sense of support may be just as important as the more formal educational preparation in improving the likelihood of successful completion of a tertiary degree.

Previously, Koori undergraduates have commented on the loneliness of their student years as disadvantaged individuals in a large and frequently impersonal institution and for this reason Koori groups have urged the creation of such enclaves. Any institution wishing to attract minority groups must respond to the problem of loneliness, of feeling different to the majority.

Changing attitudes, providing role models and building enclaves will be themes which will recur throughout this paper.

The success of MOSA can be gauged by the fact that 29 students are currently enrolled in regular courses at Monash under government (government level and two Moya students graduated) with a Bachelor of Arts in 1989.

Role models are important, so it is pleasing to see the increasing number of female graduates in engineering.

Youth Guarantee Scheme and Alternative Year 12 Direct Entry

Monash has been allocated a significant number of places for Victorians under the State Government's Youth Guarantee Scheme. The purpose of the scheme is to provide the admission of students from groups who have not traditionally per-}
The selection process recognises that quality cannot be measured simply by reference to a selection score.

Specific study interests.
- Presentation of study skills, time and stress management seminars.
- Workshops on specific study techniques (including in developing interview presentation skills for course selection and job-seeking).

Special arrangements for courses at Monash have been developed as a further incentive for students to consider nominating students in year 12 for admission to courses on criteria such as likely success in tertiary study and non achievement of potential. Schools are invited to visit an outline of circumstances which may have had severe academic performance particularly in year 12. On the basis of the school reports and educational achievement of students, teachers who obtain an aggregate selection score within 15-20 marks of the cut-off required for a particular course can be awarded bonus marks to allow them admission to that course.

The progress of students admitted to courses under the Programme is monitored, promoting the introductions to tertiary study by students who have not traditionally aspired to such level of education and in its rewards. It is an attempt to attract more quality students to courses who are encouraged and will benefit from the experience.

The selection process recognises the importance of students to the Programme. The focus of care and support is on encouraging greater participation in mathematics and science studies in year 12, and subsequent tertiary participation in science and engineering based courses.

Employers of graduates will be included in the selection process to be developed in consultation with schools. The programme is a part of the Higher Education Equitable Participation Programme and includes further development of tertiary support services for Link and other students.

The Monash University mission statement asserts that Monash will continue to improve access for disadvantaged groups, and the new status of Monash as a Distance Education Centre assists in the major objective this might achieve.

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Access to tertiary studies: The case of mature age students

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Introduction

The Federal Government through programs such as the Participation and Equity Program (PEP) has had as its overall objective higher retention rates in secondary schools and an increase in participation for disadvantaged groups. The groups identified as disadvantaged are those from less advantaged schools and school backgrounds. Aboriginals and women are also specifically identified. An over-riding concern however has been to raise the educational attainment of mature age students. This policy has not been altered with the release of the White Paper on Higher Education in Australia 1988 (Australia, 1988).

Though the reality of the current situation is that those with a lower socio-economic background or lower educational attainment are still less likely to be successful in tertiary education, there is increasing recognition that the benefits of formal education can be gained in a variety of ways.

The policy of the Government has been to create opportunities for disadvantaged students. This is an issue that is also being addressed through the Higher Education Equitable Participation Programme and includes further development of tertiary support services for Link and other students. The Monash University mission statement asserts that Monash will continue to improve access for disadvantaged groups, and the new status of Monash as a Distance Education Centre assists in the major objective this might achieve.

The selection process recognises that quality cannot be measured simply by reference to a selection score. The underlying objective of Monash in developing the Programme is to encourage and assist students to tertiary study by students who have not traditionally aspired to such level of education and in its rewards. It is an attempt to attract more quality students to courses who are encouraged and will benefit from the experience.

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