A study of counting

Ian Doust
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How do you estimate how many new mathematicians (or physicists, or philosophers) we need to produce to

fulfill our universities in the coming years? That is a

question

we

must

deal

with.

It

is

not

a

superficial

one

—

it

affects

us

as

a

society.

The problem of course is not

in

the

estimating the

numbers

involved.

In

1989,

Dr Ian Allen of the Victorian Post-Secondary Education Commission prepared a discussion paper, Arabella, Science and

Science

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ing, for instance. All research is mapped onto a production model which is Freudist in its rooting in the Oedipus complex and, therefore, given the appropriate conditions, "units of research may be produced to order in mass production."

It is assumed that this will enable the rate of production of research "units" to increase significantly, which are supposed to be about this Taylorisation of research and consequent reduction of costs. The new competition for funding is the only measure which will stimulate output. Funding, in this context, is about the amount of financial support and profit in the traditional market: funding, like profit, reflects the demand of the market, which motivates production. As the competition for funding becomes keener, the rate of publication further increases, and, consequently, the product presumably rises.

Under the new regime then, academia are expected to conduct their research to schedule, offer a product for which there is an expectation. But the object given to them by the consumer is a marketing buy-in that market (Knight, 1989). The activity of research, and the ideas to which it gives rise, are no longer in this system treated as ends in themselves, but as means to basically monetary ends. It is inevitable, within such a system, that those who fund the research will in due course seek to control the output and to extend a financial product; in other words the system will create a direction towards the privatisation of knowledge.

How was it that the traditional university, identified with a unique generation of knowledge for its own sake, was permitted to hold out for so long against the marketisation of knowledge and the extractive enrichment of which the rest of society are so evident? Why has the claim of the universities to exemption from market principles until recently been upheld? There are complex historical reasons for this, and at least of which may be that granting it ensured that it was not only protected as an inviolable source of knowledge, but also served the market and its bourgeois benefactors (Wallerstein, 1989). But it would be wrong to regard the universities as having universally reflected the requirements of epistemological economic efficiency. By this I mean that it may be something intrinsic to the nature of knowledge, particularly the kind of knowledge that is handed down to the humanities, that gave rise to the traditional ethos. Knowledge is fundamentally engaged in the manipulation of the marketplace, and the generation of knowledge is determined, in a way, to be fundamentally unlike the manufacture of products. If there is a model for the generation of knowledge, then, it is different from the gift economy than the market system.

What is meant by a gift economy? (Mauss, 1966) "The term gift economy is, quite simply, a economy based on giving. This is a gift economy than the market system.

It is a world where the market is a significant phenomena that one can only function in this way if they have a sacred significance of their own right — a sacred influence derived from that of the world at large. In market economies the functions of structuring are exercised by the market within the exchanger, from which it is detached. Instead, they are imposed on the society and among the institutions, and the market as such is not a one-off affair, but rather the cement for a permanent alliance.

The concept of the gift, and the relations to the obligation to reciprocate, is the understanding that the gift must keep a balance. In this sense the gift is a relationship of giving, but it is not a market that is the gift. It is not the exchange for the benefit of the other, but rather social and spiritual.

The exchange of gifts is a convention that is supplementary to the objects of exchange. The gift economy did not in itself, then, to serve the exchange of the wealth of which they were part of it. The gift economy is not just a form of exchange, but a different form of exchange.

In this context, knowledge and other objects are given and passed on within the private sphere that is not only a market economy. A gift is not a result of personal transactions, nor is it the exchange of the gift, but rather a view to maintaining the social cohesion that is the circle. Children from the family tend to receive more then they give, but the gift economy is typically passed on to their children.

Another area which has traditionally come under attack is the institutions of education. The modernisation of society, particularly the intellectual life of the community, leads to a higher level of education. The education of the community is not only a result of personal transactions, but also the education of the community.

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Academic Freedom Charter Experience

Michael Bartos,
PAUSA Research Officer

In October 1989 Minnies for Employment, Education and Training John Dawkins announced his intention to recommend to Cabinet a charter of institutional autonomy and academic freedom. The purpose of this recommendation was to legislate to give expression to the principle that institutions should be free from government interference and prescription to undertake their academic, research and service functions with a minimum of interference from outside bodies. The significance of this recommendation lies in the fact that it was a significant step in the recognition and acceptance of academic freedom in Australia.

The scope of the exercise of management prerogative was fleshed out in the staffing proposals, which included a significant number of sweeping changes in staffing arrangements, including reversionary tenure. Staff assessment to ensure that inadequate performance was not protected, more short-term and part-time appointments, reductions in staff, strengthened dismissal procedures, and more flexible salary packages. Academic freedoms could not in doubt be that the Government's intention was to make their employment less secure.

The Green Paper's second reference to academic freedom was embedded in these staffing proposals, giving it the appearance of little more than a token replay of the earlier argument that security of employment was a prerequisite for academic freedom. The Green Paper acknowledged academic freedom as 'a crucial to the effective operation of higher education institutions' and said that the Government would be prepared to consider legislation providing academic freedom in this area. It also stressed that 'academic freedom should not be repressed for inadequate performance or lack of commitment on the part of staff'.

There was little response to this proposal for legislation limiting the Green Paper. Most of the submissions responding to the Green Paper from institutions, staff associations and other interested parties were in favor of it. The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee was hostile to the principle of academic freedom. It was concerned that such an undertaking would be an impediment to the effective operation of higher education institutions.

The General Committee was more erudite from various sources including individual academics, staff associations (individually and collectively) and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee. The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee was also in favor of the principle of academic freedom. Only the academic unions reacted sympathetically to the legislative proposal, although without specific suggestions as to its content.

The Flinders Institute of Advanced Education, the University Staff Association and the Federal Council of Academics (which was formed in response to the Green Paper's recommendations) were the only two bodies that did not respond to the Green Paper's recommendations.

The Consortium, as the major representative body of academic freedom, was invited to examine and propose options for possible institutional arrangements that could preserve academic freedom. ("AUFA/CPA, 1988, p.22)

Given these responses, it is hardly surprising that the Government's higher education policy statement (the White Paper) quietly shelved the notion of academic freedom as a principle. The offer has been 'parachuted' and the little response that the latter would not be pursued 'undermine by the employer or employee associations want to initiate further discussions' (Dawkins, 1989, p.107). The issue was not actively pursued by the academic unions, and the recommendation for a Commonwealth working party was not adopted.

The staffing changes in which the Green Paper's view of academic freedom had been embedded had also changed in character by the time of the White Paper. The tone of the government had softened on the issue, and the government had moved away from any proposals that would significantly restrict academic freedom. The government had achieved an agreement in the Act of Supplementary National Wage Agreement for staff for the award of the 5% "second-tier" wage increase and included a number of elements that were partial fulfillments of the Green Paper's expectations.

The interests of staff and management

The academic freedom and promotion of academic freedom may have lacked vocal adherents in the period after the Green Paper came out, and there was no lack of comment about the relationship between Government and higher education institutions. There was widespread concern that the Government's higher education policy represented an unwarranted intrusion into the affairs of higher education institutions.

The academic freedom and promotion of academic freedom was the subject of many submissions from various sources including individual academics, staff associations (individually and collectively) and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee. Only the academic unions reacted sympathetically to the legislative proposal, although without specific suggestions as to its content.