Quality and traditional university values: Policy development through consultation

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Autonomy without responsibility and accountability is subject to erosion and retraction. (Dressel and Faricy)

Introduction

Changes dictated by the Federal Government's quality agenda (Higher Education Council, 1992; Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 1993) pose threats to university autonomy and academic freedom as well as challenges for institutional policy development and policy implementation. The Government's resolve to encourage and reward universities for the demonstrable quality of their operations is pressuring universities to develop, implement and evaluate policies and practices at an unprecedented level. All this is taking place in a context where there is wide disagreement about what quality actually means in Australian universities (see, for example, Lindsay, 1992; Petelin, 1992) and confusion about current policy and its implementation (Cannon, 1993).

Institutional autonomy and academic freedom have been fundamental values of Western universities. They have also been something of a continuing battleground between universities and governments (Russell, 1993). Part of the reason for this 'battle' is a perception in society and by governments that universities are not doing what they are meant to be doing well enough, particularly in an environment where the universities are claiming increasing amounts of public revenue. Present debates over quality, and particularly the quality of teaching, are due in part to a lack of institutional responsiveness to repeated criticisms of the quality of university teaching. Such criticisms date back to at least the Murray Report of 1957 (Report of the Committee on Australian Universities, 1957).

The paper proceeds from four assumptions:

- First, there are challenges to academic freedom and autonomy arising from the Federal Government's 'quality agenda';

- Second, academic autonomy and academic freedom are values fundamental to modern Australian universities;

- Third, and as a consequence, they are values worth protecting;

- Fourth, consultation which builds on and strengthens traditions of collegiality is a cooperative and positive strategy for protecting the values of autonomy and freedom.

The paper examines the nature of institutional autonomy and academic freedom, the interaction between the pressures for quality and autonomy and freedom, and finally a way in which the universities might manage the interaction through consultation with their members.

Australian universities, institutional autonomy and academic freedom

Australian universities have a history of being criticised by some for conforming too closely to the immediate demands placed on them by the state and society (Encel, 1965).

Encel argues that

... any substantial improvement in their (ie universities) situation should be based on an attempt to assert that their functions are 'autonomous' and 'cultural' as well as purely instrumental (Encel, 1965, p.23);

and that

Universities cannot ignore the instrumental pressures upon them: what they can and should do is to build up, as a countervailing force, the autonomous functions which they are equipped to provide. (Encel, 1965, p.24).

Two questions emerge from Encel's assertions. First, 'what are the autonomous functions of universities?' and second, 'what are countervailing forces and how might they be constructed?'.

Encel suggests three autonomous functions: learning for its own sake, research for its own sake and for the benefit of society, and acting as a source of influence on social policy and the community's intellectual and cultural life.

Autonomy and academic freedom have been fundamental principles underpinning the idea of the university. Autonomy and freedom are not synonymous, although they are often linked in debate. Autonomy refers to the relationship between the university and society in matters of governance and administration. Academic freedom describes the scholar's pursuit of learning, free of externally imposed dictates (Brubacher, 1977, p.40).

Autonomy is based on the belief that the administration of higher learning is complex and requires a special expertise that only scholars are able to understand. Accordingly, so it is argued, scholars are best placed to administer universities. That scholars should form a self-governing body is a reason why the university has been described as 'a republic of scholars' (Moberley, 1949, p.120). Taking the political analogy further, Jaspers (1959, p.132) has labelled universities as 'states within the state'. He argues that because the state wants centres of free and unbiased inquiry, it respects university autonomy and also provides the basic material support and legislative framework for them to carry out their functions. However, there is an expectation that scholars appointed to these universities will exercise their responsibilities for the development of independent learning.

Complete autonomy is, of course, a chimera. Universities are not immune from the rule of law. State universities are at the mercy of governments that continue to provide the bulk of their finance. Similarly, private and church universities owe allegiance to their benefactors as well as to the State.

The Seventh Report of the Higher Education Council demonstrates very clearly that Australian universities *believe* their autonomy is being intruded upon. Responses to an invitation to comment on intrusions on autonomy show the following to be the four main areas of concern for universities:

1. Commonwealth and State requests for data;

2. Interventions in curriculum matters by professional associations;

3. Government policies (eg. overseas students' visas, credit transfer);

4. Special grants and incentive funding (Higher Education Council, 1993, p.5).

Rather than having complete autonomy, Australian universities enjoy special 'privileges' conferred on them and protected by Acts of Parliament. This privilege is illustrated, for example, in the University of Adelaide Act:

The University is invested with full juristic capacity and unfettered discretion, subject to the law of this State, to conduct its affairs in such manner as it thinks fit... (The University of Adelaide, p.14)

On the other hand, the State *has* intervened in many ways in the autonomous affairs of universities over a long period and in some matters has legislated to do so. To illustrate again from the University of Adelaide Act:

Notwithstanding any Act or law to the contrary, the Industrial Commission of South Australia shall have and may exercise, in relation to any officers or employees of the University, any jurisdiction conferred upon it... (The University of Adelaide, p.21)

An example of an intrusion into academic freedom to conduct research is contained in the Sixth Report of the Higher Education Council:

This important element of institutional autonomy (ie. the right of universities to govern themselves) has been taken to include an academic freedom for universities to determine 'whom to teach, by whom and how, as well as permitting them to decide, broadly, (sic) what topics or themes to research (Higher Education Council, 1993, p.5).

Moberley tells us that the lethargy, prejudice, conservatism and intolerance of innovation of the academic guilds led to legislative action against them in nineteenth century England and America to force the entry of new fields of study that had been resisted by the academies (Moberley, 1949, p.233). In Australia, a parallel 'lethargy' among universities to respond to repeated criticism of the quality of teaching (Report of the Committee on Australian Universities, 1957; AV-CC, 1963; Tertiary Education Commission, 1978; Education, Training and Employment, 1979; Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts, 1982; Senate Standing Committee on Education and Training, 1990), and recognition of the social and personal costs of teaching practices through student failure and withdrawal must certainly have contributed in large measure to the Dawkins' reforms (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1988).

Presumably Encel would assert that the universities ignored the accountability or 'instrumental pressures' upon them. A clear example of the way these particular pressures were ignored can be found by asking questions about the outcomes and recommendations of the Williams Inquiry in 1979:

'how many universities made opportunities during first term for new students to improve their techniques of learning?' (Williams recommendation R.5.20);

'how many universities made participation in programs for staff in the theory and practice of teaching, curriculum development and examining a normal condition of tenured appointment?' (Williams recommendation R.5.24);

'how many universities accepted the responsibility set out for evaluating their work in paragraph S.168 against such criteria as:

- *the existence of written objectives;*

- *the consistency of staff and student selection and the design of course with the objectives;*

- *attrition rates and their acceptability against admission policy;*

- *methods of relating academic and financial plans?'* (Education, Training and Employment, 1979).

Clearly, this list of issues posed for evaluation would certainly appeal to a latter day quality-auditor! A reasonable answer to the questions above might be: 'a few tried to implement the recommendations, but most did not; indeed few gave the recommendations serious consideration at all'. The reason for this outcome, interesting though it may be, is not the concern of this paper.

What is of major concern are the implications that flowed from a higher education system that substantially ignored these kinds of recommendations, and the recommendations of other inquiries and reports related to aspects of the quality of teaching that emerged in the past 30 years. It is asserted that the autonomous universities were shown to be generally unresponsive to the needs of society for better quality teaching and that this lack of responsiveness invited government intervention in institutional affairs which affected both academic autonomy and academic freedom.

For example, the outcomes of Minister Dawkins' reforms in programs designed to financially encourage and support quality in teaching and learning, educational research and evaluation, and academic staff development can be viewed as threats to both autonomy and to academic freedom in universities electing to participate in these programs. The National Priority (Reserve) Fund, Evaluations and Investigations Program and National Staff Development Fund are structured to reflect public policy priorities - not the 'autonomous' functions of universities or curiosity driven research and development.

The threat to autonomy from these programs comes from externally imposed management control in setting priorities and targets, the specification of methodologies, project management structures and procedures, and in setting deadlines. The threat to academic freedom, for those electing to participate in these programs, comes from the difficulty (and perhaps the impossibility) of moving away from agreed research and development plans, strategies, and intended timelines should these be thought academically desirable. Furthermore, to the extent to which research priorities are specified and detailed, scholars are relieved of the challenge and responsibility of constructing their own agendas and priorities that reflect academic freedom in the pursuit of learning and in acting as critics of social policy.

Finally, there has been an unwelcome element of competition and secretiveness between institutions born of the quality audit process to distribute funds as a reward for quality processes and outcomes. Secretiveness makes attainment of the cooperative 'ideal' proposed by Brubacher (1977, p.104) difficult:

'Informing the scholarly community everywhere of their results enables them to stand on the shoulders of others and peer even further beyond the present boundaries of knowledge. Dedicated devotees of truth realise that there should be no proprietary interest in their discoveries and that ignorance can be subdued only by a vast, unselfish pooling of their efforts.'

In summary, the position argued here is not that adopted by the Higher Education Council which seems to be that universities have a greater degree of autonomy now than in the past. This may in fact be quite true but it misses the point that autonomy is being eroded and that this erosion, in some measure, is the creation of the universities themselves through their lack of responsibility in ensuring that the quality and excellence that was so frequently spoken about and vigorously defended (The University of Adelaide, 1979) was actually there.

Challenges to academic freedom and autonomy in teaching

There can be little argument that we are experiencing a time when traditional university autonomies and freedoms in teaching and research are being challenged. The reasons for the 'challenge' are many and varied but they have their origins both in the internal affairs and administration of universities and in the external environment.

Whether the universities would not, or could not, respond to pressures for change is an unresolved and inherently contentious issue. The fact is that they did not respond in the ways that was expected of them by outside interests. Nowhere is this clearer than in university teaching, as shown before in the discussion of the Williams Inquiry outcomes.

What are the challenges by external interests and where do they come from? In *teaching* the challenges include the following:

First, a challenge to achieve higher quality educational processes and outcomes. This challenge is mediated by government-appointed bodies such as the Higher Education Council;

Second, quite specific challenges to *what* to teach that now go beyond the demands of the organised professions and learned societies. Examples include the idea of 'generic' skills (coming from industry, trade unions and government (Higher Education Council, 1992) and the inclusion of Australian materials in courses (Centre for Research in Professional Education, 1993);

Third, challenges to the traditional autonomy of universities in deciding admissions and the academic and other characteristics of entrants. This challenge is partly embedded, for example, in the credit transfer arrangements;

Fourth, challenges to the ways students are taught and what they are taught that originate in state equal opportunity and affirmative action legislation (for example, advice on the use of language and on modes of acceptable behaviour);

Fifth, the specification of the teaching 'duties' of academic staff and the differentiation of teaching responsibilities between the various levels of appointment in industrial awards. For a Lecturer at Level B, for example, there are eight specified teaching duties, two research duties (one of which involves the supervision of research students and is therefore, arguably, a teaching duty anyway), two administrative duties and one professional duty.

Whatever the intrinsic merit or worth of these challenges, they are challenges, nevertheless. Although most come from outside the universities, it is significant that university staff play an important role in both the development and the mediation of these challenges through their work as independent consultants or their membership of various professional committees, government councils and advisory boards.

Internally generated challenges to autonomy have not been addressed in detail here as they stand outside the broad scope of this paper. However these challenges are significant. They include, for example, institutional limitations on consulting, the formal regulation of relationships between members of the university community, intellectual property matters, reviews of staff performance, and postgraduate student supervision regulations.

Building the 'countervailing' force

How can universities and their staff be assisted to address externally imposed agendas and also minimise threats to their autonomy? How can the universities, to use Encel's phrase ' build up, as a countervailing force, the autonomous functions which they are equipped to provide'?

There are two responses to these questions. The first is for them to discharge their functions, autonomous or otherwise, responsibly and well against their own declared values (or to use the current language, 'with a high degree of quality'). The second is to ensure that consultative mechanisms are used to assist scholars to exercise their responsibilities in constructive ways.

Responsibility

Of course, these responses beg many questions. What is responsibility? To whom, or to what, does a scholar - and a university - have responsibility? Who will judge and set the standards for doing things 'well'?

Exercising responsibility imposes obligations on the individual *and* the university; on the individual to *act* responsibly and on the university to *enable* the individual to act responsibly. The Higher Education Council expressed this view of responsibility in its Seventh Report to the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (Higher Education Council, 1993, p.5). The Council states:

If it is true that freedoms to govern and manage ... lie at the heart of institutional autonomy, it is equally true that fulfilling the duties and obligations relating to the use of public funds is the best means of securing that autonomy. Indeed, these obligations include regular and public demonstration that the affairs of the institution are governed and managed properly.

Responsibility does not imply that universities should respond to

every policy idea and demand placed on them by society. One such demand in current vogue is the Total Quality Management idea that universities should be responsive to 'customer' (students?) expectations for *all services all of the time* (emphasis added, Dixon and Gardiner, 1992). Nevertheless, universities need to be attentive to emerging ideas and repeated demands and consider their position in relation to them and their own system of values. Teaching, traditionally valued as the core function of the university, was the focus for repeated criticism of its quality over a long period of time and yet until the late nineteen eighties, little was done by the universities to address that criticism.

Consultation

The second response to the question concerning minimising threats to autonomy assists in answering issues of responsibility. The remainder of this paper explores the second response. It is proposed that consultative mechanisms can be put in place that enable scholars to exercise their responsibilities to participate in the organisation, development, administration, and evaluation of academic policy and practices, rather than simply leaving responsibility to others, or worse, ignoring their responsibilities completely.

There is nothing novel about this proposition (Olswang and Lee, 1984). What is remarkable is the extent to which it is ignored in universities. Drucker (1992, p.93) notes that participative practices date back to the Second World War. These practices laid the basis for productivity, quality and performance improvements; practices that were subsequently taken up with such enthusiasm by Japanese management. Drucker asserts that partnerships with 'workers' - that is, asking them about the nature of their work and the organisation, is the *only* way to bring about effective change.

Perhaps consultative processes are ignored because of the threatening nature of organisational change and our predisposition to avoid confronting resistance. Farmer (1990) observes that change carries with it a sense of 'violation' that invites resistance. He goes on:

'Social organisations are by their nature conservative and protective. Social structures have been created to guard against disturbing change. Resistance to change is particularly intense in higher education because faculty members are instinctively hyper conservative about educational matters.' (Farmer, 1990, p.7)

Another important factor in accounting for past lack of system-wide responsiveness to proposals for change was, according to Cannon (1983, p.59), that the 'change targets' - the university teachers - were not involved or consulted.

To overcome these difficulties a consultative process has been employed by the author at the University of Adelaide which builds on understandings about organisational change. The work of Schein (1972), Berg and Ostergren, (1977), and Farmer (1990) is important here. Schein (1972, p.93) maintains that those affected by change must be involved early in the diagnostic and change planning process, rather than being confronted with proposals for change. This conclusion is identical to that reached by Farmer (1990, p.13). Farmer points out that we must recognise the human dimension of change and the necessity of enabling participation in change planning and implementation. These views correspond to the notion of 'ownership' in change theories. Ownership:

... signifies the quality of feeling such participation in the emergence and development of an innovation that one feels as an owner or co-owner of the innovation. (Berg and Ostergren, 1977, p.23)

At the University of Adelaide, a successful consultative process in developing policies on quality has involved participants in tightly structured group activities designed to identify a variety of institutional and professional needs, clarify concepts, provide examples, and suggest priorities. Moreover the process has been designed to share information with participants about forthcoming decisions facing the University.

The relative ease of moving policy proposals through the decision-making structures based on this process suggests that it 'works'.

This view is confirmed by emerging evidence of policy implementation, although this evidence is by no means conclusive. It is a view that requires more systematic investigation especially in light of the well-known difficulties in securing policy implementation (Jenkins, 1978).

The consultative process: An example

An example of the consultative process is outlined. The example describes a University of Adelaide project to develop its approach to policy development in the quality of teaching and learning.

The principles of this approach were used successfully in a previous exercise to develop policy initiatives for the professional development of all staff. This was a sensitive area including as it did consideration of approaches to appraisal for staff development purposes. However, the comparative ease of moving that policy through the University's decision-making structures suggested that the methodology based on extensive consultation across the University (more than 300 staff and students were involved in structured-group meetings), 'worked'.

Accordingly, it was decided to follow a similar methodology for the development of policies relating to the quality of teaching and learning.

This project arose from the University's commitment to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Subsequent to the declaration of this commitment in the Strategic Plan it was agreed to establish a Working Party to report to the Vice-Chancellor on a range of matters concerning teaching and learning quality.

This agreement was itself based on a consultative process, having been successfully advocated through two large and predominantly elected University policy committees.

The Working Party had accepted as a fundamental assumption that its work and recommendations should be grounded as far as possible in the best features of University culture, policy and practice. It also assumed that quality is the concern and responsibility of all members of the University community and that high quality teaching and learning are essential if the University is to fulfil its educational function in society.

To arrive at its recommendations the Working Party implemented an extensive consultation program that involved 220 persons. The consultative meetings with staff and students were designed to be consistent with the view that change must be based on the involvement of those to be affected by change.

The Working Party functioned as a steering committee for the project group. The Working Party met monthly during 1991 and 1992. It considered reports, strategies and issues at these meetings.

The consultative meetings with small groups of staff and students were designed to achieve four specific purposes. These purposes were to:

- gather information and ideas about matters relating to the quality of teaching and learning;
- disseminate information to participants about quality issues in higher education;
- provide a collegial forum in which ideas about quality could be expressed and shared;
- assist in the process of identifying and documenting examples of exemplary practice in teaching.

The procedures adopted in the consultative meetings are derived from the work of Delbecq and others (1975) who have advocated the appropriateness of the nominal group technique.

The outcomes of these consultations shaped the final report on quality. The information gathered by this procedure is rich in ideas, concerns, and illustrations of good practice. It was used as a basis from which to develop new ideas and strategies for policy planning, implementation and evaluation.

Finally, the Working Party informed itself on a variety of other matters through interviews with staff and students and by inviting written submissions

When the Working Party's Report was completed, a further process of consultation, refinement, and careful introduction to the academic community was adopted. First, it was tabled at the Academic Board for information prior to its circulation to all academic departments and other policy committees for comment. Second, comments received, especially on the large number of recommendations in the Report were evaluated by the Working Party and adjustments made where it considered these to be appropriate. Finally, the revised recommendations were debated in the Academic Board. Significantly, this debate led to a strengthening of several recommendations and none of the original proposals were jettisoned, including potentially contentious ones such as the introduction of mandatory and regular student evaluation of teaching and mandatory professional development in the teaching role for new staff. These outcomes are quite remarkable in the University of Adelaide which has a strong research culture and a traditionally conservative approach to teaching.

Conclusion

University autonomy and academic freedom are under threat. This is not the same as suggesting that autonomy and freedom have been 'lost' or that there is more-or-less autonomy and freedom than at some time in the past; they are quite simply 'threatened' and will always be so. One essential strategy to fight off the threat that has been advocated is for universities to discharge their functions responsibly and well against their declared standards and values, for individuals to *act* responsibly and for the university to *enable* individuals to act responsibly.

This paper has also outlined one enabling strategy for policy development in the area of teaching quality. The strategy, intended as it is to build a 'countervailing force', has several desirable features. First, it provides a mechanism to assist staff to contribute to the academic administration of their universities in a constructive and participative way. Second, it involves staff. Involvement is an antidote to the sheer size of many universities and the sense of alienation that some of their members experience. Third, wide consultation not only assists in gathering information for policy development, it also provides important opportunities to share information with staff and students. Better informed university members are more likely to support innovations that emerge from such processes. The evidence to date is that this is the case. Finally, the consultative process is enjoyed by significant numbers of participants. They can see an outcome, they meet staff they might not otherwise meet, and they feel they are being 'noticed'. To illustrate: in the consultancy it was a matter of concern to hear from many staff a comment along the lines of 'I have been here twenty years, this is the first time anyone has asked for my opinions! Thank you!'

Such outcomes are important. The net effect of challenges to autonomy and freedom is to make universities less desirable places in which to work. We know that intrinsic motivators are essential in academic work (Lonsdale, Dennis, Oppenshaw and Mullins, 1988). Therefore any strategy that reinforces these motivators deserves to have a high profile in institutional decision making and policy development.

Members of the university community must respond thoughtfully to the challenges facing them, especially from the increasing regulation of academic work and quality policies and the threats these pose to autonomy, freedom and job satisfaction. Consultation is one strategy that can form part of that response. Consultation is consistent with collegial models of university governance and thus is an antidote to increased managerialism (Middlehurst and Elton, 1992). Consultation is also a cooperative activity which, as Russell (1993, p. 104) observes in his conclusion to his recent analysis of academic freedom in Britain, is the only practical alternative to government compulsion in the administration of university affairs.

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Articles

Use of peer review by the Australian Research Council

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Introduction

National bodies responsible for allocating funds for basic research differ in the manner in which they employ peer review (see Chubin & Hackett, 1990). Some funding agencies, such as the Research Councils in the United Kingdom and the National Institute of Health in the United States, establish expert panels for each of a large number of narrowly defined research specializations. Applications for funding within each specialization are reviewed only by panel members. Other agencies also employ a panel system, but decisions as to which applications will be funded typically are made only after the panel has considered evaluations provided by reviewers who are not members of the panel. The National Science Foundation in the United States and the Australian Research Council employ this latter approach, although in different ways.

This article is concerned with the place of peer review in the process by which the Australian Research Council (ARC) allocates funds under the Large Grants Scheme. Awards under the Australian Research Council Grants Scheme constitute the primary source of funding for basic research in Australia in disciplines other than medicine and dentistry (where the National Health and Medical Research Council is the responsible body). Policy directives for higher education issued by the Australian Government in 1988 (see Dawkins, 1988), including centralizing control through a process known as "clawback" over funds once distributed by universities, increased the influence of the ARC. In 1992 the ARC had a research funding budget of $255.5 million, of which $96.1 million were committed to research grants, $55 million to postgraduate awards, $51.6 million to research infrastructure, $20.2 million to special research centres and key centres, and $17.7 million to research fellowships. Although universities are responsible for awarding research funds under the Small Grant Scheme ($15.7 million were distributed in 1992 to 1412 applicants, with a success rate of 33%), the primary allocation of the $96.1 million is undertaken by ARC through the Large Grants Scheme. Only 19% of all applications for an initial Large Research Grant to commence in 1993 were successful, in comparison to success rates of 29% for 1992 and 31% for 1991. This circumstance arose because the number of applications for initial support increased sharply at a time when funding overall remained stable and the ARC was committed to provide continuing support for projects funded in earlier years.

An investigator seeking a Large Research Grant lodges an application which is evaluated by a discipline panel or a priority panel established by ARC. Under the present system each application that survives initial culling is sent by the panel to four assessors for evaluation. As well as having access to such peer review, the panel invites the 40% of applicants surviving the second culling to comment on assessors' reports before deciding which projects should be funded. Wilson (1990), when chairperson of the Research Grants Committee, the body within the ARC responsible for funding under the Large Research Grants Scheme, noted, "The considerable increase in competition for research funding by Australian academics means it is now even more important that the allocation of research grants by the Australian Research Council is both fair and seen to be fair" (p. 16). Supplementing expert opinion obtained through peer review with feedback from applicants might seem to provide panel members with the information needed to allow applications to be assessed strictly on the basis of merit. However, there are complex issues relating to peer review and decision making by panel members that need to be examined in considering how Large Research Grants are allocated by the ARC.

The questions of particular concern are first whether peer review as employed by the ARC is as fair, valid, and reliable as it might be, and second what the nature of decision making by panels is. Although some of these issues have been a matter for discussion within the ARC, there has not yet been independent investigation of the manner in which the ARC operates. My objective is to discuss questions bearing on the validity and reliability of evaluation of grant applications by the ARC with reference to literature on peer review and how granting agencies with a panel system of the type employed by the ARC operate. As an initial step, however, the procedures that the ARC follows need to be outlined.

The Large Grant Scheme

Individuals as well as research teams can apply for ARC funding. The following outline refers to practices the ARC will adopt in evaluating applications for support in 1995 under the Large Research Grants Scheme (see Australian Research Council, 1993). Applications close on 28 February 1994. On the basis of previous years, 2500-3000 applications are likely to be received. Each application will processed by one of nine discipline panels (Biological Sciences - Molecular, Biological Sciences - Plant/Animal, Chemical Sciences, Earth Sciences, Engineering Sciences - 1, Engineering Sciences - 2, Physical Sciences, Humanities, Social Sciences) or by one of five priority panels (Materials science and mineral processing, Cognitive science, Biology of sustainability, Citizenship, Australia's Asian context). The panels will reject 30% of applications in April 1994 without calling for reports from external assessors, and a further 30% in July 1994 after reports have been obtained from external assessors. The assessors will typically include at least one person from among the three nominated by the applicant as qualified to evaluate the project. The 40% of applicants who remain in July after the second culling will be allowed to provide the panel with a one page comment on the assessors' reports. In September 1994 each panel will generate a rank ordering of all applications still under consideration, and assign a score to each application. Lists prepared by the discipline panels and the priority panels will go to the Research Grants Committee (a constituent committee of the ARC), which provides advice to the ARC. Recommendations are then forwarded to the Minister for Higher Education and Employment Services. Only 19% of initial projects to commence in 1993 and 22% of those to commence in 1994 received funding, and in many of these cases the level of support was below that sought by the applicant.