

'A reservoir of learning': the beginnings of continuing education at the University of Sydney

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Adult education has often been on the margin of university offerings in Australia and elsewhere, sometimes regarded as 'non-core' business or at least as a financial drain on the institution. At the University of Sydney, however, adult education has managed to survive in one form or other for over 140 years, currently through the Centre for Continuing Education. Partly this has been due to the support of influential academics who have believed in the principle of 'extra-mural' studies, if not always agreeing with the way it has been delivered or funded. Research in the university's archives and through contemporary accounts shows that the pattern of provision was established in the 1890s and first 20 years of the twentieth century, particularly through the development of tutorial classes in a relationship with the Workers' Educational Association, following a model established in Britain at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. However, the research also reveals that the relationship between the first Director of Tutorial Classes and senior members of Sydney University was not always harmonious, especially against the background of the conscription debates of World War I.

Introduction

University continuing education exists in various forms in most developed countries, but in recent years has generally been in decline in Australia, as well as in Britain, although there are active units in a number of universities in both countries. It is sometimes known in universities as 'adult education', 'extra-mural education' or 'university extension', and typically operates outside the formal undergraduate and postgraduate offerings, although often involves academic staff as lecturers or study tour leaders. Mostly it is non-accredited learning, although more recently some university continuing education in Australia has included courses accredited through the vocational education training system or providing access to formal university studies, particularly through continuing professional education (CPE). Management of continuing education may be vested in a central agency in the university, or dispersed among the faculties, or may be a combination of both.

Arguably the longest-running and most successful university continuing education program in Australia is offered by the University of Sydney, currently through the Centre for Continuing Education. Sydney University has been providing some form of structured adult education, alongside its formal undergraduate and graduate programs, for more than 140 years. This paper charts the early, sometimes tumultuous, years of that development, to the end of the first world war, and discusses some of the features established in that period which enabled an adult education program to be sustained at the university through sometimes turbulent times into the present century.

In their discussion of historical research in education, Cohen, Manion and Morrison cited Borg's 1963 definition: 'the systematic and objective location, evaluation, and synthesis of evidence in order to establish facts and draw conclusions about past events'.¹ The selection and interpretation of such events is influenced of course by the

researcher's intents, experience, values and biases, but the intention in this paper is to provide what Cohen *et al.* described as 'an act of reconstruction undertaken in a spirit of critical inquiry'.² Merriam and Simpson suggested that historical inquiry is of a greater service to a field, such as adult education, when it addresses assumptions, failures and feats, the impact on people's lives, and/or the total context of an event.³ This paper particularly examines early 'failures and feats', within the university and political contexts of the time, and the intention of the initiatives to 'impact on people's lives'. It draws on primary sources from the Sydney University Archives (SUA), especially minutes of Senate meetings and annual reports of the Extension Board, as well as on other written sources.

University extension

At its meeting in July 1892, the University of Sydney Senate accepted a recommendation of the University Extension Lectures Committee that Miss Louisa Macdonald, MA, deliver a course of six lectures on 'Greek life and art'.⁴ The Senate also approved the payment to Miss MacDonald of an honorarium of £30 (\$60) for teaching the course, and agreed that the course participants should pay five shillings (50 cents) per ticket.

Extension lectures at the University of Sydney had been inaugurated in 1886 – 36 years after the University's founding.⁵ At that 1892 meeting it was decreed that each course should comprise ten weekly lectures, delivered 'at some fixed hour, usually in the evening', but with provision for consecutive courses on connected branches of one subject and for short courses of six lectures 'by special arrangement'. The courses would be on literary, historical and other subjects, 'open to all comers', and the students would pay fees.⁶ There were high expectations of the lecturer, as well as provision for responses afterwards:

At each lecture a printed paper shall be distributed, containing a syllabus of the lecture, and questions on the subjects treated. Those who attend the lecture shall be invited to write answers to these questions, and to send their written answers to the Lecturer, who shall look over and correct them.⁷

There was also a condition which some of today's undergraduates might find challenging: each person also had to satisfy the lecturer 'by means of written answers to questions set during the course, or otherwise, that he has followed the lectures with attention...'.⁸ Students could also undertake an optional final examination and receive a certificate if successful.

This model of University 'extension' developed in English universities late in the nineteenth century, following some 20 years of university reform.⁹ University Extension was a response to a demand for university education for working men and for improved provision of higher education for women.¹⁰ In general terms, University Extension was interpreted in England as 'a system of lectures and classes for adults in towns away from the universities'.¹¹ Building on individual enthusiasm and the experience of colleges and associations, and pressured by influential members of their own faculties, the two ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge led the way.¹² Their concern was not only to extend their educational provision – one of the strongest proponents of the Extension 'movement' in England, James Stuart, was concerned about the potential for external criticism of the universities as they went through the reform process, and believed that 'their position would be greatly strengthened if they ministered to the needs of a wider area than they did'.¹³

The University of Sydney followed its English counterparts by establishing an Extension Board in 1892 (the same year as Cambridge), although the immediate focus was its own city rather than 'towns away from the universities'. The Senate approved a by-law for the annual election of between eight and twelve members,

to include at least four Senate members and at least four members of the teaching staff.¹⁴ One of the Board's roles was to recommend to the Senate the names of persons to be authorised to be employed as extension lecturers. The Extension Board continued to function until abolished by the Senate in 1977.

Although funding was to come from fees, government grants and donations, there was also provision for university support, through 'such sums as may from time to time be assigned for the purpose by the Senate'.¹⁵ The issue of university financial support for 'extension' or whether it should pay its own way continued to rear its head regularly over the next century or so.

At five shillings a head, in 1904–5 the Extension Board reported average attendances of 55 for a course of six lectures on 'Agriculture' by various Sydney University staff, to over 500 for a course of six lectures on 'Typical historical characters' by Professor Wood, in conjunction with the Public School Teachers' Association, the latter seemingly an early example of professional development. Provision was also made for country extension, with four lectures at Goulburn, on 'Hamlet', by Professor M W MacCallum, with an average attendance of 80, and at Newcastle two lectures on 'The Parthenon' and one lecture on 'The Moon', by Professor W J Woodhouse, with an average attendance of 90.¹⁶ The Board reported average annual attendances expanded from around 700 in 1901 to more than 1,600 five years later¹⁷, still very modest numbers at a time when Sydney itself had a population of around half a million.¹⁸

In 1905 there were several innovations: the use of lecturers from outside New South Wales, and the provision of illustrated 'popular scientific lectures' and of 'more practical, technical or professional instruction'.¹⁹ The results according to the Extension Board were that:

In each of these directions the success has been satisfactory to judge by the attendances; and the reports and comments of

the press would seem to show that these efforts meet with a general approval that cannot fail to strengthen the position of the University in the community at large.²⁰

As the provision of extension education became more systematic, those responsible for its organisation over the ensuing decades found that they were treading a fine line in trying to convince the public and the university at large that they could address the needs of both at the same time. For example, the Extension Board's annual report of 1906–7 noted how difficult it was to conduct negotiations for lectures outside the university with businesspeople who did not understand that the 'Board's small charges are schemed so as only to keep it from losing more money than it has for the purpose'.²¹ The Board's chairman said: 'It is unpleasant to hear the University blamed for neglect of a "duty" which is simply beyond its means'.

Sometimes the students criticised the course content or the lecturer's presentation, and in the 1910–11 Annual Report the Board struck back, explaining the purpose of extension lectures and their intended audience:

...the 'public', in the sense of people who do their day's work and then only amuse themselves rather idly and without extension of mind, is not the public that the Board can serve. The Board's efforts are directed towards the satisfaction of that intellectual curiosity and longing for mental strength and mental wealth which cause the foundation of Universities and establish them in public sympathy and affection.²²

This notion of 'public sympathy and affection' for universities is an intriguing one in considering the extent of public support for higher education generally in Australia over the years since. Sydney University's Extension Board had no doubts about that role in the early years of the twentieth century:

It is conscious of an obligation on its own part to the community at large, of whose aspiration it is the symbol that makes a vigorous

university try to irrigate its whole land from the reservoir of learning it constitutes, and the new springs of knowledge it may succeed in opening.²³

This vision of a 'reservoir of learning' was not always appreciated by those the Extension Board sought to serve, particularly in the country, where lectures were often organised in conjunction with the local School of Arts or Mechanics' Institute. These two institutions were the main providers of education for adults throughout the nineteenth century outside of the formal institutions.²⁴ Operating under the control of a local committee, and part-funded through government grants, Schools of Arts and Mechanics' Institutes usually comprised a library, reading room and a lecture room. Intended as centres of culture and recreation, their most significant role was in rural areas, where the extent of their impact varied, often according to the vision, or lack of it, of the local committee.

The Sydney University Extension Board complained that, until the introduction of new government policies on subsidies in New South Wales, 'there was little to prevent a School of Arts from becoming what by no stretch of the imagination could be called a "School" or thought of in any connection with the "Arts", except those of billiards and sensational fiction'.²⁵ The Board said that, while most Schools of Arts were very cooperative, in one town the organisers 'constrained the [visiting] lecturer to speak in the open air because its hall had been let as a supper-room for a hall'.²⁶ In another town, the Honorary Secretary of the School of Arts made no arrangement for accommodating a visiting lecturer nor met him on arrival, and 'showed his personal interest in the lectures by staying away from them all'.²⁷

Tutorial classes

At this time, just before World War I, formal education in Australia was provided mainly through primary schools (including evening

schools for adults), technical schools and colleges, and the four universities: Tasmania, Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney, the latter three all having established extension boards. Peter Board, Director of Education for New South Wales 1905–22, introduced Evening Continuation Schools in 1911 to provide continuity of education between primary school and employment, a precursor to the development of high schools.²⁸ Board was also a member of the Senate of the University of Sydney, and from the time of his appointment as Director of Education had been critical of what he saw as the university's inaccessibility:²⁹

If a university is to be a living force in the state, ... a power making for the prosperity of the state, and if it is really worthwhile for the highest knowledge to become available to all who are in a position to apply it for practical purposes, and who feel the need for it in their daily occupations, then it is not sufficient that the university should wait for those to climb to it who really need its help. It must come out to meet them.³⁰

Board initially favoured the University of Wisconsin system of extension lectures accompanied by pre-arranged courses of reading, as well as its large correspondence program, with visiting lecturers, and regarded extension lectures based on the nineteenth century British model as 'mere dilettantism'.³¹ However, through his involvement in the Imperial Education Conference in 1911 and the Congress of the Universities of the Empire in 1912, both held in London, Board was impressed by the concept of tutorial classes, developed by Oxford and Cambridge Universities through 'joint committees' with the Workers' Educational Association (WEA).

The WEA was the brainchild of Albert Mansbridge, who saw it as a means of utilising the knowledge of the universities to help 'the workers' develop political and industrial power. It was supported by the leading British universities, Oxford and Cambridge, as a way of better reaching into their communities (and being seen to do so) and supported by the British government as an alternative to some of the

more radical alternatives, such as Labour Colleges, which began to emerge in the early years of the twentieth century.³² Underpinning the WEA's activities was a commitment to voluntarism and democracy, along with high academic standards and the pursuit of objectivity.³³ The organisation also claimed it was non-party-political and non-sectarian.

The tutorial class model was first launched at Oxford University in 1907, under a joint committee of WEA and university representatives. There was an expectation that at least three quarters of the students in these classes would be 'actual labouring men and women'³⁴ and all were expected to commit themselves to three years of serious study, producing on average an essay each month.³⁵ William Temple, the first national president of the British WEA, espoused the virtues of the Association's model on an Australian tour in 1910, and the extension boards at Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide Universities subsequently affiliated with the British WEA.³⁶

With the groundwork laid, there were a number of confluences over the next few years which led to the development of tutorial classes at the University of Sydney and an ongoing relationship with the WEA. The first of these was the election in 1910 of a Labour Government in New South Wales which was supportive of Peter Board's belief in the need of reform of the university. Board drafted a University (Amendment) Bill for the government, which was passed in 1912, and which provided for 'the establishment and maintenance of evening tutorial classes in science, economics, ancient and modern history and sociology'.³⁷ The government grant to the University of Sydney was doubled.

About the same time, Albert Mansbridge wrote to a recent arrival in Sydney, David Stewart, a cabinetmaker by trade, inviting him to help establish a WEA branch in Sydney. Stewart had been an active unionist and supporter of workers' education in his native Scotland, and as a delegate to the New South Wales Labour Council in 1912,

he persuaded that body to investigate the possibility of sponsoring a scheme of worker education. Boughton has shown that there was already a 'vital, independent, working class and socialist movement flourishing in Australia' at the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth but, as in Britain, its proponents were seen as more radical than those courted by the WEA movement.³⁸

On receiving the invitation from Mansbridge, Stewart wrote to A.C. Carmichael, New South Wales Minister for Public Instruction, and to H.E. Barff, Registrar of the University of Sydney. The Minister referred Stewart to Peter Board, who showed him the provision for tutorial classes in the recently passed University (Amendment) Bill, and encouraged him in his approaches to the Labour Council and the University.³⁹

However, Stewart had difficulty making inroads at the university. He claimed that neither the Vice-Chancellor, Judge Alfred Paxton Backhouse, nor the Chancellor, Sir Norman McLaurin, 'had any sympathy with the extension of University culture to working-class students', and that McLaurin had said: 'Teaching economics to washerwomen. Phew!'⁴⁰ Stewart found Barff 'coldly polite' and was told that, despite the increased government grant, the University had no funds set aside for tutorial classes. Board then intervened, convincing the government to earmark £1,000 (\$2,000) of the State grant for this purpose.⁴¹ Nevertheless, only one such class was held prior to 1914⁴² and the University was unimpressed by the concept of the joint committee – W.J. Woodhouse, Professor of Greek and Chairman of the Extension Board, was in favour of the University directing and controlling the new 'movement'.⁴³

Nevertheless, there was individual support from such leading academics such as R.F. Irvine, Professor of Economics, and Francis Anderson, Challis Professor of Logic and Mental Philosophy. Mungo MacCallum, foundation Professor of Modern Languages and Literature, and Dean of the Faculty of Arts, advised the Chancellor

that although he was 'a little against having anything to do with such a movement', he thought Stewart should be invited to the University 'to find out precisely what he represents'.⁴⁴ The Extension Board itself claimed that it had been 'watching with interest the growth in England of the Tutorial Class movement associated so intimately with the name of Mr Mansbridge, and had been looking forward to the day when it should prove possible to inaugurate an analogous movement in this State.'⁴⁵ Its chance came when Mansbridge came to Australia in 1913, invited by representatives of Sydney and Melbourne Universities.

Mansbridge was an outstanding speaker, and managed to win over many influential people, including the Australian Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, and the New South Wales Premier, W.A. Holman. Board arranged for Mansbridge to address the Sydney University Senate on 23 August 1913, and the outcome, according to Stewart, was that:

The Professorial Board of the University... after naming their earlier objection to the plan, examined the University (Amendment) Act as it affected tutorial classes, and having discussed the matter with Mr Mansbridge, recommended that the classes should be administered by three representatives of the University and three representatives of the WEA. This organisation was accepted by both the Senate and the WEA.⁴⁶

The Extension Board reported that, before Mansbridge took his final departure in November 1913, 'he and the Board had the satisfaction of knowing that all was ready for the first Tutorial Class under the Act, to begin work early in 1914'.⁴⁷ Whitelock suggested that Mansbridge's message appealed to the universities and the establishment because

... it substituted definition for the muddle of extension, it might defuse industrial unrest, and it soothed sore consciences. It seemed democratic and it was certainly good works.⁴⁸

The Department of Tutorial Classes, as it came to be known, endured for another 50 years at the University of Sydney, before it developed into the Department of Adult Education and was later transformed into the Centre for Continuing Education.

It might have been different – Higgins quotes a suggestion from historian Fred Alexander, that as a result of visits to the USA by Peter Board and James Barrett from Melbourne, 'Australia seems to have come within an ace of getting a marriage between the empirical groupings of the Sydney University (and to a less extent Melbourne University) extension boards and the experiences of Wisconsin'.⁴⁹ However, the British University influence, coupled with the persuasive voices of Mansbridge and Stewart, was just too strong. Whitelock said that Mansbridge carried the 'magic aura of Oxbridge approval', and that his close friend, A.L. Smith of Balliol College, Oxford, had influential contacts at Australian universities.⁵⁰

First director

No doubt at the urging of Board and under the influence of Mansbridge's eloquence, the New South Wales government made a special annual grant to the University of Sydney for the employment of a 'Lecturer and Organiser of Tutorial Classes'. On the recommendation of Mansbridge, the university appointed Meredith Atkinson, an Oxford graduate and tutorial class lecturer at the University of Durham. Stewart claimed that Chancellor McLaurin was the only senate member to vote against the appointment.⁵¹ However, the depth of support for the initiative from other senior university staff can be gauged by this recollection by Jane Clunies Ross of a dinner for Atkinson arranged in London in 1913 by Professor J.T. Wilson while on leave from Sydney University:

To meet the Meredith Atkinsons came Professor Edgeworth David [Professor of Geology and Chair of the Professorial Board]... and Henry Barraclough [shortly to be appointed Professor of

Mechanical Engineering]... The three men from Sydney [i.e. with Wilson] were old friends and colleagues, and Wilson as Chairman of the Professorial Board for some years, and David as Dean of the Faculty of Science, had had a hand in planning the new Department of Tutorial Classes; these two had, since their arrival in the late 1880s, played a considerable part in the growth and expansion of University teaching and were enthusiastic about expanding its sphere outside its own scholarly walls and into the community in general.⁵²

Atkinson arrived in Sydney in March 1914, taking over from Professor Irvine the first tutorial class, on Industrial History. On this occasion the class comprised mainly 'industrial workers' and from the beginning, the non-award nature of the classes was strongly set, the Extension Board reporting that 'the class followed the example of its English prototypes in definitely disclaiming the desire to receive a diploma as tangible reward for work done'.⁵³

As ex-officio secretary, Atkinson called the first meeting of the Joint Committee in April 1914, with Holme, Irvine and Todd from the University of Sydney, and Stewart and two unionists representing the WEA. The latter three were frustrated when they learned that there were sufficient funds for only three tutorial classes instead of the eight they had envisaged. Atkinson took these three classes – one at the University, one in the suburb of Burwood and one south of Sydney at Wollongong. The Extension Board was delighted with the results:

The spirit animating the students has left little to be desired. Mr Atkinson affirms that in keenness, earnestness, and application, they are at least equal to the best tutorial classes of which he had experience in England. The small select library attached to each class has been thoroughly well used...⁵⁴

The Board also noted that the preliminary organisation of the classes had been undertaken by the WEA Secretary, David Stewart, and this was the pattern of the arrangement for many years – the WEA organising the courses and the University of Sydney delivering. In

its reporting, however, each body tended to identify itself as the key agency. It was several decades before the arrangement started to unravel as the University of Sydney began to go its own way and the WEA gradually became a provider as well as an organiser of courses. In other states, the WEA quickly disappeared in Western Australia, was banned by the Queensland government in the 1930s, lost its place in Victoria with the post-World War II creation of the Council of Adult Education, and was similarly ousted by the Board of Adult Education in Tasmania in the late 1940s. Only in South Australia did it maintain a strong university link before going its own way in more recent years.

The war years

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 immediately affected the university's extension activities. There was a decrease in the number of extension lectures, especially in rural areas, and an increased demand for classes to study the causes and other aspects of the war.⁵⁵ Consequently, ten 'Study Circles' were formed around those topics, an early break from the British model of tutorial classes, and an indication of the University's willingness to accommodate students' wishes. The next year the Extension Board decided to restrict extension lectures to topics related to the war, but also managed to offer in July 1916 a class on English literature at Wills Tobacco Factory in Sydney.⁵⁶ The aim of this series of studies was 'to interest the girls in the works of a few of the great English writers'. The response of the girls is not recorded.

In line with its focus on wartime matters, the Extension Board also attempted to show support for one of Britain's allies by offering a series of lectures that year on 'Some aspects of French literature, art and thought'. However, attendances were affected by reduced services of trams and trains as a result of 'a recurrence of industrial trouble'.⁵⁷

Some university staff were also involved in a different form of adult education during the war. Towards the end of the conflict in Europe, the Australian Army introduced a scheme of education to help overcome boredom for those waiting for transport ships home and to prepare them for their return to civilian life. Among those prominent in the AIF Education Service were Professor R.S. Wallace who was Director of the Corps Central School in France, and Professor R.C. Mills.⁵⁸ Wallace later became Vice-Chancellor at Sydney University and both men were supporters of a similar but expanded Army education scheme during World War II, and of course took a keen interest in the University's provision of adult education.

By 1917 Atkinson's title at the university had changed from 'Organiser' to 'Director' of Tutorial Classes; he had also been elected President of the WEA of New South Wales. His successor as Director, Gerry Portus, described him as 'an excellent missionary, full of enthusiasm and energy', although Portus seemed to have reservations about Atkinson's activities:

In season and out Atkinson preached that only widespread enlightenment would prevent war in future. All up and down the country he lectured on the economics of war, a subject we knew very little about, and in which, it is safe to say, he was only a couple of jumps ahead of his hearers. This impressed the Labour Government of the day and, with the help of Peter Board, the subsidy to the University for Tutorial Classes was bumped up until it had been quadrupled by the end of the war.⁵⁹

Atkinson became heavily involved in the conscription debates that raged when Prime Minister William Hughes called two referenda on whether Australian men should be called up for compulsory military service. A Sydney-based, pro-conscription organisation, the Universal Service League, was formed, with Atkinson as secretary and Professor Mungo MacCallum as president. Atkinson's actions brought the WEA into strong conflict with the anti-conscriptionist trade unions,

but Stewart managed to convince the Labour Council of the WEA's impartiality.⁶⁰

Shortly afterwards, Atkinson fell out with MacCallum because the latter opposed giving the Director of Tutorial Classes professorial status.⁶¹ Induced by the offer of professorial title and status, and an increase in salary, Atkinson took up a similar position at the University of Melbourne early in 1918.⁶²

Hardly had he left when MacCallum proposed that the University Extension Board should take control of the Tutorial Classes, without any WEA involvement. The reasons given were that inadequately qualified tutors had been engaged by the WEA, that the financial administration was 'inadequate' and that 'Labour was not the only interest which should be catered for by the Tutorial Classes Department, and even if it was, the WEA was not sufficiently representative.'⁶³ This proposal created a stir, but MacCallum as Dean of Arts had considerable influence at the university, and a Committee of Inquiry was established to investigate the notion. As a result, Gerry Portus, who had been about to take up the position of Assistant Director to Atkinson before the latter resigned, was made Acting Director, and F.A. Bland was appointed Acting Assistant Director, both for one year while the Committee undertook its review.

Crane and Walker claimed that Peter Board felt an obligation to support the WEA, and that as the Chairman of the Joint Committee the redoubtable Professor Francis Anderson took MacCallum's criticism as a personal affront.⁶⁴ With support from Board, Anderson took the unusual step of arranging for himself, Portus and Stewart to address directly the Senate on the issue. The result was a compromise that saw MacCallum's proposal rejected in favour of a revamped Joint Committee comprising five University representatives and four from the WEA.⁶⁵ The principle of equal representation followed under the British model had thus disappeared in New South Wales within five years, but the relationship continued for decades.

Twelve months after Atkinson's departure, Portus replaced him as Director of Tutorial Classes and F.A. Bland became assistant director. Both were to go on to become prominent in Australian academic and public life.

Discussion and conclusion

The provision by the Senate for extension lectures from 1886 not only indicates the University's commitment to reach into the community early in its life but also set a pattern of adult education provision that persisted for more than a hundred years: well-qualified lecturers, an emphasis on liberal studies/humanities subjects, student fees for each course, oversight by a committee of the Senate, a set number of lectures, and a certificate of attendance or completion rather than an accredited award of the University.

The reasons for the introduction of extension lectures followed those of English universities – to provide education courses that met the needs of the public, and to enhance the image of the university in the community. Harrison later observed:

The public relations function of adult education, of which farsighted university statesmen have always been aware, was thus present as a secondary consideration from the very beginning of the universities' entry into the field.⁶⁶

As the first Director of Tutorial Classes at the University of Sydney, Meredith Atkinson continued the pattern set by extension lectures, but also developed the relationship with the Workers' Educational Association, a relationship that extended into the early 1980s, although the balance of power changed shortly after his departure. He had a chequered career at the University of Sydney, and the conscription referenda furore dominated much of his time there.

Portus saw Atkinson's pro-conscription activities as a 'grave disservice' to the adult education movement, citing continual criticism

that the WEA was in opposition to the workers it was supposed to serve.⁶⁷ Colin Badger, a leading figure in Australian adult education post World War II, gave a none-too-complimentary picture of the foundation Director:

It is impossible to avoid the impression that Atkinson, in his Sydney period, was a difficult, insecure, thrusting young man, adroit, quite skilled in manipulation of affairs to his own advantage and none too scrupulous. ... he managed to increase the original grant for his Department from £1000 to £5000 by 1917, secured his own appointment as a lecturer in Economic History at a salary of £160 a year in addition to his Director's salary, obtained a seat on the Faculty of Arts and by some very deft work had his protégé, Margaret Collisson, appointed in July 1917 as a full-time assistant to himself as organiser of study circles under Extension Board auspices.⁶⁸

Nevertheless, despite the wartime constraints and disputes, Atkinson oversaw a steady if unspectacular growth in enrolments. Almost from the beginning, however, the participants were generally middle class and predominantly female, not the 'workers' that Mansbridge had envisaged.⁶⁹

The imbroglio over conscription and later over the status of the position of Director of Tutorial Classes also underlines the role that individuals played in the direction of adult education at the university. One of the most significant was Peter Board, as a member of the Senate, who not only was behind the state government bill that led to the establishment of tutorial classes but also prominent in debates about the governance of the new agency. Many years later, the Secretary of the WEA in New South Wales, Douglas Stewart, described Board as 'the real parent of the WEA in the southern hemisphere'.⁷⁰

Some of the most prominent professors at the University of Sydney at the time, including Mungo MacCallum and Francis Anderson, were also keen supporters of extending the university to the wider

community, even if they differed on how the initiative should be managed. It appears that they were genuine in their attitudes, although Boughton was sceptical:

The university intellectuals who took their brand of liberal education to the workers initially in the Extension movement, then through the WEA, were part of this attempt to guide the newly emerging and rapidly mobilising industrial working class down an educational pathway which did not seriously challenge either privilege or property.⁷¹

There were certainly strong political beliefs among some of those involved with the establishment of extension lectures and then tutorial classes at the University of Sydney. The activities of MacCallum and Atkinson, outlined above, and the radical views of Professor Irvine⁷² are testament to that. And it was a volatile period politically, economically and socially, with widespread radicalism, strikes, and the turbulence of World War I.

Nevertheless, while there may have been some paternalism in their approach, there does appear to be a commitment among senior academics to the principle of extension as an educational outreach, whatever their political beliefs. Many of these supporters saw the university as having a leadership role in the community which could not be achieved through its formal program of courses alone. As a result, from the late nineteenth century and especially in the first two decades of the twentieth, the University of Sydney developed a strong vision of adult education as a legitimate function of the university which it managed to sustain in one form or other through to the present time, thus apparently fulfilling what the Extension Board in 1911 called 'an obligation of its own part to the community at large'.

(Endnotes)

1 L. Cohen, L. Manion & R. Morrison, *Research methods in education*, London: Routledge, 2007, p.191.

2 *Ibid.*

- 3 S Merriam & E. Simpson, *A guide to research for educators and trainers of adults*, Malabar, Florida: Krieger, 1995.
- 4 University of Sydney, Senate Minutes, July 1891–August 1893, SUA G1/1/9, 18 July 1892, p.203. Louisa MacDonald was the first Principal of Women's College at the university.
- 5 University of Sydney, Senate Minutes, 5 July 1886, p.291.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 *Ibid.* In *A history of adult education in Great Britain* (Liverpool University Press, 1962), Thomas Kelly claims (p.220) that such written work was introduced in English University Extension because it was considered improper for male lecturers to engage in oral questions and answers with audiences of young ladies.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 J.F.C. Harrison, *Learning and living 1790–1960: A study in the history of the English adult education movement*, London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1961, pp.221–3.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p.219.
- 11 J.F.C. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p.221.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 *Ibid.*, quoted on p.222.
- 14 University of Sydney, Senate Minutes, 18 July 1892, p.201.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 University Extension Board, *Annual Report 1904–5*, SUA. 405, G12/25, pp.1–3.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p.4.
- 18 G. Woods, *1901: A socio-economic profile of Australia at Federation*, Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Research Note 2, 2000–01.
- 19 University Extension Board, *Annual Report 1904–5, op. cit.*, p.3.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 University Extension Board, *Annual Report 1906–7*, SUA, G12/25, p.7.
- 22 University Extension Board, *Annual Report 1910–11*, SUA, G12/25, p.14.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 D. Whitelock, *The great tradition*, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1974, p.129.
- 25 University Extension Board, *Annual Report 1910–11*, p.9.
- 26 University Extension Board, *Annual Report 1911–12*, SUA, G12/25, p.9.

- 27 *Ibid.*
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