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ABSTRACT

The expansion of higher education in the 1960s from an elite to a mass activity has led inevitably to a demand that higher education be responsive and accountable to the wider community. There are several approaches to evaluation of quality and economic effectiveness in higher education institutions and programs. In the mid-1980s, Australia's Commonwealth Government initiated a series of discipline reviews, as part of an ongoing process of the evaluation of higher education. This paper discusses the discipline review approach to evaluation, in the context of the Discipline Review of Australian Law Schools. It considers the following aspects of the Law School review: the objectives of the Commonwealth discipline reviews, the assessment of quality, the assessment of economic efficiency, responsiveness to community needs, and responses to the law discipline review itself. Appendices provide data on the expansion rates of students in higher education and results from a survey of law students concerning their rating of a law course and the law school. Contains 18 references. (Author/GLR)

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The discipline review of Australian law schools

Ainslie Lamb

Abstract

The expansion of higher education in the 1960s from an elite to a mass activity has led inevitably to a demand that higher education be responsive and accountable to the wider community. There are several approaches to evaluation of quality and economic effectiveness in higher education institutions and programs.

In the mid-1980s, the Commonwealth Government initiated a series of discipline reviews, as part of an ongoing process of the evaluation of higher education. The first of these was in law. This paper discusses the discipline review approach to evaluation, in the context of the Discipline Review of Australian Law Schools.

This paper is a revised version of one prepared in the Centre for the Study of Higher Education's Master of Education course on 'Higher education institutions and their functions'.

Introduction: rationale for evaluation

Among the most important and recurring issues in higher education in Australia since at least the mid-1970s have been the issues of 'quality assurance' and 'accountability'. They are the price to be paid for the vast increase in public expenditure to meet the demands of the expanding higher education sector which has developed since the mid-1960s to provide 'human capital' for an expanded and productive economy.

That process of expansion was set in train in Australia when the Commonwealth Government accepted the recommendations of the Martin Committee (Martin 1964) and embarked on massive injections of funds to upgrade the 'old' universities and establish several new universities. The process received further impetus in the late 1960s with the acceptance of the proposal to set up colleges of advanced education, and again in the 1970s with the abolition of tertiary fees and introduction of a tertiary education student allowance. Between 1971 and 1985 the number of fulltime students in higher education increased from approximately 190,000 to 370,000: see Appendix 1 to this paper. With the commitment of vast amounts of public funding to higher education, pressures and demands for the institutions delivering higher education to be accountable in terms of their attainment of community goals, quality of teaching and research activities, and cost-effectiveness, emerged.

The Williams Report (1979), the first major review of the composite Australian system of education and training, found that high enrolment rates were not reflected in graduation rates, with about one-third of full-time students and 60 per cent of part-time students not completing their courses. The Report emphasised the relationship between the education system and the labour market and concluded that the Government was not getting value for its money, and that the emphasis should shift from target numbers to quality assurance and accountability from higher education institutions.

The incoming Hawke Government (1983) placed great emphasis on the contribution of education to economic prosperity and was committed to raising the national skills base as well as to equity participation in education. Following the collapse of the 'resources boom' and the economic recession in 1982, this government adopted a framework of national educational objectives, regarding the then current levels of participation of young Australians in education after the compulsory

school years as completely inadequate for an advanced and rapidly changing industrial society (Dawkins and Costello 1983).

As a corollary to its commitment of funding to higher education, the Hawke Government reintroduced triennial funding to encourage strategic planning, and set up a series of committees to review existing standards of quality and cost-effectiveness. They included *Quality measures in universities* (Burke 1986), the *Review of efficiency and effectiveness in higher education* (Hudson 1986), and a programme of discipline reviews.

Approaches to evaluation

The evaluation of institutions and courses is to some extent regularly undertaken through a variety of processes, for example: the system of accreditation of courses in colleges of advanced education prior to the abolition of the binary system; the use of referees for staff appointments; the establishment of specialist research centres and the allocation of research grants through competitive submissions; the recognition by professional admission bodies of qualifications conferred by particular educational institutions; invitations to academics to deliver papers to national and international conferences; consultation between the heads of institutions on the establishment and maintenance of academic standards; and internal institutional reviews of departments and activities.

But while these methods ensure constant commitment to academic standards, they do not necessarily meet the more pragmatic demands of funding sources for cost-effectiveness in those academic institutions and activities, and for meeting national political goals such as the needs of industry and employers, equity participation rates, and developing the national skills base.

There are several approaches to evaluation of educational services. Worthen and Sanders (1987: 5) note that evaluation plays many roles in education:

- provision of a basis for decision making and policy formation;
- evaluation of curricula
- accreditation of programs or institutions;
- monitoring of the expenditure of public funds;

- improvement of educational materials and programs;

But evaluation has a single goal: to determine the worth or merit of whatever is being evaluated. Evaluation may have a formative purpose (for example to improve an existing program) or a summative purpose (for example determine whether a program should continue). Worthen and Sanders (1987: 60) categorise different approaches to evaluation as follows:

Objectives - oriented: where the focus is on specifying goals and objectives and determining the extent to which they have been attained.

Management - oriented: where the central concern is identifying and meeting the informational needs of managerial decision-makers.

Consumer - oriented: where the central issue is developing evaluative information on educational product, for use by 'consumers' or users of the product.

Expertise - oriented: where professional expertise is applied to judge the quality of educational endeavours.

Adversary - oriented: where planned opposition in points-of-view of different evaluators (pro and con) is the central focus.

Naturalistic and participant - oriented: where naturalistic enquiry and the involvement of participants (stakeholders to what is being evaluated) are central in determining the values, criteria, needs and data for the evaluation.

The method chosen for evaluation depends on the purpose or goal of the evaluation.

Why choose a discipline review as the method of evaluation?

In a higher education system, which encompasses a variety of disciplines located in several institutions, meeting a broad set of goals, needs and interests, evaluation based on a discipline review has several advantages.

1. It is a review by peers who have an intimate knowledge of the discipline and its characteristics. Williams (1986) notes that peer review and expert appraisal are inevitably the main procedures for assessing most aspects of performance in higher education, because they have the advantages of relevance, flexibility and internalisation of the standards being evaluated. He warns however, that the procedures by which the experts themselves are selected and evaluated are critical.

2. It focusses on a particular area of educational activity that facilitates close examination of the achievement of particular objectives of educational policy

3. Trow (1973) has observed that in a mass system of education with rapid expansion, where achievement is measured not by quality but by target numbers, standards become variable both in different parts of the system and in different parts of each institution. A discipline review could therefore provide comparisons for evaluating different programs within the particular discipline across the full range of institutions, and concurrently for evaluating the institutions by comparison of their activities within the discipline.

4. It provides the opportunity for adopting several evaluation processes simultaneously, so that several issues and points of view can be canvassed in relation to the field covered by the discipline.

5. It may provide complementary comparison with other forms of review, based on institutions or system evaluation.

Thus by taking a 'slice' of the educational cake, a discipline review can measure the quality of the slice (the faculty), the whole cake (the institution) or a batch of cakes (the system). However, there is a risk that if the review attempts to cover too many issues from too many points of view, it may fail in achieving some of its objectives, particularly if it is limited in resources or time.

The objectives of the Commonwealth discipline reviews

The Commonwealth Government, through the then Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) commissioned several discipline reviews, including law, health sciences, teacher education in mathematics and science, engineering, agriculture and accounting. The rationale for the reviews was that 'the justification of appropriate levels of public funding for higher education carries with it an obligation on higher education institutions to demonstrate that their teaching and research is being carried out at suitable standards, avoiding waste and unnecessary duplication, and in a manner that is responsive to community needs' (CTEC 1985).

The discipline reviews were therefore concerned with evaluation of quality assurance, cost-effectiveness, and consumer satisfaction -- that is,

that the institutions were meeting the needs of students, the professions served by the discipline, and the wider community.

The reviews were to be undertaken by small committees of persons pre-eminent in the field of the discipline under review, who were to act independently of CTEC. Connell (1991: 37) in a paper reviewing the discipline reviews, points out that the 'warrant' or force of the authority of the investigators in each instance was not that of the authority of the Commonwealth to set up the reviews, but of 'the esteem and reputation among their colleagues whose work they had been set to judge'. This esteem and reputation, Connell suggests, rests on the following criteria: the quality of their own scholarship; their impartiality in making their assessments (and being seen to do so); and a sufficient width of understanding to be capable of tolerating a variety of views and of entering into worthwhile discussion with colleagues whose ideas and practices differ from their own.

In Connell's view, while the members of each review panel 'pre-eminent in their field' met some of these criteria, not all the committees met all the criteria. He declines to be more specific on this point, though he comments that the range of expertise and experience of those involved in the engineering review (which included an economist as chairman and a total of 33 engineers in varying roles as committee members, on expert panels or available as consultants) reinforced the requirement that the panel should consist of persons pre-eminent in their field.

The provision of 'independence' is also important to the reputation of the review panel, but the value of independence must be measured against the resources available to operate effectively. The first panel (law) consisted of three professorial academics, working with one research assistant but relying on their own academic secretarial staff, thus taking independence to the extreme. This lack of resourcing was noted by the committee (hereafter referred to as the Pearce Committee) as adversely affecting their ability to pursue their task (Pearce 1987a: lviii), and subsequent committees were provided with appropriate advisory committees including representatives of community interests, secretarial and research assistance, and supplemented with experts and consultants.

While there were slight variations in the terms of reference of each review committee, each had the common task of assessing the quality and economic efficiency of each higher institution offering programs in the discipline, and to consider and make recommendations on such issues as:

- the aims and objectives of those institutions in the provision of education in the discipline;
- the nature and quality of courses offered;
- the standards of teaching and research;
- relevance of the courses to the employment of graduates and the needs of the community;
- effective use of resources;
- current deficiencies in resources;
- the adequacy of places provided and the selection of students;
- the level of service provided by academic staff to the work of government, the profession and community welfare.

The principal objectives of the reviews therefore were to evaluate the quality and economic efficiency of the institutions offering courses in the nominated disciplines. The issues to be considered reflected the government's policy goals of education as an economic tool in improving the national skills base, enhancing the demand for suitably trained graduates and accessibility of graduates to the labour market, equity participation and accountability to the wider community which pays for the provision of higher education. In the law discipline review some of these issues are couched in language that seems to beg the questions the panel was to enquire into. For example, the panel was asked to consider 'the effectiveness of resource utilisation and the extent of unnecessary duplication in the provision of resources, staffing, and student places', implying the existence of waste and duplication, and reflecting the view consistently and publicly expressed by at least one member of the Cabinet that there was an oversupply of lawyers.

The assessment of quality

'Quality' and 'economic efficiency' have become the buzz words of the 1980s and 1990s, but the terms of reference of the discipline reviews do not attempt to define them, except as might be inferred from the list of issues to be covered. The Pearce Committee noted in its Report (Pearce 1987a: lviii) that its task was made difficult inter alia 'by the absence of criteria against which the issues to be reviewed should be judged', and although it

attempted to ascertain appropriate criteria from the published literature of the time, it felt obliged on occasions to express its findings in general terms and relied to some extent on 'the subjective assessment of the Committee members as to what is an appropriate standard of a law school'. The Report was virtually completed before the report for CTEC by Professor Bourke on *Quality measures in universities* (1986) was available, but the committee did not feel that Bourke's approach differed to any great extent from its own, and it recommended to CTEC that future reviews be more adequately briefed.

There is a considerable volume of literature on what constitutes quality in higher education, but the only agreement on its definition is that it is a complex concept. Williams (1986) observes that the discussions of 'standards' and the discussions of 'quality' are often confused and the danger is that narrow interpretations for example as based on performance indicators, will distort the activities of higher education institutions.

In an earlier Commonwealth enquiry into schools education, the Quality of Education Review Committee (Karmel: 1985), that Committee considered the concept of 'quality of education' citing an OECD statement:

'..... for some it appears to serve as a synonym for excellence or efficiency, others use it as a metaphor for good educational practice and others again equate it with material provision. For many it is no more than a shorthand way of expressing value discontent with the present outcomes of education while covering up a lack of cogent policies and priorities for action.... Quality will always remain a subjective entity' (Karmel 1985: 3).

The Karmel Committee took the view that the assessment of the quality of education depends on the selection of relevant elements (that make up the educational system), the assessment of the character of these elements, and the weighting given to their relative importance, and concluded that the assessment of quality in education is both complex and value laden.

Quality in the discipline of law

The Pearce Committee was specifically asked to consider and make recommendations on the nature and quality of courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, including continuing legal

education and training; and on the standards of teaching and research of the law faculties or departments and their teaching staff.

The Committee made as thorough an investigation as it could within the limitations of its resources. It did so by surveying the types of undergraduate courses available, the academic content of those courses, and their relationship to the requirements of the legal profession. It also gave substantial weight to the results of a survey of recent law graduates on their perceptions of the relationship between their courses and their work as lawyers or otherwise. This survey was conducted by a commercial market research organisation and funded on the initiative of the Committee by the Law Foundations of New South Wales and Victoria. The survey was intended to provide a representative view of recent law graduates from all law schools (other than those in Tasmania and Queensland which could not be surveyed) on the nature and quality of the legal education they received.

The results of the survey are set out in Table 5.12 of the Report (Pearce 1987a: 166), reproduced as Appendix II to this paper.

The survey required the respondents to indicate whether they agreed with a number of statements commenting on their law school's performance and acceptance of those responsibilities. The statements are generalisations, and with one exception, do not go directly to quality, but to the course content or educational outcomes. The responses to these statements reflect subjective evaluation, and an assessment of quality might be inferred from the responses.

For example, most of the respondent graduates (as a percentage of all respondents) were satisfied that the course they undertook gave a good general education (65 per cent), was intellectually stimulating (66 per cent) and provided a broad framework for professional development (57 per cent). However, 63 per cent agreed that the course did not adequately relate theory to practice, and 55 per cent would have liked a larger clinical component. But the responses to each statement varied between law schools, with graduates of the older 'traditional' law schools being generally less satisfied than graduates of the newer (established in 1964 or later) law schools.

Those responses provided the Pearce Committee with data to reflect on the quality of courses, but while their commentary provides a comprehensive overview of the nature of undergraduate courses offered

at that time, it does not make any real assessment of the quality of course content in a broad educational sense.

In terms of teaching, 70 per cent of respondents found the quality of teaching generally good, a specific assessment of quality. Further, 62 per cent regarded teaching methods as generally satisfactory, and 53 per cent found teachers were available and approachable. But only 28 per cent considered their law school took a genuine interest in students' educational needs. Again, standards were seen to vary greatly between the older law schools and the newer ones.

The Pearce report devoted a chapter to 'Teaching practices', which reviewed teaching methods, class sizes, resources available, teaching materials, assessment practices, teaching allocations and loads, and the training of law teachers, and methods in use to evaluate teacher performance. The methodology for the assessment of quality of teaching appears to be limited to the graduate questionnaire, and a questionnaire sent to each law faculty which sought information about such factors as class sizes, teaching hours, teaching methods, and skills teaching. In addition, some reliance was placed on a 1982 student questionnaire.

Another chapter on 'Research and publications' reviewed research activities in law schools, factors affecting research productivity and the forms and directions of research. The assessment of quality of research was undertaken from consideration of each law school's annual report on research, and information from law deans about funding and resource allocation, promotion of and impediments to research, and the nature and forms of legal research. The Pearce Committee noted that the nature of the discipline of law distinguishes it from other disciplines in its teaching and research methods (Pearce 1987e 48). Research is largely undertaken as a prerequisite to teaching, in that legal research is concerned with updating knowledge about the law in the light of new developments, in analysis of the effects of the law in a relation to an issue or a set of facts, and in relation to issues of law reform. While it is not limited to the teaching function in law faculties, the quality of research will be reflected in the quality of teaching.

Connell (1991) is critical, taking the view that the Pearce Review establishes the conditions under which teaching and research is conducted in law faculties but that it says little about the quality of teaching and research. However, the Pearce Committee did make specific criticisms of the standards and approaches to teaching in some law schools, and made

recommendations to CTEC as well as suggestions to those law schools, as to ways in which performance in teaching might be monitored or improved.

The assessment of economic efficiency

Similarly, CTEC gave no guidance on the measure of 'economic efficiency' and the Pearce Committee was advised to take as 'given' the level of public funding provided to higher education and to review their task 'not only as a means of addressing inadequacies but also as a means of accounting for how savings could be made through redistribution of existing resources' (Pearce 1987a: liv).

Concurrently with the first discipline review, CTEC had commissioned a *Review of the efficiency and effectiveness in higher education* (CTEC 1986) which was to inquire into utilisation of resources in higher education, the potential for better utilisation of those resources, means of improving the flexibility and responsiveness of higher education institutions to meet the requirements of economic growth, steps to improve the delivery of courses and to reduce duplication, and measures to monitor performance and productivity in higher education.

That Committee defined 'efficiency and effectiveness' in the following terms:

'An efficient system is one which enables given outputs to be met at the lowest possible level of cost. However a system which is efficient in this sense will not be worth much if what is achieved is only of limited value. Hence the effectiveness of a system -- the extent to which output achieves specified objectives -- is also important. The phrase 'efficient and effective' is thus used to mean the achievement of the best or most desired outcome, as economically as possible' (CTEC 1986: 1).

But the desired outcomes of higher education will be different for different interests -- the individual student, the institution and its academics, the ultimate employers of graduates, and the Government all have different expectations of these outcomes, representing a range of

personal, institutional and national objectives. Since there is a variety of objectives, there can be no simple criteria or timescale for measurement.

Unfortunately, the results of the CTEC review were also unavailable to the Pearce Committee until it had virtually completed its review, and again it had to resort to its own subjective view of how to assess economic efficiency. In doing so, it was very conscious of the tensions between the role of a funding body and the traditional autonomy of the universities to regulate their own activities.

The Pearce Committee was required to review 'economic effectiveness' in relation to two requirements in its terms of reference:

- B(5) -- the effectiveness of resource utilisation and the extent of unnecessary duplication in administration, funding, staffing, provision of places for students, accommodation, equipment and other resources, facilities and services, including library; and
 B(6) -- current deficiencies and ways in which they may be overcome, without measuring the provision of resources available to tertiary institutions overall'.

The Committee devoted several chapters of its report to this aspect of the survey, attempting to draw attention to and make suggestions to overcome deficiencies which could be remedied through greater efficiency, application or inventiveness within existing constraints. It was obvious to the Committee, however, that there were areas of deficiency, for example in the provision of more intensive small group teaching, skills training or the provision of more electives which law schools were unable to remedy because of the inadequacy of their resources, particularly accommodation and library. The facts indicated that, at the time of the review, law schools received the lowest level of EFTSU per capita funding, had the highest student:staff ratio in any discipline, and very low levels of funding support for equipment, research and non-salary items. The Committee noted that, to some extent, it was the responsibility of parent institutions rather than the law schools alone, to address this issue:

'Law is never likely to become an expensive discipline, but there has been a failure in some institutions to ensure that law is adequately funded to be able to meet at least the basic standards of a modern legal education. That leads to the type of result for some

law schools that is reflected in the survey of graduates' (Pearce 1987e: 67).

The Committee drew a correlation between the levels of funding institutions gave to their law schools and the rates of satisfaction recorded in the graduates' survey, and observed that the University of Sydney which received the lowest levels of satisfaction in all respects of the survey, was 'the most glaring example' of its concern.

The Committee also recommended to CTEC that it recognise the urgent need for increased research, equipment, accommodation and library funding in specified universities.

Responsiveness to community needs

A definition of the scope of 'community needs' may be inferred from those issues cited in the terms of reference which were to be considered and recommended upon. In the case of the Law Discipline Review, these were:

'B(1) Appropriate aims and objectives for the provision of legal education in contemporary Australian society;

B(4) The contribution of the staff of law faculties and departments to law reform, the work of government, the profession and the community's welfare generally;

B(7) The community requirements for graduates through ascertaining to the extent practical, the occupational destinations and work of those who undertake legal education and training for the performance of that work'.

Aims and objectives of legal education:

The Pearce Committee commenced its Report with an analysis of the multi-faceted roles of law schools, and their activities. It provided an extensive discussion of the aims of legal education. Law faculties have to satisfy multiple objectives, and there is a tension between the educational requirements of law graduates to enable them to satisfy prerequisites for admission to practice as lawyers, and the general aims of a university undergraduate degree to provide a liberal education. Even for graduates

who do not intend to undertake legal practice, law schools must provide an intellectual basis for the way in which society regulates itself. The submission from the Australian Law Deans to the Pearce Committee emphasised the point :

'The discipline of law is a fundamental and very diverse discipline. Law deals with the way in which people, institutions and nations deal with each other. There is no part of human activity which is beyond the reaches of the law or legal analysis'.

and further, that:

'Law graduates who become politicians, academics, teachers, journalists, administrators or businessmen and women should also find their professional lives enriched to the extent that they have an understanding of the legal system' (Pearce 1987c: Appendix 3).

The Pearce report identified a need for legal education to move from traditional 'black-letter' law teaching to a more theoretical and practical approach: that is, to focus on the ultimate contextual application of the law in action, rather than the law itself. The point was underlined by Sir Zelman Cowen at the opening of a conference on legal education convened by the Law Council of Australia in February 1991:

'I take the general point affirmed by the Pearce Committee that a university law school is concerned to evaluate and to criticise the law, legal institutions and legal process, and ask them: 'what are you good for?', and to assess whether they should be changed. Accordingly, in the education of law students, it is desirable to cultivate a student's intellect in a spirit of enquiry and to encourage independent thought about the law' (Cowen 1991: 9).

In relation to graduate studies, the Pearce Committee commented that the number of students undertaking higher degrees by thesis in law at that time was numerically and proportionately low compared to other disciplines, but it had also noted that a major development was the establishment of Masters degrees and Graduate Diplomas by coursework. Its concern about these courses was their standard: it doubted whether all

law schools had thought through the purpose of graduate courses in developing perspectives at a level which would not normally be expected of undergraduate courses, and recommended a review of existing graduate programs by each law school of their standards (Pearce 1987e: 40).

Contribution to wider community needs

The Pearce Report found that the contributions of law faculty staff to law reform and the work of governments generally had been very substantial (Pearce 1987e: 52). These contributions had been made by staff as members of law reform bodies, as consultants to government agencies, as officers of secretariats of government bodies, as contributors to in-service training programs, and in the preparation of submissions to government bodies. Many others also contributed to community legal centres and community legal education, though this was done largely as individuals and not as representatives of law schools.

The Report noted however that this work imposed considerable burdens on the staff of law schools, to the extent that their own work was often disrupted, and to the extent that they were also subsidising the work of governments. The Committee suggested that law schools should publicise their work more, and should give consideration to negotiating arrangements for financial recompense for the value of staff expertise and reimbursement of expenses incurred.

Community requirements for graduates

The terms of reference required the Pearce Committee to enquire into the relationship between the content of law school curricula and its relevance to vocational employment after graduation. To some extent, these issues were canvassed by the Committee in its discussions on the aims and objectives of legal education. The Committee noted that its lack of resources did not enable it to pursue this issue in great depth (Pearce 1987e: 59): however, the survey of graduates did provide data relating to the employment of recent graduates, indicating that at that time, 92 per cent of those surveyed were employed; and of these:

- (i) 58 per cent worked as lawyers in private practice;
- (ii) 14 per cent worked as lawyers in industry, government or community legal services;
- (iii) another 13 per cent did work of an essentially legal nature; and

- (iv) 15 per cent were employed in work of a non-legal nature.
(Pearce 1987d/Appendix 5: 66).

As a commentary on the relationship between course content and later employment, 63 per cent of graduates responding to the survey considered that their courses 'did not adequately relate theory to practice', but as Pearce notes:

'This reflects the diversity and complexity of the task that law schools face. Law students have a range of different expectations about their future and what the law school ought to do for them. As graduates they occupy a wide range of positions and undertake many different kinds of work' (1987a: 201).

The Committee concluded that there was likely to be a continuing demand for places in law schools as a law degree was seen to provide a good general education as well as a qualification for legal practice.

The Committee suggested to all law schools, in relation to their aims, that they should

'examine the adequacy of their attention to the material and actual perceptives, including a study of the law in operation and the study of relations between law and other forces'

that is, they should design their courses to more closely reflect the law in context to the rest of society and to provide more generalised, practical skills, rather than concentration on substantive 'black-letter' law. The Committee was particularly critical of the law schools at the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne in this context, as a result of the responses of their graduates in the graduate survey.

Responses to the law discipline review

The responses to the review can be divided between those of the academic and professional legal community on the one hand, and the responses of government on the other. The immediate responses to the Report from academics were highly critical and defensive. Weisbrot (1990) reports:

'There was justifiable anxiety by academics that the dominant concern underlying the government's call for discipline assessment was parsimony rather than pedagogy. There was also an expectation, however, that a committee composed entirely of practising academics could basically be expected to be "friendly" to the discipline. [Instead,] the Pearce Report has been variously criticised as "trendy", "mediocre", lacking "perception, sensibility, intellectual grasp or analytical force", exhibiting a "deeply conservative bias" ... and "a dangerous mixture of research findings, hearsay, and arbitrary discretionary statements which ... can hardly qualify as an instrument for rational forward planning for the development of lawschools in Australia"' (Weisbrot 1990: 129).

The principal reasons for these reactions arise from specific criticisms in the Report to aspects of several institutions' law programs. In particular, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide Universities, as identified in the graduates' survey, were seen to offer poor quality programs for law undergraduates. Secondly, the Committee was dubious of the quality of some postgraduate offerings. Thirdly, the Review was undertaken at a time when the law school of Macquarie University was wracked by internal faction fighting among its academics, ironically over the directions of law school objectives which the Pearce Committee itself had commended. The Committee recommended that the law school at Macquarie should either be 'phased out' or 'reconstituted', and expressed concern that its courses were inadequate to meet professional admission requirements.

The Committee's findings and recommendations on these matters, and the methodology used to obtain the information which led to them, were highly criticised. In the wake of this widespread criticism, the more positive recommendations and findings of the Report were overlooked.

Several issues deserve comment. Weisbrot (1990: 129) contends that the Pearce Report is the first important review, and compilation of data, on Australian legal education. Previous and subsequent conferences on legal education have been conducted by the Law Council of Australia and by State Law Societies, reflecting the views of the practitioner and academic participants of those conferences, usually on aspects of the content of legal education. Some sociological surveys of lawyers on issues

such as gender participation in legal practice, destinations of graduates and the like, have also been conducted by Law Societies or independent researchers. However, none of these have provided the comprehensive review of legal education as it is delivered in higher education institutions, as was provided by the Pearce Report in response to its terms of reference.

Despite the initial adverse reactions by those universities who were criticised, the conclusion reached by the Pearce Committee that university legal education should change from its traditional 'black-letter' law approach ultimately drew more positive response. Sampford and Wood (1988) responded intellectually to the criticism by analysing why the theoretical dimensions of law had not been translated into the content and delivery of legal education, and suggested ways in which law school teaching could be improved.

Proponents of clinical legal education and the integration of practical and skills training into law school curricula, such as Nash (1991) have also found acceptance of their view that law schools should consider altering their curricula to provide a mix of theoretical and practical education. Many law schools would like to be able bring a more practical component to their courses, but for the older law schools in particular, the present level of funding makes this extremely difficult, if not impossible, as such programs require small group teaching with appropriate accommodation and staffing levels. Bond University, which is privately funded, set an example for the new style of law school by introducing aspects of skills training integrated with theoretical education, but its fee of \$12,000 per annum per student reflects the cost of providing such a mix. Some of the new law schools established since the Pearce Report, such as those at the University of Wollongong and Deakin and Newcastle Universities, have been able to incorporate skills and practical training elements into their curricula, as they have had the opportunity and establishment funding to plan their courses from a fresh start.

Despite the Pearce Committee's recommendations that no new law schools be established, the number has doubled since 1987 from 12 to 24. The new law schools have been established in response to student and employer demand for more places. Some have been able to build on existing business studies or legal studies programs, while others are entirely new. The newer law schools have two distinct characteristics which they have been able to introduce because they are new. Firstly, their

curricula in many instances incorporate social and practical context into programs; secondly, they deliver law as a second undergraduate course or as a post-graduate course, offering electives to meet new areas of demand such as commercial law, international law, resources and environment law and human rights law.

Government response to the Pearce Report was even less encouraging than the academic responses. The Report revealed a parlous under-resourcing of Australian law schools as they existed at the time of the review, and contrary to CTEC's expectations, the Committee found no evidence of waste, inefficiency or duplication of resources. It made several suggestions to law schools and institutions for some internal changes and re-allocation of resources, as ways of overcoming some of the deficiencies, but it also made recommendations to CTEC for additional funding for research, equipment and accommodation. Apart from some rescue funding to Sydney University, these recommendations were basically ignored. The reason probably lies in the directions government policy on higher education were taking at the time the Report was delivered.

Significant changes were wrought by the policies set out in the *White Paper* (Dawkins 1987), the thrust of which was that higher education was to be an instrument of economic policy. Funding was to be directed principally to education and training for 'the skills that contribute directly to the productive capacity of our economy'. Government priorities were engineering and technology, business studies and Asian studies (Dawkins 1987: 170). Legal education has since adapted to address these areas of economic activity, partly in the provision of undergraduate elective subjects, but increasingly in the development of user-pays specialist graduate diplomas and Masters degree courses.

The Pearce Committee's final recommendation to CTEC was that it should obtain reports from law schools and their parent institutions within three years as to what consideration had been given to their 'suggestions' and what changes had been made as a result to improve quality and cost effectiveness. The provisions of the White Paper reforms, with their own emphasis on institutional size and funding priorities, and the economic implications of supply and demand for educational 'product', including law graduates and course content, have by and large overtaken efforts to consider or review the implementation of the Pearce suggestions and recommendations.

Although the initial impact of the Pearce report has subsided with the passage of time, Weisbrot's assessment of its value as the first comprehensive review of legal education in higher education institutions remains. Much of its findings and data are still used to support submissions and commentary on legal education, or to illustrate the continued neglect of the Commonwealth in law school funding, and the consequent devaluing of legal services to the community generally. For example, the submission of the Law Council of Australia in June 1992 to the Higher Education Council's latest review into the quality of higher education complains:

'Years of inadequate funding are contributing to the growing decline of Australian law schools.... Failure to address this issue has serious, longterm adverse implications for the community and the economy. Australia will not be able to capitalise on the significant potential for export of legal education and the export of Australian legal services generally (currently estimated to be worth \$ 100 million per annum) Upon the quality of our law degrees over the next twenty years will depend not only the quality of legal services provided to our clients, but the quality of advice given to our legislatures and the quality of the judges' (LCA 1992).

Conclusions

Finally, one might ask whether the discipline reviews have had any lasting effect or value.

Connell (1991) doubted that the methodology of the four discipline reviews he commented on in his paper effectively assessed the quality of teaching and research in those disciplines. He concluded more in sorrow than in anger that:

'It would have been of immense value to have a judicious, balanced and thorough assessment of the quality of teaching and research at Australian universities. Unfortunately, the review committees, regrettably, did not do that' (Connell 1991).

In February 1992, the then Minister for Higher Education, Mr. Baldwin rejected Connell's criticisms, claiming that each discipline review

undertook detailed assessments of the quality of teaching and research, drawing heavily on the views of academic staff, students, graduates and employers, and further noting that a report of the Higher Education Council (which had superseded CTEC) in 1990 concluded that the reviews had fulfilled one of their main purposes 'which was to encourage an attitude of self-appraisal within higher education institutions, which are now more receptive to the idea of performance assessment' (Baldwin 1992).

This suggests that the Commonwealth will discontinue the process of discipline reviews. However, it has now commissioned a series of evaluations on the impact of the discipline reviews and changes which have resulted in institutions in response to the recommendations and suggestions made by each review Committee, and of any unintended impact resulting from the reviews in the changing policy context.

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Appendix 1

EXPANSION RATES OF STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

TABLE 3.1
STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION, 1975 AND 1985

	Numbers		Change over period 1975 to 1985	
	1975	1985	Number	Per cent
UNIVERSITY				
Full-time	96,669	106,805	10,136	10.5
Part-time	42,194	51,528	9,334	22.5
External	8,891	16,484	7,593	85.4
TOTAL	147,754	174,817	27,063	18.3
ADVANCED EDUCATION				
Full-time	77,037	97,360	20,323	26.4
Part-time	39,980	68,759	28,779	72.0
External	8,366	29,112	20,746	248.0
TOTAL	125,383	195,231	69,848	55.8
TOTAL HIGHER EDUCATION				
Full-time	173,706	204,165	30,459	17.5
Part-time	82,174	120,287	38,113	46.4
External	17,257	45,596	28,339	164.2
TOTAL	273,137	370,048	96,911	35.5

FIGURE 3.2

STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION BY MODE
OF STUDY, 1971 TO 1985



[From "Review of Efficiency and Effectiveness in Higher Education", p. 76 - 77]

Appendix 2

TABLE 5.12: AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS ABOUT LAW COURSE X LAW SCHOOL (Percentages)

	Sydney	UNSW	Macq.	NSWIT	Melb.	Monash	ANU	Adelaide	WA	ALL
n*	303	230	140	33	287	355	140	184	75	1747
The course gave me a good general education	52%	73%	85%	81%	56%	77%	66%	48%	61%	65%
The course needed more solid legal substance	7%	15%	41%	3%	16%	17%	6%	21%	20%	16%
Course should have given more opportunity for specialisation	24%	11%	19%	13%	10%	17%	15%	15%	13%	16%
The course was intellectually stimulating	60%	78%	79%	91%	66%	68%	62%	56%	52%	66%
The law school took a genuine interest in students' educational needs	12%	49%	52%	78%	16%	28%	32%	21%	16%	28%
The course was mostly rote learning	59%	8%	4%	3%	25%	21%	26%	29%	44%	27%
Course gave me a broad framework for professional development	43%	67%	65%	84%	55%	59%	59%	54%	56%	57%
I'd have liked a (larger) clinical component	53%	56%	46%	36%	55%	67%	47%	48%	50%	55%
The course stimulated me to think about social/political/ethical issues	17%	52%	82%	42%	22%	30%	21%	35%	25%	33%
The teachers were available and approachable	40%	76%	79%	91%	33%	53%	62%	49%	39%	53%
The quality of teaching was generally good	67%	81%	78%	97%	64%	72%	76%	62%	45%	70%
Teaching methods were generally satisfactory	44%	84%	86%	94%	51%	64%	65%	55%	50%	62%
Methods of assessment were generally satisfactory	41%	85%	79%	84%	55%	66%	69%	68%	53%	63%
The course did not adequately relate theory to practice	70%	48%	36%	19%	74%	68%	62%	71%	75%	63%
The course was too long	9%	14%	7%	9%	9%	22%	9%	7%	9%	12%

* Minor variations in number of respondents answering each subsection of the question.



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