

comparisons with other nations in our economic peer group.

(iii) Thirdly, recommending to the Commonwealth Government the block funds which the Commonwealth might offer to the States (whether on a total funding or shared funding basis, according to the political ideology of the day) for expenditure at the discretion of the States on the whole package of post-secondary education, with the expectation that the States would be strongly influenced by the published national guidelines. Significant departures from these guidelines might be the subject of *post hoc* commentary by the Commonwealth body in later published analyses, and recommended grant levels might be amended accordingly.

And that, broadly speaking, would be the end of it. The remaining coordinating functions would fall to the State bodies, which can quite effectively distribute funds, determine priorities, monitor awards (to the declining extent that that is necessary), ensure diversity (how one yearns for the day when diversity will actually have to be **encouraged** in higher education — the public is convinced that there is far too much diversity now), facilitate student transfer, and rationalise institutions.

Apart from representing an acceptable manifestation of cooperative federalism in action, the above division of coordinating responsibilities would result in some immediate economies and administrative reforms.

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I should like, before concluding, to make at least brief reference to the role of a body which receives scant attention in discussions of this kind. This is the Australian Education Council, which meets once or twice a year and is comprised of the Ministers for Education from the States and the Commonwealth. With the current establishment of a full-time secretariat for the Council, and the reform of its standing committee of permanent heads of the various educational bureaucracies so

that all sectors of education are more properly represented, I believe that a new era has been entered, in which the Council can be used as a more effective means of bringing consistency and order to Australian education without recourse to the offensiveness of coercive federalism. In this connection, one can see it developing along similar lines to the Councils of Ministers of Education in Canada and West Germany.

I suggest, too, that even when the best form of coordination of post-secondary education has been established within the precepts of cooperative federalism, Australia will still lack something whose absence attracted the comment of the North American group of educators who visited Australia last year under the auspices of the International Council for Educational Development. There does seem to be a need for a national body — perhaps only small — which can stand independently of the governments and the established educational bodies and make a sustained study of where post secondary education — even *all* education — ought to be some 15 or 20 years hence. A detached, long-range and continuing view is badly needed.

Finally, you will have noted that I have made no reference to the aftermath of expansion. Unless one is prepared to condone financial profligacy in expansionary times, the issues surrounding the coordination of tertiary education in a federal system are common both to periods of growth and to periods of decline. A greater urgency is lent to the need for good decision-making structures during the latter, that's all. The great test of our systems is how well they maintain their checks and balances and how successful they are in keeping the really difficult decisions about the balance of funding in education out of the realm of sheer politics. If you wanted me, as an act of concluding devilment, to suggest a litmus test to apply to assess which way we are drifting in the months to come, you might keep a desultory eye on the inner city colleges of advanced education in Sydney and on Casey University.

## FEDERAL INTERVENTION IN AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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*This is a preliminary draft of a paper to be published in 1979 in D. Smart and G.S. Harman (eds.) Federal Intervention in Australian Education (Australian International Press.) It was delivered in this form at a Workshop at the Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Perth, 1978.*

I should like to clarify two things immediately, namely:

- I am speaking from my individual view of the role of the State coordinating authority, and more particularly of its Chairman, and not on behalf of the Western Australian Post Secondary Education Commission or of the Government; and

- I believe strongly in States' rights and I believe that the continuing intervention of the Commonwealth Government in post secondary education along present lines will become increasingly dysfunctional.

One might well ask why such strong concern should be expressed in a country of little more than 12 million people when much bigger countries such as England and much bigger jurisdictions within countries — such as in the United States and, to a degree, Canada, have introduced a greater degree of centralism in the planning and coordination of post secondary education and appear to be reasonably satisfied with the result. I can only speculate about those reasons, but one factor might be that in the countries mentioned there is a much stronger tradition of local participation in educational decision-making and hence perhaps there is a greater degree of checks and balances when centralism becomes the increasing mode of operation. Be that as it may, I hope that the case I shall make will stand on its own feet.

It can be demonstrated, I believe, that centralism is increasing, and this despite the statements being made about the new Federalism, and despite tentative attempts by the Tertiary Education Commission to hand back some authority for decision making to State coordinating authorities. As a result of recent reports centralism may well increase within State jurisdictions as well as within the Federal one. This does not make the principle any more palatable, even though it may be necessary to agree that some centralism is inevitable under present circumstances.

I would be happier about writing this paper if I had not read Ron Parry's paper entitled: "Coordination in the Federal System" given earlier this year in Canberra. He has pre-empted some of what I should like to say — particularly by way of introduction. Parry draws attention to the coercive Federalism period introduced by Prime Minister Whitlam at the 1973 Premiers' Conference and Professor Russell Mathews' definition of that as a system "marked by centralisation of power, unequal bargaining strength and distortion of priorities at lower levels of government". Parry also points out the difference in theory implied in the policy statement of the Liberal and National Country parties in September 1975 which stated —

*The Coalition Parties are convinced that national objectives can be fully asserted and social reforms achieved and maintained with a more selective use of such grants and without heavy handed interference and duplication of functions.*

*Many of the existing Section 96 grants are now part of well established and universally accepted programmes within the States. Moneys for such programmes could be transferred to general purpose revenue reimbursements and ultimately absorbed in the States' Income Tax Revenue.*

And, again, the statement says —

*Indeed, Section 96 will be used as it was originally intended it should be used, namely to make grants to the States for special purposes and not to make inroads into the constitutional responsibilities of the States.*

As I have maintained already in this paper, and as Ron Parry fears also, there has been little evidence in the past two years of any progress towards decentralisation of authority. Unfortunately the evidence points the other way, as I shall attempt to demonstrate later.

### What are Planning and Coordination All About?

For purposes of this discussion I need simply some broad headings to indicate the kind of tasks and activities involved and on which I can then anchor a discussion of Commonwealth and State relationships. Again, I have had some recourse to Ron

Parry's paper in which he quotes Grant Harman's 'Taxonomy of Coordination' published in his occasional paper No.3 for the Anderson Inquiry in South Australia and then goes on to add several other tasks to the Harman list. For my purposes I prefer a much simpler list leaving a number of the tasks mentioned by Harman and Parry to be considered more as the implementation stage. I suggest, therefore, that planning and coordination in post-secondary education are concerned with the following:

- establishing an overall philosophy for the post-secondary education system;
- planning broad goals within that philosophy;
- checking on diverse community needs, but only to set the framework within which overall goals may be adapted or implemented;
- determining priorities;
- allocating funds;
- monitoring the quality of programmes and of awards; and
- setting the framework for evaluation and feedback.

There are of course many other tasks but I would suggest that they fall in to the implementation stages. Examples would be:

- questions of transfer of students between sectors and institutions
- concern about the size and nature of particular institutions
- questions of rationalisation and equity

However, I repeat again that I am using the list of tasks outlined above as simply a way to lead into a discussion on what are the respective roles of the Commonwealth, the State and the institution.

If we look at the tasks listed above, there is not one in which the Commonwealth can claim either the exclusive responsibility or the major expertise. Take the first one, for example, which is concerned with the development of an overall philosophical framework. There is a tendency by the Commonwealth to talk about **Commonwealth** policies, or the **Commonwealth** approach, whereas in fact what are demanded here are national policies developed by cooperative effort between those concerned. On all the other tasks a strong case can be made that the Commonwealth should at best be a partner in the decision-making and that on most of those tasks the expertise in the way of detailed information and real knowledge of the situation will belong to the State and its institutions.

The attitude of the Commonwealth appears to be dictated almost entirely by the fact that it is in a position of finding the funds and, for universities and colleges, all the funds at that. The extent to which officials talk about 'our money' or 'we provide

the funds, why shouldn't we have a say in it?' is rather remarkable. The insensitivity of the Commonwealth is well shown in the Tertiary Education Commission *Report for the 1979-81 Triennium*, Volume II (pp 153/154). The Advanced Education Council, in talking about the proposal for devolution of responsibility for funding, advises the Commission as follows:

*C.87 The Advanced Education Council, however, advises that in its view the responsibility for making recommendations to the Commonwealth Government on allocations of recurrent funds for individual institutions should remain with the Commission. This will ensure the balanced and coordinated development of the provision of tertiary education in Australia, which, under its Act, the Commission is charged to promote.*

*C.88 . . . The Council is conscious, however, that the provision of funds for particular colleges or groups of colleges, Commonwealth policies and priorities, must continue to be taken into account. The basis on which funds are provided to like type colleges, irrespective of State boundaries, must be as equitable as possible. It is the Council's intention that this principle be pursued. The Commonwealth Government, for its part, must be satisfied that funds are dispersed on a basis consistent with its stated policies for higher education. Matters such as the provision of tertiary education in non-metropolitan regions, the preparation of teachers for non-Government schools and the appropriate level of provision of specialised courses are issues which are significant in this regard.*

The assumption of power is quite remarkable. The imposition of uniformity in funding for colleges irrespective of State views and the emphasis upon Commonwealth policies and priorities rather than national policies is very evident and sufficient to illustrate the points being made. Other evidence will be documented later.

One of the key decision-making areas is that related to the introduction of new courses. It represents part of major planning and coordinating tasks. Institutions and State coordinating authorities spend many hours developing courses and subjecting them to rigorous scrutiny. Yet they can be overturned very quickly at the Advanced Education Council after a very much briefer and less informed scrutiny and, even if they survive the Council, they can then be denied by the Tertiary Education Commission. This raises neat questions about the individual prejudices of particular members. At the present time major course proposals from universities falling outside of approved

teaching activities go through somewhat the same route at the Commonwealth level, being forwarded directly to the Universities Council for consideration.

The Tertiary Education Commission in the Volume II Report already quoted states as follows:

*1.57 Given the almost static position of University and Advanced Education enrolments and the need to consolidate course offerings, particularly in the Advanced Education sector, the Commission will be reluctant to permit the commencement of a new teaching activity in 1979 or 1980 unless there are strong reasons for its introduction and it is related to the particular institution's existing activities.*

Yet the world goes on, and changes in knowledge and occupations are occurring even more rapidly than ever. Changes in courses (perhaps not always in teaching activities), but nevertheless major changes, need to be followed up constantly. There seems to be a feeling that because enrolments are stabilised and financial support is being decreased all other developments should be stabilised also.

Many other examples could be given — if necessary task by task — to illustrate the hiatus that exists at the moment between Commonwealth and State authorities. Institutions are often caught in the squeeze. It is hard for a State authority to advise institutions how to go about planning courses, for example, when there is little indication what will get approval from the Commonwealth and what may be refused on the grounds that it is necessary to set up an inquiry to establish a national policy. Admittedly, within a State jurisdiction, institutions can and do accuse State authorities of being insensitive also. At least the face to face interaction holds out much greater prospects of resolving these issues in an atmosphere of some understanding, if not always agreement.

I turn now to some indication of more particular trends to try to illustrate further the major thesis that have made already.

#### **An Increasing Degree of Centralism**

There is ample evidence to support the view that centralism is increasing despite all the protestations that it is not, and despite some active efforts being made by the Tertiary Education Commission in particular to devolve authority on certain matters. As Ron Parry points out in the paper already cited, the very existence of the Commission and three statutory Councils encourages centralisation and duplication. Other examples that could be taken from recent events include the *Study Leave Report* prepared by the Tertiary Education Commission, the approach taken to teacher education resources

as illustrated in Volume II of the *TEC Report for 1979-81 Triennium* and certain comments in the recently published Sax Committee Report on Nursing Education.

The Study Leave Report, of course, imposes a number of restrictions on the autonomy of institutions to use their resources as they see fit, and proposes to establish a monitoring system to make sure that institutions conform.

With respect to teacher education, the Tertiary Education Commission really excels itself. On page 43 it says:

*The Commission expects institutions and State Authorities to plan for permanent reduction in the volume of resources devoted to teacher education; it would not wish institutions to develop additional teacher education courses merely as a means of maintaining enrolments. In some cases, particularly in the College sector, reductions in the numbers and the size of institutions may be necessary.*

And on page 44 the Commission says:

*The Commission believes that Universities and Colleges should fill vacancies in teaching staff in Education only when the filling of such vacancy is essential to the proper provision of an existing course and then with temporary appointments; only in the most exceptional cases should a position be filled on a permanent basis.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*The Commission proposes to ask the Universities Council and the Advanced Education Council to monitor staffing in faculties and schools of Education to enable the Commission to keep a careful watch on the situation.*

There is not just a question of State autonomy involved here, but a direct threat to the autonomy of the institution itself. Surely only within an institution can the proper judgement be made as to the nature of an appointment to staff.

The most naked argument and an indication of how the circle has turned is given in the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Nurse Education and Training entitled: *Nurse Education and Training* published in August 1978. The Report moves into all aspects of nurse education, including that which is directly the responsibility of the State. On page 74 the Report says:

*10.20 Even though it could be said the Committee should not concern itself with matters that are entirely the responsibility*

of States, the view has been taken that comment is justified for two reasons. First, an impressive volume of evidence has been taken and the community should not be deprived of its analysis. Second, and of more direct significance, the Commonwealth pays 50% of the net operating costs of hospitals, including their schools of nursing.

The recommendations that follow would affect drastically State departments of Health and State hospitals and it should be remembered also that this Committee was established by the Commonwealth with four representatives of the Minister for Health and four representatives of the Minister for Education and two nominees of the Hospital and Allied Services Advisory Council. Its Chairman was also appointed by the Commonwealth Government.

### The Growth of Bureaucracy

As may be expected, many of the features of classical bureaucracy emerge in a system as complicated as the one which administers post secondary education in Australia. Some of the features which can be well documented are as follows:

- The gradual development of bureaucratic machinery and complicated procedures for obtaining approvals;
- The tendency to delay proposals which are somewhat different from normal, either by just losing it in the machinery or in the case of course proposals by delaying a decision until a policy for Australia has been developed;
- A tendency to apply blanket policies to Australia as a whole without regard to the particular circumstances of States or situations within States;
- The increasing power of permanent officers and the involvement of specialists, say, from the Department of Finance in the procedures; and
- The readiness to impose demands for information and decision making requiring rapid responses in contrast to the delay in responding to State proposals.

The above may sound like sour grapes but in fact there are sufficient examples to document them. A delay in finalising the 1978 Budget for the advanced education sector in Western Australia from December 1977 to the current period, less than two months before the end of the academic year, is one example. The turning down of proposals for courses of the liberal arts type in teachers colleges for diversification until the whole thing can be examined for general policy development is another example, and so the list can go on. It may be that this is an inevitable feature of bureaucratic organisations and the accusation has been made often with justification that the same thing applies within the States. The involvement of the Commonwealth adds those extra levels.

### The Attitude Towards the Sectors

The responsibilities of the Western Australian Post Secondary Education Commission (with one qualification) are the same with respect to Universities, Colleges of Advanced Education and technical institutions. Because of the very different ways of working within each sector, as far as the Commonwealth is concerned, the State Commission has to adopt very different policies and procedures. While this is in part a result of history and in part the result of State legislation so that the Commonwealth cannot be held entirely responsible, nevertheless for a State coordinating authority with responsibilities across more than one sector, complications ensue. Planning and coordination within a State surely requires that all post secondary education institutions have a common meeting point with the coordinating authority. While most of the procedures do and should depend on goodwill and a desire on the part of the institutions to work for the good of the system as well as for themselves, frustrations can and do occur and coordination is often inefficient. As indicated above, the Commonwealth involvement accentuates the situation rather than causes it.

### Stopping and Starting

Surely nothing can have been more disturbing in recent years than the uncertainty which has surrounded the planning and implementation of post secondary education. The dramatic and traumatic events of 1973-74 set off an era of uncertainty from which the country has not yet recovered. It would surely have been better to have a more gradual developmental phase rather than the stop/start situation that has prevailed in recent years.

It may well have been that because of the circumstances attached to economic development, or lack of it, the States would have found themselves in a similar kind of situation. Undoubtedly some restriction of growth would have been inevitable, yet it seems apparent that the involvement of the Commonwealth made it much worse. It is my opinion that greater control of planning within the State and, therefore, much better face to face interaction between the institutions and the Commission on the one hand and the Commission and Government on the other, might have avoided some of the unnecessary excesses of action and reaction that have taken place.

The difficult circumstances of recent years themselves possibly contributed towards the increase in more restrictive procedures. Nevertheless it is true that in the early days of Commonwealth involvement, particularly in the second half of the sixties, the Commonwealth committees took much more of a stimulatory role — in some

States more than in others. The past five years have certainly seen the emergence of a regulatory role.

### Accountability

One of the difficulties that emerges from the present system is knowing who is accountable for what. An institution is left to some degree in limbo. On the one hand it operates under State legislation. On the other, colleges and universities obtain their finance and a great deal of their instructions from the Commonwealth Government. Quite apart from any crunch situations which may arise, the general atmosphere of uncertainty seems to be dysfunctional. In these days when the emphasis is upon accountability, and when we need to work very hard at it in a sense of professional commitment and with as much institutional autonomy as possible, I believe that the whole situation leaves something that is sadly lacking.

### Final Comments

The present Commonwealth/State relationships are very confused, to say the least. Some of the difficulties that emerge for Commissions and permanent staff are very much a result of the uncertain political situation. There is certainly no guarantee that many of the difficulties would not arise within a State if the State coordinating authority is not highly

sensitive to the relationships involved and to the basic principles that are important to institution health and vitality.

Similarly, it is accepted that a return to complete State responsibility for post secondary education seems unlikely, since opposition exists in some States and certainly in many institutions. Probably the whole university sector at least would prefer the present arrangement, and certainly many colleges would do so too. It is necessary in my opinion, however, to try to work towards some solution of the problem which is positive and not just an uneasy compromise. I believe with good will that it can be done.

As a final comment on the present state of affairs, I draw your attention to the rash of formal inquiries which have been considered necessary because the existing planning and coordinating machinery must be regarded as inadequate to cope with the situation. These have occurred at the Commonwealth level (Williams, Auchmuty, Sax) and in the majority of the States (Partridge, Anderson, Partridge again and Carney). The list is by no means complete. Surely serious questions must be raised about the adequacy of the present Commonwealth and States' procedures and relationship if we can only solve our problems by major interventions of this type.