

STAFF EXCHANGES: A FLEXIBLE APPROACH

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'Between the State University of Euphoria (colloquially known as Euphoric State) and the University of Rummidge, there had long existed a scheme for the exchange of visiting teachers...'

In its triennial report for 1982-4, the Tertiary Education Commission (as it then was), called for a 'degree of flexibility and responsiveness' in staffing policies in universities to meet the changing academic demands of the 1980s.² The Commission endorsed the Universities Council's recommendations on flexibility, and made the following statement:

There are, however, some (staffing policies) which the Council considers might be given greater emphasis. These include the increasing use of secondments between tertiary institutions and staff exchanges with the private sector and public authorities. The sharing of staff between universities and other employers could be used to greater advantage. While there are many obstacles to such arrangements, the principal one being superannuation, further scope exists for universities to explore them more actively.³

FIGURE 1 A HYPOTHETICAL BILATERAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMME

	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4	Period 5
Institution A					
Away	Historian	Physicist	Physicist	Economist	Philosopher
Visiting	Historian	Philosopher	Physicist	Physicist	Mathematician
Institution B (mirror image)					
Away	Historian	Philosopher	Physicist	Physicist	Mathematician
Visiting	Historian	Physicist	Physicist	Economist	Philosopher

FIGURE 2 A HYPOTHETICAL MULTILATERAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMME INVOLVING THREE INSTITUTIONS

	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3
Institution A			
Away	Historian	Administrator	
Visiting	Physicist	Biologist	2 Educationists
Institution B			
Away		Lawyer	Educationist
Visiting	Historian	Administrator	
Institution C			
Away		Biologist	Educationist
Visiting	Physicist	Lawyer	

FAUSA policy has supported academic exchanges in preference to other means of achieving flexibility, such as the multiplication of short-term contracts favoured by some institutions and recent reports. At Deakin University, the Deakin University Academic Staff Association (DUASA) has long campaigned in favour of measures to increase staff flexibility, and a series of proposals which it put forward in 1979 were eventually taken up by a University Working Party on Flexibility, on which DUASA was represented. The Working Party reported in 1981 and among its recommendations was the setting up of mechanisms to facilitate staff exchanges. This eventually became University policy.⁴

A staff exchange scheme is now well established and the authors of this paper were two of the earliest participants. In what follows, we set out in general terms some of the types of staff exchanges which are possible, listing their characteristics, advantages and drawbacks, from the points of view of the institution and the members concerned. This is followed by a more personal report on the exchanges we undertook, and though neither of us is a David Lodge, we hope to demonstrate some of the flavour of two rather different exchanges. Our conclusions point to the overall value of these exchanges, suggest various extensions of the scope of exchanges and invite debate on the issues raised.

Programme Types

Two general types of staff exchange schemes seem possible. The first, and perhaps the easier to operate, is of the bilateral variety i.e. either between two universities, or between a university and another employer. The second is multilateral and might involve several universities and other organisations in the exchange of personnel. This type while potentially offering a wide range of benefits to participating individuals and institutions may involve significant co-ordination.

In both classifications one could conceive of exchanges of the 'carbon copy' variety, i.e. academics in the same discipline, exchanges between academics in quite different discipline areas, or even exchanges between academics and administrators. Exchanges might occur simultaneously. Alternatively they may have some overlap of presence by participants in each location, or they may be totally overlapping in each location.

The configuration in Figure 1 illustrates how a bilateral scheme might possess several of the above features, viz. a 'carbon copy' exchange between historians in period 1, a 'carbon copy' swap between physicists in periods 2, 3 and 4 with overlap in each institution, between philosophers in periods 2 and 5 with overlap, and an interdisciplinary exchange in periods 4 and 5 between an economist and a mathematician.

A simple multilateral scheme involving three institutions operating over three periods is illustrated in Figure 2. For simplicity in this example no 'carbon copy' exchanges take place. As with the hypothetical scheme in Figure 1 there is a balance between staff on leave and visiting staff at each institution over the time in which the programme operates.

For multilateral schemes, and indeed for complex bilateral schemes, there would be a need for a 'balancing of the books' from time to time. During the currency of the scheme each institution in turn would face periods in which extra costs would be incurred for the temporary replacement of absent staff (a form of short-term contract which is acceptable to FAUSA). If there was a net deficit at the end of the accounting period this should be adjusted. Of course, at other times the institution would have the advantage of an extra member of staff at virtually no cost, assuming that participants remain on home payrolls. If exchangees were paid by receiving institutions, salary savings in periods of absence could be used for replacement staff and to offset extra costs when exchangees arrived.

Benefits

It is convenient to classify benefits into those flowing to institutions and those to individuals.

From an institutional viewpoint when staff are given the opportunity to operate in a new and different environment, their knowledge and teaching

expertise should be enhanced. Their home institution stands to gain from this upon their return. Non-participating staff members also gain from interaction with the visiting staff member. Students may benefit from a more cosmopolitan and varied learning environment.

Well planned exchanges can assist in matching staff workloads in participating departments. Where variations in student enrolments temporarily distort departmental workloads within a school or faculty, an exchange between staff in different discipline areas may alleviate the problem. This argument can similarly be applied between schools or faculties though implementation will usually be a more politically formidable task.

Benefits also accrue directly to the participants in a number of ways. An exchange may present the opportunity to depart temporarily from a job environment in which the staff member feels stale and is not performing at full potential. This may have arisen in part because of a perceived imbalance between academic and administrative functions by the academic concerned. A lecturer working continuously in a department over an extended period is likely to inherit significant administrative responsibility. As with other academic leaves, a staff exchange will remove administrative burdens. In a new environment more time can be devoted to academic pursuits.

Where exchangees have an interest in departmental administration, experience at another institution can be useful in a rather different way. By observing operations in a new environment they will be able either to suggest or implement new administrative measures or both when they return home.

Where universities of different sizes agree to exchanging staff another type of personal benefit is likely to arise. Staff from the smaller institution will appreciate the opportunity to move into a larger department with the associated intellectual stimulation which it usually involves. Lecturers from larger universities, in contrast, may enjoy a break from the 'pressure cooker' atmosphere to contribute to the quieter setting of a small department. When exchanges occur between universities and industry the opportunity to experience the alternative environment should be welcomed by both parties. The academic can observe the business world at first hand and appreciate the constraints faced by executives in operating firms in the present economic conditions. The executive has an opportunity to reflect on his or her business problems in a setting conducive to clear thinking, and to impart to students a first hand appreciation of the business environment.

Costs

From an institutional viewpoint the costs of supporting staff exchanges are relatively small. The

only cost in addition to a normal salary package which need be incurred to facilitate a programme's operation, is a contribution towards travel and relocation costs by participants.

An obvious strategy is to set such grants on a scale equivalent to those offered to participants in Outside Study Programmes. If a university wishes strongly to encourage international exchanges, however, more generous financial arrangements may be advisable e.g. complete coverage of all economy class air travel by the academic and her or his immediate family. Arrangements such as this might cost a university the equivalent of a month's salary per individual or a little more. Because of the effect of taxes, an individual would face a much greater burden in financing travel.

Programme Operation

There are several potential problem areas which must be addressed before a programme can commence successful operation. Staff exchanges probably have the best chance of working well if participants can live at the standard to which they are normally accustomed without financial embarrassment. This is more likely to happen if most of the following conditions hold:

- Costs of living are similar in participating locations.
- Salary levels are similar for participating academics.
- Participating institutions are willing to maintain superannuation arrangements, annual leave arrangements (if applicable) and other emoluments. This can be achieved without difficulty.
- Employers provide travel support to offset out of pocket expenses of participants and their families (mentioned above).
- Personnel involved are willing to exchange housing and motor vehicles. This requires flexibility from both parties. In international exchanges, particularly, neither the quality of housing and furniture nor of automobiles is always similar. There are, however, great potential cost savings from house and automobile exchange. Efforts to ensure that this occurs will enhance the overall success of exchanges.
- There are no dramatic exchange rate or salary fluctuations which adversely influence the effective salary levels of participants during the exchange period.

There are several additional factors which will help a programme to succeed:

- Universities and colleges taking part in an exchange are perceived to be of a similar quality. If this is not so participants from the 'superior' institution may be frustrated. Perceptions and reality sometime differ, of course, on this issue.

- Teaching years are similar. Where they differ, department heads should be willing to allow 'carbon copy' exchanges to commence during an academic year. This type of problem arises particularly when exchanges between countries in the Northern and Southern hemispheres are contemplated.

- Selected participants have the desire to adapt quickly to their new environment without difficulty.

- Staff responsible for programme co-ordination make advance arrangements to aid the adjustment of visitors and their families. Provision of information on schools, churches, recreation facilities, health services and so on will aid this process.

Two Exchanges

During 1982 two members of Deakin University undertook staff exchanges under the arrangements established by that institution. Philip Maxwell, Senior Lecturer in the School of Management, an economist, exchanged with a colleague in the United States, while Roy Hay, Lecturer in Social Sciences, an economic historian, went to the United Kingdom. This section deals with some personal responses to the exchanges trying as far as possible to draw out matters of more general concern.

Maxwell's exchange was of the 'carbon copy' variety taking place with Dr George A. Spiva, Professor of Economics in the College of Business Administration at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, from January to June, 1982.

Despite significant differences in the size of each school involved — 20 staff and 450 students at Deakin's School of Management compared with 130 staff and 6000 students in Business Administration at Tennessee — the exchange proceeded smoothly. The respective heads of department allocated duties to enable each visitor to operate effectively to pursue his major academic interests. Spiva, who specialises in Principles teaching, conducted the first unit in Deakin's on-campus Bachelor of Commerce programme. He received unanimous acclaim from students for his efforts. Additionally, he addressed off campus Master of Business Administration students and gave a series of lectures in other institutions with the School's blessing. Maxwell conducted second and third year classes to both large and small groups in Knoxville. He also devoted significant time to research interests in regional economics and macroeconomics. Staff in both institutions accepted the exchange in a positive way. Both recipients quickly adapted to their new environments.

The salaries of both recipients were similar, as were costs of living in Geelong and Knoxville. This enhanced the operability of each visit. Arrangements were mutually agreed on housing and use of motor vehicles. During the exchange period the

Australian dollar fell by about fifteen per cent against the United States dollar. While involving loss to the Australian and a windfall to the American, since both participants remained on the payrolls of their home institutions, the net effect was relatively minor.

A perceived advantage to Tennessee of an exchange programme is as a substitute for the lack of sabbatical entitlement for its staff. While Deakin has an established Outside Studies Programme, the School of Management faced difficulties in releasing staff during a phase of strong growth and development. The initial exchange clearly fulfilled the role of a sabbatical substitute.

During the first half of 1982, Roy Hay of the School of Social Sciences at Deakin University exchanged with Dr Ian Donnachie, Staff Tutor in History at the Scottish Regional Office of the Open University for a period of six months. This exchange had been under discussion for over a year, following a brief visit to Deakin by Dr Donnachie, while on study leave in 1980. The two participants were economic and social historians with overlapping, though not identical, teaching and research interests in the history of modern industrial societies. They both had experience of off-campus teaching methods and course preparation and had contributed substantially to a range of courses in their home universities. They also had direct experience of the institution to which they were going — Dr Donnachie through his 1980 visit while Hay had been a part-time tutor-counsellor at the Open University during 1975-77. Hay was born and educated in the United Kingdom. There were, of course, no language difficulties, familiarity with administrative procedures was easily established and both participants were able to become productive in course preparation and teaching with very little difficulty. Hay felt that he had been able to take up Dr Donnachie's pen and complete the sentence which his colleague had begun. This would not have been possible had one of the exchangees been from a conventional university, rather than one which operated in the off-campus mode.

Though no formal assessments of the exchange were conducted, it was felt that both exchangees and institutions had benefitted from the process. In the short run, new material, perspectives and ideas were incorporated in courses in preparation in the two universities. Systems which had become conventional were revitalised and it was possible for the participants to establish which of the problems each had been encountering were specific to the institution he had left, and which were common to off-campus Universities. Opportunities for future collaboration and the exchange of resources were established, though the full benefits from this will not be felt immediately. Each participant's research and teaching benefitted from the stimulus of a new group of colleagues, while, once initial apprehen-

sions about the loss of a known contributor were overcome, the existing members of the departments concerned appreciated the different approaches of the newcomer.

This 'carbon-copy' exchange proved relatively easy to accomplish. Participants were at the same point on the lecturer scales in the two countries, while salaries were not wildly out of line and exchange rate movements during the currency of the exchange were not dramatic. If they had been, then some form of cost supplementation by one institution might have to have been considered. By remaining on the home institution's payroll, problems of pay and superannuation were avoided. The domestic arrangements for the exchange which involved swapping houses, cars, and responsibility for services worked smoothly, thus removing a major potential source of anxiety. Time spent before the exchange in reaching agreement on all such issues proved to have been well spent. No major problems were encountered by either participant, either domestically or academically, nor did either of the institutions feel that they had suffered, while certain small, though tangible immediate benefits were obtained and the long-run gains from further activities set on foot during the exchange and the example set by a successful exchange should be of value for the future.

Conclusions

It would be unwise to generalise too much from only two successful exchanges but the personal experience of the participants tends to reinforce the major points raised in the earlier sections of this paper. The individuals concerned did gain most of the benefits outlined, while the costs, though significant, were tolerable. The institutions benefited from a modest expenditure and a relatively slight disruption of existing activities.

Some, though not all of the advantages of an exchange scheme can be obtained from the well tried activities of study leave or outside studies programmes. But exchanges allow for or encourage greater continuity, ensure greater institutional involvement and hence the possibility of more direct institutional benefits and ensure a greater equity between institutions over the life of a programme. For institutions which do not have a scheme of outside studies, exchanges can be an effective additional resource for the reasons already outlined.

Footnotes

1. D. Lodge, *Changing Places*, Penguin edition, London, 1978, pp 12-13.
2. Tertiary Education Commission, *Report for 1982-84 Triennium, Volume 1, Part 1, Recommendations on Guidelines*, AGPS, Canberra, 1981, p 230.
3. *ibid.*, Volume 1, Part 2, *Advice of Universities Council*, p 79.
4. Deakin University, *Administrative Guide*, Sections 4.8.1 and 2.