THE RATIONALISATION OF OFF CAMPUS STUDIES IN AUSTRALIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR FAUSA

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A History of Rationalisation

Rationalisation (and its cognates — mergers, amalgamation, collaboration, co-operation, consolidation) has been with us in the tertiary education arena for many years. It has been a leitmotiv since the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission Act of 1977. It has become clear that Federal governments unwilling to fund tertiary education adequately will look to rationalisation as a partial solution to some of their problems. It is clear from the Federal Government's response to CTECs 1985-87 Triennium Report that pressure will be kept up along the lines of subject reviews and co-ordination.

Particular stress is put upon national co-ordination of external studies courses.[1] Such specific concentration of attention requires that FAUSA prepare itself, and creating a policy is one necessary step.

Rationalisation first became a FAUSA concern with the Williams Report of 1979 on *Education, Training and Employment*[2] and CTEC's 1982-84 Triennial Report.[3] Initially, there was a great concern for rationalisation in the provision of teacher education, but the general thrust soon had implications for engineering, management courses, and clearly spelled out problems of university autonomy when it became clear that universities and CAEs would be pressured to co-operate or, indeed, to amalgamate. CTEC's Report for the 1982-84 Triennium also expressed alarm at the proliferation of external studies offered by the CAE sector resulting in course duplication and an inefficient utilisation of resources. There was a stress on the avoidance of duplication both within and between the university and CAE sectors. In regard to management education CTEC specifically recommended the phasing out of some operations in order to save resources and achieve higher education standards by the process of concentration of talents.[4]

The Johnson Report (1983),[5] part of CTEC's Evaluations and Investigations Programme, takes a very caustic look at the whole matter of rationalisation in external studies. Johnson points out that when over 40 tertiary institutions cater to only 40,000 external students the whole idea of economies of scale is illusory.[6] He speaks of a distinct lack of a national perspective in external studies. Whilst in both Victoria and Western Australia there were major reviews (in 1981 and 1982 respectively) of post-secondary external studies which suggested that there was a reasonable level of co-ordination within state provisions, Johnson points out[7] that national co-ordination is non-existent.[8] There is an over-provision in such areas as social sciences and humanities, and an underprovision in other disciplinary fields. This lack of co-ordination is the more problematic as, for Johnson like many other commentators, external studies ought to lend themselves to economies of scale and co-ordination.[9]

When it comes to recommendations, Johnson discusses a range of options rather than providing one specific plan to solve the co-ordination problem. Doing nothing, of course, is always one possibility. Creating one central institution to provide external studies for the whole of Australia is ruled out, in terms of institutional jealousies. CTEC itself, he argues, cannot run a co-ordinated scheme. There might be a National Institute of Open Tertiary Education to co-ordinate research, information, etc. Anwyl suggests that the debate has already shifted on from whether there should be a national body to exactly what powers that body should have and how it will connect with other institutions.[10] Not all would agree here: many look merely to an acceleration of the voluntary moves to collaborate that have begun (albeit cautiously) to appear within the states. 'Would it be possible for the providers to set up their own collaborative mechanism, or must something be foisted upon them from above?', Johnson asks, adding 'If they could do it, why have they not done it before now?'[11] Johnson's report concludes with his wish that CTEC will help fund the development of voluntary collaboration between autonomous institutions, but his final sentence suggests that we may well have a solution forced upon us if we cannot get our act together.[12]

The CTEC Report for the 1985-87 Triennium[13] suggests that, as a result of the redistribution of resources since the mid 70's, there are few areas left in tertiary education for rationalisation. The summary, in fact, does not specifically mention external studies and rationalisation, so one is not sure how much in the limelight the issue is. On the other hand, since the government is evidently not willing to fund its Program for Growth, it must be assumed that duplication, economies of scale, collaboration, subject reviews, etc., will continue to be central concepts in its handling of tertiary education issues. CTEC's summary does stress the necessity of more efficient usage of scarce resources and meeting the needs of the community; and it does state that these goals 'should be consistent with the maintenance of quality of output although they may not be consistent with some of the traditional aspirations of institutions or staff'.[14] Volume 1 of CTEC's latest Report does, however, note that Johnson has pointed out that considerable scope for rationalisation in external studies exists and suggests that the views expressed in the Johnson Report will be seriously considered when deciding upon allocation of funds.[15] The CTEC Report is happy that, in response to the Johnson inquiry, the major universities providing external courses have formulated plans to pool their course offerings. In the Federal Government's Guidelines to the Commission, such moves are encouraged.[17] CTEC's desire to see transfer arrangements instituted is applauded, and there is the promise[18] not only of subject reviews, but also a review of the whole sphere of adult and continuing education. The matter of provision and duplication in the external sphere is seen by the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs as involving not only universities and CAEs but also the TAFE sector.

Clearly the Federal Government is crystallising policies specifically with regard to external studies, and this is why it is important for FAUSA to prepare itself. It is not a problem that will go away, for whilst rationalisation is a problem in external studies, it is a problem only because external studies have grown so dramatically in the past decade. The Minister is well aware of the importance that external studies is assuming in tertiary education. One of the main thrusts of CTEC's 1985-87 Triennial Report is the matter of increased participation and equity, and the Minister is clear that this increased participation will not be a matter of conventional on-campus study. (Interestingly the 'Policy on Education' document released by the Liberal Party in May 1984 also stresses the importance of extending off-campus study to increase participation; indeed it advocates a national Open University.) She is also aware of the extent to which new technologies (satellites, microcomputers, etc.) have a direct bearing on educational access. External studies are most poised to keep up with the application of these technological developments.[19]

FAUSA and Rationalisation

In its supplementary submission to the National Inquiry into Education and Training,[20] FAUSA accepted, against the background of substantial growth in the tertiary education field, that 'moves towards better co-ordination between institutions and between sectors and "rationalisation" of resources are understandable'.[21] It also expressed grave concern about the infringement of institutional autonomy and about how the whole problem would be approached. It argued that an 'indiscriminate acceptance of "rationalisation and relevance" may compound rather than solve the problem'.[22] Whilst the extreme form of rationalisation — amalgamation of institutions in two sectors — was a leading concern, FAUSA expressed the fear that if the problem were not sufficiently understood and a range of alternatives looked at, moves to tidy up tertiary education might not take place on sound educational grounds, but merely as a cost-cutting exercise.[23] It hoped that co-operation would be the path chosen, acknowledging even then that there would be difficulties of cross-sectoral co-operation, given the different types of academic staff found in universities and CAEs.[24]

FAUSAs latest consolidated policy document[25] reflects our experience with the amalgamation issue. FAUSA opposes enforced amalgamations and deplores the absence of a coherent national policy for the tertiary area which sets out alternatives, grounds and goals.[26] FAUSA insists on a number of minimum conditions where amalgamations are concerned: consultation, preservation of existing rights and entitlements, funding to be provided by the Commonwealth, and so on.[27]

Amalgamation is only one form of rationalisation and amalgamation between a university and a CAE only one instance of this. As yet, FAUSA policy does not include any statement as regards the specific matter of the rationalisation of the off-campus field within tertiary education. Given recent CTEC and Federal Government pronouncements, it is important that FAUSA formulates a policy with regard to these general matters.

A Brief History of External Studies in Australia

External studies at tertiary level (originally referred to as correspondence studies and subsequently as distance education or off-campus studies) has existed in Australia for over seventy years. Before the First World War the University of Queensland was offering external studies. During the Second World War and immediately afterwards[28] there was a significant provision of correspondence education for service and ex-service personnel. Moreover, at that time, a significant level of interstate co-ordination was achieved and co-operative schemes between Australia and some Asian regions embarked upon. Such a state of affairs was not long-lived, however. In 1955, the University of New England (UNE) began offering external studies, largely in the area of teacher education. Unlike Queensland, where distance education was the function of a Department of External Studies, UNE adopted an integrated model whereby on and off campus students were taught by the same personnel. All universities in Australia which have subsequently engaged in off campus studies, have also adopted this model.[29] Macquarie early specialised in external science courses; Murdoch took over the external offerings of the University of Western Australia; in 1977 Deakin was founded with a specific rationale for the provision of external studies.

The integrated model involves problems of its own, but it is the Queensland model which, in a way, has established some general attitudes within academe towards external studies. Feelings about second rate education provided by an understaffed department lacking adequate facilities and professional

expertise were established.[30] However, it is important to realise that this general attitude is now out of date. Through the 70's an increasing sophistication characterised external studies offerings.[31] Partly because of the influence of the British Open University,[32] the need was seen for special expertise in the creation and delivery of external studies. Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education realised this in the late 1970's. Deakin now employs computer typesetting, counselling packages, professional editing and design work, media experts, team evaluation, instructional design and educational technology.[33] The expression 'correspondence education' — the sending out of duplicated lecture notes — is here totally inappropriate. It is important that those academics who have nothing to do with external studies know the current state of play and the sophistication which distance education can achieve.

This is not to say that all providers of distance education are staffed with the expertise or have the facilities which exist at Deakin. This is one of the problems and one of the grounds for rationalisation. Ortmeier reports of UNE at the end of the 1970's that quality and economy could not be expected where 290 courses were provided for a student population of 5,000; the more so where many academic staff revealed little interest in external teaching and resented non-academics interfering with their work.[34]

Today external studies providers come in all shapes and sizes with varying levels of proficiency in the creation of external studies materials. It is necessary to be aware of some of the significant landmarks in the history of this growth to appreciate the heterogeneity. The Murray Report of 1957, which was so significant in bringing the Federal Government into an active role in tertiary education, strongly supported external studies.[35] Nonetheless, the 1960's in Australia were a slack period so far as external studies were concerned. The Open University with its 'second chance' philosophy exerted an influence, but the main force in the early 1970's was the fall-off in conventional school-leaver enrolments to tertiary institutions. This led, particularly in the CAE sector, to a dramatic expansion of external studies;[36] in order to remain viable in difficult circumstances, to stave off the threat of closure, a large number of CAEs simply broadened their entry base by opening themselves up to off-campus students.[37] Quite rightly, the Government became alarmed at this proliferation. High quality distance education cannot simply be added to existing offerings; it does require special skills and operations. It is no wonder, then, that in the early 1980s when reviews of post-secondary education in Western Australia and Victoria were carried out, concern was expressed about the quality of many of these external educational programmes.

The 1970's were years of economic and social strains in Australian life which affected the development of distance education. In 1973, the Federal Government established a committee to inquire into Open Tertiary Education. It reported in 1974. Questions were already being asked about the costs of tertiary education and it was sensed that external studies provided greater access, and allowed for efficiency and co-operation. The committee opposed the establishment of a single institution specialising solely in distance education (like the British Open University), recognising that existing providers would strongly oppose such an idea. It recommended the development of offerings by a range of institutions and the establishment of a National Institute of Open Tertiary Education (NIOTE). The cut-back in education funding later in the decade meant that the idea of a National Institute of Open Tertiary Education was forgotten. Even though in its 1975 report on the 1976-78 triennium the Universities Commission expressed great support for open education,[38] again the general funding situation reduced the possibilities of some expected developments.

Paradoxically, through the steady state period in tertiary education, as conventional education became becalmed, as student enrolments failed to increase significantly, distance education experienced real growth. From 1975-80[39] university off-campus enrolments increased 50%; in the CAE sector for the same period, the increase was 135%; from 1971-80 in the CAEs[40] the percentage of students in external education rose from 2% to 12.9%. In 1981 there were five major university providers of external education (with the University of W.A., the University of Tasmania, and the University of N.S.W. being minor providers): of the five, 66.1% of the University of New England's students were external; Deakin 57.1%; Murdoch 36.1%; Queensland 14.8% and Macquarie 12%.[41] Altogether in the university sector in 1981 there were 15,575 external students representing 9.3% of the total student population. For CAEs there were 23,459 students, being 14.2% of the CAE student population. Thirty-five CAE sector institutions out of 69 were providing external studies — major providers being Capriconia, Darling Downs, Mitchell, Riverina, Warrnambool, Gippsland, RMIT and WAIT.[42]

In one sense that growth is what now confronts us in the form of a co-ordination problem. A number of institutions in the university and CAE sectors offer a range of external courses to a very small number of students; some institutions lack the specific staffing and technical facilities for providing external studies of the highest standard. In the university sphere there is a concentration on humanities, social sciences, teacher education and commerce subjects, with only Macquarie catering significantly for external science students. In the CAE sector there is a concentration on teacher education and business studies.[43] It is quite obvious that nationally there is substantial duplication in some subject areas and severe underprovision in others. It is also clear that the quality of offerings varies enormously between those institutions with expertise in external studies and those who lack it. The TAFE sector, in terms of student numbers, is by far the greatest provider of external studies. In 1979[44] the external TAFE enrolment was 47,182 students, representing 8.7% of the total. It should also be noted that, while there are 19 universities, in 1979 there were 200 TAFE institutions with over 900 annexes. Besides the relative sizes involved here, it is worthwhile recognising that the Federal Government seems to be looking on TAFE sector rather more favourably than on the other two post-secondary education sectors when it comes to funding.

Northcott is quite right[45] to claim that the reasons for the growth of distance education over the last decade are very complex indeed and by no means yet fully understood. They obviously include social, technological, psychological, demographic, political and pedagogical variables. One clear factor is the ageing of the Australian population and shifts in work/leisure patterns. External studies are particularly suited to mature age students. Especially with a growing sense of right of access to adult, recurrent, continuing education, the whole structure of the student population will change. Such access will be the more required as the pace of technological change increases, requiring periodic retraining for sections of the work force. It is fairly obvious that the geographically remote, and people with family and work commitments, can seize opportunities via external studies which are simply not there if conventional on-campus study is all that is available. It is significant that the 1985-7 Triennium CTEC Report, in emphasising greater equity and greater participation for the disabled, Aborigines, women, ethnic communities, people in the outer suburbs, etc., sees external studies as ideally suited to cater to this demand. The Report also sees how external studies can easily take advantage of new technologies.[46] More the pity, then, that it recommends no extra funds for distance education in the 1985-87 period.

There is another significant reason for the growth of distance education, and this is simply the increasing quality of that education. It might be regarded as a peculiar fact, given the association of correspondence education with vast distances, that in 1979 40% of off-campus students in Victoria actually lived in Melbourne.[47] Distance education is no longer a second class education; it is a form of education that is increasingly being chosen. It has, over the past decade, become a pedagogical system supported by specialised knowledge. Northcott is right[48] to say that besides solving the tyranny of distance, off-campus studies have also had to solve the tyranny of proximity — that is, they have had to win the credibility problem that external studies can be of high quality. Nowadays, this is becoming somewhat laughable. After all, in the traditional on-campus lecturing system, the majority of university academics have no training in how to teach, nor is their performance evaluated. By contrast, in a situation like that obtaining at Deakin, course materials are written by teams of academics who criticise each other's work. External criticism is also sought. Some courses are trialled on-campus before final production. That production not only involves the input of instructional design, it also involves editors, graphic artists, typesetting operations. Rather than feeling second-class citizens in the university world, one might well, with Deakin's Vice-Chancellor, invite conventional universities to see how much they could improve their teaching by seeing what has developed in the external studies field over the past few years.[49] This is not just in a technical sense either, for at the broadest level of educational philosophy, external studies could well be said to be leading the field. For many years the value of lectures has been doubted. External studies is essentially the provision of resources for learning. Much of the learning is self-paced and is self-instructional. There is much reason to think, given the heterogeneity of the student population nowadays, that the provision of a professionally produced learning package may well be the educational system of the future, and that in the year 2000 the conventional on-campus student sitting in a lecture room may be a rare bird indeed.[50] As Moran and Charlesworth put it 'distance education is not just a minor and ancillary mode of University education (a 'poor relation' of traditional on-campus education): rather, all the signs are that, in the next twenty years, it will increasingly become the main and central form of teaching and learning at the University level'.[51]

Rationalisation apart then, there are educational changes taking place of which we must all be aware. A professionalism has grown up.[52] The Australia South Pacific External Studies Association was created in 1973. Since 1980 there has been an international journal *Distance Education.* There are moves to provide post-graduate courses in the field of distance education itself. As early as 1978[53] the Australia South Pacific External Studies Association was calling on the AVCC and the CAE sector to establish a National Resource Centre for External Studies so that research could be developed, resources rationally employed, accreditation schemes worked out, and so on. Off-campus education cannot possibly be regarded in the 1980s as a matter of peripheral concern.

Rationalisation in External Studies

Ideas for co-operation in the external studies area have been around for some time, but one can only

remark, in general, that there has been a chequered history where schemes have backfired or been simply forgotten. This is particularly disappointing given the fact that co-operation with academic colleagues and non-academics is part of the daily fare for academics involved in creating distance education materials.[54] The Williams Report[55] wanted a national plan for external studies with courses shared by several institutions, with a wide-ranging network of study centres and evaluation procedures. Indifference, jealousy and hostility have surfaced whenever such suggestions have been made. When Deakin's position as the leading provider of distance education in Victoria was confirmed, other state institutions were upset. The proposed scheme of collaboration between the University of Queensland and Darwin Community College met real problems about the issue of mixing staff of two types.[56] Neil has spoken of suspicions and fears about educational imperialism, threats to jobs, threats to one's preserve, not wanting to have to co-operate, which have all worked to stultify rationalisation moves.[57] It is worthwhile to note that in a world-wide review of distance education, Neil, from the Open University, refers to the lack of rational co-operation between the states in Australia in the distance education field as being 'notorious'.[58]

Jevons brings together the economic stringency and collaboration problems in an interesting way by suggesting that we specifically turn the tight funding situation into a momentum to achieve rational progress, that perhaps co-operation is possible in a situation of scarce resources which would otherwise be hard to achieve. He goes on to say that collaboration 'can work without organisational links if academics are convinced of its educational virtues. It will not work even with organisational links if academics do not believe in it'.[59] The other actor in the arena, of course, is the Federal Government, and here we would do well to ponder on one further sentence. 'Apart from its many educational virtues, the suggested scheme of collaboration could be made to cushion the impact of rationalisation measures which may have to be imposed because of resource scarcities. It could minimise the need to take harsh decisions to close down particular subjects in particular institutions. A group of staff too small to be viable on such a go-it-alone basis could play a useful role in a system such as that outlined above.[60]

It is not the case that rationalisation necessarily means job loss: it could mean job preservation, albeit perhaps with altered functions within a larger system. It is not a case of voluntary collaboration or standstill, for the absence of voluntary moves may mean heavy handed interference from on high of a kind that may be far from rational and far from educationally progressive. It is also the case that the present set-up in external studies is far from ideal; the distribution of hardware, resources and expertise is such that some off-campus offerings must be rated second class. Some form of concentration of resources and collaboration would achieve economies of scale, as well as raise educational standards, so that scarce community resources would be utilised more satisfactorily. All such moves will involve inter-sectoral co-operation, and therefore not only jealousies between universities, but difficult decisions involving FAUSA, FCA and the TAFE Teachers' Association.[61] We might also add that the Blackburn Committee Report, with its suggestion of upper secondary colleges occupying a secondary/tertiary interface, possibly opens up yet another area in which distance education may be at a premium.[62]

To date no national plan or national integrating scheme has emerged. The National Institute of Open Tertiary Education, recommended in 1974 by the Karmel Committee Report to the Universities Commission, did not eventuate. The great concern expressed in the 1982-84 Triennium about the unplanned growth of external studies in the CAE sector, and the problem of University/CAE duplication has not yet resulted in a satisfactory national provision system. There has, however, been significant scrutiny and movement in some states. VPSECs report of 1981, which classified distance education in Victoria into 'general' providers and 'specialist' providers, was horrified at the very large number of institutions catering to such a small number of students. It remarked on the wasteful duplication of courses, on the inadequate quality of some courses, and summarised the situation in the absence of some co-ordinating institution in these terms: the 'provision of off-campus studies has been largely unplanned, with some tendencies to irrationality'.[63] VPSEC spotted the oversupply of some disciplines in the external mode and the undersupply of others. It was also noted that nine of the twenty-six tertiary institutions provided external studies and that educational quality could only be ensured by co-ordination and the concentration of expertise.[64] In general terms it argued that 'the interests of students, institutions and the community require the introduction of arrangements for the continuing co-ordination of existing and future off-campus studies'.[65] Its classification of providers into 'general' and 'specialised' (the former providing a large number of courses for over 1,000 students, for over 50% of their enrolees, with facilities such as course evaluation, support services, distance education expertise) was designed to help this process. It came out strongly against more specialised providers entering the field, and, indeed, recommended that some courses be scrapped.[66] In terms of co-ordination it did not advocate that one institution take over provision tout court; it did recommend the establishment of a Victorian Institute of Distance Education (VIODE). The former solution it avoided because of inter-

institutional rivalries; it also anticipated considerable difficulties in establishing and making VIODE work.[67] Meanwhile VPSEC's Advisory Committee on off-campus studies keeps a close check on the progress of co-operative schemes between Victorian institutions and is building a bank of information re jointly produced courses, shared buildings, complementary enrolment arrangements, and the like.

It must not be thought that rationalisation is being pushed only by lofty bureaucrats. Those actually involved in distance education[68] have also urged the creation of integrative structures such as the establishment of a National Centre for Distance Education. The comments of a visitor from the Open University in 1983 are pertinent. Shott[69] saw a system bursting at the seams which needed very careful looking at if it were to continue. He queried the integrated model whereby external education is provided by the same staff who teach on-campus students. He regarded each institution providing courses to its small number of enrolled students as a scandalous waste of resources and proposed pooling resources to produce shared first level external courses which would be used in a number of institutions, and which, because of the resources and expertise available, would be of a very high quality. The real Australian problem he saw as the existence of State boundaries which exerted a nonsensical influence on the provision of high quality education. Shott favoured the creation of a NIOTE and a National Resources Centre where educational technology, media expertise and research would be concentrated.

Looking back over a decade we have, on the one hand, a form of education that should lend itself to economies of scale, a pooling of expertise and rationalisation, yet there is a picture of inter-sectoral and inter-institutional rivalry, fear, distrust and apathy, plus perhaps the perpetuation of the feeling that somehow distance education is not worth serious academic attention.[70] In actual fact things are not that gloomy. The desirability for some forms of rationalization in distance education is increasingly acknowledged, and, in the last twelve months a considerable momentum has built up. Very significant here is what has become known as the "Toowoomba Accord". During July 1983 representatives of the administration and distance education areas of the five major distance education universites — Deakin, Macquarie, Murdoch, New England, Queensland — put out a statement on the desirability of creating a common pool of externally available courses from which students could select, and of creating the necessary credit transfer arrangements to make this practicable. The vice-chancellors of at least four of these universities immediately embraced the proposal and CTEC's Evaluations and Investigation Programme is now funding research into the whole area of credit transfer, complementary enrolment, etc. These are encouraging signs, and the possibilities of such inter-university co-operation are already evident in the existence of the inter-university major in women's studies shared by Deakin, Murdoch and Queensland. All the problems of enrolment procedures, quota restriction etc., which sceptics might argue would make the scheme impossible, have been overcome. Moreover, as the authors of the 'Toowoomba Accord' stressed, voluntary co-operation means that the issue of autonomy does not become a stumbling block. Whilst there is reason for optimism that other schemes can follow on, Pritchard and Jones sound a cautious note: if we are looking to a growth in rational co-operation we have to bear in mind both the low level of status of distance education in some universities which offer it and also the inertia and indifference of some of the older universities. It is a fact that, with the exception of Queensland, the university sector distance education providers eager to co-operate are the newer, smaller, less prestigious institutions within their respective states.[71]

What areas of effective co-ordination can be aimed for? It should be remembered here that we are talking not only about optimal usage of community resources, but also about quality of education offered: an unco-ordinated external education field not only wastes money, it also allows materials to go out which fail to do justice to the high standards which distance education can attain. Among the areas of collaboration and rationalisation we could aim for are the following:[72]

(i) courses could be written by academic staff in more than one institution, allowing greater expertise and criticism to enter the writing phase,

(ii) courses written in one institution could be evaluated by another,

(iii) courses written in one institution could be used by students in a number of institutions,

(iv) libraries in universities, CAEs and TAFE institutions could make their resources available to all students of whatever institutions,

(v) institutions in the external field could operate a central accreditation and transfer arrangement enabling students easily to complete a degree by enrolling in a number of establishments,

(vi) institutions in the external field could share buildings used for tutorial, study centre purposes. Counselling services and media equipment could be shared also,

(vii) concentrating educational technology, media personnel, computer typesetting operations, instructional design skills in fewer institutions would provide greater expertise and, if courses were shared, would achieve economies of scale,

(viii) concentrating resources, research materials, and so on, would enhance the professional standing of distance education,

(ix) small, under-financed, under-skilled units which might be under threat could operate with redesigned functions in a national network embodying all the processes that make up successful distance education — high quality materials, counselling, the provision of study centres, assessment, telephone tutorials, evaluation, face to face seminars, and so on.

Some Difficulties and Options

It is obvious, given the historical sketch provided in this paper, that the field of external studies and the question of the rationalisation of that field involve a number of extremely thorny issues:

(i) there is the unhappy history of rationalisation itself, which may threaten the autonomy of institutions,

(ii) there is the possibility that rationalisation will mean job loss; if not, then it will certainly mean a number of painful transitions to be made by some staff and some institutions,

(iii) in the external relations sense FAUSA will be involved in difficult discussions with FCA and the TAFE Teachers' Association,

(iv) there is a suspicion perhaps[73] that the Federal Government might be pushing external studies simply because it thinks an Open University system will make available cut-price education. As well as eroding staff conditions, then, the thrust is to provide an education for more Australians, but on the cheap.

All the above factors are complex. Rationalisation, for instance, may save jobs; rationalisation may significantly improve educational quality; first rate distance education may be of a higher quality than conventional on-campus education. Perhaps the educational needs of Australia at the end of the century are such that the University/CAE/TAFE barriers should collapse anyway. Perhaps a restructured CTEC may strive to demolish them. Behind all these contentious issues there must be a lurking fear that, if we get seriously interfered with, then it is partly our own fault.[74] Even on the pragmatic level, when we have to decide what to do, it is worth our while pondering on the following words: "We should be able to take into our own hands responsibiliy for rationalisation and co-ordination of distance education in Australia, instead of waiting passively for our destinies to be determined by outside forces whose information and assumptions may be inaccurate and/or unwise".[75]

FAUSA clearly needs a policy with regard to these important issues, and one of the problems here is that FAUSA has both industrial and educational concerns which may not always neatly dovetail. No one knows exactly the strength of will of the Federal Government to go beyond exhortations to economy and collaboration, actually to impose solutions. At the same time, although change causes stress, there is no doubt that higher distance education standards can only be achieved by some concentration of expertise and production. An overall better provision of education in the off-campus mode in terms of subjects offered also clearly involves some overseeing of the system at a national level. No one should adopt either a luddite or a millennial attitude to the question of technological change and education, but it is reasonably clear that in the next generation, social and technological changes in Australia will take place to which the nature of educational provision must adapt.[76] Given that distance education is growing and seems to be well in accord with these changes, distance education will have to become more a central concern for all organisations deciding policy in the tertiary education field. Distance education is not something one can now afford to be ignorant of.

White, in his survey of distance education in Australia comments: 'University history is replete with examples of innovations that have frequently been forced upon unwilling academics who later broadened their conception of university education to absorb them'.[77] Towards the end of the twentieth century we face some very large problems. Shifts in society, technology, educational philosophy may mean that the Cinderella of education becomes central in any future educational system. We have a history of governments which, in the name of rationalisation, have made irrational interventions in tertiary education that have neither sound financial nor educational foundations. With that as a background, there is a strong case for institutions pressing ahead with collaborative schemes that are acceptable to them and which do have an educational rationale[78]. In the broadest sense, too, terms like relevance and community needs are not dirty words, and it is arguable that the community's educational needs are not best served, nor are the academics' talents optimally used by a rigid stress on the current tri-partite division within the post-secondary education system.

Comments on co-operation in distance education made at an Australia South Pacific External Studies Association (ASPESA) conference in 1983 are peculiarly opposite now:

> *With or without national co-ordination and planning, there are several areas in which we can and should take the initiative so as to build a strong, flexible system of distance education which criss-crosses Australia in such a way that a person anywhere, anytime has a reasonable chance of meeting his/her educational objectives. Some of this collaboration already occurs, generally in an informal and quiet way. It is certainly not easy to achieve, but without it, distance education in Australia has no chance of becoming a really effective form of educational provision ... Learning at a distance is not easy; neither is teaching at a distance; neither are collaboration and the lowering of institutional fences. The foregoing [collaboration and co-ordination] proposals are put forward with a certain amount of idealism and hope, but also with a recognition of political realities. Without such moves we will gradually abrogate our responsibilities for provision of the most effective forms of education at our disposal, and will reduce the educational opportunities available to a large proportion of Australia's population. We may even sign the death warrants of some institutions which might otherwise meet well the needs of particular communities. If we can re-make the image of distance education within tertiary education, co-ordinating authorities and governments, and build that image in the eyes of Australian communities, we stand a good chance of entering the 21st century with a first-rate national educational network.*[79]

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References

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3. Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, *Report for the 1982-84 Triennium*, AGPS, Canberra, 1981.
4. CTEC, op. cit., Vol 4, appendix 9.
5. R. Johnson, *The Provision of External Studies in Australian Higher Education*, AGPS, Canberra, 1983.
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11. Johnson op. cit., p. 34.
12. Johnson op. cit., p. 35.
13. Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, *Report for the 1985-87 Triennium*, AGPS, Canberra, 1984, Summary, p. 4.
14. CTEC, 1984 op. cit., p. 4.
15. CTEC, 1984 op. cit., Vol. 1, para 3.27-3.28.
16. CTEC, 1984 op. cit., Vol. 1, para 3.29.
17. Ryan, op. cit.
18. Ryan op. cit., pp. 15-16.
19. Ryan, op cit., p. 20. On the technological possibilities in distance education, see Anwyl, op. cit., pp. 3-6, and F.R. Jevons, 'An Open University? Not an Open and Shut Case', Toowoomba Conference Paper, 1984, pp. 1-3, 7.
20. FAUSA, *Rationalization and Amalgamation in the Tertiary Sector*, Melbourne, 1977.
21. FAUSA, op. cit., para 1.7.
22. FAUSA, op. cit., para 1.8.
23. FAUSA, op. cit., para 2.32.
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26. FAUSA, 1984 op. cit., paras 6i-ii.
27. FAUSA, 1984 op. cit., paras 6iv (a-k).
28. M. White, 'National Commitments and Co-operation in Correspondence Study: An Historical Perspectives to Developments in Australia', *Education Research and Perspectives*, 2, 2, 1975, p. 38.
29. A. Ortmeier, *External Studies in Australia. A Critical Appraisal*, Institute for Higher Education, Armidale, 1982, p. 7. It should be added, though, that by no means all commentators accept that the integrated model is the best. Laverty, for instance suggests that given the differences between on-campus and off-campus teaching and between on- and off-campus students, external courses should be different and *not* taught by those who also teach in the conventional mode. See J. Laverty, 'Kevin C. Smith's External Studies at New England — A Silver Jubilee Review 1955-1979', in *Distance Education*, 1, 2, pp. 209-10.
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32. P. Northcott, 'The Tyranny of Distance and Proximity', in K. Smith (ed.) *Diversity Down Under in Distance Education*, Darling Downs Institute Press, Toowoomba, 1984, p. 9.
33. Ortmeier, op. cit., p. 26.
34. Ortmeier, op. cit., pp. 12, 16.
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42. Northcott, op. cit., pp. 32-3.

43. VPSEC, op. cit., Appendix B.

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53. K. Smith, 'A Proposal for the Establishment of a National Resource Centre for External Studies', in *ASPESA Newsletter*, 4, 1, 1978.

54. Pritchard and Jones, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

55. Op. cit., Recommendation 17.35.

56. J. Laverty, 'Aspects of co-operation between the University of Queensland and the Darwin Community College,' in *ASPESA Newsletter, 2, 2, 1975.*

57. *M. Neil, 'Collaboration in Distance Teaching,' in M. Pentz and M. Neil, Education of Adults at a Distance*, Kogan/Page, London, 1981, pp. 172-3, 179.

58. Op. cit., p. 159.

59. Jevons, 1979, op. cit., p. 28.

60. Jevons, 1979, op. cit., p. 29. Others echo Jevons' ideas, for instance, Pritchard and Jones, discussing government intervention suggest that rationalization is a road 'most safely travelled by volunteers', although they also query how durable voluntary arrangements may be (op. cit., pp. 2, 14).

61. Parry, discussing the co-ordination of tertiary education in general, pointed to the vast problem of co-ordinating TAFE and CAEs in fields such as adult education. See R. Parry, Co-ordination of Tertiary Education in Australia in *Vestes*, 22, 1, 1979, p. 13.

62. F.R. Jevons, 1984, op. cit., p. 8. See J. Blackburn, *Ministerial Review of Post-compulsory Schooling*, Melbourne, 1984.

63. VPSEC, op. cit., p. 9.

64. Op. cit., pp. 10, 14, 19, 36.

65. Op. cit., p. 31.

66. Op. cit., pp. 34-5.

67. Op. cit., pp. 44-6.

68. For instance, see Smith op. cit; Jevons 1979 op. cit., 1984 op. cit; D. Holmes, 'Some Organisational Issues for Distance Education in Australia, in *Epistolodidaktika*, 8, 1, 1977; Moran and Charlesworth, op. cit.

69. M. Shott, 'External Studies in Australia at the Crossroads?' in *ASPESA Newsletter*, 9, 2, 1983, pp. 2, 5-8.

70. Moran, op. cit., pp. 9-10.

71. Pritchard and Jones, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

72. Neil, op. cit; Moran and Charlesworth, op. cit.

73. FAUSA memorandum 90/1: 1016V on the 1985-7 Guidelines, 1984. Other commentators share this suspicion, for instance, Anwyl who asks whether external education might not be an equal opportunity for those who don't have an equal opportunity; op. cit., p. 9.

74. Moran, op. cit., pp. 1-2.

75. Moran and Charlesworth, op. cit., p.2.

76. Jevons, 1984, op. cit., pp. 1-3.

77. White, 1982, op. cit., p. 266.

78. Moran, op. cit., p. 2.

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PURSUING PRODUCTIVITY, EXCELLENCE AND OTHER RESEARCH SNARKS: A Critique of Current Attitudes

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Universities are ultimately responsible to the societies that sustain them for the quality of their research product. The ideas, explanations, theorems, prescriptions, criticisms and reflections that collectively comprise this product form an important facet of cultural development and, naturally, productivity of this kind is commended and encouraged. Commendation and encouragement are, however, no substitute for firmly grounded policy about the nurture of research. At present, research policy formulation in Australian universities seems to revolve around interlocking national research objectives, categorization and priority determination for bureaucratic ends, and exhortations to maximize productivity — with precious little policy development that has its roots in an understanding of the complex ecology of the university itself and the attitudes, values, and mythologies that pervade the research realm. A contextual view, that includes an understanding of the rich and varied nature of research itself and the personal, professional and social realms that sustain it, is fundamental to informed policy making.

The Pursuit of Productivity

Who, in recent years, has not felt and resented the sense of urgency and promotion that surrounds any discussion or pronouncement about rates of research productivity. Under the guise of social accountability and utility researchers are exhorted to produce more and more. The imperatives of a recessionary economy, a conservative ethos and contracting funds may fill many researchers with trepidation about the levels of competition induced within and between disciplines and research programmes. In such a highly competitive environment there is a danger that normal expectations of productivity in research will be pushed towards limits beyond which a self-reinforcing whirlwind of research activity is established and productivity becomes an end in itself. In this event the real purposes of research, to create knowledge, cultural development and social utility, are lost and researchers are sucked into an upward spiral of productivity and reward, reflected as a larger slice of the research pie, status and kudos.

Ironically, the exhortation to maximise productivity reflects a misconception about the nature of research itself and the way in which it is deeply rooted in, and dependent upon, the strength and rich variety of function in the university, of which research is but part. The basic misconception is that research can somehow be understood and practiced in a common way among the various disciplines of the university. The reality is that there are significant, often fundamental differences about what comprises research. Different modes and processes of research, within and between the disciplines, bring different potentials for productivity. Creativity and discovery are not necessarily linked to high rates of productivity and, despite popular belief, productivity does not decline with age. To complete the heresy it has to be said that there are fundamental problems in measuring the real level of productivity anyway.

It is worth exploring some of these considerations further.

Productivity, Creativity and Discovery

In the context of research, creativity at an individual and team level is reflected in innovation and discovery. If new knowledge is established as a result of research then the people, processes and product involved may be labelled creative. It is often assumed that a high level of productivity is a necessary precondition for creative achievement, but as Pelz and Andrews demonstrate there is no general rule that abundant producers are creative thinkers.[1] Some are, and rely on their abundant product to provide the ground for real breakthrough events; others use their abundant product to compensate for, or even to mask, a lack of such breakthroughs. Conversely, there is no general rule that researchers who apparently produce little in the way of published product lack creativity; indeed a career marked by few but brilliant achievements is not unknown at the very top of the research world. It is not so much a matter of indolence or wasted opportunity as it is a matter of cognitive style. For some researchers their most innovative work is clustered at critical times in their professional and personal development. These sudden outpourings, especially in the theoretical development of the discipline involved, often become bench marks for personal development, they occasionally progress the knowledge base of the discipline and, even more occasionally, the culture. Einstein's suite of pivotal papers in 1905 is a prime example of this clustering of product. Hardin refers to J.J. Thompson's insight that, in the quest for excellence, results do not often come regularly and that considerable interludes may separate creative research events.[2] These interludes are critical to a realistic analysis of research productivity in the university; there being a tendency to see this research style in terms of periodic clusterings interspersed in a general milieu of inactivity: this perception of research is anathema to those who have a more obsessive view about ordered, regular thinking and production processes. In fact, of