change after fee abolition as evidence that abolishing fees had no effect. In the case of the present government it is the Minister for Finance, Senator Walsh, who has said that research shows that the abolition of fees produced no discernible effect on the social spectrum of higher education. The inference is incorrect.

The national survey compared the social mix of the population of newly enrolled students in Australian universities and colleges in 1976 (three years after fee abolition) with earlier years and found little change. That result is hardly surprising since any alteration in the mix is the aggregate of thousands of individual decisions made during the final three or four years of school by students and their parents. Not a great deal is known about the processes involved in decisions leading to higher education but, allowing for the time needed for dissemination of information about fees and TEAS, and for changes in plans about staying on in school and subject choice, it could be five or six years before effects begin to show up in statistics of participation.

Methodological complexities are a second cause for caution in interpreting the results of survey analysis. In the present case one such problem is that the conventional measures of student mix — students' reports of their parents' occupation, education and income — are crude indicators of relative poverty and deprivation. Furthermore there is the dubious assumption that parental status is a valid proxy for the financial needs of an 18 or 20-year-old. Aware of the shortcomings in the traditional sociological measures, the authors of the national survey also approached the question of student financial position directly and asked about enrolment if there had been a charge for tuition. About 20 per cent said they would not have been able to enrol full-time and would have had to switch to part-time (not available in all courses), deferred their studies, or not enrolled at all. Naturally the responses of interested parties should not be accepted at face value. The answers gained some validity, however, when it was found that those who claimed that fees would have necessitated a diminution of their enrolment were, in disproportionately large numbers, from categories underrepresented in higher education — lower class families, women, country dwellers or older students.

A third reason for there being no apparent change following the abolition of tuition fees and the introduction of TEAS is that, at the same time as these reforms were being introduced, other forms of aid were disappearing, notably the lucrative secondary education studentships. During the 1960s and early 1970s these awards attracted tens of thousands of students, many of them from families which had no previous association with higher education. At the height of the scheme the numbers of students with these grants was of the same order as the number of TEAS beneficiaries. The 1974 reforms countered a social regression in participation which would certainly have occurred as the education studentships were phased out.

Finally, the evaluation of fee abolition pointed out that a substantial shift towards democratising higher education would require changes elsewhere in the system, not simply removal of the barriers at the point of entry. As has already been pointed out, almost all of the attrition from schooling of kids from poor families occurs during the middle years of secondary school. By the time Year 12 is reached the social mix is much the same as in higher education. If participation is to be more equal the bright poor will have to be helped to the starting-gate. Financial assistance during tertiary study is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for reform. This is a fact that was overlooked by the 1974 Labor egalitarians.

Until recently it appeared that the Hawke Government was pursuing the objective of 'equitable participation of students from all social groups and backgrounds' (ALP platform, 1984) with a better appreciation than Whitlam of the complex connections of social class with educational attainment. The strategy was to get more to the starting-gate and then help them over the barrier into universities and colleges. The Government's Participation and Equity Program was directed at both secondary and post-secondary education. There was to be a significant reduction in the number of students leaving school prematurely and equalisation in higher education. Clear guidelines informed the CTEC in 1983 that:

The Government accords the same urgency to having higher education address inequities in its own institutions and in the wider society. For too long women, the children of ordinary working people, members of some ethnic minority groups, rural youth and most starkly, Aboriginals, have been considerably under-represented in, or unequally distributed across courses, institutions and sectors within tertiary education. They have been deprived of much that their society offers and our society has been deprived of the contribution they could make. The Government is determined to change this state of affairs.

There has been a spectacular increase in the retention to the end of secondary school and if trends continue a majority will shortly be staying on to Year 12. Higher education is a different story however and here recent decisions have been counter-productive insofar as equity is concerned.

My most recent evidence shows that, after decades in which there was no change in the social spectrum, at the end of the 1970s a shift had begun towards equality among the groups of school-leavers entering higher education. During a period when the overall demand from the young slackened (throughout most of the 1970s participation dropped from around 20 per cent to 15 per cent of the age group) the lowest third of the social order gained ground in relation to the upper two thirds (see Table 2)[7]. This is in contrast to what is happening in a number of other countries. In Sweden for example where there has been a decline in the value of student grants, the social profile of the student population is much more unequal than in Australia[8]. And in USA evidence is emerging of a social regression in participation due to sharp rises in tuition fees following the Reagan administration's cuts in federal funding to universities and colleges.

When the data become available for 1982-85 they will almost certainly reveal a slackening if not a reversal in the democratising trend which had begun in Australia a few years earlier. The intense competition for entry, rising entrance scores, TEAS grants which meet about half of an independent student's costs, and tougher rules for mature age entrants, all combine to favour those groups which have traditionally been benefitted by higher education.

The modest gain in participation made by representatives of the lowest third of the social order at the end of the 1970s does not mean that the abolition of tuition fees had a delayed action effect, any more than the absence of change in the mid-1970s meant that there was no effect of the fee abolition. When, however, all the evidence from economic, sociological and social-psychological studies is put together the most likely conclusion is that financial barriers do inhibit the enrolment of students from certain 'disadvantaged' categories. It seems to me quite probable that the reintroduction of fees, even if accompanied by an extension of means tested grants, would lead to an even less equal social mix than exists at present. Similiar conclusions have been reached following a recent series of studies in Sweden. Authors Reuterberg and Svensson wrote:

For individuals from homes in which one of the parents has a university degree the likelihood of beginning a post-secondary education is seven times greater than for individuals from working-class homes, and the likelihood of completing a university degree as much as ten times higher. This class bias would have been far greater, however, if it had not been for the national financial aid system.[9]

Table 2

Enrolment rates of school leavers in full-time higher education Australia[a]

Social Group[b]	Enrolment Year		
	1960	1972	1979/80
1	23.8	27.9	20.8
2	11.4	20.7	14.0
3	6.7	14.0	10.3
All	13.4	20.2	15.1

[a]Sources: see end-note 7.
[b]The rates for Social Groups 1, 2 and 3 are based on approximately equal fractions of the population.

The continuation of free tertiary education will, however, perpetuate what I have called inequality of benefits. It is a value judgement whether one concludes that the beneficiaries should be required to pay the cost, or whether, in the interests of bright children from humble backgrounds and of others who get no help from parents, higher education should continue to be free. In the latter event a substantial inequality persists between those school leavers who get higher education, whatever their background, and those who do not. The most equitable system in the long run would be for all school leavers to benefit from comparable expenditure on one form or another of post-secondary education and training. Not only individuals but also the economy would benefit from such an expansion. This is the view of the Inquiry into Labour Market Programs (Kirby Committee)[10] which has recommended the improvement of the apprenticeship scheme and the introduction of a system of traineeships for about 30 per cent of leavers who presently benefit from no form of post-secondary education.

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Towards flexibility in academic labour markets?

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Unity in diversity

The Australian academic labour market is very diverse. Universities and tertiary colleges (CAEs) recruit in virtually the complete range of available formally accepted skills, from architects to zoologists. They seek employees in these various disciplines from far flung local and overseas locations (almost always by open advertisement) for appointment to ranks from tutor to professor. Applicants in turn face diversity in their supply side view of the attractions of employing institutions, including relative capacities to attract 'high quality' students, and conditions of work such as class contact hour requirements and research facilities. Applicants also compete in very different relative sub-market environments — accountants, for example, may be in heavier demand (at higher prices) in their alternative employments outside the university than, say, philosophers.

Yet overriding this diversity is considerable uniformity of wages and employment conditions. Apart from a few traditional ingrained loadings to recognise different supply prices (such as for medics) there is great conformity across disciplines in pay, one of the main keys in labour market adjustment. Once an individual enters a tenured job classification within a discipline, there is little if anything to shake security relative to others in the same classification. A common paymaster and centralised wage fixation for all tertiary institutions add to the pressures for uniformity of tenure and promotion largely by seniority. Reviews of performance are probably non-existent in the ordinary academic career course, except for those seeking transition from lecturer to senior lecturer and for those (fewer in number) applying for appointment as reader after reaching the top of the senior lecturer grade. An innovation of recent years — the requirement for readvertisement of, and open competition for, lectureships after up to five years of appointment — has reduced the proportion of tenured staff, but has also highlighted the privilege and security of those on tenure.

Elements of flexibility?

Superficially at least, the academic labour market is far removed from the competitive models used to describe adjustment free from institutional or 'non-economic' forces. Were this market to resemble the competitive outcome of price patterns, it is highly unlikely that there would be simple across-the-board wage relativities for all disciplines comprised in a tertiary institution. Instead there would be a mixture of rates, geared to decentralised market conditions. However, a review of external and internal wage relativities for academics reveals considerable consistency and uniformity.

The predominant traditional external relativity in fixing academic salaries has been the simple one of the commencing salary of a research scientist in the CSIRO. As noted in my 1975 paper with Jeff Thomas[1], the 1960 A.U.C. salaries recognised the relevance of CSIRO salaries. In 1964, Mr Justice Eggleston concluded that 'the qualities aimed at when recruiting lecturers in science are identical with those sought by the CSIRO and the Atomic Energy Commission when promoting or appointing personnel to the grade of Research Scientist'. This was again confirmed in 1970 when Eggleston took as the basis of salary proposals for professors and readers an increase of 17 per cent in the minimum lecturer's salary 'which is approximately the same percentage increase as that applied to the commencing salary of a research scientist'. In the same year, the link was recognized in an arbitration decision on CSIRO scientist salaries (though the arbitrator noted that universities were followers, not leaders, in salary fixation). In 1973, the Campbell enquiry once more linked the minimum salary for a lecturer with the commencing salary of a research scientist. And in his major 1976 review of academic salaries, Mr Justice Campbell again reaffirmed the importance of the association.

This simple relativity linkage has not been overriden by occasional references to the concept of 'sui generis', such as that by Mr Justice Eggleston in 1964: 'academic work is in truth sui generis . . . although I have taken account of salary movements in other spheres . . . I do not think there is any single group in the community whose work is sufficiently closely related to that of academic staff that a fixed relationship should be established between them'. These references find an echo in the most recent reviews by the Academic Salaries Tribunal (August 1982 and April 1984).

Table 2
Academic salaries by rank as a per cent of professional salaries, 1964-83

	1964	1967	1970	1973	1974	1976	1979	1983
Professor Reader/Assoc.	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Professor Senior Lecturer	82.7	82.5	82.5	82.3	85.7	84.1	84.4	84.4
Maximum	73.1	72.9	72.9	74.7	78.7	74.1	74.7	74.7
Minimum	63.5	62.5	62.5	64.0	67.7	63.3	64.1	64.1
Lecturer								
Maximum	61.0	60.8	60.8	62.5	64.4	61.9	62.7	62.7
Minimum	46.2	45.0	45.2	45.2	49.5	46.7	47.7	47.7

Source: See table 1.

In the latter (p51) Mr Justice Ludeke noted that a sui generis concept, implying that academics formed their own industry, did not mean that outside comparisons were precluded. The basic determinations have continued to rest on the simple CSIRO research scientist-lecturer comparison, and the creation of reasonably fixed internal relativities between lecturers and other grades.

This constancy of external relativities is shown by a comparison of lecturer and senior lecturer salaries with those for CSIRO research scientists, as displayed in Table 1: during the seventies, research scientist salaries were between 97 and 100 per cent of lecturer salaries at the minimum, and between 89 and 91 per cent at the maximum. At the end of 1983, however, there had been some slippage, and research scientist salaries were 108 per cent of lecturer salaries at the minimum, and 102 at the maximum.

Internal relativities have been more stable, as shown by Table 2. For example, over the fifteen years from 1964-1979, minimum senior lecturer salaries had increased from 63.5 to 64.1 per cent of professors' salaries, and the change in the lecturer/professor ratio was of the same order. Between 1979-1983 there was no change whatever in any of the internal relativities.

Table 1
CSIRO and university salary comparisons

	1.1.70	2.8.73	19.9.74	1.9.76	30.4.79	1.11.83
CSIRO Research Scientist Salary as proportion of University Lecturer Salary						
Minimum	.97	.98	1.00	.99	.98	1.08
Maximum	.89	.89	.92	.91	.91	1.02
CSIRO Senior Research Scientist Salary as Proportion of University Senior Lecturer Salary						
Minimum	.89	.91	.94	.94	.92	1.03
Maximum	.90	.90	.93	.92	.91	1.02

Source: M.A. Haskell (1980), *Journal of Industrial Relations*, June; Staff Procedure Guide, 1984, Melbourne University; and CSIRO Gazette.

Relative incomes

In an important article in the June 1980 *Journal of Industrial Relations*, M.A. Haskell correctly noted the attraction of Australian academic jobs to overseas applicants. He concluded that there did not appear to be general retention or recruitment problems for Australian universities, though this would no doubt vary from one discipline to another. But even in those disciplines where shortages had been claimed, Haskell did not regard these as serious. Writing in 1980, he suggested that 'if there is an academic disadvantage, it would appear to be for persons in the 36-50 age groups as non-academic incomes peak during those years for most professions. In the majority of cases, however, those age-peak incomes were below the professional standard'.[2]

But it is doubtful that Haskell's rather sanguine interpretation of the picture in the seventies is still appropriate. For understandable reasons (which are perhaps symbolic of the attenuated financial resources in universities) the Melbourne Appointments Board has not updated its review of Professional Incomes in Victoria on which Haskell's conclusion is based.

Using less satisfactory evidence, however, it seems that academic salaries in the eighties have lagged behind those in the various markets of which university personnel are a part. Casual empiricism is the first piece of evidence I offer for this conclusion: (a) in my association with the Victorian Public Service in 1982-83, I noted the far less stringent formal qualifications and experience necessary for elevation to positions paying as much as a professor or vice-chancellor, (b) for employment of economists, to quote a personal example, academic salaries, even taking into account the supposed benefits of tenure and study leave (now too costly for many to accept), look very unattractive compared with those available in government (which have tenure and excellent superannuation) or business (which have many fringe benefits attached). Other examples could be given — in my faculty, accountants.

This casual empiricism can be augmented by the latest figures which FAUSA are able to provide. Using the Campbell Report (1976) as a base point, the following increases applied at the end of 1982, and are unlikely to have altered since then in favour of university staff, whose (now to be phased in) 5 per cent (non national wage) award from the Academic Salaries Tribunal on April 17 (without recourse to change before October 1985) has been the subject of such dispute:

	% Increase from the Campbell Report 1/7/76 — 31/12/82
Academics	66.6
Transport Workers Awards	86.8
Building Industry Awards	87.8
Metal Industry Awards	93.5
Federal MPs (with allowances)	97.0
Federal MPs (without allowances)	81.2
Judges of the High Court	77.9
Average Weekly Earnings	90.9
Private Sector Salaries	73-100

Source: FAUSA submission to Academic Salaries Tribunal, 1984, Part IV.

Other evidence of lags in academic salaries relative to traditional comparators is in Table 1, showing the slippage in the 1980s when comparing CSIRO and academic salaries. Yet taking a longer view, Sloan's calculations of lifetime earnings for academics relative to professional colleagues did not make the universities seem bad employers (see Sloan 1982, p.247).

Non-price adjustments — appointment level flexibility and promotion rates

Faced with uniformity of salary structures, and declining relative income for academics which might affect recruitment quality and quantity for some disciplines, how could university administrators react? Unable to manipulate salary ranges, do they make 'up scale' appointments, more rapid promotion and higher level appointments, to overcome gaps between supply and demand in particular disciplines?

There are target proportions for each rank laid down by CTEC. In Table 3, the percentage of totals in each rank 1971-82 are given. Between 1971-77, there was little change between the relative proportions, as noted by Haskell. But since Haskell made his study, there have been considerable changes. In particular, the proportional change between senior lecturers and lecturers is marked — a 5.7 per cent increase in senior lecturers and a 7.2 per cent decline in lecturers. This cannot be explained by a policy of up-scale appointments on the part of administrators, since the proportionate rise in the senior lecturer ranks has come about at a time of the application of the 'reversion rule'.

Table 3
University academic staff by rank, 1971, 1977* and 1982*

Rank	Per Cent of Total in Each Rank 1971	Revised	1977	1982	Proportional Change 1971-1977	1977-1982
Professor	13.8	13.1	13.1	12.7	-0.7	-0.4
Reader/Associate Professor	12.9	13.9	13.9	15.8	+1.0	+1.9
Senior Lecturer	36.1	36.4	36.6	42.1	+0.5	+5.7
Lecturer	37.2	36.6	36.4	29.4	-0.8	-7.2
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	0	0

*Excludes Assistant Lecturers, Teaching Fellows, Tutors, and Demonstrators.
Source: See table 1, and computations by the author.

Haskell argued, however, that flexibility for administrators came through capacity to vary the proportions in each rank as between disciplines. Table 4 (to 1982) confirms that there is indeed much variation. The simplest way to illustrate this is to note the proportion of professors and readers/associate professors in medicine and natural science faculties (43 and 35 per cent respectively) with those for education and economics, commerce and government (14 and 22 per cent respectively).

But of special importance since 1977 has been the increase in virtually every discipline of the proportion of senior lecturers. In some disciplines it has been very substantial (for example, education and economics, commerce and government rose from 31 per cent each to 42 and 41 per cent respectively between 1977-1982). For all disciplines, the proportion of senior lecturers rose from 37-42 per cent, and the proportion of lecturers declined from 36-29 per cent.

It is easy to describe this movement as a classification creep; but it is more difficult to discern its causes. Certainly, it is not possible to use the shift as a justification for Haskell's 1980 argument that university administrators have been using the rank structure in the lecturer-senior lecturer categories to play the market.

The explanation of the growth of the overall proportion of senior lecturers in the total is probably more an indicator of a labour market with hardening arteries than it is of efforts to match the market. The growth decade of 1960-70 when the members of full time university academic staff expanded by more than 10 per cent per year was superseded by more modest increases, averaging 5 per cent between 1970-75, and then virtually no growth between 1976-84. The decline in employment

Table 4
University academic staff by discipline and rank, 1977, 1982

Discipline	Per Cent at Rank of: Professor 1977	1982	Reader Assoc. Professor 1977	1982	Senior Lecturer 1977	1982	Lecturer 1977	1982
Medicine	20	20	23	23	35	38	22	19
Natural Science	14	13	18	22	39	45	29	20
Agriculture and Forestry	15	15	17	21	48	45	20	19
Engineering and Technology	12	11	16	19	42	47	30	23
Dentistry	12	13	15	15	44	47	28	25
Fine Arts	11	8	11	11	36	30	42	51
Veterinary Science	14	13	16	21	39	40	31	26
Humanities	12	12	13	13	36	42	39	33
Architecture and Building	8	11	8	11	39	28	45	40
Law	13	11	8	11	34	42	45	36
Social and Behavioural Sciences	12	10	9	10	31	41	47	37
Economics, Commerce, Government	13	12	9	10	31	41	47	37
Education	8	7	6	7	31	42	55	44
All Disciplines	13	13	14	16	37	42	36	29

Source: see table 1, and computations by author.

opportunities within universities has been paralleled by generally recessionary labour market conditions. Departments are becoming crowded with senior academics and there is less infusion of new blood than previously, since turnover rates are reduced compared with the past. As Judith Sloan noted in her major survey of the academic labour market adjustment process:

Growth provides universities with great scope for flexibility. It is easy to alter or maintain the distribution of staff between young and old, between tenured and non-tenured and between disciplines. No growth deprives the universities of much flexibility. Certain consequences are likely if present (1982) hiring, retiring and tenure policies are maintained. The average age of academics will rise. The proportion under 35 years will fall. The proportion of staff with tenure will rise and there will be a growing imbalance between job openings and the supply of new PhDs, which will be most severe in disciplines with few alternative employment opportunities. The burden of adjustment falls on the young.

Other burdens can also be nominated. There are few increments for merit outside professorial ranks, and here they are rather secretly managed. It is not possible to agree with the 1976 Academic Salaries Tribunal's view that the possibility of promotion can reasonably substitute for merit increments as an incentive device. Internal promotion from lecturer to senior lecturer is sometimes seen as bordering on the automatic, leaving special recognition (but relatively little reward) to promotion from senior lecturer to reader/associate professor. The effective criteria for these promotions seem even more stringent on occasion than those for chairs. Internal appointment to professorships is unlikely, since universities seem to prefer outside candidates here.

The university rank structure has adverse effects on mobility: with almost no jobs advertised at the levels of senior lecturer and reader, anyone except a lecturer who wishes to move to another university must find a vacant chair or face demotion. Salary inflexibility in Australian universities may also add to the disadvantages of newer universities which are unable to outbid the more established ones for much needed senior faculty.

The rigidly arranged hierarchy and its lack of incentive for effort and output prompted Professor Geoffrey Brennan to note in the 1984 Giblin Memorial Lecture that in Australia:

the same seniority structure can prevail for thirty years, virtually independent of the relative research performance of different individuals. Whether I will be a Professor at the ANU in twenty years time will depend on many things, but there are two that it will not *depend on — one is my own research output; the other is the research output and general academic standing of those who might like my job. I cannot believe that this state of affairs is conducive to high academic morale, quite apart from the direct negative effects on incentives. And by and large it does seem to me that, predictably, Australian universities are, by comparison with their U.S. counterparts, somewhat moribund.*

It was the same conclusion which led Jeff Thomas and I to ask ten years ago why some features of the adaptability of United States universities could not be imported to Australia. Those questions remain relevant today. Why is the principle of *primus inter pares* inapplicable to Australia? Why should there be no experimentation with the more egalitarian title delineation of the U.S.? Why should salaries as between classifications be so immutable? Why should merit awards not be experimented with, even once, and incentives to productivity more fully provided?

Professor Brennan also notes his favourable impression from some years in the U.S. experience:

commitment to academic values and widespread sese of vocation . . . are augmented and stimulated (as well as reflected in) the much more extensive use that American universities make of financial incentives.

Formal opposition to the notion of rewards and incentives comes, however, from important staff association and administrative opinion, including the Australian Vice Chancellor's Committee (AVCC). As noted by Thomas and myself in 1975, this resistance to change probably reflects a desire for convenience and the easy life. Whatever the reason, the resistance is remarkably powerful. In the years since the 1976 Academic Salaries Tribunal Review, the issue has been dormant in official determinations. In Mr Justice Ludeke's April 1984 decision, the question does not even seem to rate a mention.

In a way, this resistance to change may be a reflection of internal labour market organisation and influence in academic salary and employment determination, i.e. governance by administrative rules, as distinct from the external market where pricing and allocation decisions may be more directly controlled by economic variables. Unfortunately, the supposed efficiency of internal labour market operations hardly seem to apply to the academic scene. These efficiencies are usually assumed to relate mainly to the advantages of firm-specific training and implicit long term labour contracts; but these are hardly compatible with the apparent objectives of flexibility and change in academic teaching and research.

Fragmentation

The Government's successful application to the Tribunal to phase in the April 1984 5% decision seems to have spurred on a fragmentation of academic salary pressures. Through the State Industrial Commissions, staff associations can seek separate State awards to bypass the federal system in which they are apparently losing faith. Already the University Academic Staff Association of NSW (the State affiliate of FAUSA) has filed for a separate award. Separate awards could mean different salary scales between states, with problems for institutions (funded nationally) required to meet costs for which funds have not been allocated.

It is extremely doubtful that any decentralisation of academic salary fixation through the State Industrial Commissions can produce the flexibility and responsiveness in the general academic labour market which is called for. At most, the Commissions may place pressure on the central Tribunal to match any State determinations made. Hypothetically, an innovative Commission could try to induce experimentation in salary structures — but this is in my view a remote possibility.

The cure of academic arthritis — growth or de-regulation?

Judith Sloan's point that growth provides universities with great scope for flexibility has its adverse side: much of the inflexibility of staff structure and composition has been created by the financial stringency and cut-backs in Australia's tertiary education funding in recent years. Should growth return, it is not hard to foresee renewed mobility as new positions open up and the academic staff migrations of the sixties and early seventies are relived to some extent.

But there are critics who are impatient not merely with the absence of growth in funding and the immobilising effects of financial shortage. For example, Dr Frank Milne argues trenchantly that the current problems in universities are the result of the method of government funding and the incentives it generates. Milne suggests a change in the funding system:

a much more market oriented system will be superior to (an) arthritic structure. If the buyers and sellers of (academic) services confront one another directly they (will) be more satisfied than if a huge bureaucracy is interposed between them. If students pay the full cost of their tuition, they are going to demand value for money . . . if the teacher performs badly, students have an effective weapon in refusing to buy his services. Good teachers will receive rewards which increase with their performance . . . a lecture (in) a department which does not reward him commensurately with the revenue he generates, will (soon attract) bids from elsewhere. The power of the student purse is a potent force also for directing teaching resources into the most valued subjects, and away from subjects in which there is declining interest.[6]

In view of the inherent conservatism and inertia of Australian academic staff structures and regulatory procedures, Milne's ideas are of interest only if the 'marketisation' of the provision of tertiary education services is a genuine political possibility. And even an enthusiastic view of the United States system must recognise the dangers of undue concentration on rewarding teaching popularity, or placing on a pedestal the motto publish or perish. But whatever changes are contemplated, there seems little doubt about the patient's illness.

The academic labour market is now ailing in a university system which has suffered financial stringency after a substantial period of growth. There is an uneven age distribution and a disproportionately low number of normal retirements in many universities. Turnover rates have generally declined. There is a shortage of promotion opportunities for those in the universities and — a special concern — a lack of openings for the potential entrants whose youth and new technology have traditionally enlivened the universities. There are difficulties in obtaining resources for academic staff for new subject areas, and problems for implementing affirmative action programmes with such limited opportunities for new appointments. For academic staff themselves, the financial stringencies have meant worsening staff-student ratios; fewer research resources; absence of proper staff support, such as secretarial services; decline in relative salaries; and growing economic difficulty in realising a great advantage of academic employment — overseas study leave (or its undeceptive pseudonym; special studies programmes). There is a generally run down feeling in many faculties, especially since there are apparently insufficient funds even to provide proper servicing and maintenance of existing buildings, let alone new capital works.

One possibility which the AVCC and FAUSA are apparently examining is that of an early (voluntary) retirement scheme. The British experiment in this should provide caution — in Britain, those academics with marketability of services and alternative job prospects are the ones who have been quick to take the offer of generous early retirement prospects. The net balance of the scheme was probably not a positive advantage.

It is hard, therefore, to end on a positive note. The chances of infusing change through privatisation seem as remote as those of internal reform. The inertia in the system is formidable. The remedies being considered are not promising. Perhaps the best hope is that growth in educational funding (if it is provided) will once more give mobility and new blood to the academic labour market. But it seems to me a rather sad comment on government and academic management that other potential avenues of change are so remote.

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The Australian University: A computer-rich environment?

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It is 1995. Looking back, how has the life of the Australian academic changed over ten years? Graphs of funding levels, student intakes and building programs show an erratic stop-start pattern: all is normal in the Australian university. The greatest change has been caused by the arrival — or, rather, the all-penetrating invasion — of the personal computer and its telecommunications links.

Back in 1985 there was, of course, quite heavy use of computers on campus. Computer centres were buying hardware but still not keeping up with demand. Financial systems and student records had been computerised for years; word processing was the norm in university administration and was beginning to appear in academic departments; libraries ran computerised loan systems and regularly accessed overseas databases. Most new laboratory equipment was microprocessor-based. Large classes of students learned to use computer packages, for statistical analysis, accounting, engineering design and much besides.

Some few academics scattered around campus were the harbingers. They were sophisticated computer users even then with powerful desk-top machines at home that could be pressed into service in many ways and also give access to large machines on campus and, in some cases, to networks of academics with similar interests around the world.

Early signs of change

To some extent computer permeation after 1985 was simply very much more of the same. Even so, it gradually dawned on the campus consciousness that something out of the ordinary was happening. Rooms had to be found for the microcomputer laboratories; the cost of installing computer points in staff studies became significant when they were called for by the hundred; was the library — or the computer centre, or someone else — to be a software clearing-house? Unmistakable realisation that change was happening was forced by the students. The occasional essay appearing in the slightly awkward dot matrix print of those days did not make much difference; it was a welcome improvement over handwriting. But then having a microcomputer to use for word processing, and to phone in to campus facilities from home became a student status symbol, with students not able to afford the $1000 or so starting to raise questions about discrimination and disadvantage. Coin-in-the-slot microcomputers appeared in a few places.

The message from students became clearer a couple of years further on. There seemed to be two reasons. First,