

In universities... as the twin principles of collegiality and institutional autonomy imply, management necessarily means self-management. The only effective decisions are those shaped and owned by the scholarly community. The alternative is mismanagement.

He saw collegiality as the 'only engine powerful enough to drive the kind of strategic reforms that Australian universities will need in the next decade' (Gilbert, 1991). Nor did he see any conflict between collegiality and strategic planning.

Unfortunately, the developments outlined in this article suggest that top-down management structures being introduced in the pre-Dawkins universities are not conducive to collegiality, nor to the devolution of powers.

Collegiality may have worked at varying levels of efficiency and effectiveness in the past and it was an ideal which was closely linked to notions of academic freedom and university autonomy. Essentially it grew out of an academic culture grounded in academic teaching and research, but functioning at three levels:

- (a) significant autonomy in the work of the academic, in both teaching and research, i.e. freedom to devise her/his own courses of study and research directions and to expect that the assessment of his/her work would be in the hands of people familiar with his/her teaching and expert in her/his research.
- (b) significant voice in the decision making process on academic matters at the macro and micro levels in the university.
- (c) an ability to freely communicate knowledge and ideas to other academics within the world-wide academic community without fear or favour.

This freedom has been seen as essential to creativity and to original and innovative thinking in teaching and research. It has been often held up as an example by governments of countries such as Australia, USA and Britain in contrast to the practices of the former socialist countries of eastern Europe and of present day China.

Collegiality is very much part of this whole process. But this makes universities very different from the classic business organisation where obedience to the instructions of management is the way of advancement up the hierarchy and where outcomes are virtually the sole determinants of efficiency and effectiveness.

A well known university manager said a few years ago when referring to the trend for many American companies to organise their work force into small, self-contained units with responsibilities and autonomy:

*My ideal organisation would therefore empower its constituent parts and delegate authority to them. They would have the ability to determine how their tasks are to be performed and they would be encouraged to critically test the value of what they are doing (Massaro, 1991).*

In many respects this has been the pattern for university departments with management essentially in a supportive role.

There was still strong support for the notion of collegiality in the universities examined in this project. However, there was also general agreement that as the older academics took their packages or retired, the corporate ethos would take over completely.

There is an assumption that the only form of efficient management is one based on corporate management principles. This assumption pervades the current management reforms in universities surveyed in this project. This is why they do threaten the collegiality that exists in the pre-Dawkins universities, because collegiality and hard line, classic on-line corporate management are incompatible.

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## Endnotes

1. All pre-Dawkins institutions were asked to provide documents on management changes. Most responded but it was only possible to look in detail at six of these institutions.
2. There have always been status symbols pursued in universities, especially associated with the professoriate, but they were essentially rewards for academic excellence (at least in theory) in keeping with the general aims and culture of the university.
3. This pattern of combining existing faculties/schools/departments into mega faculties with mega Deans is so widespread and has so many similarities, all developed over a discrete time period, that the presence of a guiding hand seems a distinct possibility.
4. These conclusions are based on a small sample and may well be challenged after further research.

# How should universities respond to the abolition of compulsory retirement?

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## Background

Australia is following the lead of North America in introducing legislation to abolish or limit compulsory age retirement at 65. New South Wales and South Australia have already abolished compulsory retirement, Queensland legislation came into effect on July 1, 1994 and Western Australian legislation in January 1995. Victoria currently has no legislation but is reviewing its *Equal Opportunity Act 1985*. In addition the *Industrial Relations Reform Act 1994* has age included as a grounds of discrimination and also potentially for unfair dismissal. This may effectively also prohibit compulsory age retirement or action that might allow employers to allow differential treatment for older staff.

Academic institutions are seen to be at particular risk in terms of allowing people to exercise choice about if and when to retire. Academic employment offers a greater degree of job security for those with tenure than most other employment. Academics are also perceived to have a high level of intrinsic job satisfaction, control over working hours, pleasant working conditions and choice about job tasks. For these reasons it has been assumed that they will be more likely than other workers to opt to continue employment past traditional retirement ages. Almost no attention has been paid to non academic staff who are in the majority in most universities. For these reasons the University of Queensland conducted a study to try to estimate how the impending changes might affect work and retirement decisions.

Little research has been carried out on the abolition of compulsory retirement in Australia with a few exceptions (Sheehan, 1995) and the literature is substantially from the United States, where academics became subject to a fully voluntary retirement system only in January 1994. However compulsory retirement at age 70 rather than at age 65 has applied to tenured academics in the United States since 1982 and non-tenured academics since 1978. This grace period between enactment and effective dates was a response to concerns expressed by educational administrators. The delay was to allow time for study, adjustment and the opportunity to request a permanent exemption, if necessary (Smith, 1991).

The concerns in the United States that without compulsory retirement, academic staff would opt to remain in their positions, thus stopping the flow of opportunities to younger staff, appear to be unfounded. Results of a study of 33 institutions in arts and sciences claimed that there was no evidence to suspect that large numbers of academics would not choose to retire in a world without compulsory retirement (Smith, 1991).

Hansen and Holden (1989) found that on the average, tenured academics intend to and do continue to work until age sixty-five, and with the option of continuing to age 70 a small proportion had extended their working lives for a few years. Older respondents in their survey were more likely to anticipate later retirement. As academics age, they were seen to become more reluctant to retire, but this may also reflect selective attrition. The evidence is fairly compelling that academics with fewer publications and lower salaries expect to retire earlier than their more "productive" colleagues.

Over the past twenty years in Australia, the labour force participation rates of older workers have declined. Although older women are increasing their participation in the labour force, the rate at which

males are withdrawing is resulting in fewer older people in employment. In 1986, 80% of males aged 60 to 64 were still in the labour force, but by 1989 this figure had fallen to nearly 50% and is predicted to decrease to 34% in 2001 (House of Representatives, 1990, 1992).

Research indicates that the main reason for the long term decline in participation rates of older Australians is that, as real incomes have risen, individuals have accumulated greater real wealth, thus permitting older persons to retire earlier and enjoy more leisure (Reid, 1989).

Despite the trend of early withdrawal from the labour force generally, a significant proportion of older people would prefer to continue working. A 1990 DEET survey found that 30% of people aged 55 to 64 prefer to work for as long as they are fit and healthy (DEET, 1990). These studies suggest that, given the opportunity, older workers will extend their working lives.

Policy is thus presented with a problem. Older workers' behaviour over the past few decades suggest that removing compulsory age retirement should have little effect on most workplaces since when given a choice people retire earlier rather than later. Yet tertiary administrators are concerned about doddering old professors taking up office space, mumbling in front of classes and presenting a significant danger in laboratories. Younger staff are concerned that if large numbers of older staff delay retirement this will create problems in the academic workforce. It may block the appointment of fresh new PhD graduates, and ultimately put under threat the concept of academic tenure. It also builds in a degree of uncertainty in relation to departmental and institutional planning. In order to develop policy in response to such legislative changes, institutions and unions need to have an understanding of the plans and the preferences of their members.

## The University of Queensland study

In October 1993, a self administered postal survey was conducted of 634 University of Queensland staff aged 54 years and above about their preferred retirement options. Participants were asked at what age they currently expected to retire, their preferences about their work and their retirement, and the factors that were important to them in making decisions about their retirement. This was followed by a series of feedback/discussion sessions which participants were invited to discuss their plans and preferences and views on preferred policy in more detail. Data was also collected from Personnel Services data base indicating the actual ages of retirement of staff over the preceding 10 years.

Over 48% of academic and administrative staff responded, but there were relatively low response rates amongst research and maintenance staff. The vast majority of respondents were full time and currently employed in a tenured or permanent position.

### a. When do staff expect to retire?

There is little evidence to suggest that many staff members plan to retire later than the current retirement age of 65 years. Overall only 5% of respondents indicated that they expected to retire after 65 years, whilst the majority of respondents expect to retire at the current retirement age of 65. A higher proportion of non-academic than academic staff expected to retire before the age of 65.

Comparing actual ages of retirement for those who have retired in the past decade with expected retirement ages of those who will retire in the next decade indicates some differences. Of the 178 academic staff who retired between January 1984 and January 1994, less than half continued to the age of 65 (Table 1).

	55-60	61-64	65	66+	N/Sure
<b>Expected</b> N=144	10	8	72	5	5
<b>Actual 1984-1994</b> N=178	26	27	46	1	

There is a marked difference between the age at which people expect to retire and the age at which their recent predecessors actually have retired. Possible reasons for this include:

1. Differences between age cohorts. The current trend to ever earlier retirement ages may be changing as people's expectations and preferences change.
2. The intervention of unexpected life events eg poor health, family demands, opportunities to take up alternative work or possibly unexpected attractive offers through early retirement programs.
3. Self selection: those who want to, or are able to continue working do so for as long as possible, those who do not retire early and so were out of the sample of current employees.

Although most expected to retire at age 65, in view of expected abolition of compulsory age retirement, it is significant that a relatively high proportion of both academic and non academic staff were interested in continuing to work past the age of 65 (Table 2). Almost 3/4 of academic and 2/3 of non academic staff were interested in remaining at the University after age 65.

	Yes	Not Sure	No
<b>Academic staff</b> N=144	44	28	28
<b>Non academic</b> N=135	33	30	37

There is still some self selection evident, those who are older and still working are more likely to want to continue. Respondents who were aged under 60 are more likely to be unsure of their future work preferences.

The age at which academic staff had retired in the preceding 10 years was highly correlated with rank, with more senior academic and administrative staff being more likely to have delayed retirement until age 65 than those at lower levels. Discriminant analysis suggests that rank was also important in preferences about delaying retirement past age 65. Senior staff (Professors, Readers, senior administrators) were more likely to wish to continue than staff who were at other levels. The

more senior staff members are, the more likely they are to have control over, and choice about, their working conditions, and the greater the salary forgone by retiring.

Gender was also important although it is confounded with rank. Female staff, both academic and non academic, were more likely to plan to retire before the age of 65, and to be less sure about their interest in continuing to work after the age of 65. In common with most universities, the women employees are concentrated in the lower academic and general staff ranks. Women, regardless of age are "stuck" at more junior levels and in jobs without career paths, suggesting that control over work and opportunities to participate in the more intrinsically gratifying work, eg postgraduate supervision and research, may be more limited, therefore their desire to continue working may be less.

Factors that would influence personal decisions to continue working after 65 years included continued good health, satisfaction with their current jobs and a need to stay in the workforce to meet financial commitments.

#### b. Preferences about Employment Terms and Conditions

Although many staff think that they may be interested in continued employment the majority (over 2/3) did not think that they wished to continue to work under the same terms and conditions. They overwhelmingly nominated part time or part year work as their preference. Working on a special interest project, employed for a set time period on a contract or consultancy arrangement, was an option viewed favourably by many.

Retirement was seen by academics as a time, not only of loss of paid employment, but also a loss of status, facilities and contact with colleagues when they could still contribute usefully to university life. Participants felt that, even if it meant incurring a charge, they would like the option of using library facilities, departmental equipment and a university address to pursue their interests and maintain contact with colleagues.

This suggests that if a range of options for continuing employment are available, many staff may choose to take them up. Employers can benefit from flexible employment arrangements by retaining employees who provide a significant source of knowledge or expertise and can act as mentors to other staff (Office of Ageing, 1993).

Options could include reduced hours (such as part-time or more flexible hours), or alternatively a reduced workload (eg administration only duties). Academics in particular could work a one semester on, one semester off arrangement equivalent to study leave. Another alternative might be a part time, postgraduates students only, teaching load.

Discussions with participants confirmed that financial considerations are paramount. Individuals must know they can manage financially before embarking on such phased retirement if it means a reduction in hours and therefore salary. For some staff members, financial factors alone may preclude their ability to take up the option of phased retirement.

Insofar as predicted preferences may or may not be a good indicator of actual behaviour, it appears likely that a fairly high proportion of academic staff, particularly at the more senior levels, will opt for some form of extended employment past age 65. For most the preference is not full time, full year employment.

It can be argued that this could be used constructively to enable universities to retain some of the accumulated knowledge and skill of their senior staff while meeting staff members desire for more leisure. If such flexibility could be permitted earlier (eg by allowing the option of part time employment to be phased before age 65), the university could gain by allowing the staff member to reduce working hours and salary but retain some attachment to the organisation.

In terms of enterprise bargaining the option of greater flexibility could be traded against the need for ensuring that new employment opportunities are available for younger staff by allowing older tenured staff to take up a contract with a set termination date which allows

flexible working conditions, shorter hours or special types of employment, but requiring them to give up their tenure in return.

Any such change to late life employment and retirement options must be predicated upon financial flexibility that would facilitate continued employment and allow such phased work arrangements. It must be mutually beneficial to both employer and employee, and it requires a different attitude towards older staff than that prevailing in many of our organisations which view them as a nuisance, "dead wood", and getting in the way or hiring or promoting younger, dynamic people.

There does seem to be potential for developing a range of options that would meet the preference of many older staff for flexible retirement and reduced working hours, while at the same time giving organisations some greater degree of certainty about when people will retire. Yet many barriers exist to the acceptance of such options.

#### Barriers to flexible employment

One major set of barriers is the current structure of superannuation, taxation and social security schemes.

A second is the interaction with tenure, performance appraisal, unsatisfactory performance and enterprise bargaining.

A third is the attitude towards older people and older workers that tends to permeate Australian society.

#### a. Superannuation, Taxation and Flexible Retirement

While social and industrial legislation are removing compulsory age retirement, superannuation and tax legislation are likely to encourage the continuation of current retirement practices at least in the short term.

The majority of full time, older university employees belong to a superannuation scheme. Coverage rates for male staff are much higher than for female, who are likely to have little superannuation other than the compulsory productivity scheme (TESS) and to have very short periods of covered employment. This reflects prior discrimination against women in academia and lack of eligibility, encouragement, or compulsion for them to join superannuation schemes. Some of the barriers to changing employment opportunities rest with the benefit structure of the scheme, others with superannuation and taxation regulation.

Superannuation is regulated under the *Superannuation Industry (Supervision) Act 1993*. Under this Act, with a few exceptions, contributions cannot be made to a superannuation scheme once the contributing employee turns 65. Furthermore members must cash in their superannuation benefits as soon as practicable after they turn age 65, although those working can defer receipt of benefits until age 70. Staff who continue past age 65 will be slightly cheaper for universities because superannuation contributions cannot be made on their behalf.

The situation that was preferred by many of the respondents to this study is reducing to part time or part year employment and combining income derived from a superannuation pension or annuity with a part time salary from the university. However this is discouraged by the taxation system. The combined income of an annuity and salary is taxable at the usual income tax rates, and provisional tax is payable on the annuity portion. Any tax advantage in relationship to the annuity is therefore lost, and this could reasonably be expected to be a deterrent on phased retirement for those who could not afford to defer receipt of their superannuation. Social Security also discourages the combination of part time earnings with the age pension by the very low earnings limits and high benefit reduction rates (50%) which would preclude all but very limited or casual work.

Staff who wish to commence part time or phased work arrangements before they turn 65 are dissuaded from this by the benefit structure of superannuation schemes. Many defined benefit superannuation schemes base benefits on a formula which includes the last three years of earnings. Reduction of earnings by dropping to part time or part year employment will consequently reduce superannuation entitlements.

Superannuation membership can be used to encourage retirement, and (if possible) early retirement. Employers can capitalise on their

employees' membership in defined benefit superannuation schemes by offering staff the option of entering into a 3 year terminal contract at an increased salary if they agree to give up tenure. This costs the University more in the short term for the increased salary and superannuation contribution, but gains certainty about retirement date.

#### b. Personnel Management Policies

Mandatory age retirement has in many universities become the "fall back option" in terms of managing unsatisfactory or sub-optimal performance. It is possible that employers will argue (as some are now) that tenure will need to be abolished if compulsory age retirement is no longer available as an option to remove "non performing" staff. Alternatively, it seems more useful to establish effective performance criteria for all staff rather than relying upon retirement and early retirement incentive programs as the main strategy for getting rid of unwanted or "unproductive" staff.

Academic staff in this study anticipated problems whereby older staff who continued working were unable to recognise that they had ceased to be productive in research or to perform adequately in teaching. It was recognised that open communication regarding performance needed to be developed so that employer and employee could part with dignity and respect intact if the situation warranted it. Performance appraisal and the treatment of unsatisfactory performance is going to become a key issue in University responses to the elimination of compulsory age retirement. The introduction of greater flexibility in employment and particularly in late life employment may well become hostage to enterprise bargaining negotiations in relationship to unsatisfactory performance.

Universities are more likely to offer enhanced employment options later in life to "more valued" staff. Secretarial, cleaning and lower level academic staff, the positions where most women are concentrated, are unlikely to be among those so favoured. The impact on, and options for, female employees need particular consideration in the development and implementation of late life employment and retirement options.

The need to open up opportunities for women is given as the reason for maintaining compulsory age retirement (Zanetic, 1994). Such arguments appear to overlook the fact that mandatory retirement will affect both genders - not just men. It is unfortunate that combating discrimination against women is used as the excuse for maintaining discrimination on the grounds of age.

#### c. Attitudes Towards Older People:

Perhaps one of the greatest barriers to flexible and creative options for continued employment of older workers rests in the attitude towards older workers that are held by employers, unions and the Australian public. Older people are seen as less flexible, less creative and less energetic. They are often viewed as being less willing to adapt to new technology and unable to keep up to date with changes in their field. While most research confirms that older workers are reliable, do not require excessive amounts of sick leave and adapt to new developments in their discipline or workplace at least as well as younger workers, ageist attitudes remain deeply entrenched (ILO, 1979).

The older respondents in this survey said that they thought it was fair for them to "move on" to give younger people a chance. Several voiced their concern that if older people did not "move on" younger staff would by necessity be recruited on a contract rather than on a tenure basis.

A strong commitment to acting in the perceived best interests of their Departments and the 'younger generation' was evident, and many staff were willing to negotiate a mutually beneficial way of retiring...if the university was also prepared to adopt a flexible and positive approach

It is clear also that a range of options need to be put in place to give all staff, and particularly older staff, the option of changing their employment arrangements including relinquishing tenure and entering into a new contract which may have a definite termination date. In return a range of more attractive options including changed job

responsibilities, reduced workloads and increased salary loadings and a range of fringe benefits including continuing superannuation contributions could be offered.

### Conclusion

The survey suggests that financial security in retirement is of the utmost importance, but so too is the desire for individuals to have flexibility to organise their work/leisure balance in later life. Approached creatively and pro-actively it can be an opportunity for both the employer and the employee to benefit from increased availability of flexible employment options and improved work practices. It is important that superannuation and the related taxation legislation act to reinforce new options rather than restricting or limiting employers' and employees' abilities to respond positively to such challenges. It also requires a degree of flexibility and creativity in negotiation between employers and unions, and an acceptance of the rights of older workers.

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## In Reply

# Knowing, learning and the ideal of knowledge in higher education

Tony Coady and Seumas Miller

In a recent issue of the *Australian Universities' Review* (1993, No.2) we presented a qualified defence of the relevance of John Henry Newman's views on universities to the debate about contemporary higher education. Subsequently, Graham Hendry (*AUR*, 1994, No.1) argued against a number of the propositions we put forward. While Hendry accepts our main point about the importance of reasoning and knowledge as ends in themselves, as well as means to other good things like economic development, he rejects our conception of knowledge (and reasoning?) as objective. Hendry favours a conception of knowledge he terms constructivist, and puts forward a particular view of tertiary teaching as co-operative learning which he believes consorts perfectly with his constructivist account of knowledge. By contrast, Hendry sees our "objectivism" as wedded to a teacher-centred transmission model of tertiary teaching. We think that Hendry's position embodies a number of common, and not so common, confusions, but we welcome the opportunity to clarify and elaborate our outlook in opposition to his.

The term "constructivist" like the term "objectivist" is used in a variety of ways in philosophical discourse. In some of these, such as the "Kantian constructivism" of the political philosopher, John Rawls, it is not at all clear that it is incompatible with the commitment to objectivity that we favour, but Hendry's version of a constructivist account of knowledge is certainly one we reject. Furthermore, we do not accept Hendry's claim that our commitment to objective knowledge entails a teacher-centred transmission model of tertiary teaching. Let us consider knowledge first.

We agree with Hendry (and just about everyone else) that our beliefs and theories are quite often false and should be subject to some rational scrutiny and, where necessary, revision. But this is not, as Hendry thinks, a truth which entails "constructivism". Rather it is a commonplace of elementary philosophical theorising about knowledge. Similarly, it is not contentious that we have developed all manner of methodological principles to test our beliefs and theories. This fact is not, again contra Hendry, in any way inconsistent with objectivist accounts of knowledge. Objectivists need hold only that there can be ascertainable objective truth, and that it is sometimes attained, not that absolute certainties abound or error is insignificant. Nor need an objectivist (in our sense) hold the primitive "copy" theory of knowledge foisted on us by Hendry whereby people know things when they have representations of "real entity" knowledge (p.41). We are not altogether sure what this phrase means, but, in any case, all we need, and do, hold is that the knowledge people have is of truths (since "false knowledge" is a contradiction) and that what is true is made so by what is real. Thus far, of course, such a claim is purely formal, and much of the real philosophical interest comes with the attempt to provide serious theories of truth and reality. But whatever these theories are, they will have to abide by the constraints of the formal claim.<sup>1</sup>

With these preliminaries out of the way, let us examine Hendry's main criticism of objective knowledge. This rests on his claim that "we can never step outside our knowledge" (p.42). The meaning of this sentence is hard to grasp; but it surely cannot mean that persons are incapable of reflecting on their own beliefs. After all, Hendry's claim itself is a piece of reflection on his and our beliefs; it seems to be a

highly synoptic claim about the *whole* of "our" knowledge, to the effect that it cannot be surveyed without that survey itself being a piece of knowledge. One can readily agree with this, indeed there is a paradox involved in the idea that we might survey the whole of our knowledge, since the survey itself is a piece of knowledge that is necessarily not part of the survey. Yet this is no barrier to my conducting far-ranging critical assessments of my beliefs. Nor could Hendry mean that in holding a belief one is in principle unable to attend to anything other than one's beliefs. After all, any rational person actually knows that some of his/her beliefs are false. Again, when people gaze at a full moon and believe it to be a full moon, they are attending to the moon, and not to their beliefs about the moon.

But perhaps in saying that one cannot get outside of one's own beliefs, Hendry is simply emphasising the undoubted fact that knowing involves a subject with psychological states directed upon the object of knowledge. This is evidently true, but nothing about the objective truth or falsity of what is believed would follow from this. There is a confusion on the part of Hendry here between the trivial claim that beliefs are subjective, in the sense that they are states of a subject, and the substantive - and, we believe, false - claim that the content of a belief cannot be objectively true. But from the fact that a belief state, or state of some subject, is subjective, nothing follows as to the objective truth or falsehood of the content of that belief. Your belief that you have a head (and only one head) is subjective, in the sense that it is a fact about a particular subject and its psychological states, namely the fact that the person believes that he/she has a head. But it is still an objective fact that the person's belief is true and it is an equally objective fact that the person has that particular belief. Someone who thought that they or their community was at liberty to "construct" or make up an equally valid belief that they had no head (while keeping the meaning of such terms as "head" constant, and engaging in no actual decapitations) would be deluded. The fact that related delusions abound in various of the "new humanities" merely shows how infectious such exciting confusions can be.<sup>2</sup>

It must indeed be acknowledged that inquiry is a human process, fraught with uncertainties, and with its outcomes necessarily conditioned by frameworks of thought, attitudes and values. But this is itself something that is *known*, and that the attitude of objectivity requires us to admit. The need for modesty about our own views, and respect for divergent opinions, is (where appropriate) a correlative of the objective stance, not an objection to it.

Hendry does not succeed in undermining the notion of objective knowledge and indeed on his own constructivist account, it is very hard to see how he can sustain any distinction at all between truth and falsity or knowledge and ideology. Hendry is not fully explicit about his philosophical assumptions regarding truth and knowledge but he seems to oscillate between mutually inconsistent conceptions. One conception is a crude consensus theory of truth. Roughly a proposition is true if we can get everyone to agree on it. Hendry's reference to "acceptable ideas and procedures" (p.41) and students working together to achieve a consensus (p.41) suggest this outlook. This is profoundly unsatisfactory. As the history of superstition, ideology and of cultural conditioning has demonstrated, it is all too easy to get