

Education should not be a commodity: It is a duty for both society and the citizen to develop their knowledge as much as they can.

Traditionally, academic education is assessed by merit; but as universities adopt more vocational courses these must be assessed for competency. Yet merit can alternatively be evaluated by rate of progress, without sacrificing proficiency. Large class-sizes can teach knowledge, but skill and problem-solving expertise, needed for musical performance or flying training for example, require small groups and individual tuition. Likewise, science and engineering require costly, elaborate practical facilities that have made them unsustainable at many institutions. These subjects could be best reserved as smaller Masters programs, with general theoretical science and mathematics training done more affordably at the undergraduate level.

Theoretical bachelor's programs with a national curriculum, assessed independently and progressively at certificate, diploma and degree level would be more economical, with greater integrity and more flexibility: Much better. When a vice-chancellor should say on a national broadcast that their medical students forget half of what they've been taught in six months, maybe it's time for a rethink.

Merging smaller universities into full-sized ones will be more economical, with increased course offerings being available at a consistent quality.

I append messages regarding current higher education reform, the Bradley Review, Police Studies, and the 20/20 Summit.

**From:** [MH Mills](#)

**Sent:** Monday, 6 March 2023 3:20 PM

**To:** [jason.clare.mp@aph.gov.au](mailto:jason.clare.mp@aph.gov.au); [Susan.Templeman.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:Susan.Templeman.MP@aph.gov.au)

**Subject:** Higher Education Reform

To Senator Jason Clare, MP & Susan Templeman:

A university is supposed to be a convocation of scholars; however, this is what you get with a self-governing hierarchy, which tends to serve the interests of those in charge: All the salaries going to the top, with little oversight; while entry-level staff suffer wage-theft, over-work, or worse: redundancies – to the extent of abolishing entire departments; while the students suffer overcrowding, lack of personalised supervision, and difficulties in successfully completing their courses. How did this all happen?

Here follows a tale of two campuses (or campi if you insist) – compare the pair (to coin a phrase): One, autonomous, with a highly-paid chancellor, vice-chancellor, and several pro-vice-chancellors with vague duties (how many lecturers would that all pay for?); the other, a nominal faculty, the same size as both the university AND another faculty of a major university, administered by a dean and a handful of department heads, about as many as the first example, with around the same numbers of students. We have several examples of both. Which is more economic? Which has more funds available for smaller classes and more teachers? Which has a bigger variety of courses (offering a universal education), being part of a larger university college (the hint is in the name)? Which is more successful, happier, with a greater international reputation and research output?

The answer is a no-brainer, the solution amalgamation: Merge the fraction-sized universities into a sensible sized one with sufficient 'critical mass' to function as one should. We simply can't afford not to. And question the naysayers, these robber barons, who stand to lose their extravagant salaries while unnecessarily duplicating other's duties: What is the real reason behind the groundless

reasons you advance? The answer will be the very redundancies they ruthlessly imposed on those less powerful than themselves to save money necessary for themselves – and doing so remorselessly. True Sheriff of Nottingham policy: time to take the money back from the rich and return it to the poor. How can this be done? Too easy – select the best performing chancellor from the group you wish to merge and get them to clear out the dead wood, or find a new one who will. Higher education reform.

I could have mounted an equally persuasive Right Wing argument (efficiency, return on investment, takeovers and acquisitions etc), but in Rome...(do as the Romans do).

Regards,  
Malcolm

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The following material represents my personal views

Universities and TAFEs differ fundamentally no longer

The argument that universities and TAFEs differ fundamentally no longer exists. Having taught and studied at both here and abroad I have seen the traditional differences eroded to virtual obscurity. The only advantage universities really offer is status: academic 'snob' value with the 'ivy league' taking the laurels with their mock-Gothic/Tudor architecture. Traditionally, universities have offered a liberal competitive pedagogic education – derived literally from the Platonic/Socratic bringing up youth and drawing out their knowledge by inquisition to develop problem-solving skills. TAFEs on the other hand offer an adult competency-based vocational training: training to do as opposed to teaching to think, which implies and engenders subservience of the technician to the graduate.

With time, universities have incorporated more and more vocational courses from law, medicine, dentistry, veterinary science and architecture to nursing, physiotherapy aviation and hospitality all of which unquestionably demand competency and traditionally reside in schools to imply this, rather than the academically related groups within faculties (that keep them 'honest' by informed peer review), where a large school such as medicine may draw upon several subjects taught in departments being part of different faculties. Universities can now offer shorter courses such as certificates and diplomas. Conversely, TAFE courses have become increasingly demanding – often more so than with university courses that cannot provide the training of practical skills such as medical laboratory science, technical radiography and motor mechanics.

So I think it is time to relegate such professional/ working class distinctions to the past, and encourage social mobility. I have taught students at TAFE, there because they needed to work full-time as well, unlike the majority of undergraduates, and not because they were less able. Perhaps one situation, from London, gives the most poignant illustration of a heartless inequality: a twin I knew who having literally drawn the shorter straw was restricted to technical college in order to

support a sick mother, while his brother studied at university. It's time to make education fair for all; for in the end, it is not a privilege, but a duty!

Some technical colleges have acquired university status either by merging with existing universities or via an institute of technology stage. Amalgamations are best achieved with judicious incentives as at Newcastle. My suggestion is for full integration not only of TAFEs, but police and other academies with the universities at a state level. Within the same course there is little real competition between the minor universities, the major decisive factor for the student being location, not prestige.

Miscellaneous thoughts

University and TAFE entry requirements

The entry requirements and school preparation for higher education admission should be the same i.e. federal school and higher education systems. The different state systems are too inefficient – but these can usefully be devolved to state and regional levels with advantage for some matters and to ensure even resource distribution.

A school-leaver makes career choices based upon what they like to do, what things relatively they are good at and how many well-paid career opportunities exist for each choice. Under the competitive system, desirable but not taxing careers (eg physiotherapy) enjoy unnecessarily high qualification requirements for course matriculation – leaving other careers (perhaps engineering) that need talent lacking.

It is becoming more apparent that there is not 'general intelligence'. There are several skill traits – e.g. in arithmetic, writing, science and music – innate and acquired; and, like a hand of cards, some do well, average or poorly in all, most, few or none of them. Understandably, a student would wish to advertise the best and conceal the worst, but there is a cost to them and the system. Frequently, a student will successfully complete all but one or two subjects of a course (frequently mathematical) and not graduate – they simply do not have the mental resources due to clinical attention deficit or other reasons. This causes quite unnecessary profound heartache and disappointment.

This can be addressed by either assessing the student more carefully and excluding their entry, or altering the course by either simplifying the hard subject to minimum competency or removing it (so as to offer the same subject as a science or an arts major with and without maths subjects), or offering the hard subject as a post-graduate course. With university participation climbing from 10 to 50% over the past decades, this problem is inevitable. There are simple, quick aptitude tests available that could be administered with a school leaving certificate or as a university entry requirement that would benefit the student and university: knowing your weaknesses can be more useful than knowing your strengths. All professions have areas of speciality or require servicing by experts from another field, so giving the chance to be able to do what they like in a profession (say biology or psychology) without the need to do something they can't without help is good not bad. Professions and courses should be matched and adapted more to participants' characteristics as far as possible.

A major flaw in the Australian education system is to attempt to rank all students in each state on 'ability', where students try to select the highest scoring topics to study while the administrators attempt to compensate for this. This stems from the error that there is a general intelligence: there is not. Ranking students is humiliating and stupid. The UK system of students supplying a suite of

subjects at ordinary or advanced level is much more akin to the 'butcher, baker, chandler' nature of a functioning cooperative society, not the competitive rat-race that ranking engenders. It must be remembered that ultimately, the degree is for employer not student or university concerned. Consequently, yet conversely, retaining and recognising the enabling disciplines of maths, statistics, physics, chemistry, biology and communication as broad suite are invaluable for those who can master them: and these as a general science degree should be encouraged as an excellent thorough preparation for many specialisations followed post graduation. These disciplines are often unattractive as few lucrative vocational (read 'meal ticket') options are available – perhaps the award wage should be increased for those who have them in jobs that benefit from them. The ability to teach these skills should be preserved.

#### Quality and class size

Unlike the school education system, there are no limits to class size, where the economies of scale have little resistance. Traditionally, using senior students to help allows higher numbers in courses, but this still unacceptably limits the interactive problem-solving and skill mastery aspects of any course. Often they are merely shown not taught what to do. There should be class-size limits linked to quality ratings for each course. Plague numbers usually occur in first year where often the most support is needed to transition to university-style education, but this year is frequently used to 'cull the weak' – rather unsympathetically and unnecessarily. These high numbers are often achieved at the expense of teaching places, partly due to an excessively high administrator to teacher ratio – these costs should be examined carefully to maximise quality not quantity of output and the whole system rationalised by merging to reduce unnecessary administrative duplication or administrative activities.

#### Playing the game

If university rankings are based on rejection rate and research output, following Heisenberg's principle of measurement altering the outcome, this can be achieved in ways the originators of such requirements do not anticipate. Simple ways to raise these are to offer few places in popular courses and to encourage more, less demanding articles - as impact ratings can relate more to surprise than importance. Academics should be allowed to take intellectual risks and fail in order to make great findings.

I append earlier letters in this vein.

Dr Malcolm Mills

**Subject:** Bachelor of Police Studies

**To:** Shayne Neumann, Member for Blair 4/12/07

...I hope you find this proposal interesting - I think it could revolutionise policing. We could bring in overseas police to obtain new perspectives: for an example, in China (like Japan I understand), where I have travelled extensively, their crime rate is relatively low as they have a well integrated community policing akin to our 'Neighbourhood Watch' but far more proactive - it would be impossible of a new person to arrive in a community without all knowing and attending to their actions (perhaps a little too intrusive, but this is to serve as an alternative perspective). I think a force of university trained police would be able to give the community an unrivalled degree of

care. I also believe it would give the police a more balanced view of society if they did their training amongst other students pursuing different vocations, just as law students do.

... with the relocation of the Queensland Police Service Training to Gatton, there presents an even greater opportunity of developing a complete academic training package for these recruits - as they fall right in the middle of our catchment area. The numbers and revenue would be considerable. The demands of policing have evolved, especially with the introduction of women into the force, where the societal aspects along with monitoring and preventive measures call for a more modern, professional and proactive education: requiring skills in psychology and sociology. This course would become the envy of Australia, and why not? Policing is a vital job, and we would all agree that a graduate trained officer would perform superlatively, and command the respect they deserve of this important and challenging duty. I understand that Fire and Ambulance services may also relocate to Gatton, and if so, we already have the expertise to provide paramedic training to both of those, which too could be supplied with complete undergraduate training.

Yours,

Dr Malcolm Mills

To: 20/20 Summit 19-20/4/2008

Is There Case for State Amalgamation of Provincial Universities?

Are there immediate and ongoing economies and benefits from rationalising the provincial 'non-big 8' universities in each state into single bodies of an equivalent size to the big 8s? The current savings have been or are to be made by reduction in relatively low-paid junior 'coal-face' productive staff, but even bigger savings could be achieved by reductions in unnecessary highly-paid senior staff replicating work at currently competing universities.

Benefits include more students, diversity of courses, expertise and resources, realising and resulting the economies of scale and bargaining power equivalent to the big 8 universities, with the reduction of senior management who are less qualified or productive yet paid the same as those in the big 8. Inefficiencies of smallness include, for example, inter-library loans that are required to be made from other campuses and the employment of staff to do something unnecessary if a larger university with a comprehensive library holding were there instead. The economies of scale would also allow more competitive bargaining for particular products - be it course materials, library holdings or advanced research and teaching equipment and technology. Management and academic software costs would proportionality reduced. The increase in size would allow these 'super-universities' to achieve the 'critical mass' to provide the definitive universal education for which they were originally conceived. A greater variety of courses would be achieved by employing well-established correspondence and distance education technologies to other campuses: and they would be all at the same standard. This would also encourage inter-disciplinary study and research which is a hallmark of a good university.

Many provincial universities already have multiple campuses, so the administrative know-how already exists to manage them as a group. Whether a complete amalgamation or the generation of a cluster of universities that did the same thing would be a matter of detail, but being done at the state level would be imperative in thus providing a comprehensive, universal education opportunity for all within that state: effectively US style 'state universities'. Their international reputation would be enhanced by having fewer larger universities.

I'm not necessarily advocating this, but I expect the case would be apparent to governmental higher education administrators, and if this is seen as such, we should decide whether to embrace it, resist it, or respond to it as best suits our interests, but to ignore it at our peril.

Dr Malcolm Mills

Note the following link:

<http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/documents/universities/AustralianHEMerges-Amalgamations.pdf>