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Trends and Developments in Higher Education in Australia

the traditional pattern

Since I assume that most readers of the *McGill Journal* are not familiar with the Australian educational scene, I propose to outline briefly the traditional pattern of higher education here. I hope that this introduction may serve to illumine the recent developments and current trends which I shall then try to describe. Readers who would like to know something more of that pattern will find a useful description in chapters 4, 5 and 7 of Cowan's *Education for Australians*¹ and some helpful discussion in Wheelwright's *Higher Education in Australia*.²

All the older universities in Australia are State foundations; private or Church-supported institutions are unknown at this level. They came early on the scene — Sydney in 1850 and Melbourne in 1853 — when these cities were still in their infancy. By 1911, when the University of Western Australia opened its doors, there was one — and one only — in each State; and naturally each was in the capital city. All were governed on the pattern of the older English provincial universities, with a Council representative of the community's leaders and including some academics, while academic affairs were managed by the traditional structure of Departments, Faculties, and Professorial Boards. Junior academics had little or no say in these bodies, and each Department was typically headed by its single "god-professor." The chief executive was the Vice-Chancellor while the "civil service" was headed by the Registrar. Those who completed the full course of secondary education, and were successful in the external "Matriculation" or "Leaving" examinations, were *ipso facto* qualified for ad-

mission; and even in the elitist educational situation which prevailed until after the Second World War, no further selection process was required. Finance was derived from the State governments, from student fees and from gifts and endowments. The Commonwealth Government played little or no part. Student residences were provided by the Churches, and never from public funds.

The courses were generally patterned on the Scottish model — beginning with a fairly broad first year in which three or four subjects were studied and narrowing gradually to the study of one or two subjects in the third or fourth years. Those who showed real promise were selected after one or two years' work to continue their studies for honours degrees for a further year beyond the three normal for the pass degree course. There was very little higher degree work and it was not until comparatively recently that any doctoral degrees were awarded.

post-war changes

After the Second World War, the pressures general to the whole Western world began to be felt. The increase in the rate of growth of knowledge led the Commonwealth Government to establish the Australian National University — a purely post-graduate institution, divided in the first instance into four research schools — of Medical, Physical, and Social Sciences, and for Pacific and Oriental Studies. Australian scholars would no longer need to travel to Europe or to North America if they felt the need to leave their own State University for post-graduate work; and, for the first time, the Commonwealth Government became directly involved in financing University work.

The growth of population — due in Australia, not only to higher birth-rates, but also to immigration at a very high level — and the tendency of young people to stay at school and to complete the full secondary school course in ever-increasing numbers, led to the establishment of new institutions by the States in cities other than the capitals. The first of these, the University College of New England, had indeed been established just before the war. It is in Armidale in northern New South Wales, and was initially a College of the University of Sydney — just as the Colleges at Hull and Exeter had been Colleges of the University of London. It was followed,

after the war, by the Colleges in Canberra, Newcastle, Wollongong, Townsville and Broken Hill. Each of these, in turn, except the last, has gradually developed in size and status until it has become a University in its own right. A different post-war development was the creation, initially as a University of Technology, of the University of New South Wales, at Kensington in Sydney. It absorbed the post-matriculation work which was already being done in the Technical Colleges of the State, and so, in a sense, leaped into full existence from the very outset. But it very soon became obvious that governmental interest in the education of more technologists and applied scientists was not wholly in accord with the wishes of the students concerned, and the University soon had to develop on a broader front. On the other hand, the demand for subgraduate, tertiary courses continued, and the Technical Colleges had to be re-created to provide them.

the murray committee

A major watershed in the development of University education in Australia can be traced to the setting up of the Committee on Australian Universities. It was established by the Commonwealth Government in 1956, and there is no doubt that it was the brain-child of the then Prime Minister, Mr. (now Sir) Robert Menzies. He invited Sir Keith Murray, at that time the Chairman of the University Grants Committee of the United Kingdom, to come to Australia to chair the Committee, which was to examine the whole state of the Universities of the Commonwealth. Sir Keith accepted, and brought with him, as a member of the Committee, Sir Charles Morris, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leeds. They were joined by three distinguished Australians; they worked quickly and produced a remarkable report in 1957. They stressed the poor state of many of the Universities, which they found short of every kind of material facility with numerically inadequate staffing. They pointed out that these institutions were about to be overwhelmed by a tidal wave of would-be entrants; there was, therefore, an urgent need for an immediate and massive injection of finance to bring them up to a reasonable standard, and to provide a firmer foundation on which the rapid expansion which would shortly be needed could be based. Such finance could only come from the Commonwealth Government and appropriate admin-

istrative machinery was needed to ensure the fair and effective provision of such funds.

the australian universities' commission

The Murray Committee recommended, therefore, the setting up of an Australian University Grants Committee, on the lines of the U.G.C. This was immediately accepted by the Commonwealth Government and the Australian Universities Commission was established. The title was chosen — largely, it is believed, on Sir Robert Menzies' own initiative — to indicate the fairly wide terms of reference which it was given: he felt that the word "Grants" might indicate that the new body's *only* function would be financial. He believed — and his belief was expressed in the terms of reference actually decided upon — that its responsibilities should include that of informing and advising the Minister on the necessity for financial assistance to the States in relation to the Universities and also that of co-ordinating the balanced development of all Australian Universities so that their resources would be used to the greatest possible advantage for Australia.³ The membership was to be on the lines of that of the U.G.C.: a full-time Chairman was to be supported by a permanent Secretariat, provided by the Commonwealth Government, and by four part-time members. The Chairman himself would be a distinguished academic and the part-timers would be drawn equally from leaders of the academic and the business world. Sir Leslie Martin, Professor of Physics in the University of Melbourne, was the first Chairman. The impact of these decisions was marked. The Universities received a substantial immediate once-for-all injection of funds to help them to remedy some of their worst deficiencies and the scale of their regular grants, both capital and recurrent, was greatly improved.

The effect on the morale of all concerned was notable, and a period of great progress began. Many of the most out-of-date buildings in the older Universities were replaced, much obsolete equipment was dispensed with, and staff-student ratios — which in some departments had been deplorable — were improved. The recruitment of academic staff, too, received a notable tonic, and large numbers were recruited from outside Australia mainly from the United Kingdom.

the foundation of new universities since 1958

During this period, too, several new Universities came into being — notably Monash in Victoria and Flinders in South Australia. The Murray Committee had pointed out that the number of University places available was proportionately lower in Victoria than in Australia as a whole and called special attention to the need for a new University there. In accordance with the “post-Sputnik” philosophy of the moment, it was expected that Monash would be a technological institution. It was perhaps significant that its first Chancellor, Sir Robert Blackwood, and its first Vice-Chancellor, Dr. J. A. L. Matheson, were both engineers. But once the University opened, as it did after a remarkably short period of intensive planning and hard preliminary work, in 1961, it became apparent that the legitimate aspirations of individuals would make necessary the provision of a well-balanced University, making large provision for the traditional Arts and Social Science subjects. It is in this form that Monash has, in fact, developed.

the martin committee

In 1961 the Commonwealth Government set up another Committee. No doubt, it had been watching with interest, the establishment of the Robbins Committee in the United Kingdom; and the remarkable development of tertiary education in some of the States of the U.S.A. — notably perhaps California — must have brought home to the Governments of all developed countries what a major item education at this level was bound to be in its budgets in the future. This new Committee was also chaired by Sir Leslie Martin, and hence has usually been called after him. Its fourteen members included two of the State Directors-General of Education, several other prominent academics and educationists, and leading business men. Its terms of reference were “to consider the pattern of tertiary education in relation to the needs and resources of Australia; and to make recommendations to the Australian Universities Commission on the future development of tertiary education in Australia.” It is to be noted that this Committee was to consider *tertiary* education as a whole, and yet it was to report to the *Universities* Commission. “Tertiary” was defined as meaning “all education following a full secondary

school training.”

Among its recommendations⁴ was the philosophical one that “Higher Education should be available as a basic right, to all qualified to profit from it.” This was to be achieved, partly, by a great expansion in the number of university places; they should rise, in the Committee’s opinion, from the 1963 figure of 69,000 to 125,000 by 1975. This growth should be attained as much by the expansion of existing small or young Universities or Colleges as by the establishment of new ones. In Victoria, for example, the total of approximately 38,000 places which seemed likely to be needed by 1975 should be provided by limiting the University of Melbourne to its existing size — which included 14,000 students, by allowing Monash to grow to about 12,000 and by providing sufficient funds to ensure the rapid growth of La Trobe — already being planned at the time of the publication of the report — to a final size of the same order. The Committee also called attention to the need for a higher percentage of post-graduate students and to the provision of more residential places. It was also recommended that a number of places equal to those to be provided in Universities should be provided in “other institutions.”

colleges of advanced education

These “other institutions,” in each State, should be under the aegis of an “Institute of Colleges.” These Institutes, financed jointly by State and Commonwealth in each case, would be governed by a Council, headed by a leading member of the community as its President; their chief executive officer would be the Vice-President, who would have the support of a Secretary (or Registrar) and an appropriate “civil service.” To these Institutes would be admitted those institutions which were already handling appreciable numbers of students at a truly tertiary level — for example, the Technical Colleges, with their Diploma courses in Engineering, Applied Science, Business Studies, Art, and many other subjects, as well as the single-purpose colleges such as those for Agriculture, Forestry, Pharmacy, or Domestic Arts. The State Institute, of course, would be bound to satisfy itself that any College applying for admission had reached the required standard. The Institutes would receive grants from State and Commonwealth and would allocate money to the individual colleges. At first these “Colleges of Advanced Education,” as they were to be called, would offer no work beyond the Diploma level; but the

Institutes would, in time, be able to award degrees "for work of an appropriate standard."

The report also advised that the scope of the courses to be offered should be widened; that the colleges should offer greatly improved amenities to students, that staff should be recruited by open advertisement, and that the level of salaries should be improved.

recommendations in regard to the education of teachers

The Committee recognised the need for the professional training of *all* teachers, and pointed out the dangers inherent in a situation in which the Teachers' Colleges were too closely associated with the employing authority. They made it clear that they regarded the recruitment of high quality staff as a first priority, and that this — in their opinion — could only be done through open advertisement. A few colleges, notably in South Australia, had already adopted this practice. Boards of Teacher Education should therefore be set up in each State, to advise the State Government on needs and developments in this field, and to act as the channel through which each State could receive Commonwealth funds for the education of teachers. The Boards would also approve the content of courses, and standards in all institutions for the education of teachers, would grant the Teachers' Certificates in each State, and, ultimately, would award professional degrees in Education. Some other interesting recommendations in connection with teacher-training (as the Committee termed it) were that all courses would require University entrance standards for admission, and would all be at least three years' duration. The system of "bonding" whereby students accepting State scholarships undertake, in return, to serve as teachers in the State education service for a period of years should be gradually discontinued, and some Teachers' Colleges should become autonomous, and admit persons other than those intending to become teachers.

the reaction of governments

By the date of the publication of the Murray report, much progress had been made in providing additional University places. In addition to Monash and Flinders, already men-

tioned, Macquarie in New South Wales and La Trobe in Victoria were being planned, and the Australian National University had been reconstituted so as to include the former Canberra University College as its School of General Studies, while the research schools — now increased to six in number — remained as post-graduate Schools within the same University. The Commonwealth accepted the Martin Committee's plea for more University places, and in recent years several Colleges have become new Universities — e.g. Townsville is now the James Cook University of Northern Queensland; Newcastle and Wollongong in New South Wales are full universities, and steps are being taken to plan new institutions in Perth (Western Australia), and in Brisbane (Queensland). The newcomer universities, although in many ways still of a very traditional pattern, have in some cases, (e.g. La Trobe, Macquarie and Flinders) adopted the "School" pattern of the same kind as that found in the newer English Universities; some, too, have modified their governing academic boards to include more non-professorial staff, and reduce the boards in size; and La Trobe is organizing the whole University in a number of College-Unions. All have begun to include students on their Councils. But on the whole, the pattern is still traditional and conservative.

The Commonwealth Government also accepted — with apparent enthusiasm — what Sir Robert Menzies described in Parliament as "the heart of the Report" — namely the concept of the Institutes of Colleges and the Colleges of Advanced Education. It established, as a counterpart of the A.U.C., a new Committee — the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Advanced Education — to advise it in this matter. It was made clear too that Commonwealth aid in this field was not to be dependent on the creation of Institutes in each State.

The concept of Boards of Teacher Education was, however, rejected. Apparently it was considered that the education of teachers was so closely bound up with primary and secondary education that it should be left in the hands of the States who had the responsibility for the work at those other levels. It was also said that the finance involved was not of such a magnitude as to be beyond the resources of the States! The State Governments, in general, were prepared to follow the Commonwealth's lead and the pattern of development, in spite of some differences, has followed a fairly similar pattern throughout Australia.

recent developments

The result of these recommendations and decisions has been that the universities have been given a less pre-eminent position. Indeed, for reasons which I do not have the space to discuss here, fairly severe limitations have been put on their work; the rate of development of the newest ones has been restricted, and serious financial problems have been caused for the older ones. The same kind of student problem which is well known elsewhere has begun to appear. Though it is not yet of anything like the intensity which it has reached in parts of North America, it has caused much worry and concern to senior academics, and may yet cause interruption and harm to academic work.

The Colleges of Advanced Education — organised in a variety of ways, and only (as yet) in Victoria in an Institute of the kind recommended by the Martin Committee — have already been notably improved and developed. The quality of the new sites, buildings and equipment now becoming available to them is much above that which they had previously enjoyed. Staff salaries, and staff and student amenities, are being improved, and an air of optimism prevails. A number of courses — especially in Victoria — have been recognised for the award of degrees. In Victoria, which had a very fully developed system of technical colleges, there were in 1969 over 27,000 students in the Colleges, compared with about 26,000 in Universities; the figure for the Colleges represents half the total for the whole Commonwealth.

The future in regard to the Teachers' Colleges is, however, confused and disheartening. In some areas (e.g. in Canberra, in parts of New South Wales and in Tasmania), the Colleges are becoming parts of Colleges of Advanced Education and the Commonwealth Government is thus making capital and recurrent grants available for the education of teachers. In other areas (e.g. in Victoria) no such arrangement has yet been made; the Commonwealth has revised its original decision in such a way that capital grants can be made available to the States for Teachers' Colleges. But no recurrent grants are available. Hence the Teachers' Colleges in some States are still part of the Education Department; salaries remain much lower than those in the other tertiary institutions, and morale is low.

conclusion

It will be seen that there is, at the moment, a great need for more effective planning for tertiary education as a whole. Some States — e.g. Western Australia and New South Wales — have established machinery for the purpose. But there seems to be little or no co-ordination in some of the other States, or at the Commonwealth level. It is badly needed if our resources are to be really effectively deployed. The unfortunate Commonwealth-State financial relationship, whereby the States are inevitably desperately short of the resources needed to meet their obligations, is also in great need of revision. Australia is already a wealthy country; but there are parts of her education system which give little evidence of this being so; the education of teachers, unhappily is one of them. It is much to be hoped that State and Commonwealth Governments will soon give a higher priority to the creation of appropriate planning groups which will be able to provide the necessary statistical and other information upon which effective planning depends. Australia is seriously deficient in this regard at present.

references

1. R. W. T. Cowan, ed., *Education for Australians*, Melbourne: F. W. Cheshire, 1964.
2. E. Wheelwright, ed., *Higher Education in Australia*, Melbourne: F. W. Cheshire, 1965.
3. See *Report of the Australian Universities' Commission on Australian Universities, 1958-1963*, Canberra: Government Printer, Oct. 1960, p. 7 (d).
4. *Tertiary Education in Australia: Report of the Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia*, Canberra: Government Printer, Aug. 1964, Vol. 1, Chapter I, p. 1.