

Submission in response to the Review of Australian Higher
Education Discussion Paper June 2008

Submitted by the Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery
(Australia & New Zealand)

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Chapter 1 Higher education in modern Australia

1. How adequate is the statement of functions and characteristics of higher education in modern Australia?

CDNM considers the statement adequate. It particularly appreciates the emphasis on personal development and social values in addition to the obvious vocational and economic outcomes of higher education.

Section 3.1 Meeting labour market and industry needs

2. Are there impediments to the higher education sector being able to innovate in the development of courses and programs? What are these impediments and how could they be removed?

Take as an example the development of a new model of car; it requires a lot of time, and some spare capacity to redeploy personnel and equipment to the task. No less does the development of new courses and programs which require time and spare capacity – but having spare capacity is usually frowned upon by those allocating resources, and time is an extremely scarce resource. The greater the extent of innovation, the more time and resources are usually required.

3. What are the appropriate mechanisms at the national and local level for ensuring higher education meets national and local needs for high level skills? What is the role of state and territory governments in this area?

At the national level the appropriate mechanism is a body of high standing charged with identifying such needs (after thorough and appropriate consultation); it may well also advise on ways of meeting those needs, and resources required. State and territory governments should make their views known to that body, and may have matching bodies to identify state needs in more detail. We consider that dismantling such bodies as the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission and the Higher Education Council were retrograde steps and left a significant vacuum in consistent policy development. Amongst other weaknesses, this has left the way open for non-university bodies to initiate courses without consultation with key interested parties (for instance, the moves to offer nursing degrees in TAFE).

4. How adequate are the mechanisms for aligning supply and demand of graduates? How do pricing and labour market signals impact on student choices?

The only mechanism operating at present for aligning supply and demand of graduates is the personal choices of undergraduates – not a very professional mechanism. If ‘pricing’ means tuition costs, research consistently indicates that they seem to matter little, but opportunity costs are significant; many students prefer to enter the workforce with an initial qualification (or no qualification, to drive a truck in the Pilbara) rather than continue with an extended course of study. Labour market signals clearly affect students, but with a time lag; a shortage of geologists leads to an influx into geology courses, and thus to a glut by the time many of the students graduate. Many foreign language courses of national interest (e.g. Russian, Hindi, Iranian) and the enabling sciences have been run down or abandoned because the nation sent no signals (e.g. by way of scholarships or other rewards) that these were desirable. As a way to allocate teaching resources it seems to ignore the national interest. Scholarships for particular fields have a history of working in recruitment to those fields.

It should be noted that our graduates also become the future academic workforce. Presently discipline 'pricing' far exceeds academic 'pricing'. Universities are in danger of being unable to attract bright young employees. With the ageing academic workforce it is imperative that measures be put in place to attract young enthusiastic employees and to ensure they are adequately mentored and nurtured.

5. Are there particular examples of good practice where you can demonstrate either rapid response to skill shortages or successful initiatives to improve generic skills?

Griffith University has responded quickly to shortages in the nursing workforce by providing pathways and mechanisms to produce more nursing graduates in a shorter timeframe e.g.

- *Accelerated program option - can complete BN in 2.5 years by undertaking study across 3 semesters each year.*
- *Graduate entry - students with prior degrees can complete BN in 2 years for standard progression or 18 months via accelerated offering*
- *Better articulation between TAFE and university - see 18 below.*
- *Introduced an Aged Care strand within the BN to address shortages in aged care nursing workforce.*

The University of Ballarat offers a non-award course for highly qualified and experienced overseas nurses to gain Australian registration and to aid the rapid response to skill shortages.

6. How effectively are Australian higher education institutions responding to demographic change, especially in providing lifelong learning to meet the challenge of the ageing population and the need for upgrading of skills and re-training?

All universities have flexible methods of entry for mature-age students, offer continuing education courses for all ages, and provide upgrading and retraining both by courses for academic credit and by non-award continuing education. Many also use flexible delivery of courses – from face to face to completely on-line -thus also assisting with demographic changes and geographical demands. In many universities Nursing is leading the way with innovative flexible delivery.

7. What is the relevance and applicability of the findings and approaches proposed in the United Kingdom paper, Higher Education at Work, for increasing skills levels in the workforce to Australia?

The challenges identified in the UK paper apply also in Australia. The secondments mentioned in the fifth paragraph quoted would be useful if it were practicable to implement them. The measures proposed in the sixth paragraph should not preclude the body we suggest in our answer to Q.3. The UK process may be more elaborate than Australia needs. The co-financing of higher education with employers might be very relevant in providing clinical practice for student nurses and midwives. However, we need to ensure a learning environment where the work of nursing (academic and practical) is NOT seen as a paid employment model. We stress that students like all others need to experience what learning is before employment

Section 3.2 Opportunities to participate in higher education

8. Should there be a national approach to improving Indigenous and low SES participation and success in higher education?

Yes, of course there should be a national approach. That does not mean one size fits all; different Indigenous groups have different problems, and both are likely to differ from Anglo low SES, and these latter from immigrant groups.

9. If you support a national approach to improving Indigenous and low SES participation and success how do you see it being structured, resourced, monitored and evaluated?

Any serious attempt to improve participation must begin in middle school if not earlier. Expectations need be created and encouraged. Since we are not expert in secondary school education we cannot offer more detailed suggestions. We advocate strongly for our Indigenous units in our organizations to be adequately resourced to provide concentrated support to our Indigenous students

10. What institutional initiatives have proved successful in increasing low SES or Indigenous participation and success? (Please provide information about outcomes as well as activities.)

Griffith University has a pathway for indigenous students into the Bachelor of Nursing whereby they enrol in two courses of the BN (one core and one elective) while completing their final year of School. This provides them with some experience of university life and a decreased load in two semesters when enrolled in the BN.

At the University of Ballarat Year 11 and 12 students can undertake Certificate 3 in Aged Care or Assistance in nursing courses and then secure a place in the BN program. This works well as a feeder course to the BN and gives prospective students an idea of the realism of nursing.

11. What evidence is available from institutions about the impact on individuals or groups of either failure to gain income support or the inadequacy of income support?

Section 3.3 The student experience of higher education

12. How can the quality of the student experience within Australia's higher education institutions be monitored nationally? Is there evidence that declining student: staff ratios have impacted on the quality of the student experience?

Is this not a task for AUQA? As to the student experience, we quote from your own discussion paper # 3.3: "students report less access to staff, with a substantial number of first-year students perceiving staff as not accessible and less than one-third feeling that teaching staff take an interest in their progress and give helpful feedback (Krause et al 2005)"

13. How can the quality of learning outcomes in Australian higher education be measured more effectively?

Surely the most effective measure of the quality of learning outcomes is the performance of graduates. Whether this is measured by surveys of employers or of clients or in some other way is for experts in evaluation to suggest.

14. How do institutions measure the quality of their learning outcomes and how do they know they are nationally and internationally competitive?

Institutions do not in general systematically measure the quality of their learning outcomes. Their assessment of their competitiveness is based partly on the careers of their graduates and largely on the international experience of the academic staff, who can compare their institution's practice and quality with that of other, usually major, institutions elsewhere.

Section 3.4 Connecting with other education and training sectors

15. To what extent should vocational education and training and higher education continue to have distinctive missions and how should these missions be defined?

It seems inevitable that, for instance, education in hairdressing should be distinguished from that for theoretical physics; however, increasingly TAFE colleges are offering courses in higher education areas subject to meeting accreditation requirements at that level. The requirements and the missions have been defined by COAG; we do not offer alternative definitions.

16. Does the movement between the sectors of students with credit need to be improved? If so, in what ways?

In principle CDNM would support "a more integrated framework to provide for more flexible and streamlined pathways." However we recognize the "concern that the primary purpose of the vocational education and training sector might come to be a 'feeder' to higher education, which would distort its primary purpose and reduce the standing of vocational education and training qualifications as outcomes in their own right." We believe this concern can be met if the courses and the fields of employment to which they lead are sufficiently distinctive. In some instances, such as the transition from Enrolled Nurse to Registered Nurse, the "feeder role" offers opportunities to people who would not have embarked on university studies in the first instance.

17. To what extent should relative provision between the sectors be planned or demand driven? What are the effects of current differences on funding, governance and regulation in limiting planning or influencing choice between the sectors?

In our reply to question 4 we have expressed our misgivings about a purely demand-driven approach to provision. We would hope that the national body suggested in our reply to question 3 would oversee provision balanced between the sectors. We do not have sufficient information on the "current differences" to answer the second question above.

18. Can institutions provide examples of good practices which have led to movement between the sectors with high levels of credit and good learning outcomes?

Griffith University offers a dual enrolment Diploma of Nursing at Metropolitan institute of TAFE and the Bachelor of Nursing. Students undertake three BN courses while undertaking the Diploma program. On completion of the Diploma they receive credit of one year into the BN plus two unspecified electives. They also have a reverse articulation program in place with local TAFEs whereby 2nd year BN students can enrol in particular competencies of the Diploma of Nursing course (including a short period of clinical placement) to become an Endorsed Enrolled Nurse (EEN). This caters for two groups of

students - those who want employment as an EEN while completing the final year of the BN, and those who are unable to complete the BN.

At the University of Ballarat, bridging programs during summer are also offered to Div 2 (EENs) to move into the 2nd year of the BN. There is extensive liaison with the TAFE sector and mapping between courses to ensure 'fit' and ease of progression for students

Section 3.5 Higher education's role in the national innovation system

19. By what mechanisms should research activities in Australian universities be supported?

Research activities require: personnel, time, communication, infrastructure (computers, rooms, phones, lighting, and stationery) and information technologies. These should be provided so far as affordable to those who will use them productively.

20. On what principles and for what purposes should research activity be concentrated in particular universities or types of universities?

Research activity should not be concentrated in particular institutions, but in particular individuals or groups who demonstrate by track record or strong likelihood that they will continue to produce credible research. Not all individuals in any university can demonstrate that all the time; but some individuals in every university can demonstrate it. Research is a fundamental academic activity, one of the pillars of scholarship, and all academics should be encouraged to participate and not discouraged. Whether the research is considered local or international surely the emphasis should be on participation and in some small or even large way – make a difference!

21. Do you believe there is a place in Australia's higher education system for universities that are predominantly 'teaching only' universities? If so, why?

No, and we think it unfortunate that this issue has been raised yet again, with some publicity in the media. It was the thinking of the Martin Committee in the 1960s, which led to the Colleges of Advanced Education, which were not meant to pursue research. Experience has shown that it is as difficult to stop some academics pursuing research as to persuade some to engage in it, and the CAE system was in that sense a failure. We believe that productive individuals everywhere should be supported, and new academics should be given the opportunity to show their quality. [We mention as an example that the science underlying the establishment of the whole Australian farmed salmon industry was carried out by the small Tasmanian College of Advanced Education, not by any major research university].

Section 3.6 Australia's higher education sector in the international arena

22. Are there any unintended consequences of the current approach to internationalisation of higher education in Australia?

Some universities are so dependent on income from overseas students that a steep drop in enrolments would almost bankrupt them. There is also the possibility that to avoid a drop in enrolments overseas students will be assessed more generously than their Australian peers.

Incidentally, in this section of the discussion paper, we believe that comparisons with UK and especially Switzerland (which shares a land border with four other countries) are not

very helpful. It is almost immeasurably easier for a French or German student to study in Switzerland or UK than for a Malaysian or Chinese to study in Australia.

- 23. What is an appropriate role for government in assisting the Australian higher education system to internationalise? On what principles should this role rest and what purposes should it serve?**

Government should place more emphasis on the quality of Australia's international offerings and less on the dollars to be made.

- 24. Can you provide any examples of good practice in encouraging local students to undertake study in other countries?**

Griffith University has just signed an agreement with Antipodeans Abroad to facilitate the placement of groups of students for clinical placement experience with providers of Health Care Services in one or more of the Health-related Disciplines at Facilities located in India, China, Thailand, Nepal, Malaysia, Laos, the Philippines,, Kenya, Ghana, South Africa, Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, Chile. Collaborating with an experienced external organisation increases opportunities for students to undertake part of their studies in other countries and decreases the burden on the university to source and organise such an experience.

Australian Catholic University has such a program to Vanuatu, and probably most universities offer students the opportunity to study abroad. However rural and regional students especially are not always in a financial position to take up the offer.

Section 3.7 Higher education's contribution to Australia's economic, social and cultural capital

- 25. How would you define knowledge transfer and community engagement in an Australian context?**

We would endorse the Sussex definition given in #3.7 of the discussion paper: "The generation, use, application and exploitation of knowledge and other university capabilities outside academic environments. In other words.....the interactions between universities and the rest of society." Community engagement for nursing is also about maintaining practice connections. Perhaps if universities and governments could see the value of having clinical competent staff, and that community engagement enriches teaching and facilitates research, this may be a way to attract and retain a new nursing academic workforce. Community engagement also ensures we are focused on the person or patient, and listen to service users to improve care.

- 26. Do you believe that knowledge transfer and community engagement are legitimate and appropriate roles for contemporary higher education institutions? If so, how do you see this additional role for the higher education sector blending with its traditional roles and are there limits to these additional roles?**

Yes. Community engagement also takes into account our research partners and we also engage with the clinical environments for teaching purposes. We do not see a conflict with the traditional roles, but in a time of financial and other resource constraint the traditional roles must take priority.

- 27. If you think that knowledge transfer and community engagement are appropriate roles for higher education institutions, how do you believe these functions should be funded?**

To some extent they can be self-funding or funded by external bodies and benefactors. Apart from use of premises, which does not necessarily incur a cost, we believe that the university's traditional roles must take priority for funding.

Section 3.8 Resourcing the system

- 28. What incentives or unintended consequences are there in the current arrangements for higher education funding?**

An overemphasis on attracting funding rather than on educational quality, and on workforce issues rather than intellectual and personal development.

- 29. To what extent are the current funding models adequate to secure the future of Australia's higher education sector? If there are better models, what are they?**

They are not adequate, as the discussion paper implicitly recognizes. The casualisation of the academic workforce, and its ageing without adequate provision for recruitment and replacement, signify a system running down to mediocrity. The world's best universities are far more generously funded, some by private endowments, some – e.g. University of Hong Kong, National University of Singapore – by governments. While Australia should encourage private endowment and contributions from industry as much as possible, inevitably government must face the fact that if it wants a world-class system and a number of universities that can match almost any in the world, then government will have to pay much more than now.

- 30. Are the current institutional arrangements for determining relative funding between higher education institutions appropriate? If not, what changes should be considered?**

We would favour the approach quoted in the discussion paper, "that a better approach is to distribute funding in a way which encourages excellent teaching in all universities and which supports centres of excellence in research in fields of demonstrated international competitiveness, regardless of institution."

Section 3.9 Governance and regulation

- 31. Is it time to reshape tertiary education in Australia and streamline financing and regulatory arrangements? If so, what structural changes would you make and why?**

Our experience is from the fields of nursing and midwifery. We find that the interface between higher education and TAFE/vocational education sometimes causes problems. So do the funding arrangements for students' clinical practice, where costs are incurred both by universities and by hospitals or other facilities. We would expect the national body suggested in our answer to Question 3 could overcome the inter-sectoral issues and that clear agreements at national or at least at state level between higher education and health authorities on formulae for funding should eliminate misunderstandings on the second point.

32. Is the level of regulation in the sector appropriate? If not, why not, and what should be done to reduce the level of regulation?

One could abandon most regulation and enable students armed with vouchers or some form of educational entitlement to interact with the universities to determine what is taught and how, and move to an almost wholly deregulated system driven entirely by student preferences. It would then be necessary for government to offer scholarships to ensure adequate enrolments in fields of national importance. In practical terms a measure of regulation seems inevitable; we cannot determine just what that measure should be, but there seems to be a widespread view that it has become too detailed and requires a great deal of administrative time and effort.

33. Does Australia's Quality Assurance Framework need revision? If so, why? What changes would you make?

34. Are changes required to the Australian Qualifications Framework?

35. Is there more that could be done to improve university governance? How should this be done?

Some universities appear to be very well governed and successful, others experience conflicts within their governing bodies. The conflict seems usually to stem from the personal qualities of key individuals. We do not know of a systematic way to avoid this. A simple-minded attention to the size of the governing body is not the answer; the University of Queensland, with far the largest governing body in the nation, has been a highly successful and well-run university.