President's Report

Australians abroad

A few weeks ago I joined a group of Australians studying here in Harvard to celebrate the Prime Minister's Apology to Aboriginal Australians. There is a large group of these Australian students, some in graduate coursework at the Kennedy School of Government, some in the Law School, some in the Business School and others pursuing doctoral research across a range of the social sciences.

They are a striking illustration of the internationalisation of university study, and also of the patterns among expatriate Australians that Graeme Hugo has been studying. Their appreciation of their courses of study and the intellectual stimulation of Harvard is strong. They are closely involved in events here, especially the presidential primaries, and I was struck by the strength of the enthusiasm for Barak Obama. At the same time they follow closely what is happening back in Australia.

I could not help but recall the difficulty of doing so when I was a doctoral student in England in the 1970s. Fellows who undertook similar overseas study in that distant era will recall the lack of information from Australia. Aerograms were the principal medium and occasionally I could persuade a correspondent to smuggle a newspaper clipping into one, if only to give the football results. One night late in 1975 an undergraduate contemporary who was working in *The Age*'s London office rang to say that an odd report was coming down the telex, something about the prime minister being sacked. We agreed that it must be a mistake in transmission.

The graduate students here watched Kevin Rudd in Parliament; they read online news from the Australian press as regularly as they read the print version of American media; and they are in regular contact with friends and colleagues back home. The shrinkage of distance, the capacity to follow and be involved in affairs across national boundaries, and the growing numbers of non-resident Australians who contribute their diverse experiences and understandings to Australian intellectual life is remarkable.

University funding: an update

I wrote in the last *Dialogue* of the keen debate here on the funding of higher education. The mounting cost of college tuition and the spectacular growth of university endowments have brought calls for greater assistance to students.

In January the annual report of the National Association of College and University Business Officers revealed the magnitude of endowments. Harvard's (US)$34.6 billion heads a list of 785 institutions. Seventy-six of them have endowments of more than $1 billion, and 141 exceed $500 million; but the holdings drop away to a long tail — the median is $90 million.

The wealthiest have begun to respond to the pressure to provide greater access. Harvard started the process. It already waives tuition fees for students with family incomes of less than $60,000 per annum and now will cap charges at ten percent of family income up to $180,000. Then Yale extended its financial assistance for undergraduates with family incomes of up to $200,000. Stanford lifted its income limit

for free tuition from $60,000 to $100,000, and a number of Ivy League colleges have made similar changes.

The need for fee relief is indisputable. Tuition and accommodation charges for leading private institutions come close to $50,000 a year, and the rate of increase is several points ahead of inflation.

The problem facing less well-endowed institutions is that they cannot match these concessions. As some of their presidents have remarked, all their assistance goes to students with much lower family incomes. The commitment to assist them is impressive: 31 per cent of first-year students at four-year colleges come from families with annual income of less than $50,000, according to a recent survey. But 38 per cent come from families with an income of over $100,000.

The consequences of such inequality of access are illuminated in another recent study conducted by the Brookings Institution and the Pew Foundation. They found that 45 per cent of children of parents with an income in the bottom quintile would themselves earn incomes in the bottom quintile without a college education; but only 16 per cent of those who earned college degrees remained in that income quintile. Moreover, they found that Hispanic and Black Americans are falling further behind whites and Asians in obtaining degrees.

Australia's method of charging for higher education differs significantly. Our capped fees for Commonwealth Supported Places and income-contingent loans leave a much smaller burden of debt on graduates. Yet Australia needs to increase its higher education participation rate, which is especially marked among lower-income families. It also needs to improve the quality of its universities, and the constraints on public funding have seen a shift towards fee income and endowments as means to make good the shortfall.

The new government has signalled its intention to boost research, and the current Review of the National Innovation System is an important first step. The Academy is keenly interested in the review. A recent forum of the National Academies Forum signalled that interest and our 2008 Symposium will be devoted to the subject.

There are undoubtedly improvements to be made in the effective utilisation of research and innovation, and we look forward to the outcomes of the review. But while the Commonwealth government highlights the importance of research and innovation, we should not lose sight of the importance of education.

We need highly educated Australians to undertake the research that drives innovation. We need them to take up and work with the fruits of that research. We need more graduates in the core disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, as well as the physical and life sciences, which generate the advances in specialised fields. And we need to ensure that none of the country's intellectual talent is lost for lack of opportunity to realise its potential.

Stuart Macintyre
President

Universities – Where to Now?

Conditions for an Education Revolution
Simon Marginson

In Australian policy circles in the first half of 2008 it is widely, though not universally, accepted that the renovation of the universities and research has become essential. Perhaps the litmus test of an emerging national policy consensus is revealed in the speeches and writings of Paul Kelly; on several occasions towards the end of the Howard years *The Australian's* Editor at Large argued that policy on higher education was not right. Kevin Rudd popularised his commitment to an 'education revolution' during the election campaign and it has been reiterated since by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Julia Gillard. Rudd has lifted expectations by putting figures on the under-funding of higher education in Australia under Howard. compared to other OECD nations.

There is little doubt the new government is led by Ministers convinced by the mainstream OECD argument that educational capacity and innovation are central to the evolution and prosperity of nations in what is understood as the 'global knowledge economy'.[1] Many individual ministers have campaigned long and hard for the universities or are allied to others who have done so. Australia has never had a federal government as knowledgeable about or committed to education as the Rudd Government, from early childhood learning, which is being handled by Maxine McKew, who defeated John Howard in the seat of Bennelong, to government schooling and industry training, to university and the full spectrum of research and innovation activity. The Minister for Industry, Innovation, Science and Research, Senator Kim Carr, has made an active start, establishing a review of national innovation policy which is due to report in mid 2008 and drawing support in research circles with statements about the independence of the Australian Research Council and basic inquiry across the full range of academic disciplines, including the social sciences and humanities.[2]

There is lower consensus on how to go about the education revolution in the universities and research, and no clarity on the scale or the timing of national reinvestment. So far no detailed planning is evident. Given the fiscal constraints on the government; and other potential spending priorities in the broad zone crossing economic and social policy, including the other sectors of education and training, health and hospitals, and Indigenous affairs; there remains a range of possibilities in higher education. At one extreme the education revolution will go awry and the Rudd era will be marked by tinkering at the edges of the numerous problems, amid increasingly strident and ritualistic denunciations of betrayal. This seems unlikely, but whether there is a root and branch transformation of the long term trajectory of the sector on the scale of the 1960s Menzies policies or, a less happy analogy for some, the late 1980s Dawkins reforms, remains to be seen. The solutions are not entirely in the hands of Rudd and his cabinet. Notwithstanding the change of government, two political conditions must be created before the kind of large scale expansion in national capacity suggested by the words 'education revolution' is achieved. One is that public opinion must be convinced about the tax/spending necessary to finance it.

The other, not unrelated, is that Treasury as the key policy department must be convinced about the economic necessities and dividends.

The Howard political legacy

Rudd's chief difficulty in higher education is the scale of the problem. To a certain extent Howard's Government worked with phenomena evident under the Hawke and Keating Governments:

- minister-directed administration and the emptying out of long term planning;
- micro-management of the institutions from a distance in selected areas;
- rising tuition charges for local students;
- an expanding commercial market in the international education covering much of the cost of development;
- growth of the corporate servicing functions of universities at the expense of academic staffing levels; and
- competition between institutions as the normal condition of system management and funding allocation.

But under Howard the Dawkins formula was taken to extremes and reworked without regard for Labor's public/private balance and its continuing growth of social opportunities through the expansion of local student participation. The outcome of the Howard years was a substantial transformation of the universities and university-based research in two respects: the political and policy culture, and the fiscal settings. This is the Howard legacy.

The fact that political factors have become decisive in university policy, in contrast to hegemony of forward planning and technical judgement during the long process of publicly financed national system building between the 1957 Murray report[3] and the early Fraser years two decades later,[4] says something about the evolution of Australian government in general and something about this sector in particular.

The policy climate in higher education has become politicised and ideology-driven to a high degree. Consider the 'history wars' and other neo-conservative cultural forays. The key to these issues is that while there is a gesture towards the empirical world, normally via selective quotations or evidence, this is marginal to an argument which takes the form of a clash of narrative myths. These are either manufactured for the purpose, for example the alleged collapse of literacy in a wasteland of post-modern nihilism; or drawn from existing debates, as in the neo-conservative mobilisation of Keith Windschuttle's defence of frontier settlement. Because the problem so defined is grounded in *a priori* assumptions rather than observable practices, no transcending solution is possible; the issue remains continually accessible to the type of symbol rattling and hyper-adversarial confrontation that fuels commentators of the Janet Albrechtsen type. These tactics are driven by concerns other than education-specific objectives – for example the assertion of a particular definition of national identity, and strategies of political differentiation for electoral purposes – but they deflect attention from the political economy and sociology of higher education.

The result is that one outcome of the Howard years is an impoverished public discussion of universities and research and a cynical policy culture in the sector. Official documents became alarmingly polemical, particularly under Brendan Nelson as Minister (2003-2006), with little concern for consistency or evidence. When the output of the Nelson *Crossroads* inquiry is compared to the work of, say, the 1960s

Universities Commission, or even the more selective texts of the ministerially-driven Dawkins years, a profound degeneration in the quality of Commonwealth papers is evident. One of the casualties has been a grounded sense of the public interest .Government has devolved responsibility for the quality of education and research to the institutions themselves and it is no longer in the interests of those institutions to acknowledge problems or fault, regardless of the real state of affairs; so that despite the fashion for transparency as a rubric of governance the state of the sector has become opaque. In the institutions quality assurance processes have become subordinated to marketing, so that 'warts and all' assessments of strengths and weaknesses are rarely made public. Marketing behaviours have also become the norm in public discussion about higher education, especially discussion in which executive leaders are participants. Evidence-based arguments about university policy are routinely regarded as special pleading. Even expert commentary by academic specialists in their own fields is often read as a form of promotion of their universities as corporations. Competition between institutions is celebrated to the extent that appeals to the public good are dismissed as disguised self-interest. This makes it difficult to talk about national policy, as Australian National University (ANU) Vice-Chancellor Ian Chubb noted in a speech on policy three months into the Rudd Government's term of office.[5] Though Prime Minister Rudd's statements suggest a decisive break from these patterns, it will take time to grow a new policy culture.

The Howard Government saw the universities not as a site of national investment in educational, research and cultural capacity; but as a political problem to be controlled - many of its articulate critics were in academic posts - and as a site of fecund political opportunity where there were gains to be made by 'wedging' vice-chancellors and intellectuals. Under the Coalition the politics of higher education resembled the politics of the ABC. The government lacked the devices of a single government-appointed board and an executive manager accessible to influence that were available in dealing with the ABC; but as at the ABC, it used budget cuts to weaken the universities and position them as supplicants. The process began with the first Vanstone budget in 1996 which announced successive annual reductions in the unit funding level of subsidised domestic student places over 1997-2000. The government also maintained the 1995 Labor decision to apply partial cost indexation to the public funding of those places. Ministers enhanced the fragmentation of the Australian Vice-Chancellors' committee into separate groupings with distinct interests, weakening its agenda setting capacity.

In the event, the government had less effect on the contents of universities than the contents of Radio National and ABC Television but it successfully marginalised the universities from the mainstream of policy. In a contrary pairing of arguments, one that strangely escaped analysis, Prime Minister Howard both talked up and talked down the private benefits of higher education. On one hand he said that there was nothing wrong with leaving school early, jettisoning the standard OECD nations policy wisdom; and he questioned the social benefits of enhanced participation in higher education *vis-à-vis* participation in the state TAFE systems, thereby absolving the Commonwealth of any responsibility to encourage university participation through student allowances or HECS scholarships. On the other hand he repeatedly emphasised the private benefits of higher education for degree holders so as to justify increased HECS charges and the introduction of a full fee stream for domestic undergraduates. But there was an underlying consistency, because by using these two arguments, together with the tactic of pitting one university leader against another

as if universities were simply firms in competition with each other, Howard and his successive ministers hollowed out the case for public funding based on the public good functions of universities. This sustained a continuing justification for fiscal reductions.

Little policy disagreement was expressed in the coordinating departments. If officers in the Departments of Treasury and Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) were uncomfortable with the hyper-politicisation of policy on the universities and the evident carelessness about the long term effects of funding decisions, these sensitivities were not apparent. Regardless of the worldwide momentum for arguments about endogenous growth and public investment in knowledge - as exemplified in the OECD and later the World Bank statements, the EU's Lisbon commitments, the pace of growth of the universities and research in China and notably, the UK government's position under Blair – Treasury appeared comfortable with the assumption that universities should be treated primarily as a private benefit with a public cost, not as a public investment.

Until the early 2000s there was little criticism of policy in tertiary education and even then, when policy alternatives began to be floated in *The Australian* and elsewhere they often involved a further shift from public to private funding .This was the road that the Howard Government was already moving along at speed.

The Howard fiscal legacy

The outcome of successive fiscal decisions under Howard was a sharp deterioration in the public funding level and in the teaching and research capacities of Australian higher education relative to most OECD nations and to the emerging Asian research and development (R&D) economies of China, Taiwan and Singapore. In the 1970s and 1980s Australia funded tertiary education at above the average OECD level of public investment as a proportion of GDP. In 2004 Australia spent 0.8 per cent of GDP in public investment in tertiary education compared to an OECD (and USA) average of 1.0 per cent. On this measure, Australia was 25th of the 29 OECD countries for which data are available.[6]

At the same time, the private source funding of tertiary education rose to a relatively high level. During the Howard years Australia, like most OECD countries, increased the share of funding from private sources but it did so more rapidly than any other country. Between 1995 and 2004 the proportion of tertiary funding from private sources rose from 35.2 to 52.8 per cent. In 2004 Australia spent 0.8 per cent of GDP in private investment in tertiary education, equal third highest in the OECD with Japan and behind only Korea and the USA. Australia's total spending on tertiary education at 1.5 per cent of GDP in 2004 was above the OECD average of 1.3 per cent. The Howard Government always argued in defence of its policy that the overall funding base of the universities was being maintained. However, private and public expenditure do not necessarily substitute for each other. Most of the earnings from international student fees, constituting 15 per cent of university income in Australia in 2006,[7] are ploughed back into the costs of marketing, administration, and buildings and other facilities and services that cater for the extra students and their specialist needs, such as new-arrival services and assistance with academic English. Little surplus flows into additional funding for teaching: between 1993 and 2005 the average student-staff ratio in Australian universities rose from 14 to 1, to 21 to 1. Almost none of the earnings from international student fees are funnelled into research capacity.[8]

Time for basic research, the supporting infrastructure and research training functions remain dependent on public funding in Australia, as elsewhere.

Most nations treat public and private investment as complementary rather than as zero-sum alternatives traded off against each other. The OECD noted last year:

> Rises in private educational expenditure have generally gone hand in hand with rises (in real terms) in public expenditure on education at the tertiary level, as for educational expenditure when all levels of education are combined. Public investment in tertiary education has increased in all OECD countries and partner economies (except Australia) for which 1995 to 2004 data are available, regardless of changes in private spending.[9]

Between 1995 and 2004, the average OECD country increased the public funding of tertiary education by 49 per cent. In the USA public funding rose by 54 per cent. Over the same time period total public funding of tertiary education in Australia fell by 4 per cent. As the OECD noted, Australia was the only OECD nation to do this. At the same time student numbers rose by one third, partly due to a tripling in the number of full fee international students, so that public funding per tertiary student in Australia dropped by 28 per cent. When private funding is included, total funding per student rose by 1 per cent, but as noted, the new private income was largely absorbed by the extra corporate functions and facilities associated with earning it. In overall terms, relative to the demands on their resources, universities were considerably worse off than they had been in 1996 when Howard took office.

International education

Why did international education grow (and why does it continue to grow) so rapidly? This is a function of the incentive framework governing university behaviour. The Vanstone cuts and partial indexation meant that in the second half of the 1990s the real value of government grants per student fell each year. By the 2000s the value of the public subsidy had declined so far that most institutions were losing money on each local student they enrolled. This funding 'hole' had to be filled. It was impossible to raise student Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) charges for those places because the maximum charge was fixed by policy and most programs were already at the maximum. That left private incomes from fee-based places and sale of services, and donations and investments as possible sources of discretionary income. Universities worked all of these hard but the only way to increase private income rapidly at scale was by enrolling international students.

From 1996 to 2006 international student numbers rose from 53,188 to 250,794 (371.5 per cent) while domestic students increased by 26.2 per cent to 733,352.[10] Almost three quarters of the international students were enrolled on shore in Australia. They comprised 25.5 per cent of all students in Australian universities, much the highest proportion of internationalised enrolments in the OECD. Twelve Australian universities enrolled more than 8000 international students and there were over 16,000 at RMIT, Monash and Curtin. To put this in comparative perspective, the American doctoral university with the largest international numbers, the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, enrols less than 7000 international students. Education has become Australia's third largest export industry, generating more than $12.5 billion in 2007 in fees and other spending by students, the bulk of it by students enrolled in higher education institutions.[11]

Successive Howard Government ministers claimed the education export sector as a stunning success. And certainly there is policy cleverness here, at least in terms of Dawkins' original intentions at the foundation of international marketing in the second half of the 1980s. There is a neat self-perpetuating symbiosis between policy on the balance of trade, which is augmented by growing education exports; and fiscal policy, where revenues from international students replace public spending. At the same time the universities sustain a growing Australian involvement in the high growth Asian economies. Australia enrols more students from mainland China and Hong Kong combined than does the USA. Nevertheless the quantity approach to education export, based on a business model of high volume, standard cost, medium quality provision, has serious and increasing downsides. International enrolments are largely confined to particular fields and levels of study; international student growth is not balanced by opportunities for local students; and the drive for these revenues has skewed priorities.[12]

In terms of discipline preferences, in 2006 55.8 per cent of all commencing international students were concentrated in Management and Commerce, and Information Technology. The curriculum is not varied significantly for the internationals. Nor is there much diversity between universities in their global mission. The strategic focus on mass enrolments in business programs is apparent across the whole higher education system including the leading research universities. The exception is ANU which is sustained by special research funding and enrols a large cohort of international research students. In 2006 ANU received just 4.6 per cent of its income from international student fees. However Sydney, Melbourne, Queensland and the other universities that enrol the intellectual elite at home have become less discriminating mass educators when they recruit abroad. The academic quality of their marginal international students falls below the marginal domestic students, compounding the problems caused by students' difficulties with academic English.

Most seriously perhaps, despite the fact that 'an increasing number of countries are focused on international mobility' of researchers,[13] the incentive structure that currently governs Australian universities ensures they are poorly positioned in relation to knowledge flows and global competition for young researchers. In 2006, 7658 international students (3.1 per cent) were in doctoral programs. Unlike the USA and the UK Australia offers few PhD scholarships or postdoctoral fellowships to internationals: in 2002 only 1.6 per cent of international students in Australia were on doctoral scholarships compared to 20 per cent in the US doctoral sector. The incentive structure was framed by Dawkins in the 1980s for the autarkic national economic purposes of fiscal relief and export revenues, rather than as the kind of global knowledge strategy now typical of national policies.

Local student participation

Meanwhile local student numbers grew more slowly than in most OECD countries during the Howard years, consistent with the then government's priorities and again in contrast with the main international trends. Between 1997 and 2004 the immediate throughput of students from the final year of school to the next year in first year higher education dropped from 40 to 31 per cent.[14] This can partly be explained by the increasing take up of opportunities in the labour market; and it would constitute no reduction in participation if the students who previously would have gone straight to university, and now chose not to do so, entered at a later date. However there is no evidence of a surge in older age-group entry and worrying signs that participation has

become harder to sustain for economic reasons. With successive increases in the value of HECS, by late in the Howard years fulltime students were paying $4077 to $8499 per year for a 'public' place.

Although the HECS burden is softened by the system of income contingent repayment through the tax system many students can expect to graduate with more than $25,000 in debts. In addition, eligibility for Commonwealth student assistance has tightened – in 2006 only 27 per cent of fulltime students received Commonwealth payments compared to the three quarters of all students who received Commonwealth student assistance or state teachers' scholarships in the mid 1970s – and the value of the maximum payment is not enough for students to live on, especially in the main urban centres. The result is that almost three quarters of fulltime students work during semester. Many students testify that this has negatively affected their studies.[15] Australia also has a shorter than OECD average duration of tertiary education and a higher than average drop out rate.

Research

Research funding received one substantial increase in the eleven Howard years, the Backing Australia's Ability package announced in 2001 (which temporarily silenced the government's critics in the science communities prior to Labor's Knowledge Nation policy and the 'Tampa' federal election that year). There were substantial additional resources for Australian Research Council (ARC) and National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) projects and fellowships, including the doubling of project funding over the life of the package. However these resources were not matched by corresponding improvements in the funding of infrastructure and the larger environment in which research takes place; and the government squandered much of its accumulated policy credit when in 2004 and 2005 (then Minister) Nelson intervened on political grounds in ARC project recommendations based on academic merit. The proportion of research in higher education that was basic in character fell 55 to 51 per cent during the period 2000 to 2005 which saw implementation of the Backing Australia's Ability policies (by comparison, in the USA 75 per cent of all research in higher education in 2005 was classified as basic research, and the proportion of research in higher education defined as 'basic' increased in the majority of OECD countries).[16] To boost revenues, Australian universities shifted part of their research activity from basic inquiry and knowledge maintenance to potentially commercial R&D product; so much so that the Productivity Commission sounded an alarm in its 2007 report on public sector R&D:

> Universities' core role remains the provision of teaching and the dissemination of higher quality, openly disseminated, basic research. Even where universities undertake research that has practical applications, it is the transfer, diffusion and utilization of such knowledge and technology that matters in terms of community well-being. Commercialization is just one way of achieving this. The policy framework for universities should encourage them to select the transfer pathway that maximizes the overall community benefits, which will only sometimes favour commercialization for financial gains.[17]

While Australia was letting basic research capacity slide there was accelerating investment in all R&D, including basic and applied research and commercial product development, in China, Korea, Singapore and many European countries. In 2008 the OECD, too, argued firmly against an undue focus on commercialisation, pointing out that few patents generated net incomes for universities and that the principal

contributions of universities to innovation lay in maximising the open source dissemination of research findings and the functions of research training and the codification, transmission, storage and social managing of knowledge.[18]

The commencement of global university rankings by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Institute of Higher Education in 2003 raised the stakes in measurable research performance. In 2007 Australia had 17 universities in the Jiao Tong world top 500 on research performance, a good outcome for a university system of its size and indicating a broad spread of research capacity, but there were just two universities in the world top 100, both in the second 50: ANU at 57 and Melbourne at 79. Canada, a nation close to Australia in characteristics, had two universities in the top 40 including Toronto at equal 23rd; the UK, which has a similar GDP per capita to Australia and just three times Australia's GDP, had 11 universities in the Jiao Tong top 100 including three in the first 20. In February 2008 the Jiao Tong Institute's rankings of the top 100 universities in each of five disciplines included 14 Australian disciplinary groups, a drop from 17 groupings in the 2007 rankings. There were three such groupings located at each of ANU and Melbourne. Physical sciences at ANU were ranked in position 38 in the world and Life Sciences at 40. Life Sciences at the University of Western Australia were ranked at 47.[19]

PM Rudd's starting point

Labor made few specific commitments in the 2007 election campaign. The major fiscal commitment was to abolish full fee undergraduate places for domestic students and to compensate institutions for the lost revenue, while also subsidising additional places to maintain aggregate local student participation. In 2006 eight institutions secured more than $5 million in revenues from undergraduate full fee places, including Melbourne $19.3 million, Sydney $15.1 million, UNSW $10.0 million and Monash $9.5 million. The others were Queensland, ANU, RMIT University and Deakin. This promise was costed during the campaign at $220 million but the estimate was based on 2006 enrolments, and with likely growth in full fee local enrolments in 2007 and 2008, plus those in the pipeline, it is likely to prove inadequate. However, it would be surprising if there is conflict between universities and government in this matter. Labor also undertook to increase the number of postgraduate scholarships; though no commitment has yet been made in response to the Group of 8 (Go8) universities' call for a special scheme of doctoral scholarships for international students; and to introduce a scheme for 1000 mid career research fellowships for academic staff. The government is also committed to relieving the HECS costs of students in teacher training in mathematics and science.

There were no larger scale undertakings in relation to the level of HECS costs, the number of subsidised places, or the rates of government funding of those places. Neither the level and availability of student allowances, nor international education matters, were mentioned in Rudd's pre-election policy. The new government is also unencumbered in relation to the machinery of Commonwealth administration, planning and accountability arrangements. The good thing about the absence of large funding commitments is that policy options are open, the government has time to bring expertise to bear on policy design and can respond to changing conditions, and its relations with the higher education sector are not defined by tensions around one off promises frozen in time and whether these are kept or broken. The bad thing is that the Minister cannot claim a mandate in her dealings with Treasury; and it is easier to marginalise or postpone university reinvestment.

Though the possibilities have changed, the incentives governing higher education in place in the early Rudd period are still exactly as they had been under Howard. It will take time to unpick this incentive framework and replace it with another. The framework can be summarised as follows. Universities have little incentive to recruit subsidised local students because they lose money on them; and national policy has stopped working for expanding domestic participation. Prospective students have responded in kind and demand for university entry is flat. The new government has announced that the small full fee undergraduate strand will be abolished in the public institutions so there is no prospect of a demand driven commercial market in local first degrees, which might constitute an alternative pattern of participation, though such a market has developed in the small private higher education sector, subsidised by income contingent tuition loans under FEE-HELP, and will continue under Labor. Only the revitalisation of student allowances and possibly, a reduction in HECS costs could trigger a surge in demand, though a government that talked up the value of university participation would help. Intractable issues of improved access to groups under-represented in higher education, particularly prospective students from poor socio-economic backgrounds, rural areas and Indigenous families, remain to be tackled.[20] An increase in the rate of government funding of subsidised places would create conditions for a possible improvement in the quality and quantity of teaching but this would not directly impact student demand or the social balance of enrolments.

The public universities continue to be shaped by a strong incentive to expand international student volume; while economising as far as possible on the quality of international education provision, limiting the potential of internationalisation. They still need to cream off these revenues to fill the funding gaps in other areas. In other words, at the time of writing global engagement remains primarily quantity rather than quality driven, except at the ANU. There are also continuing downward pressures on basic research capacity and the priority given to basic research within the R&D spectrum of activity. The incentives are largely uniform and formula driven. All universities pursue similar objectives, though with varying degrees of potential and success. All purport to be research-intensive institutions. Nearly all aim to build quantity in the international market. None are able to forge a fundamentally stronger global position in research because this is dependent on public investment; though it is in research, and not the commercial international education market, that the primary global competition is playing out.

The May 2008 budget is the first opportunity for funded changes to policy, but given that Labor will go to that budget after only six months in office, changes at scale are unlikely. The 2009 budget is the first spending opportunity to begin instituting a considered reform in university policy. Even so, following its commitment to a modified version of the Howard-Costello tax cuts package during the election, the new government has limited room to move for its first three years; and the revitalisation of the universities must contend with the need to renovate vocational education and industry training (where under-funding under Howard was more parlous than in the universities), to lift the material and social position of government schools, and to establish the first comprehensive national provision of early childhood education where Australia lags behind OECD norms. In 2004 Australia spent 0.1 per cent of GDP on early childhood education compared to the OECD country average of 0.5 per cent. In 2005 only 42 per cent of 3-4 year olds were enrolled in educational programs in Australia, compared with an average of 69 per cent in all OECD nations and 91 per cent in the UK.[21]

Political conditions for a forward move

Inevitably reinvestment will be slower than the universities need, want and expect. It is easy to make the case for a major increase in public funding to match other countries. But to jump-start every part of the sector at once would be fiscally and politically impossible; nor would it generate the optimum pattern of reinvestment. Undoing the skein of history by redressing past neglect is never a good basis for policy making. A more forward-looking set of objectives and strategies is needed. It is apparent that PM Rudd and his government are cautious in decision-making, focused on avoiding mistakes and naturally incremental and iterative. Rudd is unlikely to be spooked by the sheer scale of the problems in universities, international education and research. One suspects that he will hasten slowly, introducing piecemeal changes designed to last and to prepare the way for a larger scale reform of the sector perhaps in a second term Labor government.

Given the Howard legacy, it is necessary to establish the kind of political conditions that will facilitate reinvestment. There are three such conditions.

The first and most important is a sea change in the coordinating departments of PM&C, Treasury and Finance, particularly Treasury, in relation to the OECD argument about the knowledge economy. It is essential Treasury officers are weaned off the lingering ideas that an economy such as Australia merely needs to import its fundamental knowledge from the larger economies of the USA and perhaps the UK and Europe; that national comparative advantage does not require creative capacity across the range of intellectual fields; and that the primary global dealings of Australian universities are the export of educational services. These assumptions, and the related belief that Australia does not need its own Information and Communication Technology software industry, are a recipe for continued dependence, a narrow industry base and constrained global options. It may be that, as in the mid 1980s, the first stimulus for a reconsideration of policy on the knowledge economy will come from PM&C rather than Treasury; though the ideas are already freely accessible in the economic literature.

The second condition is a revitalisation of popular demand for participation in tertiary education. This has a number of dimensions. First, federal-state policy measures are needed so as to lift school retention rates that have been flat since the early 1990s. Here the most important single step is for government to campaign vigorously for students to stay at school. The Labor proposal to introduce a vocational strand within government schools may help. Second, there is the federal-state refinancing of TAFE: the extension of income-contingent HECS-style tuition loans to TAFE by the Commonwealth, coupled with an agreed increase in government subsidies. A third step is to declare tertiary programs in vocational education and training (VET) as part of the designated 'higher education' sector, as with the community colleges in the United States. Most TAFE institutions already offer some higher education places on a franchising basis on behalf of universities, and some conduct industry-related research. Declaring VET as part of higher education would cost nothing and overnight would lift the status and attractiveness of TAFE in the eyes of industry and prospective students, strengthening its resource base. Despite the anxieties the move would invoke in some universities, it would do them no harm. The fourth step is to reground Commonwealth student assistance. Potentially this is the most important step and also the most expensive. Assistance will continue to be targeted to the financial

capacity of students, but levels need to be raised and the age of independence lowered, consistent with students' responsibility for their HECS obligations.

The third condition is to build industry and popular support for a large scale and sustained expansion of national investment in basic research in the universities, together with the extension of special ANU-style research funding to a grouping of leading research universities. If the Rudd Government could achieve the lifting of Commonwealth investment in basic research to Swiss or Scandinavian levels this might be the most important single long term contribution it could make. Intellectually the economic case for funding basic research is easier to make than the case for government subsidisation of teaching. Student places can be organised either as public or as private goods, but if basic research is left to the market its funding is negligible. Economists are almost universal in treating it as a public good. There is no upper limit on its capacity to underpin value-creation in other parts of the economy and to address policy issues and problems. However the public case for basic research has yet to be made and sustained. Government and the universities should be able to work together in creating a better climate.

The question of special research funding for a designated layer of universities is difficult because of the potential political fallout within the sector (there would be little opposition in the community, unless instigated by particular institutions). Yet the selection of a group of universities for additional research support does not have to be conducted as a zero sum game. It could happen without subtracting resources from the other universities or diminishing their present research functions; and in the longer term it offers to enhance other universities by strengthening policy and public support for investment in research and higher education. There is no real dissent within the sector about the funding base that underpins ANU's distinctive commitment to research and doctoral training, including international doctoral training and has done so since its inception. It is obvious that under-funding of ANU does not improve the capacity for research at, say, Flinders or Charles Sturt University. Why should an increase in ANU's funding, allocated under a new research program, subtract from their capacity? The same logic applies to extending special research status to other universities.

The hard question is of course the selection of universities. Whereas in Australia universities are characterised by a uniform commitment to the research role, it is worth noting that in Germany and Finland, policy has proven sufficiently robust to select certain institutions for additional research support. Germany is in the early stages of that process. In Finland, a polity characterised by profound commitments to equity, the University of Helsinki towers over higher education. Most Finnish researchers want to work there. The concentration of talent, resources and status at Helsinki is seen to constitute a national and global asset. Policy making in Finland is also characterised by a respect for expertise, and the use of technical criteria, in decisions that Australians would currently consider matters of political interest. Finnish university policy is less politicised and its rhythms are longer term.

New policy machinery

This points to the need to develop new instruments for administration and planning of higher education in Australia; to change incentives, open new opportunities and modify the behaviour of institutions and their personnel in relation to mission, the balance between revenue-raising objectives and public policy, the education of domestic students and the resourcing of research. First, more diverse missions can

be created by installing the one-on-one 'compacts' between government and individual institutions proposed in Labor policy.[22] Under the compacts system government would reduce its reliance on uniform funding rates and accountability requirements. It would negotiate with each institution its balance between funded teaching, research and community service activities, and priorities in international relations, industry innovation and regional development. This would allow, for example, some rather than all institutions to focus on building volume in the international student markets on and off shore; it would enable the subsidisation of some universities for a role in regional development, and it would lodge ANU-style research missions alongside other missions within a national division of labour.

Second, the Rudd Government can use the process of policy review to take soundings, investigate problems, develop blueprints and begin to develop consensus on larger changes required. As noted, Minister Carr has announced a review designed to consider 'the coherence and effectiveness of existing government support for innovation' including national research programs, and to 'identify gaps and weaknesses in the innovation system and develop proposals to address them'. The review panel, drawn from industry, public science and higher education, will prepare a Green Paper by 31 July 2008.[23] On 13 March the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Julia Gillard, announced a 'Major Review of Australian Higher Education… to report on the future direction of the sector, its capacity to meet the needs of the Australian community and economy, and the options available for ongoing reform'. Its brief includes funding arrangements, including public and private contributions and the development of compacts; diversity of missions; the contribution of higher education to 'increased economic productivity and labour market participation'; the widening of access and social inclusion, including the improvement of student support programs; 'the highest possible standards'; and 'the creation of a broad tertiary education system with proper articulation between universities and vocational education and training'.[24] The review will provide a report on 'priority action' by the end of October and a final report by the end of 2008.

Nevertheless, direct Ministerial intervention cannot solve all of the inherited problems of higher education, because direct intervention is one of those problems itself. For example, a minister unaided would find the political tensions inherent in the selection of designated Global Research Universities very difficult to manage. Political decision-making is too vulnerable to the goals of minimising the political damage and maximising the electoral benefits. In the longer term, if the harder decisions are to be made well, these will need to be depoliticised, along the lines of the operations of the ARC. There, notwithstanding the final ministerial sign-off under law, the decisions are primarily determined by an autonomous policy agency rather than a minister or a department under direct ministerial control.

This suggests that the Rudd Government would be wise to establish an agency something like the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) as was proposed by the Go8 universities. The Go8's ATEC would be responsible for resource allocation and regulation of tertiary education within a federally-determined fiscal envelope. It would rest on expertise and install the vital capacity for consultative long term planning that was absent in the Howard years. It has the potential to establish a stable, bi-partisan set of public machinery in this sector. Perhaps the creation of a body like this Commission will determine whether the Rudd Education Revolution is able to constitute a lasting transformation of national capacity in higher education and

research. Without such an agency there is the danger that the Rudd momentum will peter out after a few early initiatives, falling back into political management and system maintenance, and so constituting little more than a partial and temporary corrective to the Howard policies.

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Changes in the Academy Secretariat

Dr John Robertson, after 10 years in the Secretariat as Research Director, has retired. We will miss him, and wish him all things miraculous on his whimsical way.

Hayley da Quinta has joined the staff as Administrative Assistant. She is now the smile that greets visitors to the Secretariat,

Sarah Tynan, a marine geologist working on her PhD, has been appointed Project Manager for Workshops and the Symposium.

Casualisation of Academic Work:
Industrial Justice and Quality Education
Tony Brown, James Goodman and Keiko Yasukawa

Introduction

Casual employment has become a key feature of Australia's 'flexible' labour market. Between 1988 and 2003 casualisation rates rose from sixteen per cent to twenty-seven per cent of the workforce. Today about one quarter of male employees and one third of female employees are casually employed, compared with an OECD average for 'temporary labour' of about fifteen per cent. With the possible exception of the US, OECD countries have sought to discourage the growth of casual labour.[1] In Australia, by contrast, casualisation has been promoted by government as a means of increasing workforce participation,[2] and has been driven on the 'demand side' by business and government agencies seeking to raise 'efficiency' and 'flexibility'.[3] Casual labour is usually defined as irregular labour, required by flexible employers operating in uncertain times. Yet casual work in Australia is now established in even the most stable and predictable of industries.[4] Higher education, the focus for this article, is one such industry.

The analysis of academic casualisation is strategically significant for a number of reasons. The sector is semi-privatised, with universities increasingly behaving as private entities, albeit formally positioned within the public sector. Academic work is generally understood to be a high-status form of employment, and the sector is well-unionised, with relatively advantageous pay and conditions for continuing staff. Academia is traditionally not heavily casualised, yet academic work is today increasingly undertaken by casuals who do not have access to the benefits of continuing academic employment. In 1990 casuals accounted for the equivalent of eight per cent of fulltime jobs in universities: by 2001 this had more than doubled to eighteen per cent, and in 2003 stood at close to twenty per cent.[5] Academic work, then, sits at the cusp of the transition from secure, high-status, unionised employment, primarily in the public sector, to insecure, low-status unorganised casual existence, at the beck and call of 'the market'.

With the advent of casualisation the structure of academic employment in Australia has become heavily bifurcated. Academics employed on continuing or fixed term contracts as researchers, lecturers or academic administrators have a high level of professional autonomy and income security. Casual academics, many of whom are equally qualified, are only able to claim professional status in a limited way as skilled teachers, they are expected to undertake scholarship largely in their own time, they are paid by the hour and they have little in the way of income security. What does this bifurcation mean in relation to building 'quality' universities? More specifically, how do we need to understand the relationship between quality education and quality of employment of those who are at the forefront of the educational delivery in universities? If this question is to be addressed in any meaningful way we must come to a closer understanding of the experience of casual academics. This study attempts to contribute to that goal.

The paper is organised into four sections. The first outlines the broad policy context of Australian higher education, including funding and industrial relations policies, and quality frameworks. The second section establishes the parameters and key concerns of the investigation: some recent studies of casualisation in Australia are discussed

and three main themes are delineated: The third section uses these three themes to analyse findings from a qualitative study of casual academics' experiences at City University.[6] In the final section we draw some conclusions about the relationships between quality education and casualisation in Australian universities.

Casualisation as a policy choice

The 1987 Dawkins reforms led to a rapid increase in university enrolments. Universities managed this growth by recruiting staff to short-term contracts. The use of these contracts to meet ongoing rather than short-term teaching needs was challenged by the unions, leading to the 1998 Higher Education Contract of Employment (HECE) Award, which ruled out the use of fixed-term contracts in areas of ongoing need. Although the union's objective was to replace fixed term positions with ongoing career positions, an indirect impact of HECE was also to increase the use of hourly paid teaching-only casual contracts. Clauses in Enterprise Agreements at each institution regulated the amount of casual work in which an individual academic could engage, but this operated more as a constraint on casual income than as a deterrent for the institutions. In the fourth round of Enterprise Bargaining, from 2003, several Enterprise Agreements tried to limit casualisation by capping the proportion of salary expenditure allocated to casual labour. However, before this new provision could have significant impact, the Commonwealth Government linked Commonwealth funding to Higher Education Workplace Relations Requirements (HEWRRs), which removed caps on the use of casual and fixed-term labour.

The industrial pressure to casualise dovetails with financial pressure. Since the late 1980s universities have undergone dramatic transformations. A key driver has been financial. Between 1986 and 2007 Federal funding per student place, calculated at 2007 prices, fell by about fifty per cent. Over the same period, domestic student fees through the HECs system increased by about forty per cent, meaning that overall funding fell by something in the order of ten per cent per publicly-funded student. Some universities have very successfully compensated for falling Federal contributions by recruiting overseas fee-paying students. Between 1986 and 1996 total university enrolments grew by 240,000 or sixty-three per cent, including 36,000 fee paying international students; between 1996 and 2006 total enrolments rose by 350,000, or fifty-five per cent, including 189,000 fee paying international students. In total, over the twenty year period, enrolments increased from about 400,000 to 1,000,000, but the number of fulltime-equivalent academic staff remained relatively static, at about 32,000. Remarkably, total expenditure on academic salaries, as a proportion of University expenditure, actually fell from thirty-four per cent to twenty-nine per cent, 1996-2006.[7]

One key outcome has been the dramatic intensification of academic teaching work. The student-staff teaching ratio has deteriorated from sixteen students for every staff member in 1996, to twenty-one students per staff member in 2003, and the question of academic workloads has become a major industrial issue.[8] At the same time, a significant proportion of the increased student teaching load in the university sector has been carried by casuals. Between 1995 and 2004 overall employment growth in universities, across all categories of employment, increased by 14 per cent, rising from 80,754 to 91,905 fulltime equivalent staff. The number of fulltime equivalent casual staff rose from 9,249 to 13,716, which is a 48 per cent increase.[9]

Despite the obvious implications for the quality of university research and teaching, academic casualisation has not been a matter of direct concern for the government's

Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA). AUQA evaluates university practices against stated university objectives, and on this basis makes recommendations, affirmations or commendations on the quality of university performance. No university has in place an objective of reducing casualisation, hence the issue is not directly on the AUQA agenda. Nonetheless, AUQA reports do raise concerns about the impact of casualisation on quality assurance. In 2006 for instance, it reported on five metropolitan higher education institutions and in all cases made reference to casualisation.[10] Three main concerns were highlighted: lack of effective training opportunities and provision for casual academics; inconsistent management and supervision of casual academic staff; and lack of integration and inclusion of casuals in faculty arrangements. None of the reports recommended against casualisation *per se*, or suggested that quality of teaching and learning was suffering as a direct result of casualisation. Nonetheless, they do suggest a strong linkage between quality of teaching, quality of employment practices, and quality of work as experienced by casuals themselves. This paper more directly explores these linkages, investigating how teaching casuals experience the academic educational process.

Recent studies of casualisation

A key objective of our investigation was to explore the experiences of academic casuals, and for this reason we chose to take a qualitative approach. Most studies of casualisation in Australia take a quantitative approach.[11] An important recent exception is the 'Only a Casual' report, an interview-based study that investigated the experience of casuals drawn from a number of industrial sectors.[12] For this study we used the framework of the 'Only a Casual' report as a starting point. We also adapted the survey instrument to reflect the findings of a separate quantitative study of academic casualisation, also undertaken in 2004, by Anne Junor.[13] Our objective was to gather some qualitative data of academic casualisation to complement the more generic qualitative data and the existing sector-specific quantitative data. The research thus was aimed at filling a gap in the literature, to give us a fuller understanding of the options available for addressing the issues faced by academic casuals.

Taken together, the Pocock *et al* study and Junor study highlight three key themes for research. The first theme relates to income security and job satisfaction. Pocock *et al* reveal that income insecurity is a major issue for relatively longterm casuals who are dependent on casual income. Junor confirms that a sizeable proportion of academic casuals fall into this category, and experience specific problems relating to conditions of work in academia. Junor finds that eighty-five per cent of academic casuals are employed on sessional teaching contracts, which require staff to work only a few hours a week for the full semester (fourteen weeks). Generally, as Junor's study reveals, the casual teaching contract does not reflect the hours that have to be worked in order to fulfil educational objectives. Casual teaching academics are highly motivated by their work: Junor finds that ninety-five per cent of casual staff cite 'interesting work' as the key aspect of job satisfaction, with sixty-five per cent stating they were satisfied their work was interesting. Underpayment though can directly undermine job satisfaction. As revealed in the interview material below, lacking the paid hours to adequately support the learning process but highly motivated to deliver quality education, casual teaching academics can be left in an invidious situation.

The second theme relates to life course. Pocock *et al* deliberately explore the implications of casualisation for quality-of-life issues, such as personal capacity, self-realisation and life-chances. Their study highlights the extent to which casual workers are unable to plan ahead, to take holidays, to plan for a family, to raise a loan or a

mortgage. Junor finds that academic casuals are on average likely to be in the job for close to four years, and that a third of casuals aspire to academic employment, while another quarter want greater job security, suggesting the likelihood of considerable personal frustration. Using Pocock *et al*'s terminology, we should categorise the bulk of academic casual staff as 'reluctant' casuals, with the vast majority seeking paths to permanency.

The third theme relates to voice and identity in the workplace. These issues are of general concern for all casuals, but are particularly sharply posed for academic casuals. Pocock *et al* stress the impact of casual status on workplace 'voice', finding a strong tendency for casuals to be excluded and silenced. The results in terms of worker self-esteem are seen as important for both workplace productivity and for 'relationships, social life and community'. Junor finds this to be a central issue for casual academics: only fifteen per cent of casual academics agreed 'moderately' or 'strongly' they were included in meetings or in decision-making, as against thirty-four per cent of casual general staff. Pocock *et al* emphasise that workplace voice - what they call 'workplace citizenship' - is a key determinant of job satisfaction. But according to Junor's data, such 'workplace citizenship' is not available to eighty-five per cent of casual academic staff. In this context, as Pocock *et al* suggest, the casual experience becomes entirely contingent upon having a 'good relationship' with a 'good boss' - dependence which is deepened where the casual academic depends on informal networks to be re-employed every fourteen weeks.

As outlined in the next section, these three themes shape our research design and interview analysis, and provide a framework for assessing the qualitative experience of casual academics.

Academic casuals at City University – a qualitative study

The site of our study, City University, is one of the most casualised universities in Australia. AVCC figures show that in 1998 at City University twenty-two per cent of fulltime equivalent positions were casualised, and that by 2001 the proportion had reached thirty per cent. In 2001, responding to union concerns, the University conducted a survey of all academic casuals. The University distributed the survey to the 5,944 casual academic staff who had been employed in Spring semester 2001, and 3,596 casuals responded, a response rate of fifty-eight per cent. The responses showed that 1,795 casuals, approximately fifty per cent, were performing 'core teaching duties'.[14] Of the remainder, twenty-eight per cent were performing professional or specialist functions, sixteen per cent were post-graduate students and six per cent were temporarily replacing permanent staff. The survey also asked casuals whether their casual work was the 'primary source of employment or income', finding forty-four per cent fitted this category. In terms of career aspiration, twenty-one per cent of respondents were seeking fulltime permanent academic employment; seventeen per cent were not (respondents were not offered the option of part-time permanent work as a preference).

The overall objective of the research was to elaborate on this quantitative data gathered by the University in 2001, and to compare results with the findings of Junor and Pocock *et al*. Interviewees were drawn from two faculties, both with a high level of academic casualisation. Interviewees were self-selecting; after responding to a general email sent to all casual staff in the two Faculties they arranged to meet with the interviewer, who was a researcher unconnected to the university. The anonymous interview tapes were then transcribed by an off-campus transcriber, and then analysed

by the authors of this paper. In total, twenty-five of these interviews were conducted, each lasting for approximately one hour.

Interview participants provided some personal details that were helpful in giving a sense of the general demographic. Of the twenty-five interviewees, eighteen were women, and seventeen were in the thirty-to-fifty age-bracket. Thirteen of the interviewees had children or other dependents and twelve of these were living in dual-income households. Of the remainder without dependents, there were eight interviewees in dual-income households and four in single-income households. Five interviewees had a household income below twenty thousand dollars, seven had an income between twenty and thirty thousand dollars, and five had an income between thirty and forty thousand dollars. In terms of educational qualifications, all had undergraduate degrees, thirteen had Masters degrees and five had doctoral degrees. Significantly, fifteen of the interviewees were enrolled in post-graduate degrees, including twelve in doctoral studies. The interviews centred on an adapted version of the interview schedule used in the Pocock study.[15] A key objective was to gather personal narratives, highlighting the immediate life experiences and aspirations of the casual worker, drawing on the three themes as outlined above.

Income security, work intensity and job satisfaction

The interviews began with questions about the contract of employment and the kind of work casuals were expected to undertake. The tension between what casuals had signed up for and what they were expected to do was a key initial concern. Interviewees were asked how far their contract employment reflected their actual activities as a casual academic. Respondents who were aware of the details of their contract described it as only stipulating their basic duties. No interviewee understood the formula for calculating their hourly rate of pay, whether for teaching or marking. Some were aware of the expectation that casual tutors undertake two hours of associated duties for every hour of tutoring but were unclear as to how this could be achieved. In all cases the process of allocating hours of pay was a mystery, and occurred without consultation.

There was much frustration about what appeared to be expected in the contract and what work actually needed to be done. A recurring theme was the feeling that casual academics were undertaking a lot of unpaid work. Lola puts it simply – 'I find I'm often doing more than specified in the contract' and Fred states '…to be honest, I sign that blue form that says hours and I disagree with it but it's the way it is, I guess'.

Several interviewees stated that workloads for casuals are increasing, primarily especially to larger class sizes. The rising expectations of students – especially fee-paying students – can also be a factor, along with the necessity to engage on email and online. Students often assume casual staff have the time to engage with them - as Scott puts it - 'they assume you've got plenty of time available to talk to them'. Large classes of students, in which there are many students needing language and literacy support, may also force casuals to work beyond their contracted hours. Juliet summarised concerns voiced by many interviewees:

> there's a lot of expectation that you'll be in email contact with your students and I find that really time consuming because to word something carefully, by email you don't have those non-verbal cues… a lot of our students are non-English speaking background international students, so I find it a bit of a problem that there's an expectation to meet with them, to consult with them by email… if I want to meet with people I'm doing it in my own time…

Others also expressed the view that the more you are re-engaged to teach in the same area, the more you are expected to do 'extra' work such as updating course materials. In these circumstances casual staff can feel they carry the whole burden of teaching. Charlotte experiences the process in this way:

> … the whole onus of the course falls on the casual, in terms of even supplying the material, in doing all the photocopying, what are you going to give the students to read, you know, photocopy it all yourself, you're going to bring it all to class ...

Remarkably, despite these experiences of under-payment and work-intensification, casual teachers, on the whole, remain deeply committed to the craft of teaching. Across all interviewees there is great enthusiasm for the learning process, and commitment to students. There is often a pride in teaching – as an end in itself. As Kate states: 'I do it because I see it as a vocation. … so the fact that it's done well is something I take seriously'.

Many casuals were frustrated at not being able to produce what they saw as quality work. Many were caught in a cleft stick – between disappointing students and working for free. Most as a result undertake unpaid activities: Jenny puts it simply – 'I think casual workers are always putting in more than they get paid for'.

For many casual academics it is a matter of professional pride – above all of respecting the learning process - that drives them to undertake the extra unpaid activities. In large part the interviewees see this as a necessary evil – if they want to be able to teach at an acceptable standard they will have to work for free. Scott put it thus: 'what's increasingly happened really I think is that to do your job well you have to give the extra time for nothing, I feel that very strongly'.

Many interviewees stated that the primary reason the university had employed them was to save money on teaching, and understood this as reflecting the financial difficulties of the higher education sector. A number of interviewees felt that the university was exploiting their goodwill and enthusiasm to maintain teaching standards. There is a cynicism about the university's intentions, and bitterness about the impact on their ability to meet student needs. Lola puts it thus: 'I think it's a very convenient way of them getting energetic and enthusiastic staff for not a lot of money, not a lot of outlay'.

Life course and casual teaching work

As with all casual workers, academic casuals live with a permanent sense of insecurity. However, casual academic teaching work is especially unstable in being centred on semester contracts, which even if they are renewed, only provide an income for twenty-six weeks of the year. Added to this is the likelihood that such contracts are limited to perhaps six hours work per week. The result is that the casual academic workforce is a highly marginalised, albeit professional, segment of the workforce.

These insecurities directly affect the life course and personal circumstances of casuals. Amy for instance described the insecurity as 'really stressful', in terms of undermining the 'ability to plan your life'. Rick agreed, arguing 'there's a real need to recognise that level of stress involved in being a casual, how it impacts all different aspects of your life'.

Half the respondents said they had children to care for, and were living on relatively low incomes, of between $20,000 and $40,000. Most stated that planning for their lives

was difficult, particularly for women with children; for Lola 'it's really a big juggle exercise… you just juggle as you can'. The lack of paid leave, such as sick leave or maternity leave, exacerbates the problems. The mere mention of holidays raises eyebrows. Fred, a long-term casual, comments: 'I can't remember the last time I had a holiday'.

A key concern for casuals is whether they will be re-employed in the next semester. Every semester there is a struggle to find enough work; not surprisingly work is usually found by personal recommendation and word-of-mouth. Juliet clearly illustrates the process:

> I sent out about 25 expression-of-interest letters trying to get teaching work. And the only one, the only thing that paid off really was the fact that I had some contact with the person who employed me.

For many casuals the sessional nature of casual academic work, that is, the lack of work other than during the semester weeks, directly poses financial difficulties. For Alice and her partner, who is also a casual academic, the time between semesters is a time of financial difficulty:

> We need the money so much that we're not in a position to save during the semester so we often find that we have very lean times in the holidays, so that's difficult.

Without a regular income, casual academics are often unable to access credit, or even to commit to an on-going tenancy. Inability to plan financially also means inability to plan for future caring responsibilities or relationships. For Juliet the uncertainty prevents the possibility of planning to have children:

> my partner and I have been considering having… a baby but she works as a casual academic as well… and it's really hard to contemplate taking on that kind of a responsibility with not knowing if I'll be employed again next year..

Given the uncertainties and insecurities, one may reasonably ask why casual academics remain in the higher education sector. As noted, a major reason is a sheer love of the job; another is the expectation or hope of some kind of more secure academic employment in the future. Damian is a good example of a long-term casual who is seeking more secure employment in the sector:

> I've worked part time for 15 years. … the only reason I'm still doing it is because I hope to get a permanent job.

Others are less optimistic. Molly is adamant that casual status is not a stepping-stone:

> …in a way I think there's a sense that they know that if you've come in on a casual basis for five years you'll probably come in on a casual basis for another five years.

Several interviewees were finding the situation impossible, and after some years as a casual academic, were looking elsewhere. Many, like Juliet, were reconsidering their options:

> … maybe I'll just have to figure out another career option.…. Yeah, I'm just like really disillusioned, actually.

Voice and identity in the workplace

Casual academics feel isolated from the university community. The sense of alienation from the workplace is greatly exacerbated by the failure to provide simple facilities, such as a space to store teaching materials. The symbolic importance of a place to put

things, if not a place to sit, or a phone or computer to use, is greatly magnified. Some casuals share an office with up to 14 others, often with no provision for storing material. Most understood what should be provided to them, but felt this was compromised. Nell comments:

> … old computers were being dumped in the part time room, they didn't work properly…there was not enough space for the number of people who were sharing it and the room was used by visiting people, it just seemed to be a room where people were sent or told that that was available to them if they needed to use computers…

These kinds of comments are common. Fred realised the necessity simply to claim his entitlements:

> I just squatted where I was… I just sat at a desk, just took a desk… I had to fight to get a pigeon hole

Many respondents were unaware that professional development was available to casuals. Juliet was especially concerned that there was no opportunity for critical reflection on her own teaching practice and performance:

> There are feedback sheets at the end of semester, we just collect in our classrooms and we get no information from that… in other jobs where you're a permanent you get a, what do you call it, an appraisal, a yearly appraisal. … If you worked with them for a year, say, and they were obliged to give you a performance review…

The sense of intellectual isolation extends to relations with continuing staff members. Most of the interviewees feel they are treated differently by fulltime staff members. In some cases, casual academics expressed a general sense of invisibility, and lack of voice and recognition as part of the workforce:

> Well you're not a real staff member, you're not at staff meetings, you're not aware of what is happening in the university in a broader sense, you have no idea what direction things are going. You're just picked up the week before the semester starts and dropped when the semester ends.

Interviewees expressed considerable frustration about lack of access to the professional work of their respective faculties. Their intellectual marginality is expressed in their exclusion from discussions about the subjects and courses they teach. Despite having a working identity as teaching professionals, casual academics are not generally consulted about content, delivery, or student feedback on the subjects on which they are working. For Amy:

> That's the worst bit about it, really, that you're not included in any way. You're not included in any sort of course planning.

For Crystal, there is sharp bifurcation between casual and permanent staff:

> there's a little bit of a class system I think at the moment, that the people that have a say in and know the background to why decisions are made are permanent staff…it's almost that we're incidental to those sort of processes.

She calls for 'a more inclusive approach', specifically for greater paid involvement of casual staff in the planning and preparation of subjects so that they are aware of and have an input into the pedagogical regime within which they are teaching:

> I don't like being out of the loop, not knowing what's actually going into decisions that the faculty makes about approaches to subjects….

Importantly, some casuals identify the isolation as a quality issue, arguing that exclusion of casual academics from these preparatory processes undermines the teaching and learning experience:

> I think casuals have a lot to offer in terms of inputting about the way courses are run or issues of the process of teaching… they're used to the structure of the course, they understand the educational principles – so they have a lot to offer.

Several interviewees feel they are being wasted. Anna was very specific, citing the need to be involved in discussions of how components of subjects fit into broader programs of study, stating 'I'd like to sit around with the people who are doing my subject and work out what we put in to each one'.

Exclusion is laced with disrespect, conveyed in the dismissive attitudes circulating amongst permanent staff. Winnie cites assumptions such as 'aren't they lucky, they can just pop in and out, they don't have to be here all the time, they don't have to make that commitment to the institution… they're well paid'. She argues the university does not know how to relate to casuals as co-professionals. She is particularly dismissive of an introductory meeting for casuals, held in a Faculty at the start of each semester:

> … where you're talked at like a mob of children about how wonderful you are and how you're the backbone of the place, blah di blah, and this is what you have to do and these are all the rules and regulations.

Such comments suggest frustration and anger about the lack of recognition of the casuals' professional status and their willingness and ability to make further input.

The sense of being both isolated and expendable is corrosive. Scott highlights the direct impacts that disenchantment can have on the learning process:

> You can come in and do your class and then you can leave and you don't feel contact with people… a lot of people teach for a while as part timers and say why bother, that's it. Or people become very cynical. Or people don't put the effort into things.

Other interviewees contrasted the broadly negative institutional setting with the more positive relationship they have with their immediate academic supervisor - usually the coordinator of the subject in which they teach. Some interviewees are regularly and directly engaged in the review of subjects, and are paid for the time they put in. Alice's experience is instructive, in terms of the benefits of such involvement:

> She meets with me regularly, she asks me to come in, she keeps in touch with me, makes sure things are going well… She is respectful of the fact that we have different methods of teaching …. She always invites me to participate when we're redeveloping a reader or redeveloping the course itself, and I get paid for that….

Not all interviewees have such a positive experience with subject coordinators. Molly for instance commented that she only met her supervisor 'for ten seconds in the hallway'.

Clearly the relationships established between casual and continuing staff are contingent upon interpersonal relationships; the university provides little structural support for productive working relationships to be established. The institutional divides entrench and sharpen academic hierarchies, undermining the collegiality required for intellectual exchange and development. Scott, for instance, is closely involved in subject development, but draws a clear line between engagement with a subject

supervisor and with the wider university. He says he has never been consulted on any matter by the university, and adds:

> I don't see myself as working for the university, I think that's important. I work for [the subject] coordinators… I don't have any contact with the university at all because I've learnt from experience that it's just not valuable.

Barry explains this in terms of the structures of the academic workplace.

> You're most definitely, a second class citizen … there is most definitely a hierarchy and some people, as in any environment, their position in that hierarchy is extremely important to them and they enforce it.

The resulting sense of vulnerability can have the effect of silencing critical voices. Anna notes the universal assumption:

> any casual lecturer is always conscious of the fact that you don't want to perhaps draw attention to yourself too much in case you're perceived as a nuisance or somebody who's requiring too much attention and so forth.

The implications for quality, given that casuals now often deliver entire academic programs, are very serious. Any notion of a feedback loop to maintain or improve quality is broken when the principal practitioners have no voice.

Conclusions

Casualisation is never necessary, nor inevitable: it is, as demonstrated by the Australian and international experience, principally a product of corporate and governmental policy. Policies can be changed, and sectors can be decasualised. On the basis of our limited research we would certainly recommend a process of decasualisation for ongoing core teaching duties in Australian universities. At City University this stipulation would require decasualisation of about half of the casual teaching positions. The question of how this can be achieved is beyond the scope of this article, but clearly must involve significant changes to both industrial and funding structures.

We also submit, on the basis of the qualitative data we have gathered, and confirmed by parallel quantitative studies, that the higher education sector needs to urgently re-assess the impacts of its casualisation experiment. No such assessment has been undertaken – whether by the universities concerned or by the Commonwealth – yet university casualisation has directly transformed the educational process. We have noted that in the higher education sector the quality impacts of casualisation have largely been ignored by AUQA. Our interviews highlight the exclusion of casuals from university decision-making, explaining why quality impacts of casualisation are not being raised internally. There is no feedback from the 'coal-face' to educational policy, either within faculties or within the sector as a whole.

In light of this breakdown we may ask ourselves why students still provide relatively positive feedback on university courses, including those offered by highly casualised universities such as City University. As our interview data suggested, many of the casual academics, despite being underpaid, do the work that is needed to uphold the quality of the courses, partly out of professional pride, and partly because they see teaching as a vocation. But how much longer can Australian universities rely on this underpaid labour of an academic underclass to protect their reputation as quality education providers? Moreover, can universities continue to claim a status as socially-responsible institutions while ignoring their impact on the livelihood and welfare of

casual academics? Universities are putting much at stake if they continue along this path of casualising academic work. They risk the quality of their courses, the sense of intellectual community and collegiality amongst staff, and their status as ethical employers.

Clearly there will remain a need for a level of short-term academic employment in the university system. The question posed by this study is whether this is best delivered through hourly-paid teaching-only positions. Where there is a genuine level of uncertainty about the ongoing staffing needs of an area, alternative models of short-term fractional or sessional employment that recognise and reward the full range of academic duties are urgently required. As well as teaching, academics must maintain an understanding of their fields of knowledge, they must advance that knowledge through scholarly research, and must engage in program development and academic administration, as well as undertake various forms of intellectual exchange both with colleagues and beyond the academy. If quality research and teaching is to be maintained then all of these aspects of academic life must be recognised and provided for in the employment arrangements for academic staff. Casual teaching-only contracts carry an implicit expectation that the non-teaching aspects of academic life can be obtained cost-free. As amply demonstrated by the interviews reported here, these contracts simply shift these costs from universities onto those least able to bear them.

The university sector now informally manages one fifth of its fulltime-equivalent workforce – a situation that would be unacceptable in any industry that prides itself on quality. Where casual staff receive some supervision or mentoring, the data from this research suggests that it is dependent upon the nature of the relationship with the supervisor. The key site for training, supervision and involvement in decision-making is the relationship with subject coordinators, but this is not recognised nor actively supported by faculties. Moreover, because casual academics are supervised by the subject coordinators of the subjects they teach, the supervision is narrowly focused around the teaching of the subject and does not extend to broader mentoring about career planning or obtaining research involvement.

The growing importance of teaching-only casuals in university education directly contradicts claims from the university sector that the research-teaching nexus distinguishes universities from other tertiary institutions. Continuation and extension of this scenario is unacceptable, and, as we have seen, counter-productive for a university sector that values quality. The three concerns about casualisation identified by AUQA – training, supervision and integration into faculty decision-making – are all best addressed through reform of the employment status of short-term academic employees. Interviewees confirm these are major issues, with the lack of professional performance appraisal and development being a central issue. Where faculty engagement and support is available it is generally an optional extra and not recompensed. A quality education system is not sustainable unless industrial justice for all university staff is built into the quality framework.

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James Goodman *researches social movements and globalisation at UTS. He is a member of the cosmopolitan civil societies research centre and director of the social inquiry program.*

Keiko Yasukawa *is a lecturer in Adult Education at the UTS. She is an activist in her union in campaigning for improved conditions for casual university staff, and challenging the increased casualisation of academic work.*

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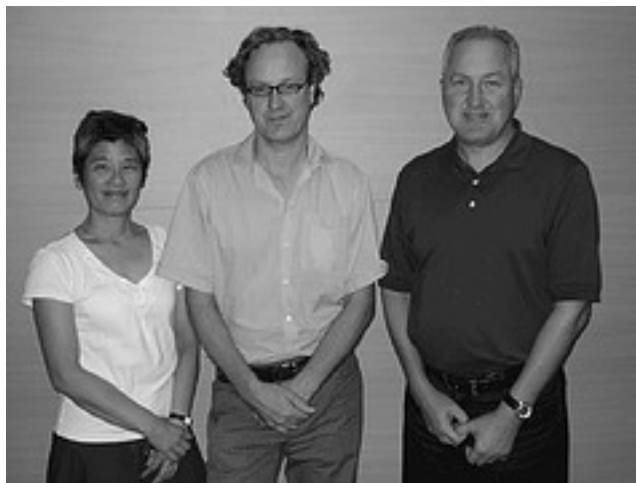
[1] Campbell, I (2004). Casual work and casualisation: how does Australia compare?, paper prepared for ACTU, RMIT and *The Age* Conference 'Work Interrupted: casual and insecure employment in Australia', Hotel Sofitel, Melbourne, 2 August.

[2] Commonwealth of Australia (2005). *Working for Australia's Future: Increasing participation in the workforce*, House Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations and Workforce Participation, House of Representatives, Canberra.

[3] ANZ Bank (2004). Casualisation of the workforce, *Economic Update* 13 May, Australia and New Zealand Banking Group Ltd, Melbourne.

[4] Australian Council of Trade Unions (2003a). *Future of Work: Casual and insecure forms of work,* Background Paper, ACTU, Melbourne.

[5] Australian Vice Chancellor's Committee (AVCC) (2004a). 'Indexation: Maintaining the value of our investment in universities', http://www.avcc.edu.au/content.asp?page=/publications/policy/elections/index.htm, accessed 25 June 2006; Department of Education, Science and Training (2004) *Staff 2004 – Selected Higher Education Statistics*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

[6] Brown, A, Goodman, J, and Yasukawa, K (2006). *Getting the Best of You for Nothing: Casual voices in the Australian academy*, Melbourne, National Tertiary Education Union. 'City University' is a fictional name for a metropolitan Australian University.

[7] Australian Vice Chancellor's Committee (2005). 'Key Statistics – Students' http://www.avcc.edu.au/content.asp?page=/publications/stats/students.htm, accessed 25 June, 2006.

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[11] Wooden, M (1999). 'Job Insecurity and Instability: Getting the Facts Straight', *Business Council of Australia Papers*, 1,1: 14-18; Buchanan, J (2004). Paradoxes of significance: Australian casualisation and labour productivity, paper prepared for ACTU, RMIT and *The Age* Conference 'Work Interrupted: casual and insecure employment in Australia', Hotel Sofitel, Melbourne, 2 August; Campbell (2004) *op cit;* Productivity Commission (2006). *The role of non-traditional work in the Australian labour market*, research paper, Productivity Commission, Canberra, AGPS, May.

[12] Pocock, B, Prosser, R, and Bridge, K (2004). *'Only a casual…' How casual work affects employees, households and communities in Australia,* Labor Studies, University of Adelaide, Adelaide.

[13] Junor, A (2004). Casual university work: choice, risk, inequity and the case for regulation, *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 14, 2: 276-304.

[14] Casuals who ticked the box for this option were agreeing to the description of the reason for casual employment: 'The casual academic will perform core teaching duties which are in excess of the workload that can be handled by the permanent staff within the school. Further the employment of casual academic staff represents a more cost effective and efficient way of fulfilling the duties than appointing additional permanent full-time or part-time staff'.

[15] Pocock, *et al, op cit*: 196-199.

Values, Research and Industrial Relations Policy: Recent Controversies and Implications for the Future

John Buchanan

Introduction

During its period in office (1996-2007) the Howard Government totally recast Australian labour law. Despite initiating profound changes, it reduced rather than increased the amount of data available to monitor and evaluate the impact of these.[1] Closely associated with this tendency was an ever more vitriolic series of attacks on any researcher who contributed to filling this gap by releasing their own data and analysis on 'workplace reform'. These attacks reached a crescendo in 2007. The year opened with the denunciation of Professor David Peetz as, amongst other things, a supporter of the assault on the twin towers in New York, in response to his careful and detailed assessment of the publicly available data concerning the impact of *WorkChoices* after its first year.[2] The year finished with a full scale attack in the press and electronic media on the research team which undertook the *Australia at Work* study[3] by then Prime Minister, the Treasurer, the Education Minister and the Minister for Workplace Relations. These were merely the last in a long line of attacks on the character and research integrity of industrial relations academics who raised questions about the often negative impact of the *Work Choices* legislation. This paper outlines the key events surrounding the attacks on the *Australia at Work* study and reflects on their wider significance. It addresses four questions:

- where am I coming from?
- what happened to our research?
- what does it mean?
- what should be done about it?

Where am I coming from?

A major feature of the attacks on working life researchers in 2007 was that we were or are associated with the labour movement. According to the then Federal Government Ministers and *The Australian* newspaper, any association, no matter how old or incidental, was all that mattered as it, allegedly, compromised our ability to undertake credible research. In my case, for example, it was noted that in my former career as a public servant I had been an active union member, workplace delegate and worked for eight weeks as a researcher for my union (on secondment) twenty years ago. *The Australian* also made much of the fact that in political outlook I am a socialist – although it failed to mention that I am from the libertarian tradition within that broad church. All this is, however, incidental to my status as a professional researcher. In contributing to the production of our reports in 2007, as in any other year, I did so as Director of the Workplace Research Centre based in the Faculty of Economics and Business at the University of Sydney.

In my professional life I am guided by four fundamental principles. The first I call the Scottish Enlightenment presumption. Indeed, I regard myself as a child of the Scottish Enlightenment.[4] The essence of the Scottish Enlightenment was that you should rely on reason to transcend prejudice to understand society, in order to improve it. I am unashamedly a disciple of that era.

That sets some very basic principles, how do I operationalise them? My second core principle comes from the British empirical tradition. I believe you learn about reality by

systematically observing facts. But in doing this I am an empirical researcher, not an empiricist. Facts do not speak for themselves, they need to be organised to make sense. This is leads to my third principle. I use only robust theory. But I am not a 'rationalist'. I believe one has to be conceptually *informed* in undertaking analysis, but not conceptually *driven*. This leads to my final principle. On questions of ethics, values and knowledge I have been inspired by Aristotle. Aristotle identified three forms of knowledge - *episteme*, *techne* and *phronesis. Episteme* is the kind of abstract knowledge normally associated with fairly arcane modes of reasoning. *Teche* is associated with the messy world of practice. *Phronesis* (or practical wisdom) is the space in between where you use your reason to guide your life. That is the essence of my approach.[5] This framework can be operationalised in contemporary social science by applying a modern version of Ockham's razor. For me, this is means being committed to combining conceptual minimalism with empirical resourcefulness. All my academic life I have endeavoured to strip down the abstract categories that guide analysis as much as possible, to let the data drive the analysis. It is something that will never be finally achieved, but it is a pursuit that allows one to get closer to the truth.[6]

I have not outlined the above because I assume a reader especially interested in epistemology. Rather, I have provided it to let you know (a) do not believe everything you read about me in *The Australian* and (b) there is more to my life than my personal political values. I take great pride in the efforts I have made as a professional academic researcher to avoid the problems of personal prejudice, rationalism and empiricism vitiating social inquiry.

What happened to the *Australia at Work* study?

Making sense of industrial relations is difficult – for both practitioners and researchers of the system. In Australia in recent decades it has also been a matter of intense policy controversy. Facts and rigorous analysis can often get in the way of a good policy story. This latter reality has caused problems for relations between researchers and governments of both persuasions. The Keating Government did not like our criticism of enterprise bargaining and our observations about the problems about its association with deteriorating working time standards, just as the Howard Government did not appreciate our analysis of its 'workplace reforms'. The real virtue of the Keating Government, and the Hawke Government before, however, was that both were committed to the provision of data and they spent money generating robust statistics and case study evidence to help people make sense of the impact of their initiatives.

The Howard Government cut data collection and as soon as *Work Choices* started to bite, ceased releasing even administrative by-product data.[7] This left a huge vacuum in the area of working life data and analysis. To their great credit, a large number of my colleagues worked to fill this vacuum and in doing so exposed themselves to serious attack. A listing of some of these individuals and the attacks they were subjected to is provided in the attachment. As noted above I was a public servant in the early part of my working life. When I first joined the University sector I was surprised at just how far from the action most scholars were, because they were pursuing academic debates and not ones of direct relevance in the practical realm. That has changed dramatically in the last 15 years. It now appears my colleagues and I have exposed ourselves to public personal attacks for trying to engage with practical concerns. The treatment David Peetz received was genuinely appalling. His experiences have been described by David Marr.[8] But others such as Barbara Pocock, Ray Cooper, Marian Baird and Justine Evesson, along with their colleagues listed in the appendix, also had their reputations attacked because they have been union delegates at some stage and one

had committed the great crime of having been a union trainer. All have been – allegedly – compromised because some of their research was funded by State Governments.

Two things especially surprised us about attacks on our study. First, because it was an Australian Researh Council (ARC) Linkage Grant half the funds came from Unions NSW, but the other half was provided by the Federal Government through the (ARC). Second, my entire research team was accused of being trade union officials masquerading as academics. I have indicated my back ground, but Brigid van Wanrooy and Sarah Oxenbridge, the first and second named authors on our report are union members, not activists. And the fourth member of the team, Michelle Jakubauskas, who has never been a unionist, was particularly bemused by the allegation.

What were the core features of our study that drew such a strong response from the previous Federal Government? The report was the first arising from a 2.2 million dollar study that is being conducted over five years. It is based on tracking 8,341 workers for the period March 2006 through to March 2010. Studies of this scale are very rare in Australia; they are actually rare around the world. The research team recognised this was a very difficult research topic so we formed an advisory board. Indeed, we made sure that it was a highly pluralistic advisory board because we thought it would be better to have technical arguments fought out amongst ourselves so that when the data was finally released, there would be agreement about the conclusions. One of the members of our advisory board, for example, has done a lot of work with the Business Council of Australia. The benchmark report contains a large number of findings and, can I warn you, you may be disappointed. We have had over 40,000 downloads and we have had a number of complaints. After all the public controversy associated with the project, people have been expecting a 'racey' read - all they found, however, was a work of scholarship.

The key findings from the study can be briefly summarised. Workloads are a key problem. Just over half (52 per cent) of the workforce reported that they just do not have the resources they need to do the job properly. Just under a third (30 per cent) of workers are disenchanted with their hours of work - they want to work either less or more. Living standards are a sleeper issue. Just over half (52 per cent) of the workforce says they are just or are not coping at all on their current salaries. The findings about Australian Workers' Agreements (AWAs) and low skill workers were similar to those recorded in ABS data – such workers' hourly wages were better where they were covered by a collective agreement.

That is the 'bad' news. There were actually a lot of 'good news' stories. As noted earlier, Unions NSW and a consortium of Unions are part funders of the project. When they saw our report they were actually quite apprehensive about the potential reaction of the media. We found many workers satisfied with current arrangements (we use the expression that they are 'a happy bunch'). We also found a large number of private sector workers who are happily non-members of unions. So if the Government had bothered to read the report they could have used a lot of the information to buttress their position. If they had read with any subtlety at all, they would have realised what most journalists did - that our data and our report poses just as many, if not more, challenges for ALP policy. The then Government, however, was not interested in engaging in debate on this matter.

How did the debate unfold? On 2 October 2007 *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* ran our report as front page news with extensive data and commentary provided in subsequent pages. In their coverage both papers quoted an unnamed source from the then Minister of Workplace Relations office. This 'spokesman' asserted that it the study was worthless because it has been 'cooked up by John Buchanan and his cronies'. The then Minister for Workplace Relations, Joe Hockey, chimed in on the ABC's morning current affairs program, AM. He accused us of being 'former union officials masquerading as academics' and that the timing of the release of the report was highly political. Peter Costello, the then Treasurer, intervened on ABC Sydney morning radio. He asserted that 'He who pays the piper calls the tune' – a reference to the fact that because our ARC linkage partner was Unions NSW the study was inherently flawed. When Virginia Triolli, the ABC compere for the show noted his government had paid for half of it he observed 'Well, we don't get everything right'. The then Prime Minister, John Howard, tried to argue with some facts. He asserted that the study ignored the benefits of *Work Choices*. A day later the then Minister of Education, Julie Bishop issued a media release reporting that she was annoyed that we had, according to her, released the report six months early.

It is important that assertions about the allegedly 'political' timing of the release of our report be refuted. We were initially mystified by the then Minister for Education's assertion. As it turned it she was referring to the fact that under the contract we have with the ARC we have to produce a report accounting for the acquittal of our funds in April each year. The fact we released our substantive findings in October the year before was portrayed as us bringing forward the release date of the report! We had always planned to release our study at this time. The *Australia at Work* project runs for five years. We had always planned to release key findings at about that time each year to (a) provide feedback to respondents as well as the research community and (b) to assess if the survey instrument needed to be modified before we returned to undertake the next year's fieldwork. If John Howard had called the election in June, we still would have released our report in October. You cannot study a random sample of 8,341 workers and arbitrarily bring forward the release date. Indeed, we were actually late in hitting our planned deadline. Such overruns are not, however, unusual in projects of this scale.

We were extremely troubled by these attacks on our professionalism. My wife is a barrister who, *inter alia*, specialises in defamation law. She advised that we call for a retraction of these defamatory comments. We followed her advice. What we did not expect was the degree of support we received in the media. The Fairfax press, the ABC and commercial radio in particular went out of their way to argue that we had produced an important study and there should be open and constructive debate on the issues it raised. We were especially encouraged when *The Sydney Morning Herald* on the day following the attacks had a full editorial telling the Government that if it had read this report it might understand its poor showing in the opinion polls better. The *Herald* also ran two opinion pieces by senior journalists saying that the then Government's standard form of attacking academics was troubling to the nature of democracy and undermining the debate on industrial relations policy. We had not asked for any of this and these writers had not talked to us. They had reached their conclusions from information in the public domain and on that basis defended us and our study.

The day after the attacks support also came from many quarters within the University sector. The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Western Australia and head of the

Group of Eight,[9] Professor Alan Robson, was very forthright. He issued a public statement in which he sent a very clear and simple message to the public and the Government: start dealing with the issues and not with the personalities. That was a clarion call in what was a very trying time for us. Our own Vice-Chancellor, Professor Gavan Brown, intervened in support of us - initially at the time of the first round of attacks and subsequently at a public forum on academic freedom. The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, Professor Glyn Davis, also openly supported us at a public forum in Melbourne. Other academics also mobilised support. We received literally hundreds of emails and phone calls.[10] Academic leaders from elsewhere campaigned on our behalf. Professor Karel Williams of Manchester University and Professor Roy Green of Macquarie University sent letters and emails of support to the press and university hierarchy that made a huge difference.

We realised that the Government must have been really hurting when, on the following weekend, we read *The Australian* – informally known amongst some in the media and policy circles at the time as 'the Government Gazette'. Writers Janet Albrechtsen and Ewan Hannan had found a transcript of an informal talk I had given at a pub on a Friday night two and a half years earlier. They turned coverage of this long gone informal event into a page one story. This was the lowest moment for me in this whole dispute. If I had known that *The Australian* wanted to give a 'Politics in the Pub' talk page one status, I would have had the speech refereed and fully referenced. I would have also cleaned up some of the rather loose language in the transcript, some of which was an erroneous account of what I said. The episode was a political beat-up designed to attack my credibility. Neither writer made any serious effort to talk to me about the distinction I draw between a citizen's right to engage in political discourse and my professional life as a researcher.

I have been involved in managing an academic research centre now for 15 years. I know from experience that if you put out a good report the media runs hot, especially if one of the metropolitan daily newspapers runs it as a page one story. The fact that not one media source rang me tells me that the whole media fraternity in this country turned its back on *The Australian*. I know from direct communications with many journalists they were disgusted by what it had done. I received some calls on the following Monday from people in the media asking if there was anything they could do to respond to *The Australian*; they did not want to run the story, they wanted to undermine it. This account needs a minor qualification. One media outlet did run with the story. Alan Jones turned it into a session on his Tuesday talkback program. Those are the kind of news values that *The Australian* would appear to support.

The attacks published in *The Australian* triggered another round of support. One of the strongest came from Jeff Sparrow, writing for the satirical blogg, *Crikey.com*.[11] He noted how the attacks on our study, and my person in particular, was part of a broader campaign by self-styled 'cultural warriors' to propagate their ideology, in part by endeavouring to discredit anyone critical of the policies of the then Federal Government. He went further and noted the irony that while I was accused of being politically biased, leading editorial staff at *The Australian* were openly priding themselves on being part of conscious movement engaged in partisan political struggle. Sparrow reported that this was clearly spelled out by Tom Switzer, Opinion Editor for *The Australian,* in an address to the 54th Quadrant Dinner delivered in August 2007, only weeks before the controversy surrounding our study erupted.[12] In this Switzer outlined how 'The tide is turning in Australia's culture wars.'[13]

> … during the Keating era, only a few well-known conservatives or free-marketeers such as Paddy McGuiness, Frank Devine, Alan Wood and John Stone existed in the media.
>
> Today, by contrast, the ranks of the Right have been swelled to include Andrew Bolt, Piers Akerman, Gerard Henderson, Greg Sheridan, Miranda Devine, Janet Albrechtsen, Imre Salusinszky, Sandra Lee, Michael Baume, Dennis Shannahan, Terry McCrann, Michael Duffy, John Roskam, Tim Blair, Christopher Pearson, Paul Gray, Neil Mitchell, and Paul Sheehan…[14]

In this speech Switzer, and others similarly inclined, present themselves as heroic underdogs assailing the 'commanding heights of Australian culture – from the arts and university humanities faculties to the Fairfax press and the public broadcaster' which are all, allegedly, under control of 'the Left'.[15] Others, however, have characterised developments in different terms. The death of Paddy McGuiness in January 2008 provided Bob Carr, former NSW Premier and journalist, with the opportunity to assess the recent alignment between the former Federal Government and this segment of the media.[16] As he observed:

> For 10 years, whatever Howard did or said he would be supported by a group of columnists, spread across the Australian media … If their … prime minister was under criticism, they locked shields and unsheathed short arms. 'This shall not pass!' they seemed to be declaring any time their man was attacked.
>
> No prime minister has had a Praetorian Guard like it, a body of opinion-makers so fiercely one-sidedly and resolutely in his camp. They were Howard's adulators. Malcom Fraser, John Gorton, Harold Holt and Robert Menzies: none of them had been able to count on such consistent support from a group commentators …[17]

It is clear from these recent writings that the treatment of our research, along with that of our colleagues, was not an aberration. The public controversy lead by former Government Ministers and followed through by its supporters in parts of the Murdoch press was, for them, just another site of struggle by cultural warlords or praetorian guards defending 'their people' and 'their policies' from the strictures of rigorous scholarly scrutiny.

What is the significance of these events?

It is useful to reflect on the practical, philosophical and political implications of our experience.

The practical implications are very real. As part of the ARC's Key Centres program we are expected to be self financing. We have maintained our credibility by having a diverse client base. Currently these include a large number of business organisations, as well as unions, churches and public sector clients like the Reserve Bank. If the Government could propagate the story that we were biased, that had the potential to scare off potential clients. Many notified us and reiterated their support. Some did, however, indicate they would have to delay working with us until things 'settled down'. Probably more important, and the thing that has hurt most, is that the researchers involved in *Australia at Work* are primarily young academic women, all at relatively early stages of their careers. They are people of considerable talent and potential, looking forward to building careers as respected researchers. As mentioned, none has had a history of union activism; for them to be tarred with that brush is distressing and a source of considerable concern. We really have to think about the long term implications for junior academics. The previous Federal Government was sending a

very clear message - if we ask what the government regards as the wrong questions, we expose ourselves to personal attack and guilt by association with others. This hardly creates an environment that fosters critical questioning and inquiry.

The second implication is philosophical. The message given by the former Government and the commentators working for *The Australian* was this: if you dissent from the political mainstream you are not allowed to be a researcher. What does that say about the nature of our democracy? Does what you do in your life as a citizen limit what you can do in your professional life as an academic researcher? The epistemology I follow is something I have been working on as an active researcher for 25 years. Yet the ministers who intervened in this debate and those writing in *The Australian* appear to wish to deny any capacity for people to be active citizens and active researchers, no matter how diligent they are in honing their research skills.

This leads directly the third implication – what do these experiences mean politically? I think that the whole character of 'really existing liberalism' itself has now changed. In the past liberalism was associated with a vision of life that promoted a plurality of voices and the notion that questioning and dissent were good for society. The Howard Liberal Government in its treatment of industrial relations researchers showed anything but a pluralistic outlook. We were on the verge of entering a very authoritarian regime where if you were a researcher asking the 'wrong' questions, the government would attempt to silence you; if you would not be silenced, it would attempt to damage your reputation - directly or indirectly.

What is to be done?

Neutralising the destructive tradition cultivated by the previous Government in its treatment of professional academic researchers has highlighted the critical role of unions, the media, senior University leaders and the Academy of Social Sciences in supporting academic freedom and free speech.

I was inspired by the support we had from our union, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU). Within a day of the story breaking we were offered all the support it could provide. Most importantly, the union organised are series of public forums on academic freedom and free speech in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth. These allowed us, and others like us, to tell our stories and to receive public support from a host of senior personnel. This was a clear example of why working people need unions - without autonomous organisations that are independent from management and government, it is very hard for those under attack by major agencies such as the Government to have the means to defend themselves.

Secondly, our experiences highlight the critical importance of journalistic freedom and diversity in media ownership. Journalists and their editors played an outstanding role in giving us the means of responding to the attacks on us. Those at *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* especially went out of their way to ask the really big questions of those in positions of power. Just as, if not more importantly, editorial writers at both these papers were especially alive to not letting the Government define the issue as one concerning our characters. As the *Herald's* editorial in our defence argued: our research contained some very important findings; instead of attacking the researchers the Government should have reflected on these. Maybe it would then have had a better understanding of why it was unpopular in the electorate. Commentary such as this provided reasoned debate of a kind that was conspicuously absent amongst some

other parts of the media. Diversity of media ownership ensured that the space for such reasoning existed. It is important that such diversity survives.

Senior University managers also showed the critical role they can play in defending important principles of public and academic life. Vice-Chancellors these days do not have an easy job to do. Any CEO is not popular with the troops a lot of the time. The fact that such prominent CEOs in the higher education sector spoke out in our defence is not something we took for granted. When the story broke we thought we were just going to have to weather this on our own. The fact that people at the highest levels in universities spoke out in support of our work was genuinely inspiring. Equally so was the support we received from academics in our own and other disciplines. From our experiences in this case, the ideal of academic freedom and free speech is something that is widely supported and actively defended by a wide range of people within our universities. This is something to be acknowledged, nurtured and celebrated.

Finally, there is an important role for the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia. The treatment that my colleagues and I received was the latest in a long series of attacks on academics in the industrial relations field and elsewhere. One of the reasons we fought back and mentioned the prospect of suing for defamation was because we were tired of seeing our colleagues personally attacked for undertaking important scholarly research. This was, towards its end, a standard operating procedure for the Howard Government. In a situation like that, a strong institutional response is required. The primary institution for promoting and defending research in the social sciences, including our own field, is the Academy. It is vital that it plays an active and vigorous role on issues related to the value and ethics of research and public policy in general and that it helps ensure that the role of university based researchers is protected and nurtured, rather than undermined.[18]

Conclusion

In some ways the year 2007 was not a good one for social scientists and humanities researchers producing work that raises questions about the direction of public policy. Attacks on one's character are professionally threatening and personally very unpleasant. It is important, however, that we are not overwhelmed by the negative experiences of last year. The supportive responses to the attacks on us, and others like us, came from a wide variety of sources. This is significant, because if democracy is to flourish we need open and informed public debate. In the future, let us hope that we can recapture the spirit of the Scottish enlightenment with its commitment to challenging dogma on the basis of clear reasoning and careful scrutiny of facts.

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[This paper is based on a transcript of a presentation given to a National Tertiary Education Union Academic Freedom Forum held at the University of Western Australia on 22 November 2007 (and at similar forums held in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne earlier in November). Great assistance in preparation of the transcript was provided by Andrea Buchanan – one the organisers of the Perth Forum. Useful comments were also provided by David Peetz and academics who attended a session on this topic held at the Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand (AIRAANZ) in Melbourne in February 2008. All errors of fact and judgment are mine.

The Workplace Research Centre has created a Chronology of key developments in the Coalition Government's attacks on Industrial Relations researchers in general and the *Australia at Work* research team in particular 2005 – 2007, with help from David Peetz with some of the detail. Space was insufficient to include the chronology here. Suggestions for additions and/or improvements, especially from other researchers attacked by the Howard Government are strongly encouraged. Those wishing to have a copy of this chronology, or to add to it, should contact the WRC.]

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1   The key developments here were (a) failing to continue to conduct comprehensive surveys of workplace industrial relations, and (b) cutting back the data released on registered enterprise agreements – especially on its greatest policy innovation, Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs).

2   David Peetz's original paper was released at the 21st Conference of the Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australian and New Zealand in New Zealand in February 2007. A comprehensive version of the paper was prepared for and published for the Victorian Government several weeks later. See David Peetz, David (2007). *Assessing the Impact of 'Work Choices' One Year On, Industrial Relations Victoria.* Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development http://www.business.vic.gov.au/busvicwr/_assets/main/lib60104/4827wcanniversaryreportweb.pdf.

3   van Wanrooy, Brigid, Oxenbridge, Sarah, Buchanan, John and Jackubauskas, Michelle (2007). *Australia at Work. The Benchmark Report*, Workplace Research Centre, University of Sydney (www.wrc.org.au).

4   Herman, A (2001). *The Scottish Enlightenment. The Scot's Invention of the Modern World*, Fourth Estate, London; Desai, M (2002). *Marx's Revenge. The Resurgence of Capitalism and the Death of Statist Socialism*, Verso, Ch 2.

5   This is also the tacit epistemology that informs the work of the Workplace Research Centre (WRC). The WRC, previously know as the Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training (ACIRRT), was founded as an Australian Research Council Key Centre. Key Centres were established to complement more traditional academic establishments by becoming self-financing institutes that undertake applied research for the widest range of parties interested in their area of inquiry.

6   This paragraph covers a lot of ground. The best recent formulation on these matters of epistemology, research design and engagement with reality is provided by Flyvbjerg, B (2001). *Making Social Science Matter. Why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Other important sources for me have been: Carr, EH (1961). *What is history*? Penguin Books, Harmondsworth (critique of empiricism); Hindess, B and Hirst, P (1977). *Mode of Production and Social Formation*, MacMillan, London (critique of rationalism); Johnson, R (1982). 'Reading for the best Marx: history-writing and historical abstraction' in Johnson, R, McLennan, G, Schwartz, B and Sutton, D *Making Histories. Studies in history-writing and politics*, Hutchinson, London:

153-204 (formation of a 'practical realism'); and the inspiring example of conceptual minimalism and empirical resourcefulness provided by Karel Williams and his colleagues over three decades: See for example Williams, K *et al* (1994). *Cars: Analysis, History, Cases*, Berghahn Books, Providence, and Froud, J *et a*l (2006). *Financialization and Strategy: Narratives and Numbers*, Routledge, London. The best general guide on research design that I use frequently is Hakim, C (1999). *Research Design*, Sage, London. It should be noted that Catherine Hakim was one of John Howard's favourite social researchers.

7   As noted earlier, its cutbacks in data collection included ceasing support for the conduct the Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey. The administrative by-product data it stopped releasing was data on the incidence and content of statutory industrial contracts or Australian Workplace Agreements.

8   Marr, D (2007). 'His master's voice. The Corruption of Public Debate Under Howard', *Quarterly Essay*, Issue 26, June: 1 – 85.

9   The Group of Eight is a network of Australia's older Universities – often referred to as the 'sandstones'.

10   To date we have not been able to respond personally to all these messages. This is a situation I hope to remedy in the next month or so.

11   Sparrow, Jeff (2007). 'Albrechtsen should look for bias a little closer to home' *crikey.com*, 8 October.

12   Switzer, Tom (2007). 'Conservatives Are no Longer Losing the Culture Wars', *Quadrant, Politics*, October, 51, 10.

13   *Ibid*: 4.

14   *Ibid*: 6.

15   *Ibid*: 4.

16   Carr, Bob (2008). 'Paddy had lost the plot', *The Australian*, 30 January.

17   This quote of Carr's continues: '…the symbiotic link with the Praetorians made it impossible for the emperor to shift. And they fed and nurtured and consolidated his attachment to the orthodoxies that did him in.'

18   While many individual Fellows of the Academy of Social Sciences spoke out in support of us, the Academy as an institution was unable to get the relevant press to publish a statement of support prepared at the time by its Acting President, Professor Sue Richardson. I am grateful to Professor Keith Hancock for drawing these facts to my attention. In December 2007 I was contacted by the President, Stuart Macintyre, inviting me to contribute to this edition of *Dialogue*.

Serving Society – a 'new role' for Universities?

Carolyn Allport

Introduction

For over a decade the market has essentially ruled Australian universities, both domestically and internationally. Both Labor and Coalition governments have embraced this, often favouring narrow instrumentalist measures of performance in order to acquit accountability for the provision of public funding. At the same time, universities have also been expected to undertake public good activities in teaching and research and have striven to retain excellence across a decade of chronic under-funding. While this is a familiar tale, retold across our centres of learning, it raises the fundamental question – is funding all there is to making universities sustainable? Clearly the issues are far more complex.

Under the Coalition Government, universities, and those who work in them, were targeted in the culture wars prosecuted by the Howard Government. Government Ministers intervened in teaching curriculum, both at school and university levels, with the so-called 'history wars' attracting the main attention. Individual researchers from other disciplines were also publicly criticised when their research did not accord with the agenda of Coalition Ministers and the independence of the Australian Research Council was undermined both in structure and practice, thus raising deep concerns about the peer review process itself.

The resultant environment was a clawing anti-intellectualism, crude and self-serving, with the consequence that the pursuit of knowledge as a public good or service was demeaned and devalued. Government removal of the public good objective in the Cooperative Research Program, a flagship program under the previous Labor Government for university and industry partnerships, is one critical example.

Universities have a responsibility to foster free inquiry, retain their independence from the government of the day and play a leading role in public debates. Over the last decade, universities battled inadequate funding, excessive intrusion by Government, increased privatisation, and threats to intellectual freedom. Institutions faced censorship of library holdings, while individual researchers had their research proposals truncated by the Attorney General under the anti-terrorism and sedition laws. This built a culture of subtle self-censorship in both teaching and research. For many working in the academy, it became a cautious culture of survival and disengagement.

Students have also paid high financial costs for their education. In 2006, the then Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (now *Universities Australia*) released a new report on Student Finances. It identified significant problems among students including financial difficulties (including taking out additional loans) and the inability to make time to attend classes and study largely due to increased paid working hours. Indigenous students and fulltime postgraduate course work students were under the greatest pressure given that existing income support schemes were narrowly defined, and payments set at lower levels than that for comparable overseas countries. Towards the end of 2005, the parliament passed the Voluntary Student Unionism Bill. Students were now not only consumers; they were consumers with no rights and increasing Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) debts, as one student reported in 2006.[1]
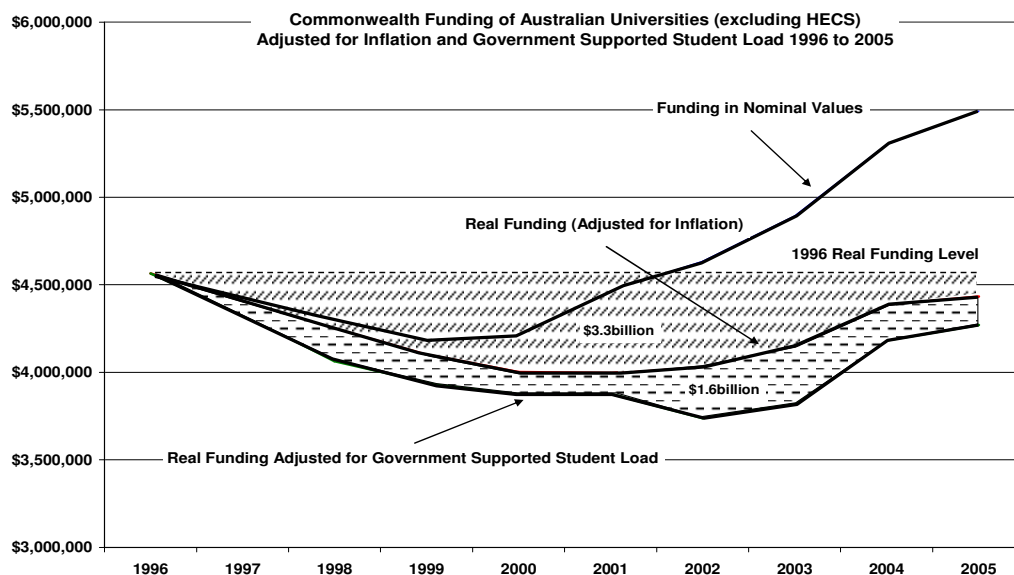
> I struggle every week with my finances. I get paid the bare minimum wage and I can only work once a week due to my timetable. I am worrying about the huge debt that I am getting into: how am I going to pay this money back? Constantly having to think ahead to make sure I have enough money to afford the next field trip, textbook or put petrol in my car so I can actually make it to classes. I even tried to condense my timetable so that I can save on petrol.

Australian students pay high tuition fees relative to those in other higher education systems. In 2003-04, Australia was second to the United States in terms of average tuition fee levels in public tertiary education institutions. The table below, adapted from Gallagher,[2] shows that students pay a high proportion of the costs of their education, ranging from around 82 per cent in Law, Accounting, Administration, Economics and Commerce to 25-27 per cent in Nursing and Agriculture.
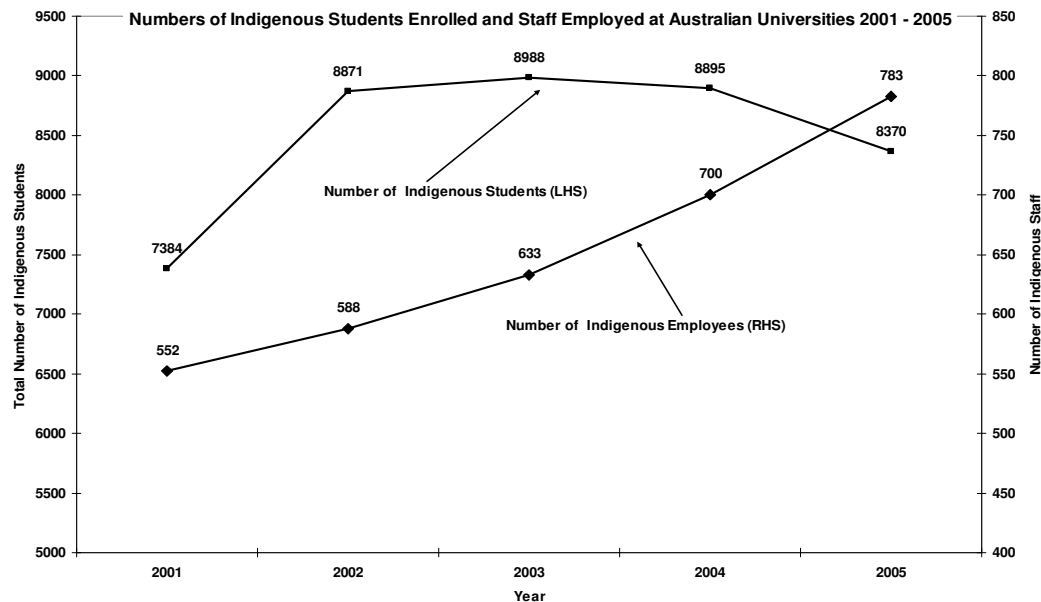
Funding of Higher Education 2008 ($)

Field of Study	Funding Cluster	Cwth Contrib. Amount (with 7.5%)	Student Contrib. (max. possible)	Total Funding	**Student Share of costs**
1	Humanities	4,996	5,095	10,091	**50.5%**
2	Law, Accounting, Administration, Economics, Commerce	1,800	8,499	10,091	**82.5%**
3	Mathematics, Statistics, Built Environment, Other Health	8,833	7,260	15,093	**48.1%**
4	Behavioural Science, Social Science	8,833	5095	13,928	**36.6%**
5	Education	8,833	4,077	12,910	**31.6%**
6	Clinical Psychology, Foreign Languages, Visual and Performing Arts,	10,864	5,095	15,959	**31.9%**
7	Allied Health	10,864	7,260	$18,124	**40.1%**
8	Nursing	12,126	4,077	$16,203	**25.2%**
9	Engineering, Science, Surveying	15,440	7,260	$22,700	**32%**
10	Agriculture	19,594	7,260	$26,854	**27%**
11	Dentistry, Medicine, and Veterinary Science	19,594	8,499	28,093	**43.4%**

For academic staff and students, the Coalition years were lean, as the graph below shows. By 2005 real funding levels were below those of 1996.

Commonwealth Funding of Australian Universities (excluding HECS) Adjusted for Inflation and Government Supported Student Load 1996 to 2005

In response to this funding environment, student/staff ratios increased, while the composition of the academic labour force became more dependent on the use of casual or contingent staff. Over the decade from 1995-2005, casual employment grew by 54 per cent, while continuing employment increased by only 23 per cent.

Numbers of Indigenous Students Enrolled and Staff Employed at Australian Universities 2001 - 2005

One notable advance occurred in the improvement in Indigenous staff numbers in Universities. This was a result of collective bargaining provisions which set targets for Indigenous employment, albeit that there was, at the same time, a poorer than

expected result in terms of Indigenous student numbers, due primarily to a lack of effective income support measures.

While these trends demonstrate real difficulties for institutions, staff and students, nonetheless our universities managed to maintain high student demand and strong satisfaction among graduate employers. Increased activity in international education continued to grow through increased numbers of international students in Australia, institutional linkage and partnership programs, and the establishment of campuses abroad. In a similar vein, research became more focused on collaboration with other international scholars.

It is important to note that during this time working hours rose, departmental budgets were under greater stress, interventionist and bureaucratic demands by government rose to unprecedented levels, and the traditional autonomy of universities was compromised. An important example lay in the area of industrial relations. In April 2005, a year before the creation of the Work Choices legislation, the Federal Government, buoyed by a new majority in both Houses of Parliament, made university funding increases of 7.5 per cent dependent upon compliance with a set of industrial demands on universities, beyond those required in the existing Workplace Relations Act. These were termed the Higher Education Workplace Relations Requirements (HEWRRs), and it was not until the election of a new Labor Government that such unparalleled intervention into the autonomy of universities could be repealed. The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) lodged a formal complaint on Australian government policy in higher education to UNESCO and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 2006.

Labour rights were contested throughout the Howard period, and apart from the construction industry, it was universities that had taken the brunt of the Government's industrial relations changes. It was little wonder that by the election of 2007, industrial relations was one of the key election issues that produced a change of government.

A change in government

When Kevin Rudd took over the leadership of the Australian Labor Party, he released his paper on the need for a new 'Education Revolution' in Australian public policy. He also stated that the greatest educational travesty of the current Government was its record on universities. Australia remains the only OECD country that actually reduced expenditure on tertiary education over the last decade.[3] Rudd's paper highlighted the degree to which the previous Government's over-regulation and petty instrumentalism characterised universities. UNESCO has long held to the principle that education is a public good; one that ensures that the community at large is able to benefit economically, socially and culturally from the teaching and research undertaken at universities operating in the public interest. In this sense, Rudd argued both for public benefit and scholarly responsibility and sought a genuine collaboration with universities.

In the afterglow of the election victory, there were few in the new government that actually slept more than four hours a night. The excitement and challenge was invigorating. While initially the focus was in implementing election promises, there was also the desire to aspire to fundamental change. The baton change to the new Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard was an inspired choice, although her portfolio seemed beyond the realm of mere mortals. It was therefore unsurprising that while 'big ideas' were expected; the pace of change remained relentless. Rudd's education revolution argued for a strong association between education and economic growth, and Minister

Gillard has taken this up. In a significant address to the recent Australian Financial Review Higher Education conference, she argued that[4]

> Policy makers now accept that investing wisely in knowledge, skills and innovation is one of the best means available to ensure long-term prosperity, leading to both overall economic growth and to better education and work opportunities.

Those in the audience welcomed her frank assessment of the hard work ahead – acknowledging a decade of neglect, overcoming the huge backlog of deferred maintenance, reforming financing to provide a more sustainable base for universities and for students, advancing the goal of education equity, and retreating from ideologically-driven interference.

The doors of the Ministry are open to universities in a way not seen under the previous government, and this is important. Change, however dramatically styled and well meant, takes time and courage of convictions. The new Government faces heightened expectations of reform, especially in health and education, and most particularly from academics, researchers and our universities. Yet the Government is committed to 'balanced budgets'. While consultations with Government remain open and friendly, the time frame for delivering fundamental change is at best the 2009-2010 budget, just in time for the next federal election.

Enter the reviews

Introductory salvos have already been fired with the announcement of two critical reviews. The first announced in January by Minister Carr, Minister for Innovation, Science and Research, promises an integrated investment strategy, one that is in partnership with the academy. It is here that we begin to see the agenda for serving society, articulated in a utilitarian way by the new Minister.[5]

> When societies invest in science, they are investing in their own future. They are entitled to expect a fair return on that investment. They're entitled to know that we are using the country's intellectual and technical capacity to deliver outcomes that matter to them – stronger communities, more good jobs, a cleaner environment, better public services, a richer culture, greater security for themselves and their children. Everybody here knows the rules of professional scientific conduct – think independently, put emotion aside, reject perceived authority, be faithful to the evidence, communicate openly. These are good rules – rules I wholeheartedly endorse – but there's one more I'd like to add – remember your humanity. Remember you're part of a wider society – one that you have a special ability and therefore a special duty to serve.

It is true that academics and researchers have a sense of vocation that is consistent with such passionate and ambitious words. It is part of who we are, who we want to be and how best to construct our work within broad accountability expectations. One thing is clear; Minister Carr places a high value on independent and critical thinking, and has urged the academy to engage.

Earlier this year, he announced that the integrity and independence of public research institutions and the right of researchers to contribute to public debate was to be protected by Charters. This is an important step, but for protection to be effective, the Charter would need to be included in relevant legislation that applies to research institutions. At a subsequent forum, hosted by the Federation of Australian Scientific

and Technological Societies, there was also robust discussion of the relationship between rights and obligations.

While Carr has been a strong advocate for basic research, he has also initiated a review that has a focus on applied outcomes. Balancing our research effort across both basic and applied research will be essential. The Review team has already conducted consultations across the country, and for universities this review matters, particularly in the context of new research assessment processes, following the abandonment of the Research Quality Framework exercise. It is critical that universities and individual researchers create space within the debate around innovation. Universities play an important role in innovation through their commitment to creating new knowledge, disseminating that knowledge, and making it available more broadly to other researchers and ultimately to our communities.

From the point of view of researchers, there is much that should and must be done. The NTEU has been consulting researchers and research staff consistently for the last few years, and their responses are salient to the achievement of the innovation agenda. Innovation cannot take place without the human capital component – the researcher. In the international context, the researcher is highly prized since most are already working in an international environment, collaborating across borders with colleagues. It is critical for innovation that we take a cold, hard look at the state of our research workforce. Here are some of their identified problems:

- Ongoing job insecurity, including the employment of increasing numbers of researchers on fixed term contracts;
- Growing levels of casualisation that impact particularly on postgraduate students, many of who might be considering embarking on a research career;
- Pay rates and employment conditions that are not competitive with industry;
- Need for specialised research infrastructure, especially in relation to maintaining and refurbishing high capital costs in laboratories;
- Lack of income support available for higher degree students, including the need for increases in scholarships. This will improve given that the Government made an election commitment to double the number of students receiving an Australian Postgraduate Award and create 1,000 mid-career Future Fellowships for researchers;
- The need for more joint international exchanges in teaching and research and incentives to retain high flyers;
- Problems in upholding freedom of inquiry and undertaking curiosity driven research in an environment increasingly governed by project based funding; and
- The fundamental problems associated with not funding research at full cost.

We need to be able to find solutions to these career issues for researchers if we are to build innovation and sustain our research workforce. This is critical in the context of the ageing demography of higher education staff. Graeme Hugo has shown that the academic workforce in Australia is older than almost any other group of Australian workers and universities may have significant difficulties in recruiting the number of new staff required to replace the large proportion of academics that are likely to retire in the next decade.

Without adequate career paths, and more stable research funding, this recruitment task will become even more difficult. The consequence may be that Australia's

innovation may suffer through a lower basic research effort and a restricted ability to produce graduates capable of working in applied, experimental and strategic research. It is crucial that the Innovation Review give prominence to investment in research human capital if we are to make the most of the priority that Government has given the innovation agenda.

The second review is a specific higher education review, and was announced by Julia Gillard more recently. Chaired by Emeritus Professor Denise Bradley, it aims to report upon 'the future direction of the higher education sector, its fitness for purpose in meeting the needs of the Australian community and economy and the options for reform'. Unlike the Innovation Review, this review will report later in the year and is focused on economic growth and labour market needs. Embedded in the review is the ambition for a more integrated post-secondary sector. In particular, the Government favours increased collaboration between universities, other higher education institutions and the vocational education and training sector. Given that the Minister has given 'guaranteed access to higher education and skills training for every young Australian with the talent and willingness to give it a go', this implies that there will be considerable expansion across the post-secondary sector in the future. This is a worthy objective, but it is a pity that the focus is only on the young.

As our economy changes and our population ages, it is also important to provide incentives for older workers to retrain and re-educate. Pathways and linkages between higher education and vocational education and training have proven to be useful in the past, but it is likely that as costs of university study are high, even with HECS-like schemes, new incentives will be needed to encourage participation. While it is early days in the life of this review, it is important that the particular strengths of universities, higher education providers and the vocational education and training institutions are valued as much for their distinctiveness as for their commonality. Collaboration within a multi-structured post-secondary system may be a way in which we can best serve our communities.

It is within this review that the key financial settings will be debated, where the complex understandings of diversity will be put forward, and where the Government will explore its objective of globally focused institutions. These interior issues will have to be set within the context of the Government's existing commitment to compacts as the mechanism for government to provide resources for a mission-based and diversified university sector, the need to raise productivity and the development of a framework to implement its new social inclusion agenda.

Sustainability

Included in the many debates fought out in the last federal election there were widespread concerns about the future of our natural environment, climate change and how to embrace a more responsible approach to use of our resources. It was also one that was not thoroughly embraced in a bipartisan manner.

As leaders in education, universities have a responsibility to raise understanding of the importance of sustainable development, whether in the international arena, through national agendas or in local communities. UNESCO has outlined a number of important roles that government, universities and communities can play in building sustainability. These include educating for sustainability, promoting and applying science and science policies for sustainable development, developing ethical principles and guidelines for such development, sustaining the world's freshwater and

marine resources (including small island developing states), ensuring sustainable development through cultural diversity and communicating these ideas through our organisations and our communities.

As collective organisations, trade unions can and are playing an important part in the climate change debate[6]. At the recent Bali conference, a representative from the Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) addressed the assembly. He was Tony Maher, an Australian trade union leader from the resources sector. Carbon emissions are a result of the way we work, the resources we consume, and our inability to change many of our work and leisure practices.

As large workplaces, universities can play an important leading role in the assessment and remediation of carbon emissions. To take an example from the UK, City University is a medium sized institution in London which has undertaken a carbon emission study, based on quantifiable elements such as building energy use, academic and staff travel and waste centre landfill. On this basis the annual carbon emission was 12,283 tonnes, or the equivalent of filling 69,834 typical double-decker London buses, or 8,336 Olympic swimming pools. Most concerning is that 87 per cent of these emissions relate to energy used in buildings.

Universities have begun to take these issues seriously and more than one thousand universities worldwide have signed on to environmental charters such as the Kyoto Protocol, the Taillores Declaration, and the University Charter for Sustainable Development. At many campuses across Australia, management, staff and students practice a variety of 'greening' strategies, including curriculum change, to promote an informed and engaged university community. Universities are also highly visible in research and development for sustainability with environmental researchers regularly collaborating at an international level. These issues are likely to come more to the fore in the future as universities and governments seek ways of combating climate change.

Conclusion

The new government is still in the consultative phase, and it is unlikely that we will see the character of their vision until later in the year. It is imperative that universities and their staff take advantage of the openness that currently exists. We have much to gain from dialogue between government and the academy. Ideas now matter in a way that was relatively absent in the previous decade. In the meantime, universities will continue to engage and await optimistically the promised 'education revolution'.

Carolyn Allport *is President of the National Tertiary Education Union. Dr Allport has published in public policy, urban planning, economic and women's history and international education developments. She is an observer to the Board of the Australian Universities Quality Agency, has worked as a consultant for UNESCO on academic freedom and is a long standing member of the ACTU Executive.*

[1] Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (2007). *Australian University Student Finances 2006,* A summary of findings from a national survey of students in public universities, February.

[2] Gallagher, Michael (2008). 'University Compacts and Higher Education Reform, A Discussion Paper', Group of Eight, Draft 31 January.

[3] OECD (2006). *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators 2006*, Paris.

[4] Gillard, Julia (2008). *A Higher Education Revolution: Creating a Productive, Prosperous, Modern Australia*, Address to the Australian Financial Review Higher Education Conference, March. Sydney.

[5] Carr, Kim (2008). *Science Serving Society*, Address to the National Press Club, Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies – Science Meets Parliament, 19 March.

[6] Everett, Brian and Copland, Rob (2007). *Climate Change a Trade Union Responsibility*, Paper presented at the VIth International Higher Education and Research Conference, Education International, Malaga, Spain, November.

Mr Howard and the Gini Coefficient
Peter Saunders and Trish Hill

Introduction

In an interesting article published in the previous issue of *Dialogue*, Kirrily Jordan and Frank Stilwell (hereafter J+S) review the Howard Government's record in distributing the fruits of the rising prosperity that economic growth delivered over the eleven years that it was in office.[1] The authors begin by noting that GDP increased on average by 3.6 per cent a year in the decade to 2006 – enough to raise all incomes by 42.4 per cent over the period if distributed equally. The paper then examines a range of indicators of economic inequality, including those based on earnings, income, wealth, bank deposits and housing, and shows that each of them displays considerable inequality. The authors conclude by noting that, 'it is because the fundamental drivers of economic inequalities persist and the ameliorating tendencies have been weakened that differences in financial futures within Australian society remain so deeply problematic'.[2]

Although this quotation suggests that the analysis underpinning it has examined the factors that have caused inequality to change over time, most of the data analysed by J+S refer to only one point in time. This reflects the fact that reliable data on many of the non-income dimensions of inequality have only recently become available in Australia, making it impossible to monitor changes over time. The two main exceptions are the shares of wages and profits in national income (where data from the national accounts are used by J+S to examine changes since the 1970s), and the distribution of income (where the situation in 2005-06 and changes since the late 1970s are described in detail using household income data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, ABS).[3] Our focus in this paper is on the latter of these two aspects of inequality.

Two overlapping sets of estimates of income inequality are presented and discussed by J+S. The first, covering the period up to 1999-2000, measures the distribution of gross income between households, where gross income includes government transfers but does not deduct income taxes. This indicator shows a substantial increase in inequality, most of which occurred in the 1980s, and confirms what many other studies have shown.[4] In the period since the mid-1990s, a new measure of income distribution is presented. It reflects the adoption by ABS of methods that have been pioneered by income distribution researchers, including in an influential cross-national study conducted for the OECD,[5] and endorsed in a major international review of household income statistics in which the ABS played an important role.[6]

The new measure is based on the distribution of weekly disposable (after the receipt of transfers *and* after deducting income taxes) income of households. It is also adjusted for differences in household size and composition using an equivalence scale, which reflects the relative needs of different households. The new measure indicates how much inequality exists between *individuals* after they have been ranked by the equivalised income of the *household* in which they live.[7] These adjustments tend to reduce the extent of measured inequality, not only because income taxes are progressive, but also because there is a positive association between household income and household size. In 2005-06, for example, we estimate that applying the equivalence adjustment and shifting from households to individuals causes inequality to decline by around 10 per cent – almost as much as the reduction that results from the personal tax system.

For both the old and new measures, J+S measure inequality using the Gini coefficient, which varies between zero (when all incomes are equal) and one (when one household has all the income). The new measure shows a slight increase (around 1.6 per cent; not statistically significant) in inequality between 1994-95 and 2005-06. Inequality declined during the earlier part of the period, so that the increase over the decade since 1995-96 (when the Howard Government was in office) is slightly more pronounced, at 3.7 per cent.[8] However, this increase seems remarkably modest, and contrasts starkly with some of the vitriolic accusations levelled at the Howard Government for promoting a culture of inequality (and introducing policies to achieve it).

Are the figures right and the critics wrong? Or is there more to the statistics than is apparent at first glance? Has the income inequality Gini escaped from the bottle, or is it just that we now view inequality through the glass of a different bottle? The remainder of this article draws on a range of ABS data to try to answer these questions. We do so by describing (in Section 2) some of the changes that have taken place in how the underlying data have been collected and disseminated over recent years and then (in Section 3) by using the available data to analyse different aspects of distributional change over the period.

2 Lies, damned lies….

Like most other social phenomena, inequality in the distribution of income can only be measured after the requisite data have been collected and organised into categories. The ABS has been revising the methods used to collect its household income statistics and the techniques employed to ensure that the sample is an accurate representation of the population from which it has been drawn.

In relation to the latter, it is common to apply weights to the sample estimates so that they better represent the population, where the weight assigned to an observation is the inverse of the probability of its inclusion in the sample. Thus, for example, if there are 200,000 sole parent families in the population but only 400 sole parent families are included in the ABS survey, each sole parent observation is assigned a weight of 500 because it is assumed to represent 500 cases in the population. The weights are normally calculated by benchmarking the survey data against external aggregates that measure the overall situation – in terms of the family and age structure of the population, its labour force status and breakdown by principal source of income (wage and salary earners, the self-employed, social security recipients, etc).[9]

In 2002, the ABS noted that it had encountered difficulties in achieving an appropriate coverage of income from government cash welfare payments, and it introduced new benchmarks in the following year to counter the shortfall.[10] Welfare income is notoriously difficult to capture accurately in surveys, and the ABS income surveys have always produced figures that, when aggregated using the weights, amounted to about 85 per cent of the amount paid out in benefits by government. However, the welfare income coverage rate declined to 82 per cent in the 1999-2000 survey and by a similar amount in the following year.[11] The ABS responded to these declines by inflating the reported welfare incomes after 1999-2000 in order to reproduce the historical coverage rate of 85 per cent, and achieved this by increasing the weight attached to the raw figures on the number of transfer recipients.[12] No attempts have been made to assess the reliability of reported incomes at the top of the distribution, and although this in part reflects the lack of external benchmarks, it might be possible to use income tax data for this purpose.

Changes have also been made to the way that the data themselves have been collected. The most important of these occurred in 1994-95, when the previous practice of conducting a survey over a three-month period once every four or five years was replaced by a more frequent (initially annual, then biennial) survey that was conducted continuously throughout the year. Emphasis was also given to the distribution of weekly as opposed to annual income, which had been used previously.[13] In 2003-04, a number of other changes were made to how the data are collected, and new questions were included to better capture income from self-employment and investment income. The income survey in that year was also combined with the *Household Expenditure Survey* (HES), with a sub-set of HES respondents participating in the income survey. The latest (2005-06) survey included salary sacrificing as a component of income for the first time, addressing its under-coverage in earlier surveys.

A consequence of these changes is that it is now virtually impossible to establish with any certainty the extent and nature of shifts in the Australian income distribution since the mid-1980s. While it is true that the changes have improved the quality of the data made available in each survey, the failure to produce a consistent series means that we are unable to establish how – or even whether – the income distribution has changed over the period. This is all the more concerning because an avowed goal of the ABS itself, articulated in 2002, was that: 'In presenting income and income distribution statistics in future, the ABS will focus more heavily on time series'.[14] This approach makes a good deal of sense and has much to recommend it. As the OECD has noted in one of its recent reports on income distribution trends;[15]

> The [OECD] Secretariat's primary interest in doing this work is not to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' countries based on whether the income dispersion is narrow or not … policymakers are, however, interested in *changes* in their countries' income distribution. For this reason, the Secretariat has mainly focused on *trends* in the distribution of resources…

In light of this patchwork history of changing methods and definitions, it is not surprising that J+S are unable to pinpoint what has been happening recently to the Australian income distribution. They describe movements in the Gini coefficient between 1994-95 and 2005-06, but avoid making the obvious point that the figures show no discernible trend over the period. Figure 1 shows the movements in the income Gini based on the official (ABS) estimates for the period 1994-95 to 2005-06 as well as those for the period 1981-82 to 1996-97 estimated by Melbourne Institute researchers David Johnson and Roger Wilkins in a study commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services.[16] Although the latter study differs in several regards from the procedures employed by the ABS, both series are internally consistent and thus provide a reliable account of movements within each sub-period. The estimates for the overlapping years are also quite close.

There is considerable short-term volatility in the series, although an upward trend is also apparent. It is also clear that income inequality increased far more rapidly in the decade *before* the Howard Government came to office in 1996 than in the decade when they were actually *in* office. This finding contradicts the widespread perception that the last decade has seen a rapid increase in inequality, particularly in income inequality. Many factors have been claimed to produce rising inequality over the last decade, including: increased deregulation of the labour market; the growth in casual and low-paid jobs; the surge in executive salaries; the strong performance of the stock market; and a series of tax cuts that favoured the rich, particularly the very rich.

Figure 1: Income Distribution Trends, 1981-82 to 2005-06
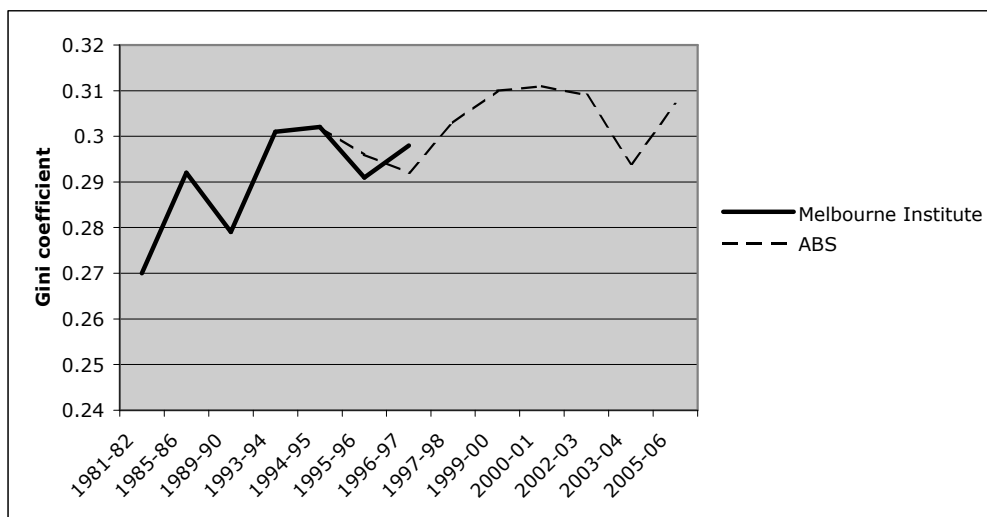
The tax cuts alone would be expected to have had a significant impact. In 1996-97 (the first full financial year under the Howard Government) the top tax rate was 47 cents in the dollar and cut in at an income of $50,000. By 2006-07 (the final financial year under Howard) the top rate had been reduced slightly to 45 cents in the dollar, but it cut in at the much higher level of $150,000. Those at the top of the distribution benefited from these changes to a far greater extent than those around the average. However, the ABS income distribution statistics discussed earlier incorporate the impact of these tax changes, since taxes are imputed by ABS when estimating disposable income. The absence of any tax change effect thus further compounds the puzzling lack of movement in the income Gini over the Howard years shown in Figure 1. It is to this puzzle that we now turn.

3 Some (un)usual suspects

We have not attempted to quantify the impact of the many factors that have driven changes in the distribution of income. Instead, we examine some of the factors that are capable of explaining the stability apparent in the data. Our analysis, although rudimentary in many regards, uses unit record (household-level) data for 1995-96 and 2005-06 to explore the impact of some of the data and measurement issues described above, and the more substantive issue of the role of (changes in) economic developments and policy.

Survey methods and data

The first, and most obvious explanation for the stability of the income distribution is that it reflects the changes to survey methodology and data definition described earlier. Although it is difficult to establish the impact of most of these changes, the analysis that has been conducted within ABS (some of it in collaboration with author Saunders and other SPRC colleagues) suggests that the *quantifiable* impact on inequality is too small to markedly change the pattern shown by the published statistics.[17] For example,

the impact of the 2003-04 changes to how business and investment income were collected caused the Gini coefficient to decline by around one per cent, while including salary sacrificing as income in that year causes the Gini to increase by a similar amount.[18]

It is possible that the changes in survey methodology and collection techniques have influenced the willingness of households to participate in the surveys, or to provide accurate information, and this raises some interesting questions. To what extent, for example, did the decline in reported welfare incomes referred to earlier represent a response to the war on 'welfare dependency' unleashed by the Howard Government in 1999?[19] The impact of such attitudinal shifts cannot be established using the available data, although it is interesting to note that there is a large (and statistically significant) difference between inequality among those who participated only in the SIH (income) survey in 2003-04 and those who participated only in the HES component of the (combined) survey.[20] If the SIH-only sub-sample is used, the dip in inequality shown in Figure 1 for that year largely disappears, although we are still left with a large 'black hole' in our understanding of what happened to income distribution over the period as a whole.

Inequality indicators

Another possible explanation of the apparent lack of any significant distributional change between 1996 and 2006 is that it reflects the indicator used to measure inequality. Any statistic that describes the distribution of incomes among the entire population in a single figure defined over a limited range will be very insensitive to many of the factors that comprise the complex reality that it is describing. The Gini coefficient, for example, is most sensitive to changes around the middle (more precisely the mode) of the distribution and thus may not adequately capture changes that have occurred at the extremes. There is a widespread (although inaccurate) perception that 'the rich have got richer and the poor have got poorer'. This is consistent with community concern about what is happening at the extremes of the distribution, as revealed in public opinion data showing that many people are concerned about the 'growing gap between rich and poor',[21] and this suggests that we may need to examine a measure that better captures what is happening at both ends of the distribution.

One such measure is the P90/P10 ratio, which measures the ratio of the incomes of those at the 90th and 10th percentiles of the distribution. Between 1995-96 and 2005-06, the P90/P10 ratio increased from 3.74 to 3.88 or by 4.6 per cent. This is above the increase of 3.7 per cent in the Gini coefficient, but the difference is hardly large enough to justify setting up the barricades. It is possible, however, that the changes are more heavily concentrated in the extremes of the distribution than the P90/P10 ratio can capture, in which case we need an alternative measure. To test this, we have examined changes in three other percentile ratios: P95/P10, P98/P10 and P99/P10.[22] We have not considered lowering the denominator in theses percentiles below P10 because these are likely to be sensitive to changes in the reporting and weighting of welfare incomes discussed earlier. Results in the upper panel of Table 1 indicate that these three percentile ratios increased between 1995-96 and 2005-06 by 7.8 per cent, 18.0 per cent and 22.9 per cent respectively, confirming that the changes at the top of the distribution have exceeded those at the 90th percentile, or around the middle where the Gini coefficient is most sensitive.

Table 1: Alternative Measures of Distributional Change, 1995-96 to 2005-06

Distribution	Inequality measure: Gini coefficient	P90/P10 ratio	P95/P10 ratio	P98/P10 ratio	P99/P10 ratio
Equivalised disposable income (all households):					
1995-96	0.295	3.71	4.34	5.32	5.98
2005-06	0.303	3.88	4.68	6.28	7.35
% change	2.71	4.58	7.83	18.05	22.91
Equivalised disposable income (all households with children under 18):					
1995-96	0.280	3.40	4.00	5.09	5.87
2005-06	0.286	3.41	4.14	6.02	7.56
% change	2.14	0.29	3.50	18.27	28.79
Equivalised disposable income (all lone person households aged 15-64)					
1995-96	0.350	4.38	5.20	6.16	8.02
2005-06	0.360	5.24	6.29	7.61	10.20
% change	2.86	19.60	17.33	23.54	27.18
Equivalised disposable income (all employed lone person households aged 15-64)					
1995-96	0.265	3.16	3.64	4.39	5.44
2005-06	0.281	3.48	4.17	5.29	6.73
% change	6.04	10.13	14.56	20.50	23.71
Wage and salary income (all fulltime employees) aged 25-55					
1995-96	0.252	2.65	3.25	4.65	5.55
2005-06	0.274	3.04	3.68	5.00	6.00
% change	8.73	14.72	13.23	7.52	8.11

Source: ABS confidentialised unit record files for each year.

Note: The estimates for 2005-06 do not include all salary sacrifice income.

Family benefits

It is undeniable that family benefits were increased substantially by the Howard Government and it is possible that the increased emphasis on income-tested payments and on payments to single-income families under Family Tax Benefit Part B have both distributed income downwards within families. This is confirmed by the results in the second panel of Table 1, which is restricted to single family households with children aged under 18 who were the main beneficiaries of these reforms. These results show that, except at the very top, inequality among households with children increased by less than inequality among all households and, indeed, that the P90/P10 ratio hardly changed over the period. Reforms to the system of family income support have thus redistributed income downwards within families with children and played a role in reducing the rise in overall inequality than would otherwise have occurred.

The labour market

The final explanation we consider relates to changes in the labour market, where two changes are likely to have affected (in opposite directions) the overall inequality profile: greater inequality in the distribution of earned incomes, and the decline in unemployment. In order to gain an insight into the impact of these changes we have compared the standard distributional measures among (working-age) lone person households, among employed working-age lone person households, and among all

fulltime employees aged between 25 and 55 – the core workforce. The first two distributions refer to the equivalised income measure, while the latter includes income from wages and salaries only in order to provide a more focused measure of what has been happening in the labour market.

The results summarised in panels three and four of Table 1 indicate that, except at the very top, income inequality increased much more among lone person households than among households with children. This finding confirms the distributional impact of changes to family benefits (which by definition do not affect lone person households), but it also captures the impact of changing unemployment. Inequality among lone person households increased substantially at the top of the distribution, reflecting large increases in earnings at the top, coupled with the Howard Government's 1996 decision to index unemployment benefits to consumer prices rather than earnings – individuals at the 10th percentile of the distribution of lone persons are likely to be unemployed and their incomes thus mainly reflect the level of unemployment benefit. When unemployed single people are omitted (panel four), the level of inequality among employed lone person households is lower, although the pattern of change in inequality experienced over the period also varies. The Gini now shows a greater increase, whereas the percentile ratios increase less, because excluding the unemployed shifts the middle of the distribution upwards. Despite this, the growth in inequality among employed lone person households is greater than that for all households at all points in the distribution.

The lowest panel of Table 1 examines changes in the distribution of wage and salary incomes among fulltime employees aged between 25 and 55 – what is often referred to as the core, prime-aged workforce. What is most striking about this distribution is the extent to which it differs from the original distribution of disposable income among all households. In round terms, earnings inequality among fulltime employees was around 10 per cent less than overall income inequality in 2005-06 using the Gini coefficient, but over 20 per cent less using the P90/P10 percentile ratio. These results highlight the role that centralised wage determination has played in moderating the overall extent of Australian inequality. This helps to explain the widespread concern that accompanied the introduction of the *Work Choices* legislation, which was (rightly) perceived as a major threat to one of the main platforms of Australian egalitarianism.

It is also clear that the change in inequality over the period is much larger among the fulltime workforce than among the population as a whole (although this is partly because the earnings measure does not incorporate the impact of changes to the tax and benefit systems, including to family assistance). Even so, the estimates of distributional change shown in the lower panel of Table 1 bear a closer resemblance to what the 'egalitarian warriors' might have expected to see emerging after a decade of the reforms introduced by the Howard Government – although it is notable that the largest changes no longer occur at the very top of this distribution.

4 In summary

Changes in the definitions used, as well as in the methods used to collect the data and present the estimates have improved the quality of the ABS household income statistics. But they have also compromised the comparability of the data, making it difficult to assess with confidence the extent and nature of distributional change over the last two decades. Hopefully, we will have a more stable statistical basis on which to judge future movements in this important dimension of inequality. We have explained

some of the changes that have been made and presented a more complex, but also in some regards clearer, picture of distributional change over the period.

Our main conclusion is that the available statistics do not confirm the picture that many observers have of sweeping distributional change induced by the economic and social policies introduced by the Howard government. Indeed, one has to search the data long and hard in order to show that inequality increased at all, and what change there has been in the decade to 2005-06 is almost certainly smaller than that which occurred in the 1980s.

We have examined the role of several factors that have contributed to the stable Gini coefficient, all of which appear to contain an element of truth. First, change has often been concentrated at the top of the distribution and is not adequately captured by the Gini measure of inequality. Second, reform of family assistance has moderated the impact of distributional change among families with children. Third, inequality among lone person households has increased substantially, as some have benefited from the growth in employment, while others have remained unemployed and on a benefit that was no higher in real terms when the Howard Government was voted out of office in 2007 than when it was elected to office in 1996.

Finally, distributional change has been greater among the earnings of fulltime workers than among the disposable incomes of households, except at the top of the distribution. The fact that the number of fulltime workers has increased as the labour market improved has meant that this latter measure has provided an increasingly clearer picture of overall distributional change over time. It also indirectly highlights the fact that the reduction in unemployment has been an important factor in preventing the inequality Gini from escaping completely from the bottle under the Howard watch.

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[1]   Jordan, K and Stilwell, F (2007). 'Financial Futures. A Touch of Inequity?' *Dialogue,* 26, 3,, Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, Canberra. The article is based on the more detailed analysis presented in Stilwell F and Jordan, K (2007)., *Who Gets What? Analysing Economic Inequality in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne.

[2]   *Ibid*: 15.

[3]   *Ibid*: Tables 2 and 3. The heading to Table 2 indicates that the estimates refer to 2003-04 but in fact they refer to 2005-06. The source for the most recent ABS estimates is the *Survey of Income and Housing* (SIH), which is currently conducted biennially. Data for earlier years were collected in the *Survey of Income and Housing Costs* (SIHC) and, before that, in the *Income Distribution Survey* (IDS). Results are published in *Household Income Distribution and Redistribution* (ABS Catalogue No 6523.0), and summarised in *Measuring Australia's Progress* (ABS Catalogue No 1370.0).

[4]   This is true of the distributions of income both before and after taxes have been deducted. See Saunders, P (1993). 'Longer Run Changes in the Distribution of Income in Australia', *The Economic Record*, 69, 207: 353-66; and Johnson, D and Wilkins, R.(2006). *The Causes of Changes in the Distribution of Family Income in Australia, 1982 to 1997-98,* Social Policy Research Paper 27, Department of Family and Community Services, Canberra.

[5]   Atkinson, AB, Rainwater, L and Smeeding, TM (1995). *Income Distribution in OECD Countries: The Evidence from the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS),* OECD, Paris.

[6]   Expert Group on Household Income Statistics (The Canberra Group) (2001), *Final Report and Recommendations,* Ottowa.

[7]   One limitation of the new approach is that it assumes that income is shared equally within the household, yet many feminists (and others) have questioned the validity of this assumption. See Hill, P (2005). *Understanding Australian Women's Poverty and Wage Inequality: Towards an Income of One's Own,* unpublished PhD thesis, University of New South Wales.

[8]   Jordan and Stilwell (2007) *op cit*, Table 3; ABS, *Income Distribution and Redistribution, 2005-06*, Table 1.

[9]   The issues of benchmarking and external validation of the ABS survey data are discussed in detail in Siminski, P, Saunders, P and Bradbury, B (2003). 'Reviewing the Inter-temporal Consistency of ABS Household Income Data Through Comparisons with External Aggregates', *Australian Economic Review,* 36, 3: 333-49.

[10] ABS (2002). 'Upgrading Household Income Distribution Statistics' *Australian Economic Indicators,* Catalogue No. 1350.0, ABS, Canberra, April, pp. 3-8; ABS (2003), 'Revised Household Income Distribution Statistics', *Australian Economic Indicators, June 2003,* Catalogue No 1350.0: 3-15. Canberra.

[11] ABS (2003) *ibid*: 5.

[12] If this had been achieved by increasing the reported incomes themselves, rather than by increasing the weights attached to those with benefit income, it would have produced the anomalous result that some families would end up with a benefit income that exceeded the maximum rate of payment of the relevant benefit.

[13] This shift made it easier to relate the incomes of households to characteristics such as labour force status, family size or housing tenure, all of which may change during the course of the year. The annual income estimates are about 5 per cent above the (annualised) current income figures, mainly because the latter misses out on irregular additional payments such as overtime and bonuses, and the difference will affect measured inequality if these are not distributed equally. See Saunders, P and Bradbury, B (2006). 'Monitoring Trends in Poverty and Income Distribution: Data, Methodology and Measurement', *Economic Record,* 82, 258: 341-64.

[14] ABS (2002) *op cit*: 5.

[15] OECD Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (2006). 'The Distribution of Resources in OECD Countries: Publication Outline', Document DELSA/ELSA/WP1(2006)11: 4. OCED, Paris.

[16] Johnson, D and Wilkins, R (2006). *The Causes of Changes in the Distribution of Family Income in Australia, 1982 to 1997-98,* Social Policy Research Paper 27. Department of Family and community Services, Canberra.

[17] ABS (2002; 2003) *op cit*; Pietsch, L, McColl, R and Saunders, P (2006). 'The Sensitivity of Income Distribution Measures to Changes in Survey Collection Tools and Estimation Techniques in Australia' presented to the 29th General Conference of The International Association for Research in Income and Wealth, Joensuu, Finland, 20-26 August.

[18] Pietsch, McColl and Saunders (2006) *ibid*: Table 4; ABS Catalogue No 6523.0, 2007: Table 1.

[19] Newman, J (1999). *Discussion Paper. The Challenge of Welfare Dependency in the 21st Century,* Department of Family and Community Services, Canberra.

[20] Pietsch, McColl and Saunders (2006) *op cit*, Table 4.

[21] The 2005 *Australian Survey of Social Attitudes* found that over 86 per cent of respondents thought that the gap between those with high incomes and those with low incomes is much too large or too large.

[22] Longer-run changes at the top of the distribution are examined using tax data by Atkinson, AB and Leigh, A (2007). 'The Distribution of Top Incomes in Australia', *The Economic Record,* 83, 262: 247-261.

At the **Annual Dinner** of the Academy, 24 new Fellows were formally welcomed into the Academy by the President, Stuart Macintyre and the Immediate Past President, Sue Richardson. Among them was the 2002 recipient of the Academy Early Career Award, *Jason Mattingley,* Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience, Queensland Brain Institute, University of Queensland.

Academy News

ASSA Introduces Named Lecture Program

With encouragement arising from the last Review of the Learned Academies, ASSA hopes to launch three new annual lectures named in honour of distinguished ASSA past Presidents, Professors Paul Bourke, Fay Gale and KJ (Keith) Hancock. The *Bourke Lecture* will feature ASSA's annual Early Career Award (ECA) winner. It is intended that from November 2008 the ECA winners will give a public lecture at their home university, with co-sponsorship being provided by that university and ASSA.

The *Hancock Lecture* offers, from among the Fellowship, a leading scholar with a long and continuing record of supporting the social sciences and ASSA. The *Gale Lecture* provides for an annual public lecture honouring a distinguished woman social scientist from among the ASSA Fellows. Both the Hancock and Gale Lectures will be given in one or more cities, co-sponsored by ASSA and home universities.

Nominations for these awards will be received from Panels at the AGM and will be considered by the Symposium Committee. The Executive Committee sees such lectures as providing valuable additional public profile for social scientists, and contributing to broader outreach from ASSA.

Research Program

Commissioned Research

As reported in the previous issue of *Dialogue*, the final paper produced as part of the Academy's program of commissioned research was published in February 2008. Appearing as an Occasional Paper, *Population and Australia's Future Labour Force* was the seventh in the Academy's Policy Paper Series.

In the report, Peter McDonald and Glenn Withers examine the likely labour requirements in Australia and the role migration could play. The authors make eight recommendations including that the Australian Government should establish an independent inquiry to determine the best planning and policy approaches to the role of immigration in meeting future labour needs for both skilled and unskilled workers.

The report is available on the Academy's website – www.assa.edu.au. Alternatively, hard copies can be made available upon request to the Academy Secretariat.

International Program

The **application dates** for programs to be funded in 2009 are as follows:

China exchange	31 July, 2008
Netherlands exchange	31 July, 2008
India exchange	19 September, 2008
United Kingdom exchange	26 September, 2008

The closing date for the France exchange program will be confirmed shortly, and noted on the Academy's website.

Australia-Japan Foundation

The International Committee has, on behalf of the Academy, submitted a proposal to the Australia-Japan Foundation for funding under the AJF Grant Program. The proposal comprises three components.

Sue Richardson has proposed a collaborative project which would seek to establish the potential for vocational education to improve the productivity of older workers, with the ultimate aim of developing a large-scale research grant proposal. The project outcomes would arise from a two-day workshop involving Australian and Japanese researchers, examining what is already known, to compare the strategies and responses of the two countries with a view to developing a more substantial collaborative research agenda.

Ann Harding has proposed a scoping exercise and workshop with a view to establishing an ongoing collaboration in microsimulation modelling, including exchanging technical expertise and skills in this research area. Professor Harding's project would extend to governmental liaison with a view to establishing the policy implications for both Australia and Japan which arise from the collaboration.

Dean Forbes has proposed a workshop to bring together staff from Flinders University (Flinders International Asia Pacific Institute), La Trobe University, Hiroshima National University and Ritsumeikan University. The workshop would aim to establish a dialogue around Australian and Japanese formulations of requirements for being a good global citizen, and would seek to identify common research interests in international relations and international law with a view to establishing a to a new, joint Masters level teaching topic.

Australia – Netherlands Exchange Program

Two exchanges will take place in 2008 as part of this program.

Stephen Wheatcroft, Professor of History in the School of Historical Studies at University of Melbourne, will visit the Netherlands in October 2008. Dr Wheatcroft will consult with historians in the Netherlands on Soviet History, and specifically the 1945 period of famine in the Netherlands.

Lenore Lyons, Director of the Centre for Asia Pacific Social Transformation Studies at the University of Wollongong, will visit the Netherlands in August 2008. Dr Lyons, whose area of expertise focuses on the intersections of gender, citizenship, nationality and identity, with a focus on south east Asia, will attend a workshop examining issues in the field of 'border studies', and will also conduct research on Indonesian material archived in the Netherlands.

In May 2007, *Lorraine Elliott* of the Australian National University travelled to the Netherlands as part of the Academy's exchange program with the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. The purpose of Dr Elliot's visit was to consult with colleagues on the results of research on institutional influence and effectiveness in the field of global environmental governance, and to conduct research on new mechanisms of cooperation and reflexive earth system governance. She attended the 2007 European Conference on the Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change, which was hosted by the Institute for Environmental Studies (IVM) at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Dr Elliot reported that attendance at the Amsterdam 2007 IHDP conference was particularly useful for the detailed briefings on their work on institutional effectiveness and on new mechanisms of environmental cooperation – and particularly those based on network and partnerships forms of horizontal governance – which were provided by international colleagues. Dr Elliot's own research, which was inflected by a framework built up during her visit, was presented in a seminar delivered to the Environmental Policy Analysis group at the IVM. She also used the trip as an opportunity to conduct two 'master classes' for the PhD summer school immediately following the conference.

She wrote: 'I would like to express my thanks to both Academies for their support for this exchange program and for my participation in it, and to the Institute for Environmental Studies which was a most welcoming host. Professor Frank Biermann and Dr Philipp Pattberg in particular were excellent colleagues during my time at IVM and I look forward to continuing intellectual exchange and research collaboration with them. The opportunity to attend the 2007 Amsterdam IHDP conference, which brings together some of the very best scholars working in the field of earth system governance, was an added bonus. IVM also has a very impressive cohort of graduate and PhD students, equal to those I have encountered anywhere else in the world (and I can confess that I am keen to attract some of them for post-doctoral opportunities at the Australian National University). Given the importance that both academies attach to research to enhance our understanding of environmental problems and earth system governance, I also hope that it will be possible for us to now attract applications from IVM colleagues to visit Australia under the exchange agreement'.

Australia – United Kingdom Exchange Program

Two exchanges will take place in 2008 as part of this program, which is conducted jointly with the Academy of the Humanities.

Jenny Fleming, of the Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement Studies, will undertake a collaborative research project titled 'The Public Gets What the Public Wants: Managing public expectations of the police'. Professor Fleming, who will be partnered on the project by *Dr Alison Wakefield* of City University in London, will commission research papers which address current shortfalls in both the measurement and management of the public expectations of police forces in the UK and Australia.

Also nominated for an exchange was *Dr Jakob Hohwy* of Monash University and his project partner from the UK, *Dr Tim Bayne* of St Catharine's College, Oxford University. Their project is titled 'State consciousness and creature consciousness: Explanation in the scientific study of consciousness'.

AASSREC: New initiative with India

In late February, at the request of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) Minister-Counsellor Linda Laker of the Australian High Commission in New Delhi, Executive Director John Beaton travelled to India to investigate new opportunities for India-Australia social science collaborations. Over three days the ED met with social scientists from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai, the Institute for Social and Economic Change in Bangalore, and the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) in New Delhi with whom ASSA enjoys an annual scholarly exchange. Having previously supplied the potential Indian partners with a list of possible topics/discussion points for generating a workshop or

Symposium, the ED joined in very positive discussions with representatives of each institution. As a result, all of the Indian partners are enthusiastic and a workshop in Mumbai is planned for May 2008 and this will be followed by a Symposium sometime in early 2009. The initial workshop which will be seeking participation from three ASSA Fellows and twelve Indian scholars, who will identify four topics of national interest to both countries. It is thought that the topics will be drawn from four broad areas having important impacts on our societies and institutions; health, education, security and employment. The four agreed topics will set the program for the 2009 symposium, and the core of the symposium steering committee will be drawn from the workshop participants. The aspiration of the workshop is to identify topics on the horizon, topics that will require the contribution of knowledge from the social sciences and which will have policy implications for governments. The workshop (planned for 12-15 May) will be supported by DEEWR through the Australian High Commission and hosted at the ICSSR facility in Mumbai by the Indian partners. The planned symposium will be hosted in India, pending continued DEEWR funding.

Workshops Program

Forthcoming Workshops:

'Climate Change Responses Across Regional Australia'.
Professor John Martin, Dr Maureen Rogers and Dr Caroline Winter (all at LaTrobe), and Professor Jim Walmsley (UNE)
To be held at La Trobe University (Bendigo), 10-11 April 2008

'Religion and Politics: Australian Cases and Responses'.
Dr Marion Maddox (Macquarie) and Dr James Jupp (ANU)
To be held at the Macquarie University, 2-3 July 2008

'The Great Risk Shift? Institutionalisation of Individualism'.
Dr Greg Marston and Professor John Quiggin (UQ)
To be held at the University of Queensland, 11-12 July 2008

'War, Commerce and Ethics in British International Political Thought'.
Dr Ian Hall, Associate Professor Lisa Hill and Professor Wilfrid Prest (Adelaide)
To be held at the University of Adelaide, 22-23 July 2008

Reports from workshops conducted under the Workshop Program, including policy recommendations, are published in *Dialogue*, usually in the first issue following the workshop.

Reports from Workshops

The Future of Discrimination Law in Australia

Beth Gaze and Margaret Thornton

This Workshop was held 15-16 November 2007 at the University of Melbourne Law School. The aim was to provide a space for interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral discussion of the successes and limitations of Australian anti-discrimination laws, as there has been limited opportunity for focused discussion of the law (as opposed to study of the specific experiences of women and disfavoured minority groups). The Workshop was attended by academics in law and other social sciences, legal practitioners from law firms and community legal services, as well as both legal and non-legal staff (and former staff) of Australian and overseas human rights and anti-discrimination agencies. The group included several early career researchers.

Anti-discrimination laws were first adopted at the federal level and in some Australian States in the 1970s and early 1980s, but have since been adopted in all States and territories. Initially, focusing on race and sex, they have been extended to cover a range of grounds, but their basic mechanisms and definitions have not been revised or updated. Anti-discrimination law has two roles in contributing to the amelioration of discrimination: first, as a symbol of social commitment to equality and intergroup harmony; and secondly, to provide an avenue of redress in individual cases of discrimination. This individualised focus is also expected to deter and reduce class wide discrimination.

The workshop focused on the concerns about the effectiveness of Australia's laws. They are weak and equivocal about their aims, inducing legal interpretations that favour complex, narrow and technical readings rather than clear and strong principles. Their limitations prompt a range of questions, from the philosophical (what do 'equality' and 'discrimination' mean?), through questions of legal doctrine (the structure and interpretations of the laws) to sociological questions about whether such laws can affect social behaviours, or whether they in fact allow discrimination to continue unseen by creating an illusion that law has dealt with it. It is notable that in comparable countries, anti-discrimination laws were drafted more strongly to begin with, and have been subsequently updated and strengthened. The international standard for equality laws has advanced well beyond Australia's basic model. However, Australia's laws have been the subject of surprisingly little debate, partly because of their complexity, but also because of the conservative political milieu that has been in the ascendancy over the past decade. The Workshop sought to move into this space and provide a site of contact and conversation for academics and others working in the field. It explored the problems and compared the experience elsewhere in order to develop a clearer case for reform.

Rather than have participants present lengthy academic papers, the Workshop program was designed so that speakers introduced only the basic conceptual issues to maximise discussion. The two days were divided into eight sessions. Conversation was interactive and exploratory, and many participants commented on how stimulating they found the Workshop experience. The first day's sessions focused on the context and limitations of Australian laws compared with overseas examples, while the second day focused on theoretical issues and social impact of the laws.

In the first session, Beth Gaze (Melbourne) introduced the workshop, the participants and the aims and format of the workshop. Margaret Thornton (ANU) introduced the social context for the legislation, noting the pervasively conservative social climate that overtook anti-discrimination laws shortly after they were adopted. With its emphasis on the market, neo-liberalism has retreated from a commitment to equality. Anti-discrimination laws in this context can have only limited effect, which is reflected in the data showing falling numbers of complaints under the anti-discrimination laws despite reduction of working conditions. The changes are also reflected in the legal academy with an increasing emphasis on teaching market-related subjects, and students regarding these subjects as essential for their careers, with a consequent reduction in areas such as discrimination law and critique. This means that few prospective lawyers (and judges) are likely to be exposed to an understanding of equality and discrimination issues.

Dominique Allen (Melbourne) spoke to the problems that she has identified in existing Australian discrimination legislation as a result of her PhD research. These include a high burden of proof on complainants which can be impossible to discharge; remedies that are very limited in scope and cannot address systemic issues or provide sufficient incentive by way of damages either to encourage the lodgement of claims by complainants or to discourage organisations from discriminating. The session was completed with Julian Gardner (Consultant to the Department of Justice) introducing the scope of the Victorian government's review of the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995* (Vic) which is due in 2008. He identified the three main issues to be addressed: how to tackle systemic discrimination, how best to manage the complaints system including a method of providing advice to complainants and how best to structure and govern the newly constituted Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission. The discussion canvassed a variety of other issues of concern. In particular, the lack of reform in Australia was contrasted with the fact that a number of governments in comparable countries have recently engaged in reform of their anti-discrimination laws (UK, Canada and Ireland) and shown them to be committed to improving the law's strength and enforceability. In Australia, substantial problems are also posed for research (and therefore reform) by the lack of published data on complaints and outcomes. This issue is related to the declining accountability of government.

The second session looked more closely at the current operation of existing laws. The speakers were Lynne Bennington (RMIT) on her empirical examination of the practice of discrimination in employment. She identified the need for those affected to identify their treatment as unlawful through 'naming, blaming and claiming' before the legal redress was even considered. Karen Toohey (HREOC) discussed the patterns of complaints and enquiries to the federal Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) over the last few years, noting a substantial increase in enquiries. Simon Rice (Macquarie, and a member of the Equal Opportunity Division of the NSW Division of the Administrative Decisions Tribunal) discussed the virtual impossibility of succeeding with a racial discrimination complaint under the existing laws, and the range of causes that contribute to it, from decision-makers without sufficient expertise to unrepresented complainants, and legal complexity, which makes proving that race is the ground of any disparate treatment difficult. Fiona Knowles (Holding Redlich, Solicitors) spoke about comparative enforcement methods; in particular, the range of enforcement tools found in occupational heath and safety law in contrast with the limited range available in anti-discrimination law. This session highlighted the limited mechanisms available in Australia and the failure of Australian

governments to broaden them, in contrast with the actions of governments elsewhere. Anti-discrimination mechanisms were also compared unfavourably with Australian laws regulating the workplace or other public sector activity.

In the third session, we moved onto a somewhat broader canvas. Jonathan Hunyor (HREOC) spoke of the Australian courts' interpretations of special measures exemptions which are intended to achieve substantive equality, but which have been interpreted by courts in ways that actually undermine equality claims. When the aim of a measure is to move towards substantive equality, rather than formal equality (same treatment), it should not be classified as discriminatory but fall within an exempting provision. Hunyor examined these issues in the context of State and federal Aboriginal land rights legislation, alcohol bans in Indigenous communities, and the recent Northern Territory Intervention by the federal government. Matthew Carroll (VEOHRC) noted that the advent of the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities will open up exploration of issue around equality, as the Charter's guarantee of equal enjoyment of rights extends beyond the area traditionally covered by anti-discrimination laws. Judith Bessant (RMIT) addressed the position of young people and asked whether the Charter will lead to better protection of their rights.

The provision for scrutiny of bills for compliance with the Charter was identified by both speakers on this area as a significant step. The discussion canvassed the advantages and limitations of the various enforcement mechanisms, including scrutiny of bills and the public sector compliance duty, as well as other powers that overseas anti-discrimination regulatory agencies often have, such as commencing own motion inquiries. The imposition of positive duties on government agencies is intended to require them to consider equality issues in their own policy and service delivery, but there is a risk that it may become a bureaucratic exercise rather than a measure to inculcate a commitment to equality. The problem of government agencies intransigently defending discrimination claims against them rather than negotiating service or policy revisions was noted by several participants.

The final session on the first day turned attention to overseas models of anti-discrimination law, enforcement and agency structure, with a specific focus on the introduction of positive duties to promote equality on public sector bodies in the UK, and the abolition of the regulatory agency in British Columbia, the BC Human Rights Commission. Dominique Allen gave an overview of the powers of a range of agencies studied on her recent field trip to the UK, Ireland, US and South Africa. Belinda Smith (Sydney) discussed the recent introduction of a gender equality duty in the UK. She analysed the features of regulatory schemes which highlighted the choices made in the Australian contexts by regulatory designers and the structural limitations of our legislation. She argued that regulatory theory has moved far since these laws were enacted, for they lack features necessary for effective regulation, such as a range of sanctions and an adequately resoured regulatory agency. Mary Woo Sims (former Human Rights Commissioner of British Columbia) outlined what had happened in BC regarding the abolition of the BCHRC and the difficult position in which parties who could not afford legal assistance now found themselves. She identified the use of rhetoric to present 'direct access' as conferral of a benefit rather than removal of assistance for these parties. Subsequent discussion moved on to other aspects of regulation, such as contract compliance and its use in Canada.

The second day of the Workshop focused on broad conceptual issues that transcended the specifics of the legislation. In the first session Anna Chapman (Melbourne) began by outlining ways in which anti-discrimination legislation can bring

about change even where enforceability is difficult. She referred to the achievements of gay and lesbian rights lobbies, including amendment by the States of a broad range of laws to remove disadvantages suffered by same sex couples. Anti-discrimination laws have also provided a 'language of rights and equality' that has some purchase on governments. The value of law reform initiatives is not solely about instrumental outcomes or specific changes to the law, but the development of attitudes and understandings. To this end, Joella Marron (Victorian Department of Justice) spoke about the concepts of disadvantage and discrimination that have received substantial recognition in recent years from the Victorian government in its Justice Statement, *A Fairer Victoria*. Many of the causes of disadvantage lie outside the scope of anti-discrimination laws, but can be tackled by government provided the will exists. Groups that suffer disadvantage may find that their best chance of relief is from lobbying government for change or resources, rather than pursuing discrimination or other claims that they will have difficulty in succeeding or being enforced. Trish Luker (ANU) spoke about the shift in recent years from a discourse of fairness and social justice to one of human rights, which has coincided with the rise of neo-liberalism. The current vocabulary and prioritising of the market is consistent with a discourse of freedom from state regulation and the individualisation of entitlements, which then extends to corporations in the same way as to natural individuals.

In a session concerned with human rights education. Diane Sisely (RMIT) addressed the question of education for equality within a human rights framework. She identified the underlying values of a human rights approach, contrasting the use and misuse by governments of terms like 'fair' in recent years. In the broader community, the idea of a 'fair go', for example, conveyed the core idea. Sisely argued that a human rights framework allows for a focus on claims for respect that are common to everyone, while the anti-discrimination framework focuses on what divides and separates us. Archana Parashar (Macquarie) spoke about educating law students for equality and human rights, arguing that students must be trained as independent and critical thinkers to take responsibility for the arguments and interpretations that they put forward in study or work: 'endorsing an idea makes me responsible for the consequences of that idea'. This requires that their capacity to assess the acceptability of theories they encounter must be developed. Mary Woo Sims (British Columbia) spoke about the role of human rights commissions, including the educative and policy roles. She pointed out that the UN Paris Principles for National Human Rights Institutions apply to agencies in the first world, as well as in less developed countries, but were not always complied with. The discussion considered the importance and independence of commissions and other agencies seeking to protect human rights in ways that are likely to bring them into conflict with governments, and how they could be safeguarded against loss of political support.

The final substantive session turned to look at the social impact of equality laws. Sara Charlesworth (RMIT) spoke about her recent report for the Victorian government on pregnancy discrimination. Despite thirty years of anti-discrimination laws, many women are still subjected to discrimination (including dismissal) during pregnancy, which can exert a major impact on the whole of their subsequent working lives. The limits of enforcement after the event were clearly apparent, as was the limited impact of anti-discrimination law, even on such a reasonably straightforward social problem. The assumption that passing a law fixed the social problem is simplistic, but governments are resistant to addressing more effective means of protecting women. Carol Adams

(La Trobe) discussed her research, tracing the reporting of women's status in company reports to both shareholders and to government agencies over several decades. She traced the nature of references to women and their employment, noting, for example, that companies tend not to report allegations of discrimination against them. Again, this research highlighted the fact that anti-discrimination law's reliance on individual enforcement can mean that its impact is quite limited, compared with legal requirements for reporting more specific data on workforce structure and treatment, as found in the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workforce Act 1999 (Cth). However, reports evaluating employers' compliance with their EOWW plans are confidential and cannot be publicly accessed, so this process is difficult to assess.

In a final session, the convenors led a discussion reviewing the extensive ground traversed. Although a broad range of areas was covered, the core issues revolved around the use of law to improve equality and eliminate some of the burdens that currently rest on women and disfavoured minority groups. The workshop offered an excellent opportunity to come together, develop our network, and fertilise our work with an infusion of ideas from a broad range of perspectives.

The Workshop will lead to several outputs. A website has been created to host the position papers presented at the workshop. These papers are not designed for publication, but we plan to produce a book of essays from the workshop. Discussions are underway with a publisher on the contents and scope of such a book, and selection and development of themes for the book will be our first task during 2008. We plan to organise a follow up conference on equality and law in Australia for 2008.

We are very grateful to the Academy for its support for the workshop.

Combating Social Exclusion through Joined-Up Policy:
Addressing social inclusion through whole-of-government approaches
David Cappo and Bettina Cass

The Workshop, held in Adelaide on 29-30 November 2007 was a collaboration between the Social Inclusion Initiative of the South Australian Government and the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales. The convenors of the Workshop were Monsignor David Cappo (Commissioner for Social Inclusion SA and Chair, Social Inclusion Board (SA) and Professor Bettina Cass (Professorial Fellow, Social Policy Research Centre and Social Inclusion Board SA member).

The Workshop was designed to address issues such as: how 'joined up' government works in practice; how the tensions and barriers entailed in this different and challenging mode of government policy making and administration may be identified, understood and addressed; what are the indicators of effective and equitable joined up policy making; what are the spheres of financial, labour market, socio-cultural and gendered exclusion which programs of social inclusion are expected to address?

These are fertile domains for debates which are cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary, drawing ideas and experiences from researchers, policy makers and service providers across universities, government and non-government organisations.

The impetus for the Workshop was drawn from the experience of the South Australian Social Inclusion Initiative and the findings of recent international research relating to social exclusion. These have highlighted the need for better understanding of the application of whole of government approaches to address various processes of social exclusion, such as those whose multi-faceted characteristics require responses across government portfolios, across different levels of government, and between government and community organisations. From a social exclusion perspective a key question arises: does a whole of government and community-involved approach lead to more effective and equitable public policy making, and from whose perspective?

To examine this question comprehensively, the Workshop adopted an approach that fostered *researcher/policy maker conversations.* Throughout the Workshop university-based researchers, policy makers in government and former policy makers with considerable expertise and experience, and researchers/ policy makers in community organisations engaged in informed and spirited discussion about policies to promote social inclusion, and the role of 'joined-up-government' in meeting that objective.

The three-way collaboration and sponsorship between the South Australian Social Inclusion Initiative, the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of NSW and the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia showed the value of the Academy Workshop Program in supporting and funding opportunities for intensive dialogue between researchers and policy makers, with the intention of promoting research-based ideas for positive policy development, as well as further research.

The Premier of South Australia, The Hon Mike Rann opened the workshop, outlining the significance and value of the South Australian Social Inclusion Initiative in introducing and implementing policies and practices to bring together social and economic policies in State government programs. He was followed by Professor Sue Richardson (Flinders University and Acting President of the Academy of Social Sciences) who welcomed participants and explained the purpose of the Academy Workshop Program.

The issues pertaining to the governance of whole of government approaches and joined-up practices and collaborations were a major theme of discussion throughout the Workshop. David Cappo provided an analysis of the complex governance arrangements that have defined the Social Inclusion Initiative in South Australia and driven effective policy development, for example in relation to addressing homelessness. Geoff Gallop argued that the nature of the social exclusion/ inclusion agenda demanded cooperation across the different levels of government and outlined the factors, such as jurisdictional flexibility and incentive pools that are necessary for this to succeed. Tom Bentley discussed the UK experience in which joined-up government was designed to open up and harness the classic structures of government to create overlapping fields of action. Strong leadership, common goals, flexibility and innovation, in particular, were identified as the tenets of effective governance structures.

Another key theme arising from the presentations which permeated Workshop debates was the question (raised in the paper by Peter Saunders) of who and what does the excluding and how this can be addressed. Tracey Bunda, using Aboriginal

education policy as both the example and the opportunity, set the challenge for re-framing policy – to redirect the gaze in policy formulation from the white knowing of the black 'other', which has often determined the form of engagement and understanding in social, political, economic and legal contexts, leading to further exclusion. Zoe Morrison, in discussing family violence, child abuse and neglect, and sexual assault as 'hidden' contributors to social exclusion, argued that attention must be given to how these issues are raised, framed and understood so that they do not become a way of further stigmatising and pathologising certain people, places and communities.

Further to this theme, Alison Mackinnon gave a timely reminder of the necessity to effectively listen to the voices of the people most concerned and what they are saying the joined-up responses might be, as she highlighted the significance of gender in understanding the education of girls and women and their life-course engagement with the education system. Sue Richardson demonstrated how the quantitative picture of the transformations in the Australian labour market can be enriched by the stories and perspectives of workers about the exclusions and barriers that they face in gaining employment, and listening to their suggestions for how these might be overcome. Paul Smyth argued that the role of the community sector is particularly suited to engaging excluded individuals and groups, giving them a voice in the decisions of government that affect their livelihoods and facilitating their economic and social participation. The issue of how governments effectively join-up with individuals, communities and places remains a challenge.

The Workshop discussions highlighted that inclusion is also about agency and that the issues surrounding agency and the institutional constraints on the exercise of agency are often given inadequate attention in research, policy and practice relating to social exclusion. Peter Saunders built on this theme in defining deprivation and social exclusion and in constructing indicators to measure both deprivation and exclusion that reflected people's lived experiences and community values. He also noted that 'social exclusion' is a flexible and adaptable concept that has shed new light on a broad range of social issues, adding dimensions not adequately captured in the use of purely income definitions and measures of poverty. Brian Howe explored how the 'risks' (economic and social) associated with transitions at key points in the life course have been increasingly transferred to individuals and their families, and he argued instead for a social investment approach to imbue social inclusion policies at key points in life course transitions.

The potential value of whole of government and community approaches was made clear in the new policy agendas proposed for addressing specific issues. Bettina Cass put forward the idea of conceptualising care giving throughout the life course, rather than as separate care activities, such as child care and aged care, and in this way bringing both care giving and employment into the same policy frame. She went on to suggest a 'modest' eight-point egalitarian agenda for statutory and work-place based policies in Australia that would enable the reconciliation of care and employment, the balancing of work and family, throughout the life course. Kathy Arthurson, in noting that for complex reasons neighbourhood regeneration had often led to reductions in social housing, proposed that social housing should be adopted as a key tool in combating social exclusion rather than being seen as a problem to be fixed in renewal policy. Graeme Hugo argued that migrants have largely been neglected in the discourse on exclusion: recently-arrived migrant groups are especially vulnerable to exclusion as a result of systematic discrimination in the labour market and other areas of society. He outlined a range of policy areas for action that would go some way to

addressing the persistent exclusion experienced by many migrants across Australian society, regardless of their significant contribution. Anne Hampshire used a 'capitals' (economic, institutional, social human, and natural/environmental capital) framework to highlight the points of exclusion that can occur in rural and regional Australia. She went on to explore the potential areas for creative, flexible and innovative action involving multi-sector collaborations

At the end of each day, David Cappo and Bettina Cass chaired a roundtable discussion in which all workshop participants, including paper-givers, section chairs and other participants, primarily from the South Australian government, universities and community organisations, were invited to engage in discussion: to identify the key issues raised in presentations, gaps in knowledge about social exclusion practices and social inclusion policies.

There was a pervasive sense of excitement and optimism during the workshop, the feeling that the researchers/ policymakers' conversations would contribute both to better research-informed policy-making and better policy-informed research. Participants agreed that it was a significant, informative and stimulating workshop advancing new understanding and knowledge about ways in which whole of government and community approaches may better inform social inclusion research, policy and practice and the essential links between them.

The vibrant atmosphere of this Workshop was assisted by the excellent administrative support provided by the Social inclusion Unit, Department of the Premier and Cabinet (SA) and the great venue of the National Wine Centre, sponsored by the University of Adelaide's Australian Institute for Social Research.

Theoretical, Empirical and Policy Inputs to Modelling Healthy Ageing

Laurie Buys ad Kaarin Anstey

The workshop was co-sponsored by the Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG) and the ARC-NHMRC Research Network in Ageing Well (RNAW), and hosted by the Centre for Mental Health Research at the Australian National University (ANU) on 5-6 December 2007. Workshop co-conveners were Associate Professors Laurie Buys and Kaarin Anstey. Nineteen researchers and policy makers from diverse backgrounds participated with the aim to advance multidisciplinary understanding of ageing. Presentations were given across three major themes of ageing research; 'ageing and the political economy', 'risk factor interaction: genes and environment' and, 'indigenous ageing'.

Karen Ritchie opened the workshop with a keynote address highlighting the changing models of gene and environment interactions. She outlined the historical changes in perspective from the 19th Century *tabula rasa* of environmental determinism, through to the Quantitative Trait Loci (QTL) approach informed by the Human Genome Project.

Using the example of late-life depression, the difficulties in explaining the role of genetics and the role of environmental factors were discussed. Professor Ritchie suggested that as technology progresses, it will be possible to further delineate these gene and environment interactions. she concluded by suggesting potential value in an 'envirome' project to classify environmental risk factors to parallel research completed for the Human Genome Project.

Ageing and political economy

Peter Saunders observed that issues surrounding the aged pension have not been adequately addressed in debate on ageing in Australia. The potential benefits of pension payments based on requirements for the maintenance of living standards, rather than income (a potentially inadequate indicator of deprivation) were discussed, as was the significance of the baby boomer cohort as a voting bloc in coming elections. Although Intergenerational Reports (IGRs) released by the Commonwealth Treasury have mostly focused on the fiscal implications of an ageing population, it was suggested that a broader view recognising social changes and the implications for older adults is required. The ensuing discussion addressed the need to consider psychosocial and health related factors as they relate to broader social structures and the economy.

Risk factor interaction – genes and environment

Kaarin Anstey's presentation explored the interpretational and methodological issues involved in the identification of risk factors for disease in late life. Professor Anstey stressed the importance of taking a lifespan approach when examining associations between risk factors and pathology. Using the examples of smoking, alcohol consumption and cholesterol levels, conflicting evidence produced by case-control and longitudinal research was discussed. The importance of longitudinal research in allowing for the study of within-person change over time, for the identification of risk and protective factors, was emphasised.

Peter Schofield followed with a presentation on the role of genes and environment in complex diseases and the biology of ageing. A major challenge for ageing research is to better define the specific genetic and environmental effects that impact this key biological process. A number of examples were used that demonstrated the genetic and environment interactions for complex diseases. Professor Schofield concluded that the combination of genetic analysis and epidemiological studies may lead to identifying gene and environment interactions that could be used to improve health and ageing outcomes.

Discussants agreed with the call for cohort studies and the need for multiple points of validation across the lifespan, time periods and populations. It was noted however, that even with the shift from case-control studies to cohort studies there is still the chance to find false positive results because of difficulty in accurately measuring disorders. It was suggested that a detailed classification of risk factors and a greater understanding of biomarkers would increase the level of accuracy in experimental and epidemiological studies.

Indigenous Ageing

Tony Broe began the third presentation by examining the meaning of Indigenous ageing in relation to adverse health outcomes, by reviewing and comparing the epidemiological transition in Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Epidemiological transitions in patterns of systemic disease are responsible for high

mortality and disability rates in the Indigenous population, rather than premature ageing. Additionally, the persistence of disadvantage in socio economic and other social determinants of health are likely to continue placing Indigenous people at higher risk for disease. Professor Broe suggested that the broader approach of epidemiological transition theory can provide an alternative for describing and acting upon the health needs of Indigenous Australians.

Subsequent discussion focused on the impact of government policy change on the provision of aged care services for indigenous communities. Concluding remarks expressed a need for an integrated health and community service provision model, with a focus on prevention and on restoration of function.

Extending the research paradigm

Hal Kendig focused on longer term goals for ageing research with the aim of extending the research paradigm. He discussed the value of building a multidisciplinary knowledge base but acknowledged the tension between research and policy time frames. The discussion raised several important issues. First, there is a need to acknowledge that research paradigms are embedded in specific methodologies, and a change in paradigm may require changing or expanding upon methodologies. There is also a need for standardisation of terminology and measurement, to allow for better communication among researchers and collaboration nationally and internationally. Addressing complex questions brings the requirement of multiple methodological approaches that incorporate contextual information into quantitative analysis, and take a lifespan approach. The scope for linkage of datasets was raised as a valuable future direction, as was the possibility of providing input to the 2011 Census. Finally, there was discussion on directing research according to social responsibility, particularly recognising a need for research to lead policy for the ATSI population.

Challenges and aspirations

A number of challenges surrounding ageing research were discussed in the final session of the workshop. These included clarifying appropriate definitions of ageing, the compression of morbidity and disability, issues in Indigenous ageing, the effective measurement of social determinants and the impact of early life experiences on the ageing process. The challenge to set a national ageing research agenda with links to international partners was discussed as a high priority.

The need to foster interdisciplinary connections with early career researchers was raised and it was suggested that post-doctoral research should be utilised to build links between different researchers and institutions, and across disciplines. Questions were raised as to whether there is currently a strong enough focus on ageing across universities and it was agreed that the AAG, ASSA and the RNAW could promote the inclusion of ageing as a core theme across all relevant undergraduate disciplines to ensure the growth of the cohort of early career researchers in ageing.

Workshop outcomes: key research questions and directions for the future

- To identify the risk/protective factors that can be modified in early and midlife to facilitate healthy ageing, with a focus on appropriate interventions and target populations;
- To identify the extent to which opportunities exist for those beyond 60 to avoid chronic disability;
- To identify environmental modifications that can facilitate healthy ageing and reduce disability;

- To research how workforce participation in later life interconnects with health;
- To address the question 'What will create the Australian "elders" – who are they and what will they represent?' (considering economic, social, health and disability factors as well as aspirations and values);
- To explore the impact of information technology on health, psychosocial and economic aspects of ageing;
- To consider broader social and cultural issues as they relate to ageing (including lessons learnt from other sectors – ie, climate change, security, transport and housing);
- To identify key universal principles for health promotion, and how to make these acceptable to individuals of all ages; and
- To prioritise the formation of an Australian Research Agenda on Ageing and for this to become an issue for the whole of government.

Another former recipient of the Academy Early Career Award (1995), *Professor Kay Anderson* from the Centre for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney, was also among those elected to Fellowship of the Academy and formally welcomed by the President, Stuart Macintyre.

Policy Roundtable

Policy Futures for Urban Water
Kate Harriden and Leo Carroll

This report broadly outlines the content of the first of two sessions of the Policy Roundtable held by the Australian Academy of the Social Sciences in conjunction with its Annual Symposium, 'People, Power, Water: Urban Water Services and Human Behaviour in Australia', which was held at the Shine Dome, Canberra on 20 November 2007. This first session, which was chaired by Professor Leon Mann, was titled *Water Consumption in an Urban Environment*, and brought together experienced social science researchers, industry representatives and public policy officers in the field of water services delivery and use, to discuss urban water management in the context of the issues raised at the Symposium. A report on the second session of the roundtable, *Water Supply in an Urban Environment*, provided by Leo Carroll, follows.

Session One: Water Consumption in an Urban Environment

The Chair opened this Roundtable session reinforcing the Symposium's aim to promote greater integration between social scientists and decision makers in an effort to ensure better water management. To start the conversation a number of challenges to urban water consumption policy and practices, as identified at the Symposium, were provided. These could be summarised into three main aspects of urban water consumption:

- underestimating the social and institutional difficulty discussing alternatives, and further systematising them eg recycled sewerage for drinking;
- the difficulty retrofitting the range of existing systems as related to water; and
- the impact of house design and lifestyle fashions on consumption patterns.

This interpretation of the Symposium proceedings indicates how water can be used to express social wellbeing and wealth. This insight into the social uses and values attached to water enhances the poignancy of a question raised early in the session: what is the water future vision underpinning water consumption assumptions in the urban environment? This question was answered in a myriad of ways throughout the discussion and the responses are reflected thematically in this report.

Institutional capacity and commitment

Whatever the water future, it was widely agreed it needed to be supported by better data regarding both the physical characteristics and social roles and values of water in urban environments. It was further noted that the lack of government commitment, the increasing reluctance to openly share information and the one-off nature of most projects seeking to manage water in alternative ways, inhibit the collection and collation of strong data sets.

Data scarcity was also considered by some participants to be one aspect contributing to a failure to learn the water lessons of the past. Examples of these contributions include the difficulties in systematising promising alternatives and the cyclical interest in water policy, appearing to peak with droughts and trough in wetter times.

These issues and others, including environmental, corporate governance and equity issues, led some participants to call for the greater use of evidence based policy in

water resource decision making. A few went further, suggesting it was time for new institutions to manage all aspects of water. In spite of these suggestions, many felt it was more a question of institutional capacity and political will to implement the mandate of current legislation, regulations and policies, than the institutional structures themselves that inhibit cohesive evidence based water policies.

Market versus public good

When talking about the future of urban water, the debate inevitably turns to familiar arguments for and against the provision of water by the public or private sector. This roundtable was no different. Market (private sector) proponents suggest opening water services to the full extent of the capitalist market represents a major economic opportunity for Australia. This is because the minority of users (mostly urban residents) providing the bulk of water revenues would be joined by the entire water market in paying market rates for consumption. The environmental benefits revolve around the elimination of marginal economic activities, as the rising cost of water more accurately reflects its economic value and allows that water to be diverted to more efficient uses.

Those seeking to keep water services in public control argue water is not a 'widget' to be squeezed into a market models, but a resource that has many values and roles in a society, around which there are already established social norms, including provision and pricing practices. It was noted that there are other social values and norms that cannot be negotiated on a market basis. For example, no household would be able to purchase the right to play loud music late at night, as the social conventions of suburban living have been legislated to prohibit such behaviour.

Among the private market proponents there was a suggestion that water is no longer a scarce resource, given the opportunities generated by new technologies, including desalination, sewerage mining and water recycling, and therefore no longer needs to be treated as a unique public/social good. Others questioned the suggestion that these new technologies meant unlimited water supply, thus opening the resource to full capitalist market economics, arguing that i) there are still externalities from the new technologies; ii) many remain unreliable and unproven; and iii) an entirely open market approach to water management is not socially acceptable.

The supply side focus inherent in the public versus private debate was challenged by contributions from those with overseas urban water consumption research experiences. In particular, UK experiences suggest that to focus on demand management is a better approach to influence water consumption in the urban environment. Essentially it was argued that as neither the private nor public sector has perfect supply management models or tools, focusing on supply has limited value. That is, focusing on the water meter narrows the debate. Instead, seeking to understand and influence the social customs and conventions of the water consumer can be more important to policy development than focusing on the water itself.

Water cultures

It was recognised by the participants that in any vision they may have about the future of urban water, the behaviour of the individuals consuming it would need to be accounted for. Contradictory public messages from a range of sources confuse water conservation messages, and these were noted as a key to the contradictory practices between individual consumers and the infrastructure demands of urban mores. For example, some individuals were willing to pay exorbitant rates for bottled water, in spite of the demand for public funds to be spent on widespread reticulated supply infrastructure providing reliable potable supply.

Population

Given the link between population growth and urban water consumption some participants questioned why population growth is seen as a given and not a political variable in the visions of urban water articulated during the Roundtable. Perth and Southeast Qld were specifically identified as regions where population growth is a critical factor in water management. This discrepancy was also noted in relation to the willingness to control population for economic purposes (generally seeking an increase), but not environmental purposes (where a cap or reduction is likely to be sought). It was further noted that when laypeople ask these questions, water managers and developers do not have good answers. Referencing the on-going discussion about limits (to water storage, use, the finite nature of resource etc) throughout the session, some participants made a plea that population size be innovatively handled in urban water policy.

In conclusion, this dynamic roundtable discussion covered a wide range of contemporary urban water issues, if not in depth. Australian water culture researchers have been arguing for a few years that understanding and influencing social customs and conventions regarding water be seen as an integral aspect of water management (eg ,F Allon, Z Sofoulis and H Goodall). Interestingly this group of social scientists/researchers were noticeably under-represented at the Roundtable, in spite of their ability to provide valuable insights into the water cultures of individuals – those who are expected to live the future water values being considered at this session. Regardless of the limited time available for this timely and important discussion, the ability of social scientists and policy makers to work in a more integrated manner was demonstrated.

Session Two: Water Supply in an Urban Environment

This report describes discussions at the second session, *Water Supply in an Urban Environment*, of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia's *Roundtable on Policy Futures for Urban Water*, held in Canberra on 21 November 2007.

I won't endeavour to provide a chronological report of what was discussed, nor will I cover every issue that was raised. Rather, I'll try to draw together some of the themes that were covered, and summarise the conclusions that were reached.

There was relatively limited time for discussion, and a large number of participants, so it was difficult to cover any issues in depth. Overall, the discussions during the session could be divided into four key areas. In no particular order, they were: first, the nature of the water system; second, the role of institutions; third, the use of markets; and fourth, the significance of human behaviour.

The nature of the water system

It was acknowledged that perhaps the most obvious water supply issue is how to ensure secure and reliable supply. With this in mind, a range of new supply options are now on the table – for example desalination, and more use of rainwater tanks.

However, this isn't the only problem we're facing. Participants noted that if we consider the water system as a whole, there's more to it that just supplying water. There are many different types of water in the system – for example, as well as rainwater and potable water, there are wastewater, stormwater, and groundwater.

A sensible approach to water management would take into account all the different types of water, and how they interact. But this doesn't always happen: sometimes we focus too much on supply augmentation, rather than other aspects of the system, such as demand management. Moreover, different aspects of the water cycle are treated separately, and often not in an integrated fashion.

Water issues also cover a range of different geographical scales. There are water policies, water managers, and water utilities at federal, state and local levels, and in rural and urban areas. Often, water issues at different scales aren't dealt with as coherently as they could be. For example, there is a clear divide between rural and urban water management.

This needs to change, as water becomes an increasingly national, rather than just a local, issue. Governments and others in the water industry are now talking about water supply 'grids' and 'networks'. Old, fragmented approaches to water management are being overhauled.

There was also some (colourful) discussion about one 'forgotten' aspect of the water system: sewage. Sewage could potentially be recycled or otherwise reused, but thus far, there's been relatively little public recognition of it.

The role of institutions

To cover the water system in a more coherent and integrated way, we need effective institutional and policy frameworks. There have been moves to better integrate water governance, but there are still a maze of different regulatory frameworks at local, state and federal levels. Effective water supply planning needs better coordination across different scales. Policy integration in the realm of water is still in its infancy. Some disciplinary areas – for example urban studies – have obvious links to water management, but these links are not always well integrated.

South East Queensland was highlighted as an example of an area where policy integration is particularly important. In this fast-growing region, water policy needs to be connected to other planning frameworks, particularly land use planning.

If we're going to better manage 'forgotten' aspects of the water system, like sewage, then appropriate institutional arrangements need to be put in place. Property rights over sewage need to be clarified, particularly for third parties involved in sewage recycling, were that to become common.

Institutional arrangements need to effectively involve the community. Some participants suggested that water supply planning hasn't always done this as well as it might. We need to encourage institutional models which allow the community to not just be told what to do (by water utilities and the government) but take active responsibility for managing water. Initiatives such as rainwater tanks and water rationing are a step in this direction.

The participants strongly agreed that institutional initiatives need to be long-lasting: there has been a tendency in the past to come up with all sorts of wonderful initiatives, usually during droughts and/or El Niño years, and then not pursue them once the weather again becomes wetter. Effective institutional frameworks will endure through both wet and dry periods.

Markets

There was quite a bit of discussion about how much of a role markets should have in water management. Some participants suggested that public ownership of water supply should be put back on the agenda – and that recent moves to privatise utilities

should be wound back. Other participants supported a market-based model. Among other things, they suggested that decision making by public utilities is too easily politicised, and that public utilities have gained efficiencies by contracting out their services.

It was generally agreed that the market isn't a 'silver bullet' that will solve all water management issues. One problem with the market is that it's imperfect: water supplies are frequently subsidised by both sides of politics. Moreover, this issue often isn't even debated; it seems to be accepted that government will keep subsidising water supply. If industries don't have to pay for themselves, then overinvestment can occur. For example, in Berlin, there had been massive overinvestment in water supply systems, and people were now being told to consume *more* water, purely to keep the system working. This wouldn't have happened had the industry bee obliged to pay for itself.

The problem of 'postage stamp pricing' was discussed. As with some other public services (such as the postal system, from which the term 'postage stamp pricing' gets its name) different geographic locations often pay relatively similar charges for the public service (in this case, water supply), despite differing costs for the infrastructure needed (in this case, to supply water). In other words, some locations effectively subsidise the cost of water supply to other locations.

Another issue is the willingness of the private sector to take on risks associated with supplying water – and how this risk might be passed on to consumers. It was pointed out that when the Building Sustainability Index (BASIX, which sets energy and water reduction targets for houses and units) was introduced in New South Wales, many costs were passed on to consumers. There may be a need for appropriate consumer protection to help manage this problem.

Human behaviour

Human behaviour often seems to be forgotten by water managers. Many participants agreed that we need to think about it more, particularly as an element in water planning. For example, we may snigger at seemingly primitive 1940s appliances and water use habits, but fail to recognise that many aspects of water use behaviour are quite recent, such as private spa baths. These patterns of behaviour can have significant implications for water consumption and attitudes toward water management.

Next steps: where to from here?

At the end of the session, the participants identified some key priorities that they thought needed further work.

- Public health is a sleeper issue. The water reforms instigated by Chadwick in the 19th century have been phenomenally successful at addressing health concerns. However, not enough is known about the impacts of new initiatives, such as the increasing number of private water tanks. Further research is needed to make sure they don't, for example, become vectors for water-born diseases.

- Academics and industry need to interact more effectively. Policy challenges should inform research and development questions. Research is needed on the actual impact of policy interventions, such as rebates. Policy makers might benefit by inviting scientists and researchers to discuss water issues, *in*

camera: this would help offset researchers' frequent reticence about talking to the press.

- Future research should not just involve the big urban water utilities; it should also involve other water supplies, such as those provided by local government. Peri-urban issues are particularly important. Rural residential growth is a crucial issue for future water management.

- Subsidies (for the water sector) are not good policy. This message needs to be promoted. Real costs need to be factored into water supply planning.

- More research is needed on how to optimise the timing of water supply investments. Currently, new decisions are often made on political grounds; decisions should be more transparent, and made on objective and accountable grounds.

- Urban water supply planners need better, and more standardised, data on urban water consumption. This would help planners understand what consumers do with water, and how consumers' decisions affect water demand.

- Water institutions need to be flexible, and able to learn new skills. For example, they need to consider social issues. In the past, water management has been dominated by engineers; social scientists can help identify new ideas and issues that might otherwise be overlooked. Urban water managers could also learn lessons from rural water managers.

Some conclusions

Given so many things to consider, it's perhaps no wonder that water management is no simple matter. There is no one answer to our urban water challenges. Markets won't fix everything. Nor will scientists, or engineers, or water utilities. We need to approach the problem on several fronts at once, or as one the participants commented, we need to 'walk and chew gum at the same time'. Moreover, we need to be pragmatic, and balance a whole range of competing interests with each other.

I wish to thank the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia for the opportunity to attend, and report on, the policy roundtable. It was a valuable insight into the issues discussed by some of our pre-eminent water researchers, policy makers and industry representatives.

Book Reviews

Rediscovering Recherche Bay. Edited by John Mulvaney and Hugh Tyndale-Biscoe. Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, Canberra, December 2007, ISBN 9780908290222.

In November 2001, in a review published in the *Journal of Australian Studies*, Leo Scheps made the startling assertion that the translation of French Admiral Bruny d'Entrecasteaux's account of his voyage to Australia and the Pacific (the first in English) 'might find a market with collectors of early Australiana and maritime arcana', but that 'its text and extensive notes' were 'of little value to scholars of Australian and Pacific history, geography or anthropology'. No doubt this present volume, edited by Emeritus Professor John Mulvaney and Professor Hugh Tyndale-Biscoe, will come as a surprise to Mr Scheps: d'Entrecasteaux's account is cited in the endnotes of several of the papers delivered by experts in a variety of disciplines, at a symposium held in Hobart, 26–28 February 2007. It may also surprise Senator Eric Abetz, who was as dismissive of the remarkable heritage of Tasmania's Recherche Bay as he was enthusiastic about having it logged. Ultimately the privately owned north-eastern peninsula of the bay was saved thanks to a generous donation by philanthropist Dick Smith. It is now owned by the Tasmanian Land Conservancy. In the wake of its acquisition, the symposium was organised to 'celebrate the cultural, historical and scientific significance of Recherche Bay' and was enthusiastically supported by all four of Australia's learned academies. Named by Bruny d'Entrecasteaux in honour of his flagship, the bay has a rich heritage: long Aboriginal habitation, visits by Bruny d'Entrecasteaux and his scientific expedition in 1792 and 1793, mutiny on the brig *Cyprus*, European settlement, whaling, fishing, coal mining and nineteenth- and early twentieth-century timber-getting. My own participation in the symposium was regrettably thwarted by pre-existing obligations in Paris; so it was with great interest that I read the dozen papers all inspired by a connection with the bay. Having also been involved in the campaign to save Recherche Bay, I hope my readers will forgive what are sometimes very personal observations in this review.

One of the editors of these papers, John Mulvaney, has already done a fine job examining the joyous interaction between the members of d'Entrecasteaux's expedition and the indigenous inhabitants of the bay. In 2007 he published an important historical portrait of Recherche Bay: *'The axe had never sounded': Place, People and Heritage of Recherche Bay, Tasmania* (ANU E Press and Aboriginal History, Canberra). This offered a case study of the National Heritage nomination process. In studying the values associated with the bay, Mulvaney highlighted major contradictions in state and federal policy and legislation. He also examined the concept of heritage and particularly the notion of associative cultural landscape. In this present collection, Joan Domicelj, of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), further explores this concept in the context of Recherche Bay sites and UNESCO's World Heritage Convention. Nevertheless, another of the contributors, Aynsley Kellow of the University of Tasmania's School of Government, apparently sees a focus on heritage considerations, as an example of environmentalists employing an (implicitly cynical?) coalition-building tactic of political 'whirlpooling'. He does not offer any critique of the notion of associative cultural landscape, but does provide interesting examples of contradictions in recent conservation policies and

campaigns, including a critique of the use of cultural heritage for political purposes. Environmental and heritage campaigns, however, can co-exist and overlap with shared appreciation of a landscape and its ecological, historical and cultural associations. The campaign to save Recherche Bay was never one about preserving wilderness untouched by human hands; it was always one which celebrated a multiplicity of human associations with the bay.

As an historian who initially sought to give the Tasmanian Government objective advice on Recherche Bay and then wholeheartedly embraced the campaign to save it when that advice was ignored, I never doubted the sincerity of Senator Bob Brown or Wren Fraser Cameron of the Recherche Bay Protection Group. This was not an opportunistic campaign, however much it helped demonstrate the profound inadequacies of state and federal legislation in the face of insatiable logging.

I do not doubt that some French, with bitter personal memories of the campaign against France's nuclear tests, distrusted environmental activists who now celebrated France's links with the early history of Australia. When I tried to convey my concerns about the threat posed to France's heritage at Recherche Bay to one French diplomat, he focused on the campaigners and declared that 'not long ago these same environmentalists were dumping manure on our doorstep'! France's representatives in Australia, however, eventually acknowledged the significance of the debate, even if they steadfastly sought to avoid the fray. The French Ambassador, Patrick Hénault, aided by his astute and admirable wife Anne Hénault, did facilitate an archaeological assessment of the site presumed to be that of the vegetable garden planted by Félix Delahaye. The results of this assessment, carried out by a team led by Jean-Christophe Galipaud, formed the basis for one of the major papers of the symposium. In it, Galipaud and his co-authors declared:

> The lack of any artefactual evidence on the stone structure, the nature of the soil in and around it, the absence of any recognizable phytoliths, and the proximity of the structure to the sea, all point to the conclusion that the stone layout cannot be the French garden of Delahaye, although its size and orientation are quite similar to the known descriptions of the garden.

The site located by Helen Gee and Bob Graham in 2003 had already generated a great deal of public interest. When, during an interview with Judy Tierney for 'Stateline' on ABC TV, I acknowledged that there was an element of doubt about the presumed location (because of cartographic anomalies) and urged caution until a full archaeological survey was possible, I was surprised to receive a hostile email from my friend, the late Bruce Poulson, who accused me of 'kicking own goals' for the loggers. It was a reminder that passions can become very heated in such circumstances and that the quest for truth and accuracy can sometimes be viewed with suspicion. I was as disappointed as Bruce was, when the archaeological study indicated that the presumed site was probably not the long-sought garden location. But much more disappointing was how close this ultimately National Heritage-listed peninsula came to being logged and that both the state and federal governments were prepared to let it happen. For Tom Baxter, who presented a paper on the 'Legal lesson from the recent history of Recherche Bay', that close call 'demonstrates the urgent need to reform at least the Commonwealth EPBC [Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation] Act and Tasmanian legislation to provide proper protection for Australia's heritage places'. Many will agree with him.

Even without a definite garden site (and there certainly was one planted), Recherche

Bay remains important – arguably as important as Botany Bay in New South Wales. It has a major place in the history of early science in Australia. In the symposium papers Alan Frost provides a useful orientation to the international context of d'Entrecasteaux's expedition. The geophysicists of that expedition established an observatory and undertook pioneering experiments that helped to prove for the first time that the earth's magnetic field intensifies north and south of the equator. The naturalists of the expedition gathered many thousands of specimens. Indeed the collections of the botanist Jacques Julien Houtou de Labillardière (1755-1834) provided the basis for the first general flora of Australia: the *Novae Hollandiae plantarum specimen*. This contribution was further discussed at the symposium by botanist Gintaras Kantvillas of the Tasmanian Herbarium. Other papers on the scientific heritage of the expedition include Michael Pearson's fine account of the work of the expedition's hydrographer Charles-François Beautemps-Beaupré (1766-1854), who was much-praised in his lifetime by Matthew Flinders. There is a stimulating paper on the 'Tasmanian Aborigines and the origins of language', by Iain Davidson and a fascinating contribution by Stewart Nicol on the study of the echidna, which was not seen by the naturalists of d'Entrecasteaux's expedition, but was studied by later visiting French naturalists. One paper which does not deal with French visits to the bay is Ian Rae's engaging study of the technology of whaling. Despite the gruesome use of this technology, I found myself captivated by discussion of zany inventions such as harpoons filled with prussic acid and curare and even electric harpoons connected to hand-cranked generators. I knew exactly what he meant when he wrote of the smell of whale oil that he had encountered 50 years earlier at his grandfather's workbench. My own indelible memory of that potent smell comes from a visit I made to the Russian whaling factory-ship the *Soviet Union* in 1970. Once experienced, it is never forgotten! Appropriately, the final chapter, 'The conservation and management of ecological communities' by David Lindenmayer looks to the future and how best to conserve Recherche Bay. As several of the contributors also argue, it offers lessons for other important heritage locations in Australia, particularly those on private land.

It is very pleasing to see Australia's academies join together in multidisciplinary initiatives such as the Recherche Bay symposium. John Mulvaney and Hugh Tyndale-Biscoe deserve our special thanks for helping to make the symposium happen and for bringing together the papers in this fitting celebration of one of Australia's special places. And Senator Bob Brown and Wren Fraser Cameron deserve our thanks for leading the fight to save the bay.

Edward Duyker FAHA

Oxford Companion to Australian Politics. Edited by Brian Galligan and Winsome Roberts. Oxford University Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0-19-555543-1. 686 pp.

The *Oxford Companion to Australian Politics* is an unassuming title for a book that claims to provide 'the first scholarly and comprehensive account of Australian politics, covering all aspects of Australian political life and thought' (inside cover). But it was also a title that left me unsure of what to expect from this book. So, what is distinctive about the *Oxford* Companion *to Australian Politics*?

Likely to be classified as an encyclopaedia rather than a dictionary, the *Companion* is ordered alphabetically in much the same way as both of these genres. Entries vary in

length from shorter more factual contributions of less than half a page to longer interpretive essays of three or even four pages. As the Preface states (p viii), the *Companion* has been 'designed to give thematic treatment of larger topic areas rather than focusing on particular individuals and instances'. This means that the *Companion* is also something more than an encyclopaedia. It has resulted in entries that are analytical in style as well as factual, which is a significant achievement given the restrictive confines of a book such as this.

The *Companion* is also comprehensive. It is just under 700 pages long and has benefited from the contributions of over 200 people who have collectively written more than 400 separate entries. Each of these entries has been commissioned by the editors and contributors have typically written between one and four entries each. I was pleased to see that longer entries also had suggestions for 'further reading'. All but a small number of the contributors are academics (in the sense that they have a formal association with the higher education sector). The vast majority are acknowledged experts in their respective fields (for example, Patrick Weller on 'cabinet' or Judith Brett on 'John Howard'), although there were several entries from newer members of the academy (such as George Vasilev on 'racism' and Gary Foley on 'Aboriginal politics - historical'). Selecting and bringing together such a diverse range of contributions is clearly a huge editorial task. The comprehensiveness of the outcome must be a satisfying reward for a project that has been more than three years in the making.

The title of the *Companion* also leads one to question whether there is anything distinctly 'Australian' about it. The answer to this question is a definite 'yes'. It is clear that the editors have taken great care in the unenviable task of choosing what to include and what to leave out. So, you find entries that you would only find in a *Companion to* Australian *Politics* as well as other contributions that are not country-specific but which have nevertheless been written from an Australian perspective. Gwen Gray's entry on 'Medibank' (p 338) is one example of a contribution that focuses almost exclusively on Australia's past attempts to introduce a national health insurance scheme but this is then set in a broader historical and comparative context in Gray's other entry on 'health policy' (pp 245-7). Another example is James Walter's entry which begins with a definition and account of the historical and international origins of 'political psychology' (pp 431-3). He then examines the particular contribution of the Melbourne School before reaching the general conclusion that political psychology's 'provenance within Australian political science remains marginal' (p 433).

The *Companion* therefore corrects the British, American or European focus that is often implicit in other compendiums of this sort. As a visiting Brit, I found this feature to be of great value. There may be some similarities between the UK and Australia but I don't think that I am alone in believing that the differences often raise the most interesting questions. The *Companion* allowed me to explore some of those differences and I would therefore recommend it as an accessible yet informative introduction to Australian politics.

Paul Fawcett

Deported; A History of Forced Departures from Australia. By Glenn Nicholls. University of New South Wales Press, 2007. ISBN 9780868409894.

Australia is almost the only country in the world to have developed a system of planned immigration over a period of two centuries. Through the convict system, the assisted passage schemes from 1831 to 1983, the White Australia policy, the universal visa system developed under the *Migration Act* of 1958, and right up to the current system and its innovative 'Pacific solution', governments have decided 'who will come and under what circumstances', to quote our former prime minister.

Any immigration control system has varied categories and systems; selecting some people and getting rid of others. After the convict system ended, the colonies had allowed immigration to almost anyone who could get here, but only gave assisted passage grants to British subjects. For 100 years Australia encouraged almost unlimited entry to United Kingdom subjects, provided they were of white European descent. But with the standardising of immigration law in 1901 as one of the first acts of the new Commonwealth, a regime was put in place which allowed the national government to exclude anyone it chose, by use of a dictation test or for specified crimes and undesired characteristics. This system has been gradually extended to the point where all non-citizens entering Australia, other than New Zealanders, must possess a visa issued outside Australia. This is a very rigorous system for a world in which international travel has rapidly expanded.

Making entry to Australia increasingly difficult also means that expulsion from Australia is a necessary weapon to get rid of those not wanted, but already here. This cannot be used against Australian citizens, but can certainly be used against British subjects, which was very rare until thirty years ago. It can be applied to people who have lived in Australia most of their lives, although the courts have challenged this in cases spread over almost a century. Breaches of the law, failure to renew limited visas, security fears, can be used to expel the unwanted non-citizens. Race alone can no longer be a reason, although it certainly was until 1970. This is the background to Glenn Nicholls's excellent study of the deportation power in its many facets since 1901.

This is a topic which others have studied for particular cases - notably of Egon Kisch in 1934. As Nicholls clearly states, Kisch was a communist and not just a 'radical' or a 'socialist' as most other accounts put it. His deportation was under an amendment made to the *Immigration Act* in 1925, which permitted deportation on the basis of information received from overseas - in other words, from British intelligence. But politically inspired deportations were unusual and, as with Kisch, usually mobilised considerable opposition. They were mainly used against suspected radicals rather than the not inconsiderable number of war criminals admitted to Australia after the Second World War.

Other cases, under the White Australia policy, were also controversial, but none have occurred for over thirty years. Most impact on non-Europeans has been felt by asylum seekers, arriving without a visa and thus subject, under a 1992 amended *Migration Act*, to mandatory detention while their refugee status is established, followed by deportation if it is not. This has, of course, been a subject of major controversy ever since. Nicholls deals with this very well, while not reiterating already much covered ground. In effect, as asylum seekers cannot be returned to their homelands if they genuinely fear persecution, most have been detained in places like Nauru, Baxter or Woomera for long periods, before being grudgingly allowed to remain with temporary protection visas.

This excellent account stands alone as a detailed analysis of a major aspect of Australian immigration control and the issues of human rights which are inherent in any system of forcible removal. As his tables show, criminality is not a major reason for removal, compared with illegal entry or breaches of visa regulations. Nor are most people technically deported, implying a degree of force, but leave voluntarily or under supervision. This valuable study was published before the most recent controversial case, the attempt by (then) minister Kevin Andrews to detain and deport Dr Haneef as a way of avoiding the bail decision of the court. A study of that intricate mess would have been a fitting finale for this most interesting study.

James Jupp

Vale Fellows of the Academy

Emeritus Professor John Keats AM, Psychologist, formerly of the University of Newcastle, died on 1 January 2008.

Professor Les Hiatt, Anthropologist, lately of the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, died in London on 12 February 2008.

Dr Harrison Bryan AO, Historian, past Director General of the National Library, died on 12 February 2008 in Victoria.

Professor Christopher Heyde AM, Statistician, formerly of the Australian National University, died on 6 March 2008 in Canberra.

Emeritus Professor Gregory Dening, Historian, died on 13 March 2008 in Victoria.

Obituaries will appear in the *Annual Report*.

Opinion

Local knowledge, Bushfire, Resilience and Rural Communities
Jenny Indian

On the map, Captain McCallum's plan looked childishly simply, and on the map it was easy to imagine it: the human chain, the proceeding, the justice being dispensed. The map was correct enough….

But Thornhill had been there and knew that the map was correct only in generalities. He knew that, in the real world, the ground that McCallum indicated as being where the human chain would proceed along the creek, was an exhausting jumble of trees, bushes and boulders. The hillsides bristled with fins and plates of rock, the gullies were full of mangroves and reeds in mud thick enough to swallow a man. Every tangled vine, sprawling root and whip-like bush would resist a single human, let alone a detachment, passing through.

Mosquitoes would eat them alive, leeches slide down their boots no matter how tightly laced, ticks would drop in their hair and burrow into their skin, and they would be forced into a series of exhausting detours that would increase the journey along the cleft by ten or twenty times its distance on the map.

Captain McCallum, not long from Home, his rosy cheeks already blistering in the colonial sun, could not be expected to know any of that.[1]

Introduction

The idea of local knowledge is widely embraced and recognised as important in the debate surrounding fire management, particularly after the extensive 2003 fires throughout Alpine Australia.[2] Speaking to individuals with direct experience of both this fire and others, discussion often returns to the question of local knowledge, its use, dismissal or simply what it involves.

Although the term local knowledge is often used, the concept remains ambiguous and misunderstood. Initially seeming straightforward, local knowledge is a complex mixture of observations, thoughts and reasoning based on experience and tradition. It is mentioned by various government departments within their research, including in Victoria the Department of Human Services and Department of Planning and Community Development, as 'local intelligence'. For the purposes of this paper, local knowledge is considered as information based on tradition, personal observation and experience of a particular geographic location and how it functions within a community, both first hand and passed on.

All knowledge has a context and, as such, who the expert is depends on the circumstance.[3] One can delve beyond that and suggest that local knowledge involves a degree of understanding over and above simply knowledge. Information exists and is received, but interpretations vary. Indeed, knowledge is not something of which an individual has 'more' or 'less', but rather reflects the specific forms of practice undertaken in daily life; thick in some areas and thin in others, knowledge is embedded in daily political and environmental activity.[4] The tacit, almost elusive, nature of local knowledge is also acknowledged, contributing to the inherent difficulty of isolating this concept.

Within this paper I will consider the general idea of the concept and discuss its use and application in fire management in rural Australia. The use of this tool will also be considered in the light of its potential weaknesses and the timing of its application in relation to the varying stages of fire management. I will also be exploring local knowledge in relation to the changing demographic of many rural communities and, in turn, viewing this in relation to the resilience of these communities. Finally, the importance of local knowledge in genuine and longterm community engagement will also be considered, though this, in itself, needs further research.

To date extensive interviews have been conducted with individuals, local government officers and government and non government agencies throughout the high country of Victoria, NSW and, to a lesser extent, the ACT. Numerous focus groups have been conducted, bringing together a range of both locals and newcomers within these communities and thus a diversity of thought and opinion. Participant observations have been conducted at community meetings and current and established literature has been reviewed extensively.

The idea of local knowledge

Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) is one form of local knowledge as ancient as the hunter gatherers, yet the term only came into widespread use during the 1980s.[5] This form of knowledge represents experience acquired over perhaps thousands of years of direct human contact with the environment. TEK can be a vast accumulation of knowledge and understanding. Within the Alpine areas of Australia, for example, large fires appear to have been extremely rare before European occupation; however the movement of Europeans into the area shows a massive increase in both the frequency and intensity of fires. Fire frequency and intensity in the Alps under Aboriginal management was far lower than that for the rest of south eastern Australia.[6]

Local knowledge can be intensely specific, applicable only within a very small geographic area, potentially limited and problematic in application. However, its successful use and transfer within any district may have generic application elsewhere - verification of map accuracy, for example, with those who know the country in question. How local knowledge can be harnessed and practically applied and why this is important to the process of community engagement is at the core of a genuine understanding of this concept. There is no template for the gathering of this information, it is more about relationships. Local knowledge can be riddled with subjectivity, coloured by self interest and bring with it value-laden emotions and potential weaknesses. Further, it can be used as part of the airing of long held grudges, general distrust of authorities and personal gripes. Local knowledge is difficult to measure and test quantitatively as it involves 'local values; anecdotal, observational experience; colloquial terminology; the all-but-invisible background of relationships, behaviours and kinship structures that shape people-environment relations'.[7]

Importantly, local knowledge need not run counter to scientific or expert knowledge but can be viewed as complementary.[8] Where scientific knowledge can frame overarching policies and practices, local knowledge can guide local, practical applications. Herein lies the dilemma of local knowledge, its apparent weakness and inherent strength – it can underpin the knowledge interface between experts and locals and, as such, play a pivotal role in the communication process by promoting trust and cooperation. What is fundamental to the gathering and use of this tool is the acceptance and understanding that local knowledge must be subject to the same scrutiny as all knowledge collected –

simply because it is deemed local does not mean that it should automatically be privileged over other forms of knowledge.

In considering this area of research it is tempting to indulge lost rural traditions, to romanticise the past - the 'good old days' - and the demise of self-reliance amongst changing rural communities. All too often 'collective memory simplifies; sees events from a single committed perspective; is impatient with ambiguities of any kind; reduces events to mythic archetypes'.[9] The changing demographic of rural populations, the questioning of the sustainability of farming practices, and bureaucracy and regulation can be viewed as disruptive elements to the apparent rural idyll. However, and particularly in relation to fire management, many aspects of improved scientific knowledge and technology are enormously positive, and often enable the continued existence of isolated rural communities which may otherwise decline. Greatly improved communication, understanding of fire behaviour and constantly updated equipment must be acknowledged as crucial to fire management.

Pitfalls and potential dangers of using local knowledge

The potential dangers of using local knowledge are many and varied and include the difficulty in reaching consensus within a community – divergent views exist and not everyone wants to be involved. Is the information reliable or is it dated, based on country long gone? Is it based on opinion rather than fact, charged with emotion and sentiment? Is it totally subjective rather than objective? What is perceived as local knowledge within a community must be examined with pragmatism. Is it coloured by self interest? Is it too narrow and, if followed, will the specific information received actually jeopardise the broader fire effort? Does the information gained actually provide a complete picture? Judge Stretton (reporting on the bushfires of 1939) noted that:

> The truth was hard to find. Accordingly, your Commissioner sometimes sought it (as he was entitled to do) in places other than the witness box. Much of the evidence was coloured by self interest. Much of it was quite false. Little of it was wholly truthful.[10]

Who is to judge what is the balanced view and how can this be achieved? Outcomes from seeking local knowledge are not necessarily predictable nor tangible; verification may be very difficult and take time and resources. This is not a simple tool - in considering local knowledge one must proceed with caution.

Rural observations and use of language vary and the overuse of acronyms and scientific terms is often confusing and alienating to those unfamiliar with them. Language understood by all needs to be used and respect shown for variations; those less articulate may have much to offer and their views should be sought with suitable methodologies. As noted by Pennesi, 'The gap between information and usable knowledge can be bridged with effective communication practices that take into account a wide range of linguistic and cultural factors'.[11] In addition to using appropriate language when harnessing local knowledge and listening to those who may have it, the messages which come from this process must also mean something to local people. There is little chance of bringing communities on board if the information gained and applied is difficult to fathom. This information must be conveyed in a form accessible to all.

Local knowledge can bring with it a position of power in a community. This has the potential to further fracture the community and those unsure of the worth of their

knowledge may remain silent. 'Sides' may develop, become polarised and the resulting conflict can impact negatively for everyone. Care needs to be taken to ensure that prejudices don't become entrenched, dominating and distorting dialogue.

The term itself and its role can be confused; even misused as something of an elixir for all the ills befalling communities before, during and after a major emergency. The application of the term can be ambiguous and encourage distortions; it may deepen rifts between communities and government agencies, causing blame and a negative backlash which further complicates recovery.

This is not a comfortably measurable concept – there are no easy answers. It is hard to quantify just whether the use of local knowledge in a community is actually doing anything to help foster the engagement of that community or, indeed, in any way helping individuals. Local knowledge, its harnessing and potential use, is subtle and elusive to an extent, making it more qualitative in application. Because of this, its use is resource intensive and may take considerable time.

Local knowledge in Australian fire management

Local knowledge is one tool available to fire managers; it should not drive decision making processes but be viewed as situational and contextual - specific, applicable at certain times, in certain locations and in particular ways. It may not, therefore, be geographically transferable though, as noted, can have generic application (see Table1).

Local knowledge is not an instant tool, to be used in an ad hoc fashion; it must be gathered from within a community in a longterm process. Rural communities are complex and vary enormously and, while common themes and aspects will be noted, a 'one size fit all' approach cannot be taken. Each region, district and every community has its own history and sense of country. This must be respectfully acknowledged and the specific attributes of this knowledge and understanding openly recognised and valued at all levels of fire management. What is most disempowering for those involved in an event such as the 2003 fires is the view that local input is irrelevant and can be completely disregarded. In times of emergency it is crucial that the confidence of locals in fire agencies and management is not compromised, as this can quickly deteriorate into anxiety, uncertainty and mistrust. Once this process begins, further longterm alienation and disquiet can occur.

Opportunities to harness and utilise local knowledge exist at a regional and international level for both fire brigades and government departments. Common training for those from completely different geographic terrain can broaden experience, for example, and including local brigade personnel in the decision making process wherever possible can offer respect and value to local sensibilities. Where displacement of local brigades may be part of a phase of the fire management response, careful explanations should form part of the process.

As outlined in Table 1, though initially very resource intensive, the accumulation of local knowledge is a longterm investment which has the potential to aid all phases of fire management, in particular the final, operational phase when the information is being used to reinforce community participation and engagement.

Rural communities – the changing demographic

Rural communities are both complex and undergoing change; in early 2008 this is compounded by prolonged drought, bad seasons and uncertain futures. Rural landscapes too, are changing dramatically; visually, through subdivision and changes

Table 1

Stages of fire management	Use of local knowledge – strengths	Use of local knowledge – weaknesses
Generally/ across all	Availability of detail – ground-checked, verified and accurate. Can provide access to community.	Potential to be narrow and parochial – limited and subjective.
Listening	Early communication and contact with local community. Community involvement can be seen as a long-term investment by managers. Broadening of information base. Promotion of trust and cooperation.	Hard to access and verify – may be distorted and ambiguous. May not be altruistic. Too local for generic application. May encounter conflict from/within community. Very resource intensive.
Planning	Potential for new perspectives. Building community involvement and confidence. Greater confidence as decisions made based on verified/checked local knowledge. Utilising existing information – not 'reinventing the wheel'. Allows for early organisation of specifics eg, to ensure presence of locals in Incident Management Teams. May aid the application/acceptance of broad government policy.	Limited in application – may be impossible, even dangerous, on a broad scale. Could be gaps in the knowledge interface (between locals and agencies) – leads to distortion of information.
Operational response	Taking the community with you; a greater respect and understanding of decisions made due to early inclusion. Increased communication and involvement resulting in increased fire awareness and understanding. Potentially greater confidence eg, when maps checked by locals. In strengthening community involvement and understanding of emergency, resolve is increased and resilience Underpinned.	The use of local knowledge here is less tangible/ more difficult due to rapid nature of response phase.

in vegetation and management; and ecologically, through different management practices and approaches. Many settlements have altered enormously, particularly over the past two decades, and continue to undergo rapid population shifts. The

concept of 'tree changers' – previously urban based people moving into a rural community seeking a lifestyle change – is now well accepted. While potential land use conflicts abound, as does the increased potential for neighbour/boundary disputes as properties reduce in size and land uses change, many from rural communities welcome these changes – newcomers are described by one fourth generation woman from a remote rural town as 'a breath of fresh air'. Entrenched attitudes and long held prejudices are questioned and not 'taken as gospel' as they may have been for generations. Often local tradespeople are employed by the newcomers and paid handsomely for their services; payment normally hard to find in many rural communities under severe financial pressure. With a change in expectations many locals also benefit as services, which may have originally been part of the towns' infrastructure, are again established. Some lament the naivete of these newcomers, are concerned at their lack of rural skills and decry their arrogance, but to greet these changes with disdain and constant criticism is surely to fly in the face of the inevitable.

The exodus of many younger rural folk from their communities to urban areas seeking work and education is also an acknowledged reality as is the increasing age of those remaining within many rural communities. Arguably, this could translate to some rural communities becoming more vulnerable to disasters such as bushfire, since the population comprises both the more elderly and those less experienced, perhaps uninitiated, in the event of a major fire.

Expectations of those outside rural communities have also changed. With increased travel and tourism, the rural landscape is no longer perceived by outsiders merely as the setting for food production; many seek the 'rich visual experience' of rural and remote locations, the 'peace and quiet' they imagine to be non-urban. The ability to adapt and accept the diversity in both expectations and change in rural communities might be considered a contributing factor in the resilience that those communities generate to meet future change and potential trauma such as bushfire.

Resilience of rural communities

Identifying resilience is not straightforward either; the term can be overused and lose meaning. Resilience is also something of a moving target – people and communities have a mix of strengths and weaknesses and, depending on circumstances, these vary over time. Nor is resilience a static notion -- you may be resilient to a particular event today, but not tomorrow; you may cope well with some things but not others; and, if you didn't cope well this time, it may help to improve your resilience in the future or, equally, could invoke a return to previous trauma.

For our purposes, resilience is defined as the capacity of an individual or community to experience an adverse event (for example a major fire) and recover to return to near normal functioning. Within ecological systems, the ability to absorb and adapt to change is considered a major factor in the genuine resilience of that ecosystem. Populations which cannot adapt, which exhibit a lack of flexibility and capacity to change are acknowledged as those which are potentially more vulnerable. Should that ecosystem experience a major shock and have difficulty adapting to the changes, the future of the entire system may be jeopardised.

Bushfire is one traumatic event in the life of rural communities but, when combined with prolonged stress from other factors such as continued reduced rainfall, it can impact severely. Recognising just what it is that helps foster resilience in individuals and, in turn, their communities, is therefore fundamental to the continued functioning of many rural settlements. In speaking with older farmers, in particular, their dogged

mentality and stoicism is seen as getting them through difficult circumstances; yet this too takes its toll. In interviewing local district nurses, the effect of prolonged stress is often mentioned and acknowledgement given to the 'layers of despair' with which many people live, and the impact of this on their daily functioning.

The capacity to accept the changes occurring in rural settlements, and the ability to embrace and utilise these changes to the advantage of the community, would seem to underpin aspects of the resilience of that community. Obviously, this takes time and has no clear pattern – resilience is a difficult and complex concept. However, research so far would seem to indicate that those communities better able to adapt and accept the changes occurring within and around them are often also better able to maintain their perspective during, and return to near normal functioning after, a major trauma such as bushfire.

Resilience as a result of perception is an area needing more research. Something as basic as underlying negativity within a community, perhaps stemming in part from entrenched ideas and the polarisation of attitudes, can gradually undermine a sense of community strength and purpose. Constant criticism of government agencies and organisations, though often valid, can wear down the most positive of individuals. The role of the propaganda machine during war is perhaps an extreme but effective example of the potential to unsettle individuals, laying the foundations for uncertainty and mistrust.

During a bushfire the importance of having a task or job to do is also acknowledged as being very important to encourage individuals to retain perspective and keep functioning effectively. Many interviewees spoke of their tasks during the fires and the sense of purpose which these gave to them, in addition to the physical and emotional support their efforts provided for the community at that time. This is widely recognised within disaster research and, as noted by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 'Instead of seeing themselves as victims, people tell themselves that they can influence what happens'.[12]

Local knowledge as a dynamic concept

There are some who lament the loss of local knowledge from within rural communities, who are saddened by the apparent demise of the old ways and alarmed that the accumulated wisdom acquired will be lost forever. While this is perfectly valid in some senses, it can also be argued that local knowledge is a dynamic rather than static concept and by recognising the dynamic nature of local knowledge, the capacity of this concept to contribute to the development of changing communities is acknowledged. Certainly enormous change is apparent – consider technical advances for example – and with that, many previously adequate methods and approaches to land management and rural lives have altered considerably. Aspects of this change can be seen as negative but on the whole - and particularly in relation to something like fire management - the advantages of progress, scientific research and development are both apparent and beneficial.

If local knowledge is seen as static, as somehow 'locked in', there is the danger that it is no longer current. Basic geographic understanding and knowledge of surrounding country, for example, alters with subdivision, climate change and resultant land use changes, older landholders selling up and so on. In addition, there is the danger that this important information is not seen as accessible to those new to the community but is somehow the province of 'locals' only, thereby restricting cooperation.

If, however, local knowledge about individuals, community and landscape is viewed as dynamic, the fostering of it within the community, its recognition as important but not restricted to a few, can complement the overall feeling of involvement and resilience within that community. To return to the definition, local knowledge can be information which is both first hand *and* passed on, observations that are useful and accessible to all. Obviously those with generations of experience within a community will have greater knowledge and depth to that knowledge but that is not to say that aspects of this information cannot be learnt by those newer to the district. A clear example of newcomers seeking to help, and becoming part of a community, is the joining of the local Fire Brigade. This is also where an exchange of information and knowledge is not only inclusive, but crucial.
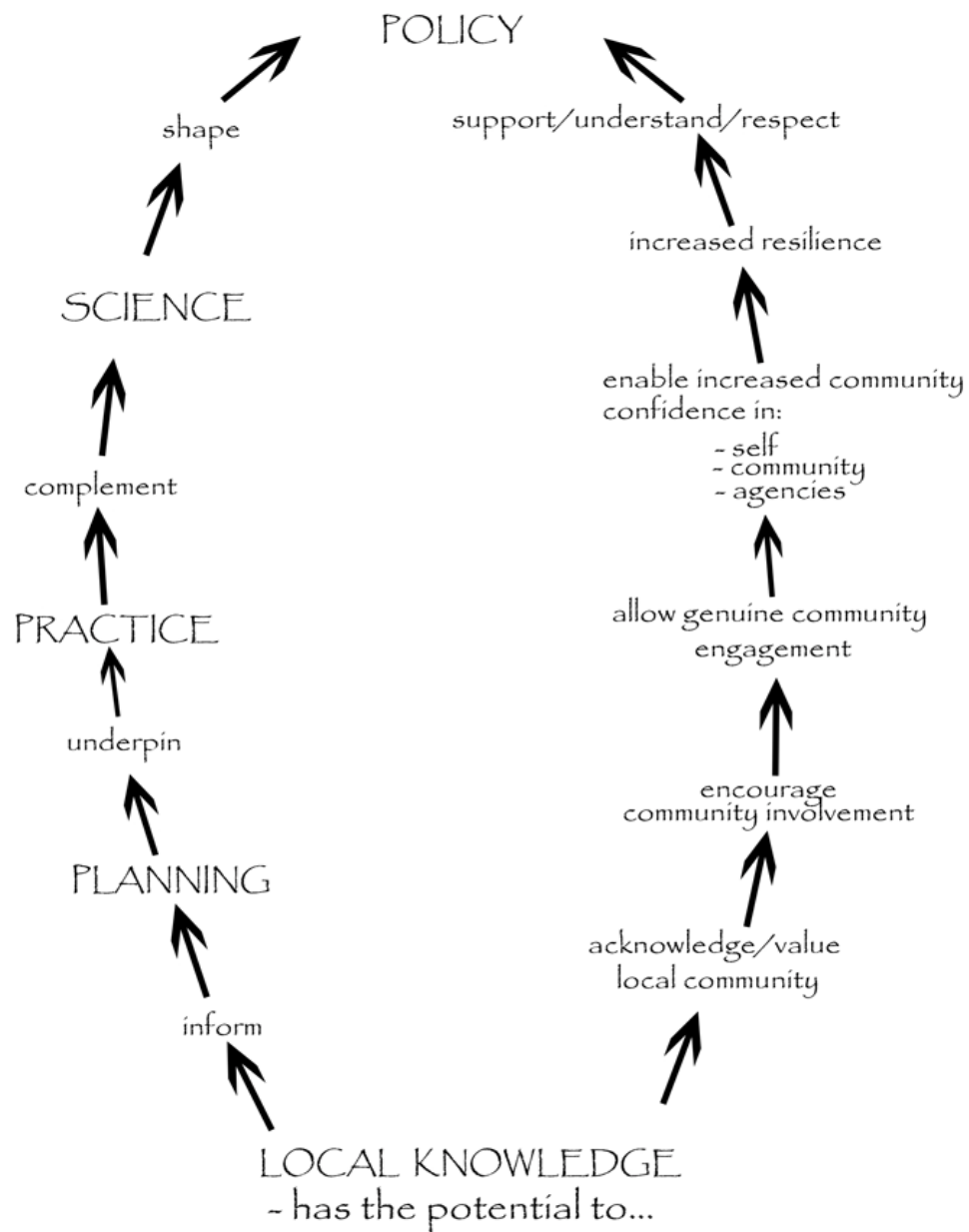
The concept of genuine community engagement

In exploring the concept of local knowledge and all that it entails, it becomes apparent that it is inherently complex, hard to grasp and isolate, and so rather tricky to apply. However, this concept is fundamental to genuine community engagement and is especially important when dealing with potentially disenfranchised rural communities.

Rural communities are heterogeneous, yet are often viewed as simplistic; perhaps even as examples of pastoral bliss. Rural life can and does provide all the richness and diversity required for some, but not for all. However judged, rural communities remain complex; genuine engagement with these communities can be very difficult. Many communities are under pressure from climate change and its impact on individuals and the landscape – prolonged drought/reduced rainfall, bushfires, late frosts, floods, reduced prices and an uncertain future. The layering of all these factors can be reflected in a similar layering of despair among some rural people – it is simply getting too hard, but is often impossible to 'pull out'. The stress caused can be compounded by the apparent relentlessness of it all. Engagement is very difficult.

Interviewing individuals and listening to focus groups I have heard many examples of misguided (or simply arrogant) approaches made to communities by agents of government departments, who show little capacity to sit quietly, listen and observe. Taking time and listening is the first necessary step in acknowledging the information, knowledge and wealth of experience held within rural communities. Such respect can be perceived as genuinely valueing the traditions and cultural strengths held within these communities, thus cultivating the beginnings of trust. It takes time to build rapport and even more time to establish reasons why this information is, or isn't, deemed useful to the purpose. My research with rural people in relation to fire management and their experiences indicates that what causes the most disquiet and rancour is not so much that higher officials from within fire agencies and government departments come in and 'take over' during an emergency, but more the way in which this is done. Local people cited examples of dismissal of input, arrogance and blatant rudeness. To alienate rural communities through discourtesy is hardly best practice.

The following model is an attempt to visually convey the complexity of just what local knowledge, its harnessing and application, has the potential to do. As noted previously, local knowledge is not without pitfalls and dangers – one must always proceed with caution - but the concept should be considered in the light of where it can take us in relation both to future fire management and solid, grounded community engagement.

POLICY

shape   support/understand/respect

increased resilience

SCIENCE

enable increased community
confidence in:
     - self
     - community
     - agencies

complement

PRACTICE

allow genuine community
engagement

underpin

PLANNING

encourage
community involvement

inform

acknowledge/value
local community

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE
- has the potential to...

Jennifer Indian 2007

Conclusion

The use of appropriately derived local knowledge can only be beneficial to future fire management whether in the explicit transfer and use of otherwise unknown or misinterpreted local geographical knowledge or through the more general fostering of

trust and cooperation between community and agencies. In times of emergency it is crucial that the confidence of locals in fire agencies and management is not compromised as this can quickly deteriorate into anxiety, uncertainty and, often, mistrust. Once this process begins, further longterm alienation and disquiet can occur.

Methods of feeding this information into the policy process needs further exploration. The use of local knowledge in fire management is both complex and controversial and, as with many aspects of community involvement and participation, it must be scrutinised thoroughly. Though initially very resource intensive, the accumulation and use of local knowledge should be acknowledged as a longterm investment which has the potential to aid all phases of fire management. Talking to locals in their own environment provides circumstances where people can feel comfortable – '…how citizens are invited to participate in disaster management is critical to the success of that participation'.[13] Local knowledge cannot be considered a silver bullet which can overcome all perceived problems within fire management and changing rural communities – but its complexity and usefulness is worthy of further research.

Local knowledge should also be considered for what it has to contribute to genuine engagement, particularly within disenfranchised rural communities which are experiencing other pressures. While it may be difficult to engage with these communities because of their changing nature and challenging circumstances, the wealth of tradition and experience within them needs recognition. The potentially dynamic nature of this experience should also be considered, and respect and time be given to harnessing information. Local knowledge is not a position within an organisation or government department, but a basic understanding and receptiveness – a willingness to establish relationships and to listen. If recognised and harnessed, local knowledge can become a tool of considerable use and importance. Respect and understanding of this concept, its potential applications and pitfalls, should be embedded within the workings and lexicon of emergency services and government departments.

In taking the time, providing the resources and being involved in the use of local knowledge, fire managers, emergency services and government departments alike are investing wisely, acknowledging the wealth of experience available and developing the necessary skills to ensure the reliability and effective application of this tool. No longer can the experience and tradition found within rural communities be held at arm's length – all levels of these organisations and agencies need to embrace this understanding, rub shoulders with those who have it and use it willingly and innovatively.

***Jenny Indian** has lived and worked in rural communities all of her life. Originally trained as a Landscape Architect she has worked in Planning, Landscape Architecture, tertiary teaching and research. She lives in north east Victoria where, particularly in 2003, her own community has been seriously impacted by bushfire.*

Jenny is currently researching the resilience of rural communities to bushfire, as part of the Highfire Project for RMIT and the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre.

[Aspects of this work have appeared in earlier published papers, including *The Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, December 2007.]

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