

UNIVERSITIES IN SOCIETY: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

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The role of universities in Australian society has rarely been tension-free. Societal demands have often pulled universities in one direction while academic values have been pulling in another. Various resolutions of these forces have defined three phases of university development, with a fourth foreshadowed.

Phase 1 started from mid-nineteenth century, when each state began to establish its own university, modelled on a vision of universities as they were believed to be in the Home Country. Standards both of financing and of scholarship varied considerably between states. Phase 2 was ushered in by Prime Minister Menzies when he commissioned the Murray Report, which brought universities under federal financing, giving them their own academic charter. Colleges of advanced education were later established in order to provide preparation for a range of professions. Phase 3 began in 1988 when Education Minister Dawkins merged the university and college sectors and re-introduced student fees. The Howard Government took this further by forcing universities to self-finance to an even greater extent, which resulted in the managerial-style universities of today.

In each of these three phases, the nature of universities and their function in society has been rather different. The current phase is problematic, in that it may be regarded as selling society short in some important respects. I examine how managerialism is affecting teaching and research, and outline where future universities might best be heading in order to provide for an informed, progressive and just society.

Phase 1: Australian universities under state control

The Universities of Sydney and Melbourne were established in the 1850s, roughly along Oxbridge lines with residential colleges, Adelaide followed in 1874, Tasmania in 1890,

Queensland in 1909 and Western Australia in 1911. These are today's 'sandstone universities', the oldest universities in each state and built in gothic style after their British models. However, each state had different ideas about what a university should be and its relationship to the community. Members of some university councils had strong feelings of ownership over 'their' university, how it should be run and what the academic staff should be doing. Research was not generally regarded as an essential ingredient of a university's activities and it was for this reason that what is now known as the CSIRO was founded in 1926.

I'll take case of the University of Tasmania as an example of where state-run universities could go wrong and why they needed to be changed. The membership of the University Council invariably comprised a mix of lawyers and local businessmen who had in common membership of the exclusive Tasmanian Club, that plush and oak-dark centre from which the affairs of Tasmania were conducted. The business community saw themselves as paying the academic pipers and accordingly they claimed the right to call the tune. The pipers disagreed. But as one councillor put it in a dispute with the academic staff in 1928, the University 'is a public utility' and should be governed accordingly.

Things came to a head in the 1950s. In October 1954, the Professor of Philosophy, Sydney Sparkes Orr, on behalf of several staff members, wrote an open letter to the Premier of Tasmania, Robert Cosgrove, and published it in the Hobart *Mercury*. The letter claimed *inter alia* that the physical conditions at the University were intolerable, and that the University Council and the Chancellor, Sir John Morris, interfered inappropriately in wholly academic matters. One particularly sore point was Council's over-riding Professorial Board on lowering the standard for matriculation. Orr's letter called for a 'searching and thorough inquiry' into the administration and the conditions prevailing at the University.

The staff got their inquiry: a Royal Commission that reported in May 1955. The report supported virtually all the staff complaints. The commissioners strongly criticised Chancellor Morris and Vice-Chancellor Torliev Hytten for their interventionist style and recommended that Council be reconstituted with fewer businessmen and lawyers, that Council should defer to the Professorial Board on academic matters, and that many procedures needed to be changed.

But instead of taking the advice of the commissioners, Vice-Chancellor Hytten drew up a hit-list of staff involved in the protest, with Orr's name heading the list. Hytten compiled a dossier of complaints against Orr, for example that Orr 'leered' at girls in his classes, that he had harassed a lecturer in his department, and moved to have Council sack Orr in December 1955. However, the Chancellor (who was also Chief Justice of the State) advised Hytten that this grab bag of grizzles gave insufficient grounds to sack Orr. But two months later, seemingly out of the blue, a local businessman claimed that Orr had seduced his daughter, a student of Orr's. After a farce of an internal inquiry, Orr was summarily dismissed, without the six months' salary that was contractually owed him.

Orr appealed to the Tasmanian Supreme Court for wrongful dismissal. Before the case was heard, the presiding judge was rumoured to have assured his fellow members of the Tasmanian Club (of which most of the University Council were also members): 'Don't worry. Orr's not going to win.' And neither did he.

The Orr Case caused a national and international furore. Orr's summary dismissal was widely seen as Council getting their own back for Orr's instigating the Royal Commission. The international academic community declared the Chair of Philosophy at Tasmania black, a ban that was lifted only when the University agreed to a settlement. In May 1966, Orr was awarded a lump sum of £16,000 (\$32,000); he died two months later of a heart condition.

Other universities had their own stories, if not quite so dramatic as the Orr Case. In short, the quality of any particular university in Phase 1 was largely dependent on the finances and priorities of individual state governments, and on the often idiosyncratic views of the city fathers on what 'their' university should be doing. Something had to be done to establish a quality university system across Australia. Accordingly, very soon after the Tasmanian Royal Commission and its unsavoury aftermath, Prime Minister Menzies commissioned the Murray Report to advise on the state of Australian universities.

Phase 2: Universities following the Murray Report

The Murray Report was released in 1957. It concluded that 'if the present situation is not to become catastrophic' immediate action should be taken to bring all universities under Commonwealth control and financing. The university sector should then have three main aims:

1. to provide for 'more highly educated people in all walks of life' but especially more university graduates.
2. to assert two central aims of universities: the education of graduates, and to conduct 'untrammelled' research to discover knowledge for its own sake.
3. to regard universities as the guardians of intellectual standards and of intellectual integrity in the community.

The Murray Report gave heart to academics, particularly in Tasmania. Indeed, Tasmania quickly cleaned up its act, putting in place new regulations especially to do with dismissal procedures that were to become a national model until the Dawkins attack on universities in 1988 (see below).

The sixties, following the Murray Report, saw a period of university expansion. New universities such as Monash, Macquarie, La Trobe, Flinders, and a little later James Cook,

Griffith, Deakin and Murdoch were established. Newcastle and Wollongong were granted autonomy from being colleges of the NSW University of Technology, which itself became the University of NSW. All these universities, along with the sandstone universities, were dedicated to teaching the traditional basic disciplines and to the pursuit of untrammelled research, the results of which academics were to publish by their writing and teaching. Academics had tenure and the freedom – indeed the duty – to speak out within their area of expertise as social critic. Professional preparation in these universities was usually limited to the traditional professions of law, medicine and engineering, with some universities specialising in areas of local concern, such as rural science and agricultural economics at the University of New England.

However, post-secondary education was needed for the full range of professions. This was a large and expensive task that the universities were not equipped to undertake. Accordingly, in 1967 Menzies commissioned the Martin Report, which proposed the introduction of colleges of advanced education (CAEs). CAEs were state owned and controlled instead of being federally funded and independent, as were the universities. CAEs were designed to complement universities, providing professional education as demand required for a wider variety of professions than universities alone could provide. They were frequently single purpose institutions such as teachers' and agricultural colleges broadened to become multipurpose, offering at first sub-degree awards of certificates and diplomas, in such professions as teaching, nursing, agriculture and pharmacy.

Although this binary system of CAEs and universities was meant to rationalise the higher education sector, CAEs soon began offering degrees, then postgraduate and doctoral awards in a few institutions such as the institutes of technology. CAE staff were generally not required to undertake research and were on lower pay scales than their university counterparts. Seeing themselves as second class citizens, they lobbied for equality with

universities. There was much animosity between the two sectors, especially where amalgamations between individual CAEs and universities had been mooted; university staff claimed that standards would suffer, while college staff accused the universities of elitism.

By the 1980s, the university sector was starting to get a bad press, often for good reason. Paid overseas study leave, before electronic conferencing was an option, was often vital for researchers to keep up to date in their fields and to carry out collaborative research with other international experts. While study leave technically had to be earned, many academics took leave on the flimsiest of grounds with nothing much to show for it when they returned to their home university; they got away with that because all too often accountability was slack. The long summer vacation was the time for academics to bring themselves up to date with developments in their field, to catch up on their research and publishing, and to prepare for the next year's teaching. But many did none of these things. The public perception grew that academics were lazy bludgers who took world tours at public expense.

Some universities had scandals of their own – those at Newcastle leading to a suggestion that its closure might well be considered.¹ One issue at Newcastle is interesting in that it not only echoes Tasmania's problems but foreshadows those of today. The Vice-Chancellor, Don George, and Deputy-Chairman of Senate, Michael Carter, thought they could avert amalgamation with Newcastle CAE by rationalising courses between the two institutions. In secret talks, to which the University's Faculty of Education was not privy, it was decided to trade the University's Diploma in Education for a handful of specialist Masters degrees for which the CAE was staffed whereas the University was not. The academic body, the University Senate, twice rejected the deal but the Council on the urging of Michael Carter (despite the fact that he was the Senate's representative on Council) over-rode Senate each time. Carter himself told Council: 'University councils over all the Western world are assuming more power, precisely because the Senates find it impossible to make the hard decisions.'

But councils assuming too much power was what went wrong in Tasmania forty years earlier and that had led to the Royal Commission there. This issue was to return full circle, for conflict between academics and lay governance is essentially at the bottom of many of our current problems.

Phase 3A: The Dawkins intervention

Newcastle was not the only university that appeared to be bucketing out of control. Don Watson remarks that by the eighties, alongside some brilliant intellectual effort, ‘a certain amount of equally well-paid Olympic lassitude’ had co-existed and had caught the public eye.² Labor Education Minister John Dawkins, with his newly acquired neoliberal glasses, thus had plenty of excuses for taking his axe from the woodshed and hacking into the higher education sector as he did in 1988.

The Dawkins reforms were drastic. Selected colleges of advanced education were forced to amalgamate with adjacent universities; these and the remaining colleges were all called universities, while the governance of these universities was restructured into the top-down management style of the colleges of advanced education. And to pay for this wholesale lateralization – not to say dumbing down – of higher education, Australian students had to pay substantial fees for the first time since the Whitlam years.

However there was rather more to these changes than the intervention of one control-happy minister of education. The Hawke-Keating Labor Government had just swung sharply to the right by joining Britain and the United States in their obsession with neoliberalism, a dogma that makes the market the ultimate decider on all major issues, including education. As UK Prime Minister Thatcher had ruled, education is a private good and so you should jolly well pay for it yourself. This changed the nature of the game. Universities soon morphed into shops selling a commodity called ‘knowledge’, the market deciding what particular parcels of

knowledge were most saleable, and hence what courses should be run and, the other side of that coin, what should be run down. Departments that trained people for jobs in high demand survived, and those that didn't were in trouble. Classics, languages, pure science and mathematics courses suffered badly, becoming virtually extinct in some universities or reduced to providing service courses for professional degrees, while hospitality and tourism, information technology, business and marketing either flourished or suffered a boom and bust cycle as demand fluctuated. Like politics itself, universities had become poll-driven. The idea advocated in the Murray Report that universities were the guardians and nurturers of the basic disciplines had all but gone.

Dawkins' transformation of the tertiary sector might have been brutal and nonconsultative but matters became even worse under the Howard Government. Academics were dismissed as 'elites' who were divorced from the 'real' world. Public funding of universities thirty years ago had been around 95 per cent: Howard saw it cut to below 40 per cent, one of the lowest figures in OECD countries. This is worse than it might seem for, unlike American and British universities that have a tradition of donations and endowments from grateful alumni, Australian universities have no such tradition. Consequently, they became seriously cash-strapped and milking international students was the only way many universities were able to stay afloat. Class sizes became grossly inflated following staff dismissals and redundancies. Casual and often inexperienced teachers filled the more glaring gaps in staffing courses – whether or not the gaps were in these teachers' expertise. Teaching quality was at an all-time low.

Universities had to find alternative sources of funding. More students meant more fees so with government encouragement, universities accepted a wider range of school leavers than previously, near-doubling their intake, to at least 40 per cent of school leavers and rising. Wider

ranges of professional and vocational courses had to be provided to cater for this broader student population.

In just a few years, the nature of the tertiary sector had changed drastically.

Phase 3B: Managerial Universities

In the next phase of university transformation, call it Phase 3B, the universities had settled into the demands of self-funding, having shifted from being publicly funded institutions to becoming businesses, very large and lucrative businesses in some cases. ‘Academic capitalism’, as two US writers have put it, had taken over our universities.³

The pressure to put fee-paying bums on seats means that universities have to sell themselves in a way they didn’t have to do before. For example, the *Weekend Australian* ‘Uni Guide’ (September 15-16, 2012) comprises ten snappy little articles, low on information and high on spin, such as ‘Snail male: why boys aren’t keeping up’, with folksy case studies that the bright eyed and bushy tailed prospective student might identify with. Universities advertise their own sets of ‘graduate attributes’, which students are assured they will possess upon graduation in order to appeal to potential employers.

Previously, the vice-chancellor was an academic, *primus inter pares*, the first amongst equals, and deans of faculties were elected by the academic staff from their own ranks. Decisions about teaching and what courses to provide were made by academics at department and faculty levels and ratified in an academic senate or a professorial board. That has now changed. Deans are appointed, not elected by their peers as previously, and are accountable to their superiors not to their peers. Senior administrators, who may come from a business as much as from an academic background, prepare mission statements and strategic plans; they determine what programmes and courses are to be run, and they design key performance indicators against which staff and resources are measured for ‘quality assurance’.

Quality assurance took front page with the 2008 Bradley Review of the higher education sector. This review led to the establishment of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), which requires documentary evidence that standards have been met, as outlined in three documents comprising over 70 daunting pages of management-speak. It is meant to provide industry and the community with assurances of graduate quality.⁴ The Australian Qualifications Framework sets out a 'taxonomy of learning outcomes' that attempts to define the criteria for learning outcomes for knowledge, skills and application of knowledge, for ten levels of postsecondary education: from certificates at level 1, through diploma, bachelors and masters, to doctoral level at level 10.⁵

These quality assurance procedures may seem appropriate in the business context but not, I fear, in the academic context where they are counter-productive. These key performance indicators address different domains, such as learning and teaching, research performance, university environment and engagement and, to quote one website, 'organisational sustainability and capability', which seems to mean anything the administration wants it to mean, such as forbidding academics from making public statements that might be seen as criticism of the institution or its administration. This undermines the important responsibility academics have – or used to have – for acting as social critic within their own areas of expertise.

Most academics today are not on tenure but on short-term contracts – and if they want their contracts renewed they had better be good little boys and girls in the eyes of administration. Measuring staff against key performance indicators can force academics to act in ways that they may see as contrary to their academic judgment. It also allows senior administrators to bully and harass their staff if they feel so inclined. As indeed some do: one university has a blog site devoted to examples of bullying put up by its victims.⁶ Richard Hil claims that continual assessment by line managers is demeaning and insulting: in no other profession are highly qualified experts treated as being so untrustworthy.⁷ Seventy five per cent of academics across

Australia are suffering psychological stress, as opposed to nineteen per cent in the general workforce, while job satisfaction amongst academics is much lower than it is in general.⁸

Quality assurance procedures distract academics and damage what they should be doing. Let me elaborate.

Teaching and research in Phase 3 universities

Typically, a teacher would face fifteen 15 class contact hours and more a week, on top of which is the time outside the classroom spent in assessing student work and in setting up compulsory blogs for student feedback and discussion: the latter alone can involve three and more hours a day. Academics may be working flat out for fifty hours a week, leaving little time or motivation for teachers to reflect on their teaching and to innovate. .

But there is an added complication. While in the eyes of the general public and of students, the purpose of most present day universities is teaching, and while the major source of funding comes from teaching, full-time appointments and promotions are largely determined by research productivity rather than by teaching quality. There is a major disconnect between the expectations of those from without the university that place teaching as the top priority and those from within the university that see research as the top priority. Understandably, then, all but the most dedicated teachers will devote their energy – what is left of it – to building their research profile in preference to improving their teaching. Thus, relentless measurement against key performance indicators relating to teaching creates conflict, stress and resentment amongst academics.

However, with students now paying big money, they expect to be taught well. Many institutions accordingly have teaching and learning centres to help teachers with their teaching and to help implement systems-wide approaches to teaching and assessment, such as outcomes-based teaching and learning. Unfortunately the term ‘outcomes’ is red rag to some

academic bulls. The problem is that ‘outcomes’ is a term used in two quite different ways: as belonging to quality assurance and as belonging to an effective design for teaching.

The Australian Qualifications Framework’s ‘taxonomy of learning outcomes’, intended for quality assurance purposes, provokes violent reactions from critics such as Donald Meyers and Richard Hil. Hil regards teaching to predetermined learning outcomes as ‘rigidification’ of teaching, ‘ensuring conformity to the prevailing order’.⁹ Hil’s observation of rigidity is well taken but here it surely applies to the institutional climate, not to a method of teaching. As noted below, in outcomes-based teaching proper, the teachers themselves design the intended learning outcomes for a course, either alone or as a member of a course or programme committee, and so it is up to them to decide the appropriate level and nature of the course outcomes. Teachers also decide what assessment tasks to use in order to assess how well those outcomes have been achieved. Such assessments should include open-ended tasks, such as portfolios, to allow for outcomes that the student thinks are appropriate and that the teacher may not have thought of. This is hardly ‘rigidification’.

The other quite different meaning of learning outcomes, then, is given by American psychologist Thomas Shuell, who wrote:¹⁰

If students are to learn desired outcomes in a reasonably effective manner, then the teacher’s fundamental task is to get students to engage in learning activities that are likely to result in their achieving those outcomes. . . . It is helpful to remember that what the student does is actually more important in determining what is learned than what the teacher does.

This use of ‘outcomes’ as denoting what and how students are to learn is paradigm-shifting about the way we think about teaching. This has nothing to do with managerialism. In this

view, both teacher and student should be quite clear about what it is that students are intended to learn, the teacher sets up a learning environment that helps the learner to achieve those intended outcomes, and the student's performance is then assessed to see how well those outcomes have been achieved. This is the essence of constructive alignment, an outcomes-based form of teaching and learning that has been successfully implemented in many parts of the world.¹¹ It is all about using selected teaching and assessment methods that help students achieve particular learning outcomes to satisfactory standards, not about assessing teachers or other forms of managerialism.

There is another problem with the quality assurance of teaching. It is retrospective: the horse has already bolted. Quality assurance tries to ensure that the standards reached in degree programmes meet externally defined outcomes or benchmarks. If they do not, the best that can evidently be done is to blame those involved and order them to do better next time.

Universities should instead be concerned with the quality *enhancement* of teaching. Outcomes-based teaching may be used to enhance learning in the classroom, as discussed above. If the results are not as good as is intended, reflective practice or action research may be used to pinpoint any problems. These problems are then addressed by a worked out theory of teaching in order to generate alternative strategies of teaching or of assessment. Quality enhancement is proactive, it is ongoing and formative. It addresses problems as they arise and helps teachers take steps to prevent them.

Clearly, universities don't need the retrospective and debilitating matter of quality assurance of teaching if they are already in the prospective business of quality enhancement. Quality enhancement ensures that what is being taught now will be taught better in future. All that time spent in online form-filling and in the other busywork that is associated with quality assurance procedures can be better spent in paying attention to the improvement of teaching through staff development and by putting in place quality enhancement procedures.

If only all those deans and line managers could see that.

Now let me turn to quality assurance and research. Credible research is described as being ‘disinterested’, meaning that it is to be carried out by a researcher who has no stake in the outcome. However, being judged against key performance indicators ensures that researchers do indeed have a stake on the outcome of their research. Their job might be on the line if they don’t produce at least one publication a year, according to one common key performance indicator. In the sciences, this is made easier with large team-based research that is published under several names. However, such pressures in the arts and humanities encourage ‘quickies’, pot-boilers that can be whacked out in a hurry in whatever journal that will accept an article that passes peer review. Such short term pressures also discourage academics from engaging in in-depth research that may take years to bring to fruition.¹²

Another important key indicator is the ability to obtain funding for research. Previously, research funding came predominantly from the public sector, but now funding comes from various sources: from grants from the Australian Research Council and the National Health and Medical Research Council, which today are more competitive than ever before, from income derived from teaching, and from the private sector.

However, when powerful corporations in particular commission research, it is difficult for the researcher to be disinterested in the outcome. Corporations do not commission research to be altruistic; they want a particular result. Academics hired to carry out contract research for large corporations are under pressure to produce the desired results if they want their funding to continue – and their employment contract to be renewed. Further, the results of that research are all too often ‘commercial-in-confidence’, which means that any patents arising from the research are owned by the company and academics may not publish that research when publication is an important currency by which an academic’s worth is assessed. Worse, what would otherwise be public knowledge is privatised. On the other hand, one of the most important roles of

universities is precisely to build upon public knowledge. Knowledge should belong to all of us for the benefit of humankind, not for the benefit of rich corporations to make yet more money.

Knowledge, and the research that produces it, also needs to be published so that it can be replicated, and either disconfirmed or confirmed and extended. If it is locked away we are all deprived. Traditionally academics were charged to seek out and publish ‘the truth’, as it arose from their research and scholarship. You can’t do that very effectively if the truth you find is an inconvenient one, and your job is on the line if you publish it – as well it may be.¹³ Academics were originally granted tenure precisely so that they could feel free to tell the truths that their research had uncovered, however inconvenient to governments or to powerful others that might be. Tenure also allowed academics to carry out long term research, the outcomes of which may take years to produce. But as today most academics are on contract, not tenured, there must be a deleterious effect on the production and propagation of research findings.

In short, the major flaw in today’s Phase 3 universities is that they are trying to do the academic task with a monetarist set of values that impede the proper conduct of that task.

Phase 3 universities and contemporary society

Universities of any era and in any location are components of the societal ecosystem in which they find themselves. They fulfil the functions that their society expects of them or else they disappear. Like it or not, neoliberalism is espoused by major political parties all over the Western world; taxes are minimized, public expenditure is minimized, services are handed over to the private sector – and let market forces prevail. This now applies to universities, as it does to banking, merchandising and mining.

In that light, universities aren’t doing a bad job. Public expenditure on universities has fallen from nearly total thirty years ago to less than half today, while participation rates are high and rising. The public cost per student is a fraction of what it was, yet standards in the workplace

of such professions as paramedical, hospitality and the arts, for example, are rising (or should be) as entrants to those professions now have university degrees whereas previously they did not. The quality of teaching and learning, that ten or so years ago could be so bad, is now recognised as a priority and is improving – but, it has to be said, in some universities much more than in others. Maybe those ubiquitous market forces will sort that one out in due course. In short, today's universities are part of our society and seem to be doing a reasonable job in preparing peoples for that society.

If only that was all there is to it.

Phase 4: Universities for the future

Predicting the nature of universities in the future is in effect trying to predict the future of society itself. Currently most Western societies, including our own, are run in accordance with the neoliberal economic model. However, just as Keynesian economics was a passing phase with its very different implications for society and for the place of universities in society, neoliberalism too will no doubt become a passing phase. It has to be. A society that unilaterally bases its existence on annual and increasing economic growth, using non-renewable resources, is inevitably facing extinction, Easter Island style: the law of the conservation of matter will see to that. Factor in effects on climate change as well and things get somewhat worse.¹⁴

It should be self-evident that we must move towards a society based on a different and hopefully fairer economic model, one that values quality of life, social justice and environmental sustainability, not one based on unsustainable exponential growth. However, achieving a new template for society will require a paradigm shift in our thinking. And that gives us a clue as to the nature of future universities.

According to John Ralston Saul the thinking behind neoliberal managerialism keeps western governments in holding mode, resisting change.¹⁵ The global financial crisis is an

example of the damage caused by such resistance. Neoliberal economics led to the banks grossly over-lending on unsecured mortgages. However those responsible for this reckless decision-making weren't punished but were charged with fixing the very problem that they themselves had created. Instead of government taking the pressure off the people whose mortgages were now unmanageable, hundreds of billions of dollars of taxpayers' money were used to prop up the failed private banks. It would have been far cheaper, and better for the banks themselves, Ralston Saul argues, if the government had taken over those mortgages. People would then have money to keep the economy going and the banks would have remained sustainable. But instead of questioning the economic theory that had led to the global financial crisis, the solution to the problem was more of the same – to everyone's detriment except the extremely wealthy few whose greed had created the problem.

That dangerous mix of closed-loop thinking and greed is also seen in resistance to accepting the science on climate change and what might be done to mitigate it is. Rustle up a few rogue scientists, some with links to the fossil fuel and mining industries, and demand in the best post-modern manner that they have equal time with the remaining 97 per cent of scientists, call carbon pricing 'a great big toxic tax', and the public becomes deeply confused. What three years ago people regarded as a top priority is now seen by many as just an unwanted tax on an issue on which there is no scientific consensus. And so we continue with the status quo, its dangers to our very planet being swept under the corporate carpet.

This is inimical to democracy, which requires a willingness to evaluate evidence, thoughtful debate, and openness to change. The universities of the Murray era, in their inefficient and bumbling way, had something like that noble end in sight with interest-driven research encouraged and academics acting as social critic, but these universities lost their direction sufficiently to be attacked and taken over by the neoliberal right. Academics in their social role were deliberately marginalised as effete latté sipping elites by no less than a recent

prime minister of Australia. But then powerbrokers need such mockery in order to preserve the status quo for their own ends. Universities have thus been rejigged. Now the order of the day is to tune graduate attributes to the demands of the corporate world and to put in place on-line strategies for cost-effectively achieving managerially imposed institutional outcomes. No radical ideas that question the status quo, please.

Taming the academic role in this way is to hobble universities, preventing them from doing what they can and ought to be doing, which is what Steven Schwartz, ex-Vice-Chancellor of Macquarie University, neatly sums up as the need for students to acquire ‘wisdom’.¹⁶ He proposes that final year students do a capstone course, called ‘Practical Wisdom’, which requires them to reflect in the broadest terms on what they have acquired over the whole of their university studies. One final year project is unlikely to change the way students see the world but getting them to think about how their studies fit into the big picture seems like a good start

But is fine tuning the existing system going to go far enough in helping students to think outside the square in a way such that, for example, they may challenge the self-serving dogmas created by the corporate world? Probably not, given that most universities have been shackled by tight managerial constraints to serve society-as-it-is. Certainly we need institutions that provide vocational and professional preparation focused on good teaching, with built-in quality enhancement through staff development – and time allowed for teachers to focus on teaching well – but that is not about the getting of wisdom either through the in-depth study of the humanities and the basic sciences or by engaging in the sort of research needed for creating a better world. While the Phase 2 university of the Murray Report was committed to ‘untrammelled research’ in the basic disciplines, the new institution would also need to promote new modes of thinking, and engaging in research across a variety of disciplines in order to tackle problems relating to the nature of society itself.

Let us call these ‘universities for wisdom’ or Phase 4 universities. They need to be unconstrained, which probably means that they need to be financed with no strings attached, no subservience to market forces in either teaching or research, and to be administered by academics themselves. The emphasis in all programmes, undergraduate and graduate, would be on ‘post-formal’ thinking, that is thinking at an integrative, systemic level that includes ethical considerations, not narrowly focused thinking converging on a specific area (a not so flippant suggestion is that a degree in Political Wisdom would be a prerequisite for all contenders for political office). Universities would concentrate also on interest-driven and problem-driven research within and across the disciplines, possibly with specifically focused think tanks.

However, as I write, another ball has suddenly dropped into play. On October 24, 2012, corporate giant Ernst & Young issued a report, *University of the Future*¹⁷, which concludes that the forty Australian universities delivering much the same service in much the same way is inefficient and unsustainable, especially given competition from cheap on-line courses from internationally famous universities. The smaller ‘second tier’ universities the report predicts will fall by the wayside unless they can become much more efficient by, for example, heavily cutting down on support staff which at the moment outnumber teaching and research staff. Universities have to become ‘much more integrated with industry’, at three different levels for which three different kinds of university are foreshadowed:

1. ‘Streamlined status quo’ universities that are essentially our present institutions but streamlined and focused on vocational preparation.
2. ‘Niche dominator’ universities, comprising some existing established universities and new ones specialised to target particular customers.
3. ‘Transformer’ universities comprising a new breed of private providers that will create new markets, new segments and new sources of economic value.

In other words, being ‘more integrated with industry’ means that the *entire* tertiary sector is redefined and nuanced to fit into the various levels of corporate need. Such a proposal is not surprising coming from a firm like Ernst & Young, but a corporate takeover of all postsecondary education in Australia is the last thing we need.

‘Streamlined status quo’ institutions sound reasonable: current universities indeed have far too many support staff and not enough academics, so that streamlining and focusing them as vocational teaching institutions first and foremost would be a good thing. That then leaves several research, teaching and consulting functions still to be carried out. The Ernst & Young report fills that gap with two more styles of university: ‘niche dominator’ institutions comprising well established conventional universities (presumably this would include the sandstone universities) that would specialise as demanded by ‘customers’ (sic); the ‘transformers’, the equivalent of what I am calling Phase 4 universities, that would be ‘a new breed of private providers’ geared entirely to creating ‘new markets’ and ‘economic value’. This astonishing take-over of tertiary education is based on a world view that sees the push for relentless economic growth as our top and only priority. Other values, such as social justice and environmental sustainability, are seen as even more unimportant in our educational system as they had been in Phase 3.

At least we seem to be agreeing that the Phase 3 experiment has failed. That provides a real opportunity for change, one that is far more imaginative and socially beneficial than designing a raft of corporate service providers that give us more of the same. We need to depart from the managerial university, however jazzed up and streamlined it might be, because that model is holding society in intellectual stasis, except in a narrow technological front. Universities in Australia are already called to serve only one particular societal end, an end that has been shaped by commercial values and procedures to such an extent that the *academic* task of universities has been diverted and blunted.

The answer is not a range of institutions geared to what the corporate world wants but a new kind of institution, largely publicly funded, that can undertake the sort of basic research that a healthy, sustainable and ever-changing society needs to carry out, research that may have no immediate or even foreseeable pay-off, and that makes the results of research publicly available, not hidden as commercial-in-confidence.

At the present time society itself is dangerously poised: we may tip one way into more corporate control and to ecological disaster, or another way into a newly structured, sustainable and just society. Which way we go depends on the way we can conceive our alternative futures and how we do that will depend crucially on how our education system liberalises our thinking. This is the role of the Phase 4 university, whatever specific shape that institution or range of institutions may take.

¹ David Clark, 'Taxpayers are supporting quantity, not quality academic institutions.' *The Australian Financial Review*, 3 November, 1986. See also <http://www.bmartin.cc/dissent/documents/sau/sau09rev.pdf>

² *The Monthly*, August 2102.

³ Slaughter S. & Leslie, L. L., *Academic capitalism: Politics, policies, and the entrepreneurial university*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

⁴ <http://www.teqsa.gov.au/>

⁵ <http://www.aqf.edu.au/>

⁶ <http://stop-b-uon.blogspot.com.au/>

⁷ Richard Hil, *Whackademia*, NewSouth Publishing, 2012, p. 88 ff.

⁸ Hil, op. cit.

⁹ Hil, op. cit. See also Donald Meyers, *Australian universities: A portrait of decline*, 2012.

www.australianuniversities.id.au/Australian_Universities-A_Portrait_of_Decline.pdf

¹⁰ Shuell, T., Cognitive conceptions of learning. *Review of Educational Research*, 56, 411- 36, 1986.

¹¹ Biggs, J. & Tang, C., *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. McGraw-Hill Education, 2012.

¹² This argument is brilliantly extended by Bruce MacFarlane in 'I'm an academic and I want to be proud of it', *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 4 October 2012.

¹³ <http://www.uow.edu.au/~bmartin/dissent/documents/sau/sau10.pdf>

¹⁴ In *Now or never: Why we need to act now for a sustainable future*, HarperCollins, 2009, Tim Flannery offers us a stark choice: either we combat climate change or we go under.

¹⁵ John Ralston Saul, 'The reinvention of the world - It's broke: How can we fix it?' The University of Tasmania, 27th August, 2012.

¹⁶ Schwartz, S. 'Restoring wisdom to universities.' 2010 Annual Lecture, Macquarie University.

<http://www.vc.mq.edu.au/speeches.php>

¹⁷ *University of the Future*,

[http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/University_of_the_future/\\$FILE/University_of_the_future_2012.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/University_of_the_future/$FILE/University_of_the_future_2012.pdf)