

EVALUATING THE PERFORMANCE OF
TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

Report of a Study Group at the Conference.

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At the conclusion of their discussions the group formulated the following recommendations and agreed that they be submitted to the Inquiry into Education and Training being conducted under the chairmanship of Professor B.R. Williams.

1. That the Committee of Inquiry discuss with the Tertiary Education Commission (and other appropriate bodies) how each decision making unit (State Boards/Departments, universities/colleges, faculties/schools) might be encouraged to establish a strategy for evaluation appropriate to the type of institutional performance for which it is responsible.
2. In this process the Tertiary Education Commission and the State agencies would need to consider a broad range of purposes for the whole system of education beyond secondary school. Those advocated by the Carnegie Commission (The Purposes and Performance of Higher Education in the United States, 1973) are set out for the purposes of illustration:
 - * The provision of opportunities for the intellectual, aesthetic, ethical, and skill development of individual students, and the provision of campus environments which can constructively assist students in their more general developmental growth.
 - * The advancement of human capability in society at large.
 - * The enlargement of educational justice for the postsecondary age group.
 - * The transmission and advancement of learning and wisdom.
 - * The critical evaluation of society - through individual thought and persuasion - for the sake of society's self-renewal.

Within the broad range of system purposes, individual sectors and institutions select different sub-sets with different emphases on particular purposes. We see post-school education in Australia as a system in the sense that the particular sub-sets of purposes for an individual institution should combine with those of other institutions to make appropriate provision for the full range of purposes at the local, State and national levels. For example, at the national level a particular specialised research orientation at a university might be justified by reference to research programmes

in other universities; and a single-purpose regional college may be appropriate if other colleges in the region complement its offerings. The scope of the system's purposes, the need to make best use of scarce resources, and in particular the potential conflicts between some of the purposes, preclude any individual institution attempting to fulfil all of the purposes of post-school education. Further, the particular demands of meeting a sub-set of purposes may require the development of what might be called 'sectoral or institutional protected enclaves'. Evaluation should, therefore, be against the relevant sub-set of purposes and not in terms of an overall formula applied to all sectors and institutions.

It would be most beneficial for the Committee to facilitate this process rather than to undertake itself the specification of institutions and sector purposes, and the measurement of performance.

3. Whatever strategy is adopted comprehensive and accurate data would need to be developed and maintained. We recommend attention to the following categories of information:
 - a) History and social environment of the institution, including an analysis of trends and constraints.
 - b) Purposes, goals, functions which have been recognised or selected by the institution, or imposed by the community.
 - c) Organizational structures, resources, policies and procedures.
 - d) Descriptions and statistics detailing the teaching, research and community service functions and the supporting administration.
 - e) Outcomes of these activities both short and long term.
 - f) Future development plans.
4. The centrality of outcomes in the evaluation process should be emphasized in view of education's tendency to evaluate itself on the basis of inputs, such as student to staff ratios or resources per student. For illustration and without consideration of specific application to Australian tertiary education the Committee should consider using a procedure similar to that developed and applied by NCHEMS. See the extracts from NCHEMS's Inventory of Outcome Variables and Measures.

5. In evaluating tertiary education an overemphasis on the "production" nature of the system in training students for employment should be avoided by recognizing the broad range of functions of educational institutions in society, such as providing for personal development and promoting equality of opportunity.
6. It is considered to be essential that procedures be set up to inform interested community groups and the community at large of the results of evaluation and consequent changes.
7. When considering how to encourage the development of evaluation strategies attention should be given to the need to employ a balanced combination of rational persuasion, financial incentives and participatory processes, and to the legitimacy of the defence of institutional traditions. In the process of persuasion it needs to be pointed out that if the state and institutional decision-making units do not make adequate provision for evaluation, the external and political processes of evaluation will still operate, possibly to the unjustified detriment of tertiary education. Further, it should be recognized that if feedback from evaluation is to be successfully used in modifying internal processes, the style and objectives of the evaluation process should be shaped by the participants. Financial incentives for these developments could relate to ear-marked grants or the employment or secondment of specialized resource personnel.
8. Careful consideration should be given to the negative aspects of evaluation such as the financial and social costs relating to the disruption of productive activities by diversion of resources to the evaluation, and to the possible misuse of findings. For these reasons, the purposes for which a decision-making unit adopts an evaluation strategy should be carefully examined in relation to who needs the information and how it can enter into the decision-making process.