

REPORT ON THE SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP MEETING

ON PROMOTION AND TENURE

(Reporter D.J. Magin)

Members of Special Interest Group:

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Scope

Recognition of the current reduction in growth in the tertiary education sector was seen by the special interest group as posing a number of vexing issues with respect to academic appointments and to changes in promotion and tenure prospects and policies.

The problems of coping with a 'steady state' - a relatively stable period of virtually no growth in staffing numbers - was seen as quite distinct from those problems arising from the aftermath of a relatively sudden end to a period of rapid growth of financial resources and academic personnel. The group agreed that the most pressing issues resulted from the termination of the expansionist phase in tertiary education, a phase in which steady growth had become assumed to be the normal condition.

In considering these issues and problems the group had studied previously circulated articles relevant to staffing and tenure (References 1, 2, 3, 4). Also two of the participants spoke to and made available information from their own studies in press at that time (References 5, 6). These have subsequently been published in Vestes Vol. 20, No. 3, 1977.

The SIG (Special Interest Group) limited its discussion to the academic and educational implications of the current 'slow down' and to the consequent need for changes in appointment and staffing policies. We excluded from direct consideration questions on the appropriateness or otherwise of the present cut-backs in funding. Also, questions relating to appointment, tenure and promotion were not discussed as industrial issues

as such. It was felt that these matters, e.g. maintenance of professional entitlements and career expectations, were more properly the province of staff associations. Rather, the SIG attempted to select and identify those aspects which are likely to affect the functioning of our tertiary institutions with respect to their academic and educational obligations.

Issues

The SIG saw as the major general problem that of maintaining flexibility and mobility within the staffing establishment of a tertiary institution. In the past this has been achieved through expansion, but in a 'no-growth' period other mechanisms need to be established to attain this. Flexibility and mobility in career paths were seen as necessary to:

- (i) Provide continuing opportunities for academic renewal - the entry of new recruits to the profession.
 - (ii) Cater for changing requirements of staff patterns to meet the changing needs of students and society.
 - (iii) Maintain morale and productivity amongst academic staff.
- Lack of promotion opportunities and insecurity now attending moves to other institutions are likely to diminish academics' commitment to research activity and excellence in teaching.

Fixed-term/contract appointments

In attempting to achieve flexibility in establishment provisions institutions have increasingly made use of short-term or non-renewable contract appointments. These have been seen as administratively desirable in that they:

- (i) Achieve a relatively quick and easily administered change in staffing levels.
- (ii) Do not impinge on the security and rights of existing permanent staff.
- (iii) Allow staffing levels to be reduced by effectively making no decisions at all, i.e. short-term appointments are simply permitted to terminate on maturity.

The SIG saw this approach as containing many undesirable features. These included:

- (i) Entrenchment of staff in present positions through reluctance to take appointments in Australian universities which did not provide opportunities for permanence.
- (ii) Insecurity and low morale of appointees.
- (iii) Potential for abuse with respect to termination of appointments.

The SIG did acknowledge the need in the current situation for institutions to develop further staff flexibility and suggested the following approaches as alternatives to contract appointments should be further explored:

- (i) Appointment of academic staff capable of teaching over a wide range of his/her discipline, thereby providing the capability of moving sideways whenever changing students enrolment patterns indicate such a need.
- (ii) Development of early retirement and part retirement schemes for senior academics to reduce the number of years spent in specific appointments.
- (iii) Development of employment liaison schemes with industry to provide for periods of employment in industry - especially in areas where there is current overstaffing.
- (iv) Encouragement of secondments to governments and overseas educational institutions as part of Australia's development assistance schemes.
- (v) Changes in demographic patterns of staff by initiating appointment policies which encourage a 'mix' of age and experience amongst appointees. This would result in a significant proportion of appointees being employed for relatively short periods before retirement. Such a policy may sometimes necessitate appointments at other than the lowest salary level.

Tenure

It was noted that institutions may seek to increase flexibility of staffing levels by attempting to restrict the numbers of staff in tenured positions. In reviewing overseas experience in this respect (Refs. 2, 3, 4), and considering our previous discussion it was argued that such moves were, generally, undesirable and would not achieve their purpose in providing for flexibility in managing staffing changes or reduction. It was noted earlier that erosion of tenure can produce an

opposite effect in that it encourages 'inflexibility' through the entrenchment of those already in permanent positions. Also, moves to erode tenure provisions are likely to have a miniscule effect on staffing level flexibility in the intermediate term.

Model

The SIG discussed at length a model for staff recruitment and retention provided by Richard Campbell. The model was accepted as most useful in identifying consequences of various recruitment and appointment policies. This has been subsequently published in Vestes (Vol. 20, No. 3) and an extract covering the points made at the SIG meeting is included below:

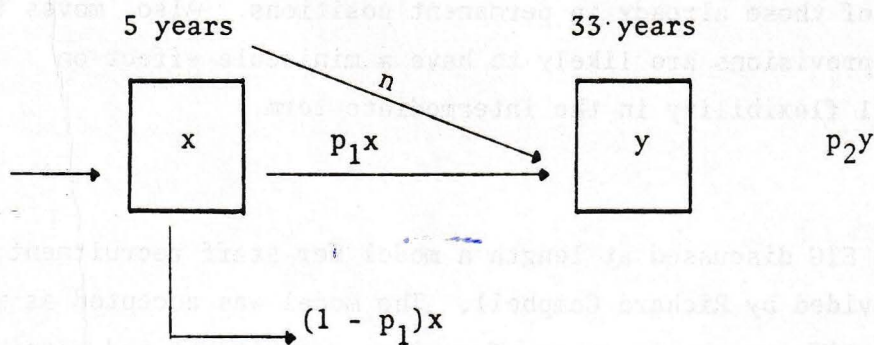
Before deciding on any policy on the tenure ratio, we should look into the long term and examine what an equilibrium situation would be like. Unless steps are taken to move towards such a situation, we will be locked into a see-saw in which the influx of new staff of the 60's and early 70's will be followed by a period of stagnation which will give way to another flood of new staff early next century and so on.

As a contribution towards the discussion of this complex issue, I present an equilibrium model of the A.N.U. in a no-growth situation. By that I mean a model in which the number of tenured academics with a given number of years of service does not change from year to year. (This model is, of course, ideal in a number of senses of that word, and has been adapted from John G. Kemeny: 'What every College President should know about Mathematics', American Mathematical Monthly, 1973, pp. 889-901.)

In the S.G.S. of A.N.U., limited term positions (tutorships, senior tutorships, and the relatively new lecturing fellowships) carry a normal maximum period of five years. For our model let there be x persons in this group, and y in the group of persons appointed to tenurable posts. If one takes the year of first appointment of each person in this second group and subtracts that from the year in which each retires at age 65 that provides another interesting statistic. The average number of years of service (excluding resignation) is 33.

Now following the standard Australian pattern, persons enter tenured posts either from outside the S.G.S. or from an untenured position (already three lecturing fellows have been so re-appointed). Let us say that n persons come in the former way. The number of untenured people given tenure will be a fraction of x . Let us call this fraction P_1 . That is, $n + P_1x$ are appointed to tenurable positions. Let us call the fraction of tenured people who leave by retirement or resignation P_2 .

This yields the following picture:



The Tenure ratio $t = \frac{y}{x + y}$ (1)

In an equilibrium situation, $p_2y = n + p_1x$ (2)

and $\frac{n}{y} \leq p_2$

Substituting (2) in (1) and simplifying yields:

$$t = \frac{p_1}{p_1 + p_2 - \frac{n}{y}} \quad (3)$$

Now, if staff retire after 33 years, in equilibrium 3% retire per annum. In addition, some - probably between 1% and 2% p.a. - will resign, I present solutions to equation (3) for both the pessimistic figure of 1% and the optimistic figure of 2%. In that equation, t , n and p_1 are the only variables over which the university has any real control, and then within limits.

Over the 5 year period in which all untenured posts are turned over, the pessimistic resignation rate of 1% p.a. will give the value of p_2 as .2, so $\frac{n}{y} \leq .2$. The optimistic value for p_2 will be .25.

Substituting these values in (3) yields the following results.

Assuming	Assuming resignation rate	
	1% p.a.	2% p.a.
$t = .8\frac{n}{y} = .1$ (i.e. half new tenured vacancies)	$p_1 = .4$	$p_1 = .6$
$t = .8\frac{n}{y} = .15$ (i.e. $\frac{3}{4}$ new tenured vacancies)	$p_1 = .2$	$p_1 = .4$
$t = .8\frac{n}{y} = .2$	$p_1 = 0$	$p_1 = .2$
$t = .6\frac{n}{y} = .1$	$p_1 = .15$	$p_1 = .225$

p_1 , of course, is the measure of the probability of a person in an untenured position being appointed to a tenured position. The table reveals that in an equilibrium situation, changing the tenure ratio from 80 : 20 to 60 : 40 lowers this probability by .25. Maintaining this probability at something better than .4 could well prove to be a necessary condition for attracting high quality staff to untenured positions.

The most desirable stages, I suggest, are those indicated on the top line, and the second if the resignation rate is 2% p.a. in these states, there is a turnover of $\frac{1}{5}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ of all tenured staff in a five year period (approx. 60 to 75 persons), the tenure ratio remains at 80 : 20, yet untenured staff have about a half chance of gaining tenure at the same time as a substantial number (27 to 40 over a 5 year period) of new staff are imported from outside S.G.S., all of which appears to optimise flexibility.

Having identified what seem to be the most desirable forms of a 'steady state' situation, the hard question is: how best to move from our present freeze-following-expansion state? One obvious move is to try to encourage present staff to retire earlier, especially in the trough years 1976-1991. This is discussed in the next section. Another - dare one mention such a 'non-academic' consideration! - would be to avoid appointing to tenured positions persons aged now between 32 and 43.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, consideration of the model in the light of the actual retirement pattern at A.N.U. also suggests that we should keep the present tenure ratio of 80 : 20, filling as many tenured vacancies as finance allows, provided that the new appointees are now either over 43 or under 32 in age. Our problem now is not one of static staff; quite the contrary, in the past 5 year period 1972-76 we have appointed about 90 people to continuing positions. Our future flexibility problems are a function of the indigestibility of such a large intake. Whatever the financial attractiveness of replacing senior lecturers and readers by tutors might be, in general to attain an equilibrium state they should be replaced by young lecturers.

The upshot of this investigation is that, if it continues to be held that tenure is itself academically (as distinct from industrially) desirable for as many academics as possible, then the present 80 : 20 tenure ratio should be maintained in the interests of future flexibility during the forthcoming tight period. The continued intellectual vitality of Australian universities in the long term could well depend on each taking deliberate steps to move towards such an equilibrium staffing pattern.

After discussion the SIG saw many of their earlier suggestions as being generally consistent with the implications of the Campbell model for optimizing flexibility in the allocation of academic manpower resources. Although there was some disagreement on the optimal level of the 'tenure ratio' it was generally agreed that moves towards reducing the average number of years spent in both non-tenured and tenured positions ('X' and 'Y' in the model) are likely to produce more effective means of flexibility and mobility than would result from simply measuring the numbers of staff on fixed-term non-renewable appointments.

Summary

In reviewing the issues discussed at our meetings, the following general principles were agreed to:

- (i) There is an urgent need for universities to develop guidelines relating to recruitment and tenure policy which take account of the educational and academic consequences of such decisions.
- (ii) A number of alternatives to the use of short-term and fixed term appointments exist which can better serve universities in maintaining flexibility and academic renewal in a period of non-growth.
- (iii) Decisions relating to reductions in staffing levels or revisions to appointment and promotion procedures should be completely 'open' and should involve the full participation of the academic staff.
- (iv) Changes in staffing policy and academic mobility are now evident. The recognition that such changes have implications for the future academic and educational vitality of tertiary institutions makes urgent the need for further investigations, debate and participation of the academic community with respect to staffing policy.

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