

Innovative Research Universities Australia

Response to Issues Paper

Building University Diversity –
Future approval and accreditation
processes for Australian higher education

April 2005

INNOVATIVE **R**ESEARCH **U**NIVERSITIES **AUSTRALIA**

Flinders University • Griffith University • La Trobe University
Macquarie University • Murdoch University • The University of Newcastle

Building University Diversity – Future approval and accreditation processes for Australian higher education

Response from the Innovative Research Universities Australia April 2005

The IRUA Position on Building University Diversity

- The position of the IRUA universities with respect to their own status as universities is clear. Since the outset, members have played a transformational role, performing innovative and practical research, and providing equitable access to high quality university education. Our universities have linked research, scholarship, learning and teaching activity with a strong culture of community engagement and outreach where the needs of individuals, communities, commerce, industry and government inform the nature of our teaching and research.
- Society has high expectations of modern universities. They are increasingly called upon to apply research and scholarship to assist communities in dealing with cultural, commercial, educational, environmental, ethical, health, social, scientific and technological issues. New universities, public or private, research-intensive or specialist teaching, must be required to play this transformational role.
- National Protocols should therefore reflect the full range and character of existing universities and encourage new entrants to choose a model and associated mission based on the range of needs of individual stakeholders and the wider community.
- There is a sound case for modification of the National Protocols to recognise the diversity that already exists and to take full account of the future needs of society.
- Modifications to the National Protocols alone are unlikely to result in significant change in the absence of policy drivers and funding mechanisms that recognise and reward the full range of activities undertaken by universities. Current policy and funding arrangements inhibit successful repositioning and encourage universities to gravitate toward a particular model in which, over time, they become more comprehensive in their offerings rather than specialised.
- Introduction of the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund and a Research Quality Framework will assist in promoting diversity across the Australian university system.
- A Community Engagement, Outreach and Regional Development Fund would be a welcome addition.
- The Australian university system has an outstanding international reputation and will not benefit from the introduction of lesser quality universities that present a threat to the quality of Australian higher education and to a \$5 billion per year export market. New universities should be required to adhere to the same high standards and be subject to the same quality audit processes as existing universities.
- The IRUA urges the preservation of the university title and recommends adoption of titles such as College or Institute, with or without the University prefix, for an aspiring university for a minimum five year provisional approval period, and until such time as they can offer three or more fields of study, all with bachelors programs and with masters and doctoral programs in at least one of those fields.
- New universities might also be required to link up with existing Australian universities to access and utilise their knowledge, to assist with the discharge of their community engagement and outreach function, and become feeders into higher degree programs.
- In order to avoid the unhelpful ranking of institutions that have very different missions, a Carnegie-style Classification Scheme should be considered whereby our higher education institutions would be grouped according to characteristics such as size and setting, mission, course and student profile, research activity, and community engagement and outreach. The aim of such a typology would be to better inform our stakeholders about the diversity of choice. A National workshop should be convened to consider such a scheme.
- Specific changes to the National Protocols are contained in the *Attachment*. The intent of the recommended changes is to achieve more flexible National Protocols that recognise existing and future diversity while demanding outstanding quality before an institution can be accorded university status.

Diversity and Equality

The six universities of the IRUA have, since their foundation in the 1960s and early 1970s, been deeply committed to the principle of diversity – deliberately developing ways of making themselves distinctive by embracing innovative approaches to teaching, research and community engagement, adopting alternative organisational structures, and actively recruiting students from more diverse backgrounds than are typically found in the longer-established universities.

Diversity within higher education systems has gained renewed momentum with the advent of mass higher education, and governments worldwide are recognising the transformational role of universities.

The IRUA therefore appreciates the attention given by the current Government to diversity. For the purpose of this submission, the IRUA has examined diversity in two main forms:

1. within institutions themselves; and
2. across the higher education system.

The former can be more easily pursued by larger institutions which can sustain a broader spectrum of research and educational programs, simultaneously catering to local and regional needs, responding to the national agenda, and playing an international role. Diversification across an entire higher education system presents a greater challenge and will not simply be achieved by revising accreditation and approval protocols. Nor will it be achieved through the introduction of new types of specialised institutions into the mix without first assessing their ability to play a transformational role in the broader community that is distinct from the role played by existing universities.

In the USA, diversification is a direct consequence of a deregulated higher education environment whereas in the more regulated environments of Europe, UK, and Australia a culture of equality or ‘sameness’ in the provision of higher education has prevailed.

Recognition of the need for change is strong, even within the ranks of the so-called ‘elite’ universities. In a position paper published in March 2005, the influential League of European Research Universities (LERU) states that:

“the global setting demands much stronger competitiveness than currently exists in Europe, and it demands strong political will to implement drivers that maintain diversity. It is an issue both for national governments and the EU in creating mechanisms that will maintain rather than diminish competitive functional diversity.”

The LERU position paper acknowledges that policy and funding mechanisms drive diversity, not protocols. However protocols should at least reflect the existing situation. In the Australian context, the fact that approximately one-half of Australian universities are teaching-intensive is not recognised. It has taken almost two decades to discard the illusion that a former college will be immediately transformed into a university simply by a change of title.

There is a sound case for modifying the National Protocols to recognise the diversity that currently exists. There is however little prospect of the much-debated ‘teaching-only’ institutions being capable of discharging the larger role of universities through changing the Protocols to create a new set of universities. This will not occur without simultaneous changes to other drivers of behaviour that currently create barriers to diversity.

The Modern University

A defining characteristic of the modern university is its ability to apply research and scholarship to assist communities in dealing with cultural, commercial, educational, environmental, ethical, health, social, scientific and technological issues. This needs to be present irrespective of its status as research-intensive or teaching-intensive.

There is widespread recognition that universities are finding it harder than ever before to perform their diverse roles. A higher education system is needed which maintains a set of universal university attributes, and yet which rewards universities for achieving excellence in the pursuit of a distinctive mission.

National Protocols should therefore reflect the full range and character of existing universities and encourage new entrants to choose a model and associated mission based on the needs of both individual stakeholders and the wider community. The IRUA therefore supports a revision of the National Protocols, provided that any new model calls upon higher education providers who seek the status of an Australian university to fully contribute in this way.

The IRUA is also in favour of the introduction of a preamble to Part One of the Protocols to define ‘university’ and advises against relying solely on quantitative indicators such as size and field of study as this will simply discourage diversity and reinforce an Australian university “mould”.

Barriers to Diversity

Modifications to the National Protocols alone are unlikely to result in significant change in the absence of policy drivers and funding mechanisms that recognise and reward the full range of activities undertaken by universities. Current policy and funding arrangements inhibit successful repositioning and encourage universities to gravitate towards a particular model in which, over time, they become more comprehensive in their offerings rather than specialised.

Research into the Australian context by Professor Simon Marginson (2002) suggests that “current policy and funding arrangements as well as the practices of universities themselves inhibit significant repositioning”.

Current funding arrangements encourage universities to pursue larger rewards by becoming more comprehensive in their offerings. The spread of legal programs across the system is one such example, as is the effect of the research quantum and research block funding mechanism in producing uniform research management strategies. These rewards for sameness restrict the degree of differentiation in university missions, learning and teaching styles, and research management strategies. Therefore to encourage diversity rewards for difference need to be considered alongside any changes to the National Protocols.

The introduction of a Learning and Teaching Performance Fund and a Research Quality Framework will assist in promoting diversity across the Australian university system. A Community Engagement, Outreach and Regional Development Fund would be a welcome addition. However, these additional schemes need to be significantly resourced in order to motivate change.

Threats, Opportunities and Solutions

The Australian university system has an outstanding international reputation and will not benefit from the introduction of lesser quality universities that present a threat to the quality of Australian higher education and to a \$5 billion per year export market. For this reason, new universities should be required to adhere to the same standards and be subject to the same quality audit processes as existing universities.

The IRUA urges the preservation of the university title and recommends adoption of titles such as College or Institute, with or without a University prefix, for an aspiring university for a minimum five year provisional approval period, and until such

time as they can offer three or more fields of study, all with bachelors programs and with masters and doctoral programs in at least one of those fields.

New universities might also be required to link up with existing Australian universities to access and utilise their knowledge, to assist with the discharge of their community engagement and outreach function, and to become feeders into higher degree programs.

Much has been made of the prospect of highly competitive, teaching-only universities entering the Australian market should the National Protocols be amended to permit their access. According to Davis (2005), the more likely scenario is that any new entrants will be existing local private providers, mainly of undergraduate qualifications, who may even choose to align with a prestigious public provider. It is also likely that new providers will remain as specialised institutions filling niche markets not occupied by existing public providers. It is debatable as to whether these institutions will even view themselves as capable of discharging the responsibilities of a university and whether they will withstand the scrutiny of both the Australian and international markets which have a clear impression of what an Australian university entails.

On the other hand, large public providers are also faced with management issues such as growing demand and public expectations, uneconomic programs and unpopular courses which could perhaps be delivered more efficiently by small, nimble institutions with or without university status. The opportunity exists for these colleges and institutes to become affiliated with public providers benefiting from the influence of university research and knowledge, as well as rigorous academic standards, and possibly awarding university degrees through a licence arrangement.

A major problem that could emerge should the National Protocols be amended to allow the creation of single-discipline universities is the secession from existing universities of smaller entities that carry strong brand names and which can operate efficiently and profitably in their own right. Prime candidates for such action might be incorporated schools of business and law which benefit from low operational costs, compared to medical schools for instance. The IRUA proposes two safeguards to prevent this where there is not a sound rationale for doing so:

- Introduction of a National Interest requirement before such approval will be granted; and

- A restriction on the title given to any single discipline provider such that they may only be classed as a College or Institute (with or without the University prefix).

A Classification Scheme for Australian Universities

The proliferation of rankings, usually based on research indicators, presents worrying signs for universities striving to be different, to policy-makers attempting to introduce genuine diversity, and most of all to university stakeholders wanting to make informed choices.

In order to avoid the unhelpful and divisive ranking of institutions that have very different missions, the IRUA advocates the consideration of a classification scheme for Australian universities. Classification is not the same as ranking – the purpose of classification is to categorise institutions to enable a better understanding of differences.

The Issues Paper discusses the Carnegie Classification which was established in 1973. The Carnegie Institute is currently in the process of revising the scheme in order to prevent misuse, especially for marketing purposes, by institutions seeking to portray the classification as a ranking scheme. Dr Alex McCormack of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (the Senior Scholar responsible for the Classification revisions) has advised the IRUA that the new on-line system due for release later in 2005 will be more flexible, permitting institutions to be grouped in several ways, in recognition of the fact that a single classification scheme can conceal the many ways that institutions resemble or differ from one another. The various new Carnegie categories include:

- Size and setting;
- Research activity;
- Undergraduate education;
- Graduate education;
- Student profile; and
- Outreach and community engagement.

The IRUA recommends that a national workshop be convened to consider the desirability and feasibility of an Australian University Classification Scheme. This Scheme would allow universities to be grouped according to Carnegie-style characteristics. The aim of such a typology would be to better inform our stakeholders about the diverse choice as well as the strengths and ‘fitness for purpose’ of each university.

Recommended Changes to the National Protocols

Specific changes to the National Protocols are contained in the *Attachment*. The intent of the recommend changes is to achieve more flexible National Protocols that recognise existing and future diversity while demanding outstanding quality before an institution can be accorded university status.

References

Altbach, P.G., *Differentiation Requires Definition: The need for classification in complex academic systems*, *International Higher Education*, Winter 2002.

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Marginson, S., *Enhancing Diversity in Australian Higher Education*, Discussion Documents, University of Western Australia, 2002.

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Recommended Changes to the National Protocols

A Preamble to Part One of the National Protocols

- Recommendation 1 That a preamble to the National Protocols be developed in consultation with the university sector to define the title 'university'. The definition must require that a university:
- offers a range of academic programs (refer recommendation 3) some of which will be higher degrees by research;
 - conducts research, at least in the areas in which it offers higher degrees by research;
 - creates a culture of scholarship ensuring that all staff (research-active, teaching-only and non-permanent) are suitably qualified and well informed of current advances in their field; and
 - promote a culture of community engagement and outreach.

Protocol 1 - Criteria and Processes for Recognition of Universities

- Recommendation 2 That the criterion for research in Protocol 1 be revised as (deletion indicated by ~~strike through~~, additions shown in *italics*):

A culture of sustained scholarship extending from that which informs inquiry and ~~basic~~ teaching and learning, to the creation of new knowledge through research and original creative endeavour, *or active dissemination of advanced knowledge into the wider community through a systematic process of community engagement and outreach.*

- Recommendation 3 That an additional criterion for approval of proposed new universities be included as follows:

Any proposed new university, whether assessment is based on an existing institution or on a plan, will only be accredited to operate for a minimum five year provisional approval period using the title 'College' or 'Institute'.¹ The responsible accrediting body may grant the title of university following the provisional approval period. A college or institute will not be granted full university status unless it offers at least three fields of study, all with bachelors programs and with masters and doctoral programs in at least one of those fields.

This recommendation reflects the Guthrie Report, recommendation 7, with several additions to stipulate the minimum period for provisional accreditation and to leave open the question of the use of 'university' in the title until such time as a suitable definition of 'university' is arrived at in the preamble to the National Protocols.

- Recommendation 4 That clause 1.20 be replaced as follows:

A College or Institute should demonstrate external input to provide academic, administrative and quality assurance guidance and such input should be provided by at least one existing Australian university.

¹ In Recommendations 3 and 4, use of the words 'college' or 'institute' can be understood to include – 'with or without the University prefix'.

Recommendation 5 That an additional 'national interest' clause be introduced:

The responsible accrediting body must be satisfied that the National Interest is served by the approval and accreditation of any new university, university college or university institute. Approval is unlikely to be granted for an organisational entity already operating under the auspices of an existing university,² at the time of application unless it can be clearly demonstrated that such an action is in the National Interest.

Recommendation 6 That recommendations 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 15 from the Guthrie report be included within the National Protocols (Protocol 1).

Protocol 2 – Overseas Higher Education Institutions Seeking to Operate in Australia

Recommendation 7 The IRUA recommends that 'operating in Australia' be defined in a preamble to Protocol 2, enabling better recognition of the activities of transnational providers. The criteria proposed in Guthrie Report recommendation 23 are sufficient.

Recommendation 8 That recommendation 17 from the Guthrie Report be considered for inclusion within the National Protocols (Protocol 2). Drawing from the Guthrie Report, recommendation 13, the IRUA proposes that:

An audit by AUQA shall be held in the penultimate year of the provisional period prior to the jurisdictional consideration of re-accreditation.

Upon gaining full university status, any university would then undergo quality audits conducted by AUQA on the same basis as existing universities.

Recommended Changes to the Implementation of the National Protocols

The IRUA also supports 'in-principle' several recommendations put forward by the Guthrie Report concerning the implementation of the National Protocols:

Guthrie Recommendation Numbers

Recommendation 1 That National Protocols be implemented consistently across jurisdictions.

Recommendation 2 Conduct of an audit of accreditation agencies in all jurisdictions to report on the level of national consistency.

Recommendation 19 Distinct and separate processes for the accreditation of HE and VET awards.

Recommendation 20 Mutual recognition of courses already approved in another jurisdiction.

The IRUA supports the following Guthrie recommendation with some qualifications:

Recommendation 4 *That a National Register of assessment panel members for Protocol 1 be established including the possibility of members drawn from overseas.*

The IRUA does not necessarily support the part of Guthrie recommendation 4 which suggests that AUQA might be the host, or that assessment panel members would automatically be drawn from the commercial sector.

² This also includes cases where the university is the sole or majority shareholder.