Book Reviews

Harman (Grant) and Meek (V. Lynn) (eds.) *Institutional Amalgamations in Higher Education Process and Outcome in Five Countries*. Department of Administrative and Higher Education Studies, University of New England, 1988, 237 p. (A\$20.00) ISBN 0-85834-758

Toombs (William) and Harman (Grant) (eds.) *Higher Education and Social Goals in Australia and New Zealand. A Conference Summary*. Department of Administrative and Higher Education Studies, University of New England, 1988, 230 p. (A\$20.00) ISBN 0-85834-786-5

As we approach the 1990s, the ends and means of higher education in the broad sense of post-secondary training and advanced research are up for a thorough reconsideration in the advanced market economies. Gone is the steady state that higher education moved into in the mid-1970s, following the crisis in academia around 1970. Again, profound issues about the role and structure of higher education institutions are raised as in the 1960s, but now the policy context is an entirely different one.

Two interesting volumes on the present state of higher education in Australia and New Zealand testify about the new debate on universities and colleges. They bring together various kinds of materials, presented at major conferences, about ongoing trends in higher education in Australia and New Zealand that have international relevance.

The crisis of the 1960s was followed by institutional consolidation in the 1970s and a return to normality in the relationship between the state and higher education institutions. The ambitious higher education policies initiated as a response to the student challenge of established procedures and status distinctions were either brought to rapid completion or abandoned. After institutional crisis and reform, there followed a period of conservative policy-making, leaving the higher education institutions enough space to revitalize themselves. There are now new trends of development within higher education due to four main factors:

1. The central role of higher education in the information society: each and everyone, not least the governments and business, realize that the revolution in information technology will provide higher education institutions with an edge when it comes to planning for the future. Universities and colleges are being transformed willy nilly into crucial centres for storing, transmitting and creating new information that is vital for the development of the local and regional environment. Increasingly, higher education is looked upon as a national asset that is important for the future manpower needs of a country.
2. The inadequate public funding of universities and colleges: the involvement of government in the operations of higher education institutions is being reduced, partly reflecting the problems of government funding keeping up with the rate of inflation, and partly because of the new awareness of an institutional identity at universities and colleges. More and more, universities and colleges take on new initiatives in securing funding outside the state budget.
3. The emphasis on efficiency, productivity and concrete economic results: the traditional values of academia — a liberal arts training and basic research — are questioned due to lack of immediate relevance and involvement in the promotion of mundane social objectives. Thus, enrolment in courses orientated towards science, engineering, technology and business studies is given priority.
4. Concern about equity: at the same time that the contribution of universities and colleges to the achievement of social goals is underlined, the obligations of higher education institutions to

the variety of student demand are emphasized. Thus, measures have to be taken in relation to demands for affirmative action as well as distant training.

The policy response on the part of government to these new trends will differ from one country to another, as will the institutional mechanism of adaptation at local level. However, they do set a new climate for higher education institutions and higher education policy-making. The main outcomes of these forces are:

1. more institutional autonomy or decentralization;
2. a secular movement from academic excellence towards the social or practical relevance of universities and colleges;
3. more diversification within the national system of higher education.

How these various developments combine in a country depends, again, on the cultural and political setting.

Here, it is most interesting to compare the experiences of the new reforms in Australia and New Zealand with the gloomy predicament of higher education in their model country, Great Britain. Whereas, so far, Thatcherism has meant only more frugality in the universities and polytechnics, the new steps on both national and local levels in Australia are seen as a positive challenge to increase institutional salience and as an opportunity to amalgamate small institutions into larger and more diversified units. What accounts for the differences between England and Australia is the awareness among policy makers and university people that a strengthening, in combination with a reorientation of the system of higher education, is a *sine qua non* for the successful development of the future Australian society. Both volumes report on the new national policies and institutional responses — their hopes, fortunes and failures. Several of the edited articles provide insights into the difficulties in implementing policies and how sluggish institutional adaptation may be. But there are also successful cases, in particular with regard to the amalgamation of small institutions into larger ones, enhancing the diversification of the major institutions. Since these reforms are only at a first policy stage, one may hope that there will be a third volume that reports on what followed after these introductory steps.

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