

# PREFACE

---

Over the centuries, the university has had to live in, and adapt to, many human environments – political, economic, social, cultural. It has moulded many and, in its turn, has been shaped by them and by those successive upheavals that have brought mankind from the depths of feudalism to a post-industrial society. The university is, as Clark Kerr has pointed out, one of the few social institutions to have survived those tumultuous times and, in surviving, stands as a symbol of continuity in the midst of change. If one were to equate influence with sheer numbers – which is not always advisable – clearly the university has never been more influential than it is at present. And few countries which have claim to the status of a Nation-State are bereft of this instrument of higher learning, of highly skilled manpower and rationality.

If the university has often sought to protect the sanctity of its own inner environment, against kings and conquerors and petty tyrants all, it has all too often acquiesced, where it has not been in the forefront, in subduing the natural environment. Taming the forces of nature was *the* symbol of nineteenth century achievement and the university contributed in no small manner to this undertaking in the development of science, the application of technology and the transmission of those values which drove society along the highway to material progress.

Today, our views on the place of the human species in the natural environment are going through major reappraisal. Some of the planet's resources may be renewable with careful husbandry and a more modest ambition in their usage. Others may not. Though we no longer equate the *summum bonum* of human enterprise with the driving of railways across continents, we remain wedded to what are still remarkably similar ethics expressed in the form of growth rates of GNP, rises in *per capita* income and all the apparatus of economism which would have us believe that it provides a legitimate and surrogate measure of human happiness.

If we are condemned in the midst of our billowing filth to consider how we may move towards sustainable economic development, what should be the role of the university? As Dr Howard Clark, President of Dalhousie University and host to the Halifax Conference in December 1991, pointed out in his address of welcome, '...sustainable development challenges the very educational mission of the university and forces us to re-examine the basic precepts on which virtually every discipline within the university is taught'.

Clearly, as the one university organization that has a planetary reach, IAU is highly sensitive to an issue which, by its nature, affects all its members and, by extension, all universities across the globe. In this year of the Earth Summit, scheduled to be held in Brazil in June, *Higher Education Policy* is committed to placing this matter firmly before the attention of its members. Our purpose is to widen the debate among universities, which our Canadian hosts launched.

*Higher Education Policy* is especially happy to be able to invite Ivan Head, Professor of Law and Political Science at the University of British Columbia, who presided at the Halifax Conference, to edit this issue.

The major papers presented have been divided into three parts. The first deals with the fundamental issues posed by sustainable economic development for the universities. The second part is taken up with a number of grounded case studies which show what is currently being done by a number of universities in Indonesia, Brazil and the United States to bring the issue before students, staff and governments. The third section is devoted to action being undertaken either currently or as an outline plan for action in the future. In addition, the third part contains the Halifax Declaration, which stands as a summary of the debate as well as suggestions for how the university world may wish to move forward with what may well turn out to be the greatest challenge it has yet had to tackle. This challenge is nothing less than to ensure that Earth remains a place fit to live in – for the present generation and for those who are yet to come.

Guy Neave  
Director of Research,  
International Association of Universities