

Comments on PRODUCTIVITY Commission's Issues paper, New Models of Tertiary Education, dated February 2016.

Submitter Information

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Submission

I comment first on *Commonly Used Terms*, pp. x-xiii

On p. xi *innovation* is narrowly defined, but in the main document it is in fact used in a number of ways.

The narrow definition – emphasising ‘application’ – has, on the other hand, not prompted any reference in the Paper to the research companies universities have set up, such as Uniservices at the University of Auckland.

A wider definition – which I have found in fact to be the main usage in the document – covers a wider field, and I assume the capacity to innovate or ‘innovativeness’ is more germane.

I also draw attention to the need for *renovation* or restoration. Under the current funding structure for universities, subjects die out if the number of enrolments falls below a particular level. Such, for example, has been the case with Indonesian, though one might expect New Zealanders to be concerned to seek knowledge of its sixth largest trading partner and Australia’s most significant Asian neighbour. Perhaps the need will later be realised, and library and other resources built up again. I believe the system should contain a trigger point when a subject is likely to vanish and discussion take place as to how it might be sustained till numbers pick up again. It is not easy to find staff in some such fields once lost.

The word *models* is rather loosely used. The list on p. 73 is not so much a list of models as a list of conceivable approaches, some of which could be integrated into the kind of university I believe New Zealand should have, some not. Recruiting African students, for example, would not differ in principle from recruiting Latin American, Asian and Middle Eastern students, such as now takes place, though the prospects and the modalities might vary.

Some of the ‘New Models’, therefore, could be utilised or adapted without changing the essence of the universities, which in my view must remain essentially campus-based and offer teaching by those who know their subject through doing research in it, directed

towards that deeper knowledge that will provide long-term benefits, individual and social, in the capacity to adapt or to initiate adaptations or innovations.

Universities are distinctive, some of the ways being set out in the 1989-90 Act. My former colleague, Wilf Malcolm and I, sought to identify and reaffirm them in our book, *Crisis of Identity The Mission and Management of New Zealand Universities* [Dunmore, 2007], which does not appear in Issues Paper's bibliography. I take the liberty of referring the Commission in particular to chapter 13 of the book.

In my view the universities in New Zealand have been changed in the last two decades by an undue growth of 'managerialism'. They have not been characterised by 'inertia', but some of the changes have been adverse. They need now to de-emphasise the top-down approach and to revive a more collegial culture. 'New models' that encouraged that would in our view enhance the academic content of their teaching as well as the innovativeness of their research.

The general thrust of the paper on the whole discourages the approach I advocate. It emphasises only some aspects of such a university and seems likely to contribute to what has been termed their 'businessisation'. Not all the diverse functions of a university can readily be measured in terms of outcomes, any more than, as Robert Kennedy put it, GDP could measure our wit, our courage, our wisdom, compassion or devotion to our country. To stress measurable outcomes indeed may be counter-productive even so far as innovativeness is concerned.

I turn to some of the *specific questions* put by the Issues Paper.

Q1. The advantages are greater than the disadvantages, provided the approach is not mere homogenisation. The nature and purpose of different kinds of institution have to be kept in mind.

Q2. It is impossible that students can ever have enough information. However good it is, they may not realise what they are best at until they have had some experience of it. That may involve an element of trial and error, and the system should allow that.

It is also difficult to signal in some disciplines what the prospective employment prospects may be. What government or business might want may be the subjects of statements but not of guarantees, such as a student embarking on a long and costly course might prefer.

There is, too, some premium on degrees that are not too specific, but allow for the change in direction, or the capacity to pick up something else, as time goes by.

Q8. The 'competition' among institutions has led to an excess of expenditure on 'marketing' and some rather pathetic, if not offensive, advertisements.

Q11. The 'bundling' of teaching and research is absolutely essential to a university. The attempt to distinguish 'research universities' from others has no validity.

Q12. One of the difficulties relates of course to measurement. It is easier to count books and papers published than to measure successful teaching. Getting student feedback has some value, but is best directed to the teacher her/himself rather than to those who decide

on tenure or promotion. Students should certainly be made aware of the purpose of the exercise.

I also think that heads of departments or schools should be aware when allocating teaching that some staff are better with small groups than with large, while others revel in trying to expound ideas to large classes, a rather different *form* of 'teaching'.

Q15. The table on p. 18 shows how difficult it is to teach. It is also difficult to teach how to teach. University teachers will, however, have had some years of being taught at university. They should also be assisted, as they gain their own experience, by their colleagues. Enthusiasm for the subject is in my view a prime requirement.

Q17. I was concerned to note the preference employers give to qualified immigrants over the home-brewed. How does relate to the notion that employers should have more input into New Zealand curricula? It seems rather contradictory.

Qs22, 25. The system, along with the recent reduction in non-appointed members of councils, gives too much power to government to allow universities the autonomy they need if they are to be as effective as they can be, and able indeed to 'innovate'.

Q26. The distinctive roles of universities mean that they should continue to have distinct and appropriate quality assurance arrangements.

Q28. No doubt the universities should not be unduly reliant on income from overseas students, and should certainly not compromise their standards to sustain the income flow. It would be a good thing if the media ceased to stress the financial benefits they bring to city and institution. Might they not be bringing social and also intellectual benefits?

Bringing in qualified doctoral students – encouraged by the lower fees – is undoubtedly a worthwhile investment all round.

Q29. One would have thought that the nature of the New Zealand economy, its limited size and focus and its wage structures, might be relevant to this question, as well as to the comparisons offered. And, of course, 'productivity' is not the only 'dividend'.

I am not sure how far the departure of graduated international students or citizens and PRs affect these assessments.

Q41. Bowen's 'law' is nonsense. Baumol's suggestions are more convincing. MOOCs will not substitute for the person-to-person on-campus teaching characterising universities. Such a mode of teaching cannot be 'first best' at universities which, albeit with inadequate funding, seek to be of world repute. It would not enhance 'productivity', but rather the reverse.

Q46. A relevant trend is surely the growth [or otherwise] of the major Asian economies.

Q48. I have made remarks on 'New Models' earlier.

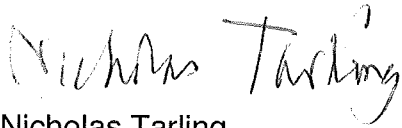
Q59. Diito.

Q67. The CUAP process does not hinder 'innovation'. It does help to preserve quality. The processes do not create a conflict of interest, unless peer review is so regarded.

Q72. If existing 'constraints' were removed, I would expect diminution of quality in some areas and, as a result, a reduction of reputation overall.

Final comment. In my own field I find the diminution of teaching on Asia [not only languages] extraordinary, at a time when Asia has become more important to us, and Treasury and business call for the 'Asia-prepared'.

Other languages have also disappeared. I do not think New Zealanders will prosper by talking English loudly. Nor will they do so if they know nothing of the history and social practices of the countries they seek to penetrate.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nicholas Tarling". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Nicholas Tarling
29 April 2016