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The *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*: an output analysis

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This paper analyses the contents of the first thirty years of the *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* and its predecessor, the *Journal of Tertiary Education Administration*. The paper examines the papers published between 1979 and 2008 according to their authorship, country of origin and broad content, noting changes over time. In the broadest of terms, the proportion of papers written by academic staff and by women has increased, as has the proportion of papers from sources other than Australia and New Zealand.

Keywords: AITEA; ATEM; higher education policy and management

Background: a potted history

The *Journal of Tertiary Education Administration* first appeared in October, 1979 as a single-issue Vol. 1. In their first editorial, the editors said: 'This journal is intended for people interested in the administration of tertiary education. It is also the 'house' journal for the *Australian Institute of Tertiary Educational Administrators* [AITEA, renamed ATEM, the *Association for Tertiary Education Management* in 1997]… The editors' policy is to present a Journal of professional experience and ideas. Although oriented to the needs of the practising administrator, we believe that it will interest many other groups of professionals working in post-secondary education' (Muffet & Massaro, 1979, p. 4). Papers in the first edition had all been presented at AITEA conferences or seminars, but the editors stated that they wished '…to encourage articles written especially for publication, either by practising administrators or by people with academic or scholarly interests' (Muffet & Massaro, 1979, p. 4). In the same issue, Colin Plowman said, in his 'Introductory Message from the National President of AITEA': 'There is in Australia a significant lack of discussion and communication, by way of written word, on topics relating to tertiary education; this is especially so in the area of the administration of institutions' (Plowman, 1979, p. 5). There was a need for this journal!

In its thirty-year history the Journal has had few editors, and several of them have been Vin Massaro. Vin co-edited with David Muffet in 1979 and from 1982 to 1984. Between 1985 and 1999 he co-edited variously with Colin McAndrew (1985–89), with Gavin Moodie (1990–98), and with both Gavin Moodie and Helen Sjöman (1999). He also did the job alone in 1980 and 1981. Gavin Moodie ended his ten-year stint as co-editor in 1999, but continues his involvement as reviews editor.

The Journal ceased to be self-published in 1997 when the *Journal of Tertiary Education Administration* became the *Journal of Higher Education Policy and*

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Management. In this paper 'Journal' is used to cover both the original and the current titles. Following an approach from publisher Carfax (now part of the Taylor and Francis group), the renamed journal continued to be published twice a year until 2003. The number of issues per year increased to three from 2004, and to four from 2008. This growth has managed to satisfy some of the increased demand for publication by authors, but the rejection rate remains high. Few papers are drawn directly from conference presentations these days.

Introduction and methodology

Two recently published papers prompted this paper. *Higher Education Policy* (the quarterly journal of the International Association of Universities), celebrated its twentieth year with a paper entitled 'Higher education policy: the evolution of a Journal' (Huisman, 2008). Similarly, the *Australian Universities' Review* (AUR) reviewed its first fifty years (Marginson, 2008). Whereby the first paper presents a contents analysis based on a scan of papers published during its life-to-date and of their authors, Marginson's AUR piece is a discursive summary of some of the material published during that journal's lifetime, matching content with what was happening in the Australian higher education sector at the time. The present paper takes an intermediate approach – a broadly statistical analysis of authors and the subject matter of the papers they have had published is followed by a closer look at the Journal's more prolific authors and a few of the papers published over the years.

Some of the Journal's papers are classified more easily than others. In some instances, the content of a paper was clearly indicated by the title. For instance the title of Ray Marginson's 1980 paper 'Energy management at the University of Melbourne' leaves little scope for confusion about its subject matter (Marginson, 1980). On the other hand, a closer examination was needed to discern the subject matter of papers such as 'Do storks really bring babies?' (Grichting, 1992) or 'A lot of nonsense: the story of a storm in a teacup' (O'Neill, 1980).

Author! Author! Who has been published in the Journal?

Authors have been classified according to three criteria: their type of employment; their gender; and their country/region at the time of their writing. These variables seemed to be appropriate in an examination of a journal established by an Australian association of tertiary education administrators, in an environment in which women in senior posts are under-represented. Acquiring some of the necessary information took a bit of digging. For example, the rather formal use of initials instead of given names in early years meant that an author's gender was not immediately obvious. Google can be a great help!

The classification by 'Staff type' reflects whether authors worked for higher education institutions either as 'General' or 'Academic' staff, or whether they worked for 'Other organisations' – a term intended to cover government ministries, bureaucracies, staff associations, consultancies, and other organisations not directly engaged in providing higher education. People such as vice-chancellors and heads of some research units have been counted together with academic staff even though the unimaginative DEST/DEEWR taxonomy, requires that they be designated, along with most general staff, as 'Other'. In most cases, the 'Staff type' was clearly indicated by an author's title, department or institution, but some clues were less than decisive. For example, it is unsafe to assume that a recent author with a PhD must be an academic. And it is also unsafe to assume that that the lack of a PhD marks the author of an older paper as a member of the general staff since, when the Journal started, many academic staff – and particularly those from the then college sector – didn't hold doctorates either. In recent years, too, the Journal has shown authors' affiliations only according to the university or other organisation that they worked at, without indicating whether that work is in, say, the Department of Veterinary Medicine or the Planning and Analysis Branch. Just occasionally, a little guesswork was required.

Information on authors is summarised in Table 1. The table shows counts of the number of publications, so the number of authors is expressed in *full-time equivalents*. That is, a paper co-authored by a member of the general staff and an academic staff member has been recorded as 0.5 for each of those staff types. Similarly, a paper co-authored by two women and one man has been recorded as 0.67 for female staff and 0.33 for male staff. Papers co-authored across national boundaries are similarly represented.

In the first thirty years of the Journal, a total of 518 papers were published. The proportion of papers written by general staff declined from 46.8 per cent to 22.9 per cent between the first five-year period (1979–83) and the most recent (2004–08). Accordingly, the proportion of papers published by academic staff has risen. 'Other' authors make up a relative small proportion of the total. What is not shown in Table 1 is that none of the papers published in Vol. 5, No. 2 (in this analysis, buried within the 1979–83 period), was written by general staff. In fact, the proportion of papers authored by general staff dropped very quickly: 63.6 per cent, 50 per cent, 61.1 per cent, 52.2 per cent and 15.8 per cent in Volumes 1 to 5, respectively. Perhaps this decline was to have been expected. After all, it is academic staff that are under pressure to 'publish or perish' in these days of accountability and precarious higher education employment.

There has been an under-representation of female authors, particularly in the Journal's earlier days. In the first five years of the Journal women produced only two papers, or 2.1 per cent of the total for those volumes. The first woman to have a paper published in the Journal (on the subject of desktop computers) was Dr Helen Sungalia from the University of New England (Sungalia, 1980). The gender distribution has improved steadily in recent times but contributions by women have yet to reach 40 per cent in any five-year period. Nevertheless, women first reached the halfway mark in 1998 (Vol. 20, No. 1), and in Vol. 30, Nos. 1 and 2, papers by women, respectively, represented 64.6 per cent and 55.4 per cent of the total. The proportion fell to 25.9 per cent in Vol. 30, No. 3, but rose to 50 per cent in the final issue for the year. From an editor's point of view, this variability is a function of the varying number and quality of papers submitted from time to time. Perhaps a subsequent study could examine the gender differences in the authorship of papers submitted and rejected.

Table 1 also shows that papers come predominantly from Australia, but the proportion from that source has dropped from over 90 per cent in the Journal's first five years of life, to around 70 per cent in the past two five-year periods. Authors from the United Kingdom and North America produced 31 and 28 papers, respectively, in the thirty years since the Journal was first published. The Journal now receives a lot of material from overseas authors due, in part, to the international

Table 1. Authors of papers published in the AITEA/ATEM Journal by type of staff, gender and country of origin of the papers.

	Volume						Total	
	Vol. 1–5	Vol. 6–10	Vol. 11–15	Vol. 16–20	Vol. 21–25	Vol. 26–30		
	1979–83	1984–88	1989–93	1994–98	1999–03	2004–08	No.	%
Total papers published	94	78	67	74	82	123	518	100.0%
Staff type								
General staff	44	26.5	24	19	19.5	28.17	161.17	31.0%
Academic staff	42	38	40	54	60.5	90.83	326.83	62.9%
Other (non-higher education)	7	13.5	3	1	2	4.5	31.5	6.1%
General staff % of total	46.8%	34.0%	35.8%	25.7%	23.8%	22.9%	31.0%	
Author gender								
No. equivalent female authors	2	8	13.5	19.5	30.71	46.24	119.95	23.3%
No. equivalent male authors	92	70	53.5	54.5	51.29	76.76	398.05	76.7%
Female % of total	2.1%	10.3%	20.1%	26.4%	37.5%	37.8%	23.2%	
Paper country/region of origin								
Australia	87	71	63	55.5	53	81.50	411.00	79.0%
NZ	1	1	4	4	4	4.00	18.00	3.7%
UK	3	4	0	3	7	15.00	32.00	6.3%
Rest of Europe	0	0	0	1	3	8.17	12.17	2.3%
North America	0	2	0	10.5	8	9.66	30.16	5.8%
Africa/Middle East	0	0	0	0	1	2.00	3.00	0.6%
Asia/South Pacific	3	0	0	0	6	2.67	11.67	2.2%
Australia/NZ % of total	93.6%	92.3%	100.0%	80.4%	69.5%	69.2%	82.7%	

promotional efforts of the publisher and, in part, perhaps, to the Journal's reputation.

Prolific authors

It is only when one goes through thirty years of tables of contents at a single sitting that recurring names become obvious. Perhaps it was easier to get multiple publications in a new journal before the onset of 'publish or perish' and rising rejection rates. Of course, editors and blind peer reviewers deal with each paper on its merits.

The Journal's most prolific author in its first thirty years was Dr Raj Sharma, late of Swinburne, Capricornia IAE and RMIT. Most of Sharma's eight papers had a strategic planning theme, and appeared from Vol. 2, No. 2 (1980) until Vol. 26, No. 1 (2004). Sharma spent his career in higher education as a member of the general staff, but he did a bit of teaching and research on the side. The most recent paper by Sharma was written following research funded by the competitively awarded Peter Karmel International Travel Grant.

Grant Harman, an emeritus professor of the University of New England and current Journal editorial board member, has produced six papers, as have Professor Simon Marginson (from the University of Melbourne's Centre for the Study of Higher Education) and Dr Arthur O'Neill (late of the University of New England, La Trobe University and the Lincoln Institute of Health Sciences). O'Neill was also in the general staff camp. Roger Scott and Mantz Yorke, both academics, were responsible for five papers each.

Harman's first paper appeared in Vol. 5, No. 2 (1983), and his most recent in Vol. 28, No. 3 (2006). A paper by Simon Marginson first appeared in Vol. 13, No. 1 (1991), and the most recent in 2007 (Vol. 29, No. 2). Perhaps we should adjust the Marginson total by including the two papers written in the 1980s by Simon's father Ray. The Marginson family total would then be equal to that of the Sharma family! Arthur O'Neill's first paper with the Journal appeared in 1980 (Vol. 2, No. 1), and his most recent in 1998 (Vol. 20, No. 1). Harman and Marginson Jr continue to publish, so perhaps their counts will increase. Roger Scott's papers with the Journal appeared between 1984 and 1988. They included the interestingly named 'Biscuits, bicycles and BSc's: the impact of market forces on the management of publicly-funded universities' (Scott, 1987). These authors are all from Australian universities. The only 'foreigner' among the prolific authors is Liverpool John Moore University's Professor Mantz Yorke. His papers appeared between 1998 and 2005. More could follow!

Honourable mentions go to David Sloper (four papers) and N.F. Dufty, Chris Duke, Lynn Meek and David Battersby (three papers each). For his sins, Lynn Meek is also a member of the Journal's editorial board. David Battersby was one of the first contributors from New Zealand, before crossing the 'dutch' to work in Australian universities. He is now Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ballarat.

And what did authors write about?

Table 2 enumerates the papers published in the Journal according to their subject matter. Any such categorisation is, by nature, subjective, but a fairly broad list was necessary to make it possible to plot changes in trends and interest. Most papers are about university administration, management or policy, but the focus of the Journal

Table 2. Papers published in the AITEA/ATEM Journal by subject matter of papers.

	Volume						Total	
	Vol. 1–5	Vol. 6–10	Vol. 11–15	Vol. 16–20	Vol. 21–25	Vol. 26–30		
	1979–83	1984–88	1989–93	1994–98	1999–03	2004–08	No.	%
Administration: general	4	5	2	5	3	1	20	3.9%
Buildings & Grounds	7			1	1		9	1.7%
Finance & Budget-related	6		5	2	1	1	15	2.9%
Staffing issues: HR, professional development & leadership	10	10	11	8	8	21	68	13.1%
Industrial Relations	2	6	5		1	1	15	2.9%
Planning-related	10	10	6	3	8	4	41	7.9%
Quality	2		1	17	4	2	26	5.0%
Technology/IT	6	1	2		1		10	1.9%
Policy	12	16	13	6	5	15	67	12.9%
Government-related	4	8	6	1	1		20	3.9%
Teaching	5	2		7	4	15	33	6.4%
Research	1	3	3		8	12	27	5.2%
Community Service	1		1	1	1	2	6	1.2%
Student issues: enrolments, access, support, welfare	5	4	5	9	18	14	55	10.6%
Overseas students and Internationalism	1	2	2	3	3	7	18	3.5%
Overseas systems	8	6	2	8	11	19	54	10.4%
Non-university providers	4	3		1	1		9	1.7%
Other	6	2	3	2	3	9	25	4.8%
Total	94	78	67	74	82	123	518	100.0%

has clearly shifted over time. I leave it to the reader to peruse the table, and to note the ebbs and flows in the popularity of various topics. But a few comments are warranted.

The early issues of the Journal featured a number of descriptive papers on 'How we do it at my place', whether the subject matter concerned buildings and grounds, finance and budget, planning or staffing-related issues. This type of paper slowly disappeared but, in recent years, the Journal has tried to revive it by urging ATEM's members to write for their own journal. These attempts have met with only limited success. The competition for limited space is such that all papers need to be well written and need to provide a broader context to readers beyond the author's individual institution or local practices. Some would-be authors (not just members of the general staff) appear uncertain about how to write for a scholarly journal – perhaps there is a professional development/training opportunity here.

Although papers on staff-related issues have increased in number and as a proportion of the whole, papers relating specifically to industrial relations issues have declined in number, almost to the point of extinction. Perhaps the authors of such papers have adjudged that there are other journals more appropriate to their topic. Papers on staffing-related topics represent about 13 per cent of the papers published in the first thirty years. Of course, this is a wide-ranging area, comprising subsidiary topics such as vice-chancellors and chancellors, gender-related issues in staffing, professionalism, the general staff–academic staff nexus, sectoral growth and prospects, and a range of staff selection, interviewing and development issues.

Two papers have been published about vice-chancellors, and one about chancellors. David Sloper's 'Science: a ladder to the vice-chancellor's office' considered a social characteristic profile of forty-six Australian vice-chancellors in office in 1983, 1973 and 1963. Apparently, 58 per cent of the 1983 incumbents were scientists, twice as many as in 1973 and 1963 (Sloper, 1986, p. 85). Perhaps scientists had more time on their hands than others back then. The second paper about vice-chancellors was also *written* by a vice-chancellor. Don Aitkin (1998) wrote 'What do vice-chancellors do?'. Cynics might have expected this twelve-page paper to have been rather shorter.

Some authors have considered gender-related issues in the university sector. Wolfgang Grichting's enigmatically-named paper 'Do storks really bring babies?' is a criticism of Australia's Affirmative Action Agency and its simplistic way of attempting to overcome employment discrimination against women. He says 'the entire argument seems to be predicated on the assumption that women are discriminated against because of their gender rather than some characteristics which may be highly correlated with gender. By exclusively focussing on gender….one commits the same old fallacy as the individual who attempts to explain the variation in birth rates through the presence or absence of storks in the immediate neighbourhood' (Grichting, 1992, pp. 76–77). So that explains the title!

Over and McKenzie (1985) also discuss affirmative action in their paper on women's academic career prospects in the context of the tight job market for academics. Allen (1987), Wieneke (1988, 1995) and Martin (1996) also consider gender-related issues. Allen considers the participation of female academic staff, Wieneke focuses on general staff, and Martin covers both academic and general staff.

A subject dear to the heart of many administrators is the academic–general staff 'conflict', particularly as academic and managerial roles change over time. These issues have been examined in several recent papers, and the nature of most of these papers is indicated by their respective titles:

- 'What's in a name? Issues for ATEM and administrators' (Conway, 2000);
- 'Them and us: general and non-general staff in higher education' (Dobson, 2000);
- 'The invisible workers' (Szekeres, 2004);
- 'General staff experiences in the corporate university' (Szekeres, 2006);
- 'Who do they think they are? The changing identities of professional administrators and managers in UK higher education' (Whitchurch, 2006); and
- 'Sleeping with the enemy': how far are you prepared to go to make a difference? A look at the divide between academic and allied staff' (Wohlmuther, 2008).

However, no one could accuse this Journal, published by a society of managers and administrators, and edited by members of the general staff, of ignoring the academic side of the workforce. Over the life of the Journal, academic prospects, academic aspirations, academic leadership, academic recruitment, academic salaries, academic work, ageing academics, academic performance, demographic trends in the academic workforce, academic titles and academic workloads have each been considered in one or more papers.

'Quality' should pervade all areas of all our work, but a perusal of the table shows the rush with which 'quality' came (and perhaps, went). It therefore seemed reasonable to examine the publishing phenomenon that was (is) 'quality'. Gabrielle Baldwin's 'quality' paper 'The student as customer: the discourse of "quality" in higher education', notes the 'sudden ascendency of the discourse of "quality"' (1994, p. 126). She adds that 'a word count of most publications in the area of higher education would surely establish it as one of the most frequently used terms…'. She notes the reification of the term, and the implication that somehow 'quality' is tangible and discrete (Baldwin, 1994, p. 126). Nonetheless, 'quality' became a topic that people wanted to write and others wanted to read about, and nearly 23 per cent of papers published between 1994 and 1998 were on this topic. Papers on 'quality' continue to be submitted, but many (in this editor's opinion) are not of sufficient 'quality' to be published.

Recent years have seen many more papers about teaching and research, perhaps as a result of the increased interest by academic staff in having their research and opinions published in the Journal. But modern competitive universities have increased the number of support staff assisting teaching and research, and perhaps it follows that the growth of interest in these areas was to have been expected. More than thirty papers on teaching-related issues have been published – covering medical education, teacher education, on-line and e-teaching, open learning, doctoral education, accreditation and vocational degrees. Four papers on the MBA and DBA have been published – perhaps, with hindsight, too many. The paper on open learning is also another of the imaginatively named papers: 'Holy cow! It's open learning' (Joy & O'Neill, 1998).

Papers on research have increased in number after a very slow start in the first five years of the Journal's operation. Papers have covered topics such as research assessment and performance, peer review, research grants and costs, commercialisation and corporate ventures, research management, research staff and a paper that demonstrated the econometric instability of the Research Training Scheme for funding PhD training (King & Dobson, 2003).

Although 'technology' is a pervasive force in the modern world, it is something we take for granted. Papers on this broad topic have declined in number, perhaps because we are all blasé about it these days. Most university staff have computers on their desks and also several at home, especially if they have student children. The Internet is all pervasive, often in wireless environments, and most of us have pocket-sized mobile telephones at our disposal. This is a far cry from the 1980 message in the aforementioned paper by Dr Sungalia's (1980, p. 85), in which she advised that '…it is predicted that desk computers will become as commonplace on the desks of executives in government, industry and commerce as the telephone and the calculator. Why should they not also appear on the desks of tertiary administrators?'. Why not, indeed! How could we have played 'Leisure Suit Larry' on the boss's time without a desktop computer? Who would have predicted how cheap today's powerful laptop computers would become, compared with the clunky and slow XT and AT computers we had in the 1980s.

Papers were written as a reaction to various aspects of government policy and government relationships. As might have been expected, there was a rush of papers that related to occurrences just before, during and after the so-called Dawkins Revolution. The *Green Paper* came out in 1987, and the *White Paper* the following year (Dawkins, 1987, 1988).

Judging by the contents of Vol. 10 (1988), the Journal reacted quickly to the Dawkins Revolution. There were six Dawkins-related papers out of the fifteen papers published. These included one written just before the 'revolution' by Hugh Hudson, Chairman of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) (the expert intermediary body between universities and the education department), highlighting various inefficiencies of the binary system and predicting its demise (Hudson, 1988). However, his paper didn't predict the abolition of CTEC, an early outcome of Dawkins' policy shift.

Don McNicol, then Vice-Chancellor of the University of New England, pointed out the difference between academics and ministers of the Crown. 'When academics present their ideas they put them in the context of previous work on the topic. ….[A] Minister's policies are nearly always represented as radically new and rarely acknowledge anything that went before them….However, a reading of [other] documents…will reveal that many of the policies in the *Green Paper* are iterations or extensions of previous policy' (McNicol, 1988, p. 27).

Former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sydney, Bruce Williams, asked 'Was the abolition of CTEC soon after the amalgamation of the Departments of Education and Employment due to evidence of its inefficiency, or to the wish of the Government to avoid the possible embarrassment of rejecting published financial and other recommendations of an expert statutory authority?' (Williams, 1988, p. 112).

Richard Blandy, Director of the National Institute of Labour Studies, published a paper in the form of an academic report card: 'Student: Dawkins, J.S.; Essay topic: Higher education policy; Grade: Fail (F) [crossed out] High Distinction A+ [written in next to it] …as you will note, my original sentiment was to give you an F, one reason being the uncanny similarity between your proposals and those in an essay submitted by a fellow student, Thatcher, M. (Ms). A number of my colleagues have impressed on me the inappropriateness of such a grade, however, not the least because you own this University along with all the other universities in this country…there is no doubt that a proper assessment of your effort must lead to the awarding of an A+' (Blandy, 1988, p. 19).

In the following year, there were two papers on the topic, and in 1990 four that were, arguably, related. By 1991 and 1992 there were papers of a crystal ball variety about 'the future' in light of the 'revolution' the sector had just survived.

Many more papers are written these days about students, our principal raw material, but perhaps fewer papers than might have been expected on overseas students, given the staggering expansion in overseas student numbers from the late 1970s. In 1976, universities reported 6753 overseas student enrolments (4.4 per cent of total enrolments) (ABS, 1977, Table 7) compared to about 273,100 in 2007 (26.5 per cent) (DEEWR, 2008, Table 28). About 14 per cent of papers in the first thirty years covered student-related issues, including seventeen papers (3.3 per cent) on international students and related issues such as off-shore campuses, the Columbo Plan and overseas student fees. The main categories of papers on domestic student issues relate to student progress, retention and attrition (twelve papers), access and university entrance (ten papers), and fees and student support (eight papers). The topic of other papers on student-related issues has included disability, housing and credit transfer.

The number of papers on matters relating to practices in other nations' higher education sectors has risen recently due, in part, to the current editor's interest in such matters. The *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* is the one to read for information on campus crime in the USA, resource allocation in Jamaica, funding in Kenya and Germany, student support in Norway or management by results in Finland.

The Journal published papers on the TAFE sector in its early days, but recent papers written on TAFE and by TAFE staff are rare.

It is hard to have a specific category for every possible topic, so some papers have been categorised as 'Other'. Among papers in this category have been papers concerning the establishment of new institutions, regional universities (Sharpham, 1993), a history of AITEA (Conway, 1994), various other 'histories', freedom of information, sexual assault, the Trade Practices Act and various other legal issues, and fake degrees (Brown, 2006).

Looking at thirty years of Journal contents over a short period of time makes one conscious of what has been published in quantity, and what has not. Whether there has been 'too many' articles on some topics is yet another subjective matter. However, some topics seem not to have generated as many papers as they might. Plagiarism is one such topic. To date, the Journal has published just two papers on the subject: one relating to staff (Martin, 1984), and one to students (Devlin, 2006). This is perhaps strange, given the considerable media attention given to alleged plagiarism by former Monash Vice-Chancellor David Robinson, and his subsequent departure (Monash University, 2002). We are also presented with frequent reports of plagiarism by students, with particular concern about whether overseas students have a clear understanding of what constitutes plagiarism (see, for example, Song-Turner, 2008).

For some of us, the quality (there's that word again!) of written English is important, and it is a shame that no one has yet submitted a paper specifically about the mutation and/or decline of the written word as used on behalf of our universities. Baldwin discussed the colonisation of universities, and noted that 'a key element in colonisation is language – to impose a foreign language is to impose a foreign world view…' (Baldwin, 1994, p. 125). Otherwise, the closest the Journal has got is Jim McGrath's entertaining but critical book review of Don Watson's 'Death sentence: the decay of public language', published in Australia in 2003 (McGrath, 2004). It is hard to disagree with McGrath's criticisms of Watson's book, although some of the annoyance one suffers while reading the book comes from the strange physical layout involving parallel columns of disconnected text, forcing the reader to flip the pages backwards and forwards. In fact, the US version of the book is rather better (Watson, 2005). During his review McGrath segues into a content analysis of the strategic plan of a large university ('…no worse than those from most other organisations' p. 436). Perhaps we should be saddened by his amusing and informative findings. This review is a piece to be re-read. Will someone please submit a paper about the decay of public language in universities?

The next thirty years

The *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* has increased in size and stature since its early days, partly because of the need of academic staff to publish, but also because of the support of its owner and sponsor, ATEM. As a journal of both theory and practice, it can draw its material from a wide area. The diversity of material identified in the analysis above clearly demonstrates this.

A review of thirty years of papers shows that good papers can come from simple themes or ideas. Consider Arthur O'Neill's (1980) paper, 'A lot of nonsense: the story of a storm in a teacup'. This is a paper with a memorable title. The paper recounts the result of cash-strapped Lincoln Institute's attempts to introduce a system of staff contributions for tea and coffee. As O'Neill noted, '…a relatively trivial matter touched staff deeply and excited more response than any other college issue of recent times… It seems that the suggested withdrawal of a benefit available daily and taken for granted is likely to arouse staff much more than other administrative or fiscal measures which may affect their work… there is a striking concordance between the range of views expressed on this miniscule issue and the diversity of opinion in society at large on the provision of and mode of payment for social benefit welfare' (O'Neill, 1980, p. 38). How did the college resolve the issue? 'We have not worked it out yet, but my guess is that we will end up with a mixed (tea and coffee) economy, without providing distributive justice to the beverage drinking proclivities of staff, much less to the burden placed on inexpensive black tea drinkers to the advantage of luxurious white coffee with sugar drinkers' (O'Neill, 1980, p. 39).

The published contents of a journal depend on the material submitted for review. To this extent, the contents are market-driven; authors decide what they wish to write about. There will always be a passing parade of what is currently popular. One hesitates to speak of 'fads', but what else could explain the surge in recent years of submitted papers about league tables whereby none were submitted in earlier years? Are league tables this decade's 'quality'? Time will tell.

Editors come and go; when the current editor is even more past his 'use by' date than now, it may be just about Vin Massaro's turn again!

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