

Association of Tertiary Education Management (NZ) Inc.

Submission to the Tertiary Education Advisory Commission on

The Shape of the Tertiary Education Sector

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The Association of Tertiary Education Management NZ Inc. (ATEM) is an organisation that draws its members from managerial and administrative staff right across the tertiary education sector. It has 426 members from over thirty different tertiary institutions. They are employed at universities, polytechnics, colleges of education and private training establishments, as well as at a number of other public and private organisations working in this sector. In addition, some 12 tertiary institutions support the association through corporate membership. Though only recently incorporated as a society in its own right, ATEM has been active for over twenty years as the New Zealand branch of the Australasian Institute of Tertiary Education Administrators (AITEA). Our organisation is therefore uniquely placed to comment upon the future shape of the tertiary education sector.

This submission is based upon members' responses to the questions posed by the August 2000 report of Tertiary Education Advisory Commission (TEAC). Members of course responded to our email survey as individuals, not as representatives of their institutions. As one would expect from our diverse membership, opinions were often not unanimous: differences of opinion are reflected in the body of the submission.

Summary

On the whole members feel the present shape of the tertiary sector is appropriate though there could be minor modifications. Funding issues are more critical ones than structural ones. Structures must be flexible to reduce the barriers to tertiary education and encourage lifelong learning. Cultural considerations must be taken into account. We favour collaborative over competitive models.

The Shape of the Tertiary Education Sector

Are the current system and provider forms able to deliver what the NZ society and economy need?

For the most part the current system and provider forms deliver what the New Zealand society and economy need, though the present funding regime encourages competition over complementarity of offerings in a given geographic location and concentration upon EFTS funded courses over ITO funded courses.

Universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, wananga and PTES all have a distinct role. However, there is a certain blurring of the distinction between polytechnics and universities with the tendency for polytechnics to concentrate upon the degree end of the qualification spectrum to the detriment of trade and foundation-level training which is more and more the preserve of PTEs, some of which lack depth of educational expertise. Current funding policies encourage polytechnics to concentrate upon EFTS funded courses as ITOs can turn the funding tap on and off. It is debatable whether present structures provide adequately for informal adult and community education.

The multi-cultural nature of contemporary New Zealand society means that cultural expectations about the place of learning for work and personal development must be taken into account. The development of wananga is a positive move, providing a means of responding relatively rapidly to Maori needs and enhancing Maori access to tertiary education.

It is debatable whether the diversity of institutions delivering teacher education is the best guarantor of quality for students or whether accessibility for students could be better met by universities entering consortium arrangements with local tertiary institutions. Members tend to favour the merger of the remaining Colleges of Education with universities to broaden their students' options and enhance the international standing of their qualifications.

Members from PTEs are concerned that under the 1989 Act all private providers are included in one category: clear delineation between types of private providers according to level of awards would be beneficial.

1.1 What levers, incentives and penalties may be needed?

There should be incentives, such as increased subsidies, to enable institutions to offer courses and qualifications that are essential to the New Zealand economy but not in high demand from students. Institutions should not be prevented from offering such courses because of cost effectiveness restraints. There is also a need for incentives for some providers to make a distinction between courses that require research-based teaching and those that require a more basic level of teaching.

1.2 Should there be a wider range of organisational types, for example community colleges or universities of technology or should we accept the current organisational types and arrangements as a given?

There should be a range of organisation types to meet the needs of the New Zealand community. However, transferability, seamlessness and accountability must not be compromised. Some members support the concept of universities of technology which would reflect the full range of what are traditionally considered polytechnic courses but also offer university-level courses as provided for by the Education Act: such universities of technology would be universities with a distinctive character. This could also apply to universities which take on a special character as a “research” university. Other members oppose the creation of different types of university. Some members support provision for the creation of small, sharply focused “single faculty” institutions with distinct status, delivering undergraduate and postgraduate degrees into an established market niche. There may also be a need for a “TAFE” sector, or some organisations which do not offer degrees, but articulate clearly to other institutions that do. This distinction might work best in large cities where students could move to a university through a community college etc, as happens in the USA but could also work in smaller centres.

1.3 How should we determine the appropriate number of each type of organisation [or how many the government would be prepared to fund]?

The number in each type is not relevant as long as each individual institution can meet the obligations of its category and maintain financial sustainability in the medium to long term. The critical financial state of many public tertiary institutions needs to be urgently addressed. The issue may be how much research the government can afford to fund. Some members feel we are probably now at full capacity and have the maximum number of universities. Others argue that institutions of one type which are able to meet the specified requirements of another type should not be prevented from seeking re-designation or merger and that the government should be more concerned about the delivery of quality tertiary education and financial viability rather than which category institutions might wish to position themselves in, provided they meet the specified criteria in the Education Act.

1.4 What might be the effect of e-learning?

We support attempts to break down barriers to tertiary education: structures which impede learning across a range of disciplines and in a variety of modes should not be retained. E-learning will enable people to adopt a flexible approach to learning, de-emphasising the role of the institution. Many mature students and postgraduate level courses could be delivered fully on-line; many other courses could have on-line components and be offered more flexibly. So the effect of e-learning is likely to be fewer on-campus students at higher levels, but possibly less take-up of sub-degree level courses. It is vital that high standards are maintained. E-learning will not totally replace the need for social and educational interaction with students' peers and teachers: it should be seen as a complement to face-to-face learning. Some members feel that e-learning will have a limited impact. Others note that e-learning is already spreading rapidly and it is essential that a range of New Zealand providers are active in this mode to avoid domination by overseas-sourced material to an extent that is detrimental to our cultural identity, as has occurred with television.

1.5 What are the respective roles of the public and private sectors in the system?

There is a place for the private sector in tertiary education: PTEs have specific niche markets. However, in general, our members feel that government financial support should be restricted to disciplines not currently or adequately provided for in the public sector, for example where demand is higher than the public sector can accommodate or for lower level courses which it is difficult for the public sector to provide at an economic level because of the higher infrastructural requirements for public institutions. Government-owned institutions should not be "sacrificed" because of competition from government funded private institutions. Members in the private sector feel a mechanism should be introduced to allow private tertiary providers to meet the educational objectives of the government and function with long-term security.

1.6 To what extent should each institution or provider have a distinctive character, and how could this be regulated/enforced, if at all?

Institutions should be able to develop a distinctive character such as being a university of technology or a research university, though not all our members support these being legally distinct entities. The anticipated process of having a clear charter which articulates its particular character seems a fair one. But forcing institutions to adhere to this with regulations or funding implications would seem draconian. Institutions should be able to choose to develop niche market courses. The market niche they choose will probably determine how successful they are. Members suggest all government-funded institutions should have a profile or envelope defining the range of programmes and levels agreed on a triennium basis. Institutions could be reviewed on a triennial cycle to ensure the predefined parameters are being met and viability is being maintained in the longer term.

What new intermediary or system- wide structures might be desirable?

Members differ over this. Some feel government interest in the sector should be focused on ensuring that appropriate educational, social and economic goals are achieved.

2.1 Should there be a high-level co-ordinated organisation for the whole system?

Some members support one overarching body deciding who will deliver certain programmes where student numbers make it uneconomic and undesirable for institutions to compete for students. Others feel such a body would create too many levels to work through: the Ministry of Education should maintain its role as policy maker and funder and perhaps a commission such as TEAC could be maintained to provide a strong advisory role to the Minister.

2.2 Could there be regional governance bodies for groups of institutions? How will an adequate structure of regional provision be ensured?

This should not be a requirement as it is unnecessary for larger institutions but it could be a useful option for smaller polytechnics in provincial areas with lower population levels. It could lead to lower overheads and reduce costly duplication of the development and approval of new programmes and administrative systems. However, regional governance should be considered alongside the option for mergers which would create multi-campus institutions.

2.3 What are the merits and shortcomings of inter-institutional arrangements [mergers, alliances, networks etc.]? What sorts of networks or alliances could be promoted?

Inter-institutional arrangements should be encouraged due to the relatively small size of the New Zealand tertiary population. Greater collaboration and co-operation between all institutions needs to be encouraged, rather than fierce competition which may lead other institutions to become non-viable. The tertiary education system could support smaller, focused providers by encouraging them to group themselves into functional consortia to secure economies of scale. They could enable better stair-casing of courses and allow younger students to start tertiary education in regional

areas before moving to cities for University study. Probably smaller polytechnics in regional areas should have alliances with universities or larger polytechnics in more central locations. The plethora of pre-service teacher education providers is not conducive to quality: the needs of their students would generally be better met if small providers were each closely linked with a major provider.

Mergers and amalgamations can be difficult to manage in the short term particularly from a human resource perspective. However mergers can also enhance student choice while enhancing financial viability across the sector by reducing the number of competing institutions and saving on infrastructural and programme development costs. In particular, smaller institutions which are finding difficulty delivering a range of courses to meet community needs and are not financially viable should be encouraged to merge with universities or larger polytechnics to create multi-level, multi-campus institutions and thereby enabling a tertiary presence to continue in smaller communities.

What could be done to provide learners, business and the community with better information?

A well-promoted tertiary-wide internet site with links to Kiwi Careers and all institutions could assist in providing better information to learners, businesses and the community. To have all approved programmes in a set format in one New Zealand publication would also be cost effective by reducing the need for every institution to produce its own prospectuses and calendars.

3.1 Is there a need for an independent referral or advice service?

An independent referral or advisory service is opposed. Kiwi Careers already provides a form of central information service. Most institutions have well developed course and career advice centres and need the freedom to promote their own programmes and provide advice and guidance directly to prospective students. Some members from smaller institutions feel a separate enrolment 'clearing house' system similar to that operating in Australia may reduce the large administrative workload emanating from students who enrol in more than one institution.

3.2 How might lifelong learning be better facilitated and supported?

International trends that widen opportunities for learner engagement and permit lifelong learning must be paralleled in the New Zealand system. Provision for second chance learning is important and could be encouraged by having greater access to flexible learning options. Lifelong learning needs to be facilitated by the government through the provision of incentives. There could be grants provided for developing flexible programmes. Cost is a big barrier for some people and those who already have mortgages are reluctant to increase debt levels with a student loan. The level of the tertiary subsidy for institutions, scholarships, low interest or interest free loans, easy access to student allowances and tax rebates under specific criteria may be ways that to facilitate and support lifelong learning. Within an agreed envelope of programmes offered, additional funding could be identified (say 5% of the level of bulk funding) for use in activities to encourage lifelong learning opportunities at reasonable price levels.

What agencies or interventions are required to facilitate and support lifelong learning?

The benefits of lifelong learning need to be promoted by the Government and some tax rebate may be appropriate for those who participate. The Government, Ministry of Education, Inland Revenue Department and the Department of Work and Income are the key agencies to provide the support for both students and tertiary institutions as outlined in 3.2 above. The tertiary system must allow for differing learning styles and cultural needs and ensure that opportunities are available for part-time study, distance study, staircasing, opting in and out of formal study without penalty. Fair credit transfer must be available between institutions. In addition there may need to be more support for not-for profit community organisations active in this field.

How can we ensure our system has international standing and is internationally orientated?

We strongly endorse the emphasis on creating a system for tertiary education which is “internationally oriented and engaged” (pp. 14,16). New Zealand should be aiming at achieving tertiary enrolments at the level of the upper quartile of our OECD partners. The tertiary sector needs to be funded by the government at a level that will enhance New Zealand’s reputation as a country offering quality tertiary education and enable institutions to benchmark themselves in the international market. Maintaining high levels of research funding for postgraduate levels of study is essential.

If New Zealand is to continue to be attractive to overseas students, they must be confident that the qualifications they receive will have international currency. Compatibility between the quality assurance and qualification systems of New Zealand and Australia is highly desirable so that credit values can flow freely both

ways. Encouraging greater movement internationally by students during their course of study helps ensure international standing and international orientation. This requires partnerships with overseas universities. Some members feel Australian accredited awards taught in New Zealand should be afforded accreditation and funding support.