

Comments and reflection on Karmel, Tom (2008) Reflections on the tertiary education sector in Australia and van Vught, Frans (2008) Dealing with diversity: the role of institutional classification schemes in the US and Europe, L H Martin Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Management conference *Charting new terrain: creating and maintaining a diversified tertiary education sector in Australia*, 27-28 November, 2008.

Gavin Moodie, Griffith University

Thank you for inviting me to join your conference and for the privilege of offering some remarks before our discussion. I regret that I had to miss yesterday's proceedings. I had a prior speaking engagement at James Cook University which I couldn't change. I thought my absence yesterday would make worthless any comment I may offer today, but Dr Goedegebuure's view prevailed. Leo has a considerable hold over me, having examined my PhD when he was at the University of Twente. You will soon be able to judge whether I have returned one good turn with another, or perhaps you will conclude that Leo is an unconscionably soft examiner! Whatever your conclusion, I'm not returning the PhD!

I am most grateful to Dr Karmel and Professor van Vught for making their notes available before the conference. They have informed me greatly, and have helped me considerably to try to make my remarks relevant to this session's discussion. I plan to reflect on Tom's paper first since I understand it to be about vocational and higher education, and then move onto Frans' paper which I understand to be about higher education alone, although raising some rather big issues in that sector. In offering these remarks I am acutely aware that I missed yesterday's discussion, so I apologise in advance if I trespass onto ground that you have already covered.

Sectors

The sub title and substantive topic of our conference *Creating and maintaining a diversified tertiary education sector in Australia* is soooo 2008! Even a few years ago one would have had to refer to multiple sectors of tertiary education in Australia. This highlights the fact that sectoral demarcations are contingent in time. In Australia what counted as vocational education, advanced education and the university sector changed with the establishment and then dissolution of the advanced education sector. And as Tom said, diplomas which are now mainly understood as vocational education awards were the distinctive award of advanced education when the sector was established. Before the establishment of the advanced education sector sub graduate diplomas and certificates were 15% of all university enrolments (DEET, 1993: 5). So, sectoral demarcations are contingent in time.

Sectoral designations are also contingent in space. Tafe institutes' analogues in the US, community or 2-year colleges, are administered as part of higher education. Two-year colleges and universities have the same curriculum, financing and tuition fees regime, and some US states even require 2- and 4-year colleges to have the same subject codes. You will have heard yesterday the different arrangements in England. So what counts as 'higher education' differs from country to country even at the same time.

Thirdly, I suggest that sectoral distinctions are contingent analytically. Tom has already hinted at that by noting the vocational nature of many of higher education's most exclusive programs such as law and medicine. And of course this is nothing new. The institutions that developed into universities north of the Alps – in Paris and Oxford, for example – were

established to train clerics for the church, to introduce novices to a vocation in an older meaning of the word. I have argued elsewhere (Moodie, 2002, 2008: 40-2) that the distinction between vocational and higher education can not be founded on any of the standard grounds: epistemological, teleological, hierarchical or even pragmatic.

Nonetheless, all countries I have examined distinguish between what we in Australia recognise as vocational and higher education, and these distinctions are longstanding, certainly over a century old. The distinctions between vocational and higher education also seem deeply embedded in the economy and society. So while removing or at least reducing the distinctions between the sectors in the political system will greatly improve the operation of the sectors, it will not transgress the deeper economic and social distinctions between them. Also, very considerable benefits can be gained from reducing the educational distinctions between the sectors. In particular, Australia should allow content and knowledge back into the vocational education curriculum. Actually, 'curriculum' does not exist in the current Australian VET lexicon, so the first step is to acknowledge the salience of curriculum in Australian vocational education.

But even allowing all of that, I don't think one can or even should try to merge the vocational and higher education sectors. Vocational education is closely engaged with industry and the economy and changes as industries change. Higher education is engaged more closely with academic disciplines and changes as the disciplines change. These different dynamics mean that the sectors are changing continuously, but in different ways. As a consequence, the work that is required to harmonise the sectors is not only an initial investment, but requires a continuing investment as each sector follows its own different dynamic (Moodie, 2008: 172). So I think vocational and higher education must in the end remain distinct, notwithstanding that they can and should be brought a lot closer. I get the impression that Tom wouldn't disagree greatly with that, although he would presumably put it differently.

Neither do I think Tom would disagree with my argument that Australia should decouple the programmatic and institutional designation of the sectors (Moodie, 2003), since he has written much the same himself (Karmel and Nguyen, 2003: 1). Australia is distinctive in having a very tight alignment of its institutional and programmatic designation of tertiary education sectors. Until recently in Australia, almost all vocational education programs were offered only by vocational education institutions which offered only vocational programs, and almost all higher education programs were offered only by higher education institutions which offered only higher education programs. This tight alignment of the institution and programmatic designation of the sectors is quite distinctive of Australia: there is much more flexibility in the offerings of institutions in England, British Columbia and New Zealand, for example.

One could go either way, but I think the distinction between vocational and higher education should be founded on programs, not institutions. Since Australia's current distinctions are overly shaped by a legacy of idiosyncratic national institutional practices I would base the distinction between vocational and higher education programs on international standard classification of education (ISCED). ISCED was developed by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in the early 1970s to facilitate comparisons of education statistics and indicators within and between countries. It was originally endorsed at the General Conference of UNESCO in 1978 and the current version (ISCED-97) was formally adopted in November 1997. ISCED-97 is the most widely accepted classification of education and is the basis, for example, of the OECD's annual publication *Education at a glance*.

ISCED-97 classifies formal education into 7 levels:

level 0 - pre-primary education;

level 1 - primary education or first stage of basic education;

level 2 - lower secondary or second stage of basic education;

level 3 - (upper) secondary education;

level 4 - post secondary non tertiary education;

level 5 - first stage of tertiary education;

level 6 - second stage of tertiary education.

Relevant to the current discussion are level 4 - post secondary non tertiary education and level 5 - first stage of tertiary education. (Level 6 is about PhDs.) UNESCO describes level 4 thus –

71. ISCED 4 captures programmes that straddle the boundary between upper-secondary and post-secondary education from an international point of view, even though they might clearly be considered as upper-secondary or post-secondary programmes in a national context.

72. ISCED 4 programmes can, considering their content, not be regarded as tertiary programmes. They are often not significantly more advanced than programmes at ISCED 3 but they serve to broaden the knowledge of participants who have already completed a programme at level 3.

(UNESCO, 1997)

Vocational education certificates I - IV are classified as level 4 - post secondary non tertiary education. This is about 63% of Australia's public funded vocational education and training. UNESCO divides level 5 - first stage of tertiary education into 2 types, 5B and 5A. It bases this distinction on 2 elements: theoretical/practical and profession/trade –

84. The first dimension to be considered is the distinction between the programmes which are theoretically based/research preparatory (history, philosophy, mathematics, etc.) or giving access to professions with high skills requirements (e.g. medicine, dentistry, architecture, etc.), and those programmes which are practical/technical/ occupationally specific. To facilitate the presentation, the first type will be called 5A, the second, 5B.

(UNESCO, 1997: para 84)

While this distinction is deeply flawed, it has remained the standard international classification of tertiary education. UNESCO says that because the organisational structure of tertiary education programs varies greatly across countries no single criterion can be used to define boundaries between ISCED 5A and ISCED 5B. However, in general ISCED level 5A programs have a minimum cumulative theoretical duration at tertiary level of 3 years' full time equivalent, although typically they are of 4 or more years (UNESCO 1997, para 87). Tertiary type B programs are of shorter duration, a minimum of 2 years' full time equivalent duration but generally they are of 2 or 3 years (UNESCO 1997, p.90). So in Australia ISCED 5B programs are diplomas, advanced diplomas and associate degrees while tertiary type A programs are bachelor degrees in the first cycle and graduate diplomas and masters in the second cycle (OECD, 2008: 24).

So I would define vocational education as ISCED tertiary type B programs. Since I have decoupled the institutional and programmatic designation of the sectors it would remain perfectly appropriate for most Tafe institutes to continue to offer ISCED level 4 programs and to expand their offerings of tertiary type 5A programs, as they are in the UK, the US and British Columbia.

That goes rather beyond what Tom has written, but I don't think it contradicts his position. I will find out soon enough if it does. All this consensus is rather dull so I will liven my remarks by being disagreeable, for which purpose I now turn to Professor van Vught's paper.

Diversifying and classifying higher education

I have 4 difficulties with Frans' reiteration of the familiar functionalists' arguments for a more diversified higher education system. First, I don't accept the functionalist's fundamental position that society's different functions are best met by different institutions. Consider the senior years of secondary education. In some countries at some times there is a different curriculum and different institutions for vocational and general or academic senior secondary education. Indeed, that was the position in Australia until the closure of the technical high schools from the 1970s and continues to be the arrangement in the 'tracked' systems of northern continental Europe. But I think Australia's multiple functions for upper secondary education are best met by the variegated but nonetheless comprehensive institutions it currently has.

Consider, further, the exiting assessment and qualification for senior secondary students. Again, there are at least 3 quite distinct functions to be served: to assess and certify the completion of senior secondary education, to assess matriculation or eligibility for admission to university, and to rank applicants for admission to university programs with competitive entry. These roles are in tension, as we observe from time to time. But I suggest Australia is much better served by having the same institution serve all 3 functions than the US, for example, where the senior secondary assessment and certificate are much less useful for assessing eligibility and competitive entry. I suggest that this is an example of different functions being better served by a common institution, and I suggest there are several other relevant instances.

Secondly, Frans does not note that diversified higher education systems are economically and socially stratified. In my view this is a serious problem with diversified systems. I hold the Marxist position that it is not possible for an education system to escape its society's economic and social stratification. But I would design an educational system to ameliorate fundamental economic and social inequities, not to replicate them.

Thirdly, Frans reiterates the familiar distinction between programmatic and institutional diversity, but considers only institutional diversity. Why may not all the claimed advantages of a more diversified higher education system be achieved by differences within institutions rather than between institutions? We have examples of such institutions in Clark Kerr's (1963) multiversities, Australia's dual sector universities ((Doughney, 2000), England's mixed sector colleges (Wheelahan & Moodie, 2008) and Germany's *Gesamthochschulen*. Admittedly not all dual sector universities have developed their dual sector character as well as Swinburne University has done, and perhaps Swinburne isn't perfect. And while the remaining *Gesamthochschulen* may be successful, the comprehensive university form hasn't been attractive in Germany. But England's mixed sector institutions seem vigorous and to have potential for further development.

Finally, I think Frans accepts too readily the current increasingly dominant pattern of tertiary education institutions as having more or less comprehensive ranges of programs, with institutions distinguished more by the level of their highest award than by the range of their programs. Specialist or single discipline institutions remain in the dominant pattern, but as increasingly rare exceptions. I think it is worth considering more seriously an alternative of monotecnics: institutions that concentrate on 1 field of education, but which offer it at several levels. These were common in the former Soviet Union, which is perhaps not the best recommendation for them, and I accept that monotecnics have disadvantages. Nonetheless, I still think they are worth reconsidering. I accept that Frans doesn't rule out monotecnics and that they will probably be classified readily by the classification scheme he presents.

I found much explanatory value in Frans' theory of diversity and differentiation in higher education systems (van Vught, 2007). I present as evidence, if more is needed, table 1 which shows the funds that the Australian Government allocates to universities for their performance. Research dominates the funds the Australian Government allocates for institutional performance at 87%, learning and teaching is 10% and equity is a derisory 3%.

Table 1: institutional performance funds amount and share of total institutional performance funds, 2008

Fund	Amount \$m	Share %
Research training scheme	541	
Institutional grants scheme	285	
Research infrastructure block grants scheme	160	
<i>Research block grants</i>	986	87
<hr/>		
<i>Learning and teaching performance fund</i>	114	10
<hr/>		
Indigenous support program	25	
Higher education equity support program	2	
<i>Equity</i>	27	3
TOTAL	1,133	100

Source: Dest (2004) tables 2.12, 3.13 and 3.14.

While financial incentives are important to institutions, institutions are also strongly motivated to increase their positional value (Hirsch, 1976). Perhaps this is included within Frans' academic norms and values, but positional value is not an academic value. Indeed, the whole point of positional good is its social sorting, not its reflection of 'objective' good nor even its congruence with value assessed by experts.

I'm afraid that is all the disagreement I can muster. The European classification project seems excellent and I look forward to its further development.

Closure

I have taken up far too much time already. It will be much more interesting for all of us to hear your discussion, which I now look forward to.

References

Department of Employment, Education and Training (Deet) (1993) *National report on Australia's higher education sector* ('the blue book'), Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

Department of Education, Science and Training (Dest) (2004) *Higher education report for the 2004-2006 triennium*,
http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/higher_education_report_2004_2006_triennium.htm (accessed 13 June 2005).

Doughney (nee Wheelahan), L. (2000) Universal tertiary education: how dual-sector universities can challenge the binary divide between TAFE and higher education – the case of Victoria University of Technology, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, **22**, 59-72.

Hirsch, Fred (1976) *Social limits to growth*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Karmel, T. and Nguyen, N. (2003) *Australia's Tertiary Education Sector*. Centre for the Economics of Education and Training 7th National Conference, Monash University, Melbourne.

Karmel, Tom (2008) Reflections on the tertiary education sector in Australia, paper presented to the L H Martin Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Management conference *Charting new terrain: creating and maintaining a diversified tertiary education sector in Australia*, 27-28 November, 2008.

Kerr, Clark (1963) The idea of a multiversity, in *The uses of the university*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, pp. 1-45.

Moodie, Gavin (2002) Identifying vocational education and training, *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, volume 54, number 2, 251-267.

Moodie, Gavin (2003) The missing link in Australian tertiary education: short-cycle higher education, *International Journal of Training Research*, volume 1, number 1, 44-63.

Moodie, Gavin (2008) *From vocational to higher education: an international perspective*, Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2008) Education at a Glance OECD Indicators 2008, Annex 3: Sources, methods and technical notes, Chapter A: The output of educational institutions and the impact of learning, viewed 14 October 2008, <http://www.oecd.org/document/9/0,3343,en_2649_39263238_41266761_1_1_1_1,00.html>.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (1997) International Standard Classification of Education, viewed 23 December 2007, <http://www.unesco.org/education/docs/iscd_1997.htm>.

van Vught, Frans (2007) Diversity and differentiation in higher education systems, CHET anniversary conference, Cape Town, 16 November,
http://www.universityworldnews.com/filemgmt_data/files/Frans-van-Vucht.pdf (accessed 1 February 2008).

van Vught, Frans (2008) Dealing with diversity: the role of institutional classification schemes in the US and Europe, paper presented to the L H Martin Institute for Higher Education Leadership and Management conference *Charting new terrain: creating and maintaining a diversified tertiary education sector in Australia*, 27-28 November, 2008.

Wheelahan, L & Moodie, G (2008) Higher education in TAFE, national VET research and evaluation research program proposal, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide.